New Inventions: Judge Not! Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 13:6

June 4th, 2023 Scripture Reading: John 8:1-11

SLIDE 1: Title

We have been talking about worldviews for quite some time now. We have been trying to nail down what we would call a biblical worldview. What does the bible say about the nature of reality? And how has that perspective been twisted or tampered with? In what ways does our culture present us with a new invention?

 The last two weeks we have addressed head on some of the lies of our culture. These aere the doctrines that we are expected to uphold and accept. And they are easy to fall into because they reflect a worldview that the majority of folks are willing to adopt. So, we mentioned the cultural lie that says feelings are the ultimate guide. We should follow our hearts. And last week we talked about happiness being the ultimate goal. But what we actually find is that Jesus insists that our main interest should lie in seeking God’s kingdom – that’s our ultimate goal and that’s where happiness lies. Today, we tackle cultural lie number three that says: Judging is the ultimate sin!

SLIDE 2: **Feelings are the Ultimate Goal /Happiness is the Ultimate Goal / Judging is the ultimate sin**

 There are a few things to notice about this rule and the first is that there is here acknowledged some sort of wrongdoing, some sin. So we begin with the understanding that some things are good and some are bad. If you bring judgement upon someone else or their behavior, you have sinned. Others are simply living their lives according to their feelings and trying to maintain a state of happiness. How can anyone else come along and rain on that parade? Anyone who presumes to judge another person is standing in the way of that person’s happiness and is therefore a sinner.

**SLIDE 3: no one wants to be judged**

Now, let’s be honest, no one wants to be judged. I remember trying out for the elite traveling choir at my little bible college. I had a decent voice; I had a good amount of experience and so I strolled into the choir room with a certain amount of confidence. I knew I was signing up to be judged. My skill as a singer was about to be evaluated and critiqued. I knew that going in, but I thought I was up to the challenge. I thought I could pass muster. Then they had me sight read. Are you familiar with this? They handed me a piece of music I had never seen before, they played no notes for me, and they want me to sing it according to the notes on the page. Cold turkey, no lead in, just by sight. I was immediately flustered and proved to everyone in that room that I was not actually up to the challenge. I was judged inadequate that day. I did not make it into the choir and walked out of the audition quite embarrassed and maybe a little more humble.

 I would never sign up for the math team or something like that. I am not good at math, I don’t want anyone judging me on my ability to work with numbers. I would never open myself up to such scrutiny. But, choir? I thought I had it in me, but others judged differently.

 No one wants to be judged, even when we open ourselves up to it, even when we agree to it, we still don’t like it. I like to see other people be judged, we have whole TV shows all about that. No one wants to be judged and everyone wants to be accepted. But if everyone is accepted, what kind of choir would that be? That kind of choir would then face judgement from the audiences for which they perform. Everyone’s a critic as they say and yet the rule we are looking at today prohibits any judging.

**SLIDE 4: we must recognize that there is a standard**

 But we must recognize that there is a standard. I auditioned for a choir whose standard included the ability to sight read. Hence everyone in that choir had that skill. We want a church in which everyone faithfully lives into their baptismal vows to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world and to repent of sin. That’s the standard. To confess Jesus as Savoir, to put all of our trust in his grace and to serve him as faithful members of his church. That is the standard for members of our church. Now we all fail to meet that standard, but we still name it, we still strive for it. And, by God’s grace, when we do hit it, what a beautiful thing it is. We want a society in which people follow the laws and are able to generally live together. That requires a certain standard for how people behave. And every one of us has a line. Has your line ever been crossed? Every one of us has a moment in which we are no longer able to tolerate a certain person or behavior or situation. And we can tell when someone has had their line crossed. Maybe they start to raise their voice. Maybe they get a little red in the face. Maybe they just quietly get up and leave the room. Maybe they become very quiet and simply refrain from speaking. We are all tolerant people until our line is crossed. Then we deem the situation intolerable and we must respond in some way. Choir have auditions, society has the justice system, church’s might have to revoke membership in some cases. But the point is, certain standards must somehow be enforced. So what is the standard? What is the rubric we go by when it comes to judgement? What does our biblical worldview have to say about it?

 Well, feelings and happiness is what this world offers up to us. How you feel about something and how much it makes you happy is basically the framework this world provides for us. And judgement is right out. We are not allowed to say boo to another person in their pursuit of happiness. And part of the problem for us as Christians is that this prohibition against judging is in the bible! Jesus says outright in Matthew 7:1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” Later in the New Testament, James 4:12 tells us the God is the lawgiver and judge, who are you to judge your neighbor? These verse seem pretty definitive. Judging it seems is off the table. So could it be that we haver found a spot of common ground with our society?

 It may be instructive to consider a real life example of this no judging rule played out. Consider Seattle Washington. Once one of the most beautiful cities on the West coast, Seattle now has the third highest homeless population in the country. The government proposes to spend billions on new housing efforts, but much of the problem involves mental heath and drug addiction issues. Nearly 10 per cent of all residents over age 12 are classified as having a substance abuse disorder. If someone is dealing with addiction, they do not tend to pay the rent.

 I realize addiction hits closer to home for some of us than for others, but, whether it’s family or friends or neighbors; it is a reality we cannot deny. How do we respond? As Christians we do not want to abandon people and cut off relationships, but we also don’t want to enable their addiction either…

**SLIDE 5: harm reduction policies**

This law of our culture that says judgment is the ultimate sin, has led to something called “harm reduction policies”. These are government programs that seek to accept people who use drugs as they are, to meeting them where they are in their lives without judgement. No one can see the impact of addiction and walk away saying it is good. We can easily recognize the badness of the influence of drugs, and yet, when it comes to trying to help people who are living in that situation, we have policies and government programs unwilling and/or maybe unable to judge the behavior as destructive, as unacceptable, as errant. People are taking their lives into their own hands through these addictions, but we are worried about them feeling judgement?

 Biblically speaking, are we able to judge drug addiction as bad? Well, what might be the standard by which we judge drug use? Does it lead to health and flourishing? Does it draw people toward God and his kingdom? Or is it simply a matter of saying, drugs aren’t for me, but you go ahead if that is what you choose. You go ahead if that is what makes you happy. I think the bible presents to us a standard, a rubric, a means by which we can and should judge, and that standard is love. Love has the good of the other person in mind. Love wants what’s best for them. Love is not self-seeking. Love is patient and kind. But love does indeed judge. Take a look at 1 Corinthians 11:31. In this passage, Paul is taking issue with how the Corinthians are running the Lord’s Supper. Paul is judging them and demanding that they change their current practice. He writes in verse 17 that when it comes to communion, he cannot praise them. Paul judges their mode of practice as wrong, unacceptable. Paul points out that when they celebrate the Lord;s Supper they actually bring their own meal. They divide into those who have and those who do not have. Some come drunk while others have nothing. Paul says that this disregard for one another leaves them to eat and drink in a n unworthy manner and they actually bring judgement upon themselves. But, Paul says, if we examined ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned with the world.”

**SLIDE 6: Paul deems communion as Inappropriate**

 Paul’s standard that he uses in this process of judging the Corinthians, is love. Highlighting divisions at the Lord’s table does not show love either for the Lord or for other people. So, such practice ought to be judged. Paul would rather judge this behavior than see it continue in an unloving way. Paul judges because of love.

 Love is the harder choice. Love stands up to say something. Love is not permission or even tolerance. Love is not acceptance or endorsement.

**SLIDE 7: Love is the harder choice. Endorsement is easy!**

 Let’s think about endorsement for a moment…If I am trying to sell a product, say basketball shoes, I might try to hire a famous person, some celebrity basketball player, to endorse my product. I would want them to do a commercial for my shoes, to have them use my shoes during games, to say good things about my shoes. By attaching their name to my product, they are endorsing it, promoting it…but do they love it? Maybe. Maybe they really are the best shoes they have ever worn, but at the end of the day, they are getting paid to “love” my shoes. There is extra incentive…an ulterior motive. Endorsement itself falls short of love.

Love seeks the good of others, and it does so through the means of self-sacrifice. That’s why it’s so hard! Endorsement is easy! That’s why we have so many different terms that revolve around the idea of love and yet they fall short, because we want to find ways to love without having to expend too much ourselves. So we vote for policies and put into place programs to help people in need or who are homeless or who are addicted or hungry. That way, I am removed from the equation. I can support the program, or I can vote for the thing, I can endorse it and I am a loving person but just from over here…just from a safe distance away.

Love is the harder choice. Love is based on truth. Love will require something of us. Love is going to ask questions. Love involves judgement. Again, out of love, Paul confronts the Corinthians to let them know they are eating and drinking in error. He wants them to know that by doing so, they are bringing judgement upon themselves. He says in verse 30, that because of this judgement, “many of you are weak and sick and quite a few of died.” There are consequences to living in error and Paul, in love, confronts their practices in order to bring them life and a closer walk with God.

Now, Paul is talking specifically about communion with the gathering of the church. But it would have been so much easier to simply let it slide. It would have arguably been a peaceful option to let the Corinthians continue in their way and not address what was going on. Does this principle not apply to our personal relationships? We may not be in a position to speak to the practices of a whole church, but we are in a position to speak with people who are in our lives, people we love.

One of my favorite bands wrote a song called “The Shape”. The song reflects this tension we feel when it comes to love and judgement and the thin line we must walk. The one of the verses says this:

“I’ve always kept to myself. I’ve always let you have your privacy. I’ve always kept my hands clean, no one could beat your secret out of me.” So we have a picture of a good, trustworthy friend. Someone who will listen well, but not really intrude. Someone in whom you can confide.

Then comes the chorus: “Bit my tongue when I should have said something ‘bout the shape you’re in.” So this person has some doubts here. They notice some patterns, some ways in which their friend is making some questionable decisions. It is evident in their life, in the shape they are in. They have the urge to speak up. Should they or not?

 The bridge: “Except for the time I didn’t. Except for the time I didn’t rely on the feeling inside, except for the time I didn’t deny a worthy reply…except for the time.”

 So this person finally speaks up, even though it feels wrong, he decides he needs to say some “worthy reply” to the decisions their friend is making. It is an expression of love, it is the harder thing to do.

 We must remember, biting our tongues can indeed be a very valuable practice. We do not want to blurt out our opinions at every opportunity. We do not want to speak out of turn, or without some careful thought, but we do want to love.

And we look to Jesus for how that love ought to be lived out. Jesus was not interested in “harm-reduction” policies. Jesus was going for complete transformation. He never beat around the bush with the truth. He never bit his tongue when he should have spoke. Jesus was straightforward and honest. He never tolerated or endorsed someone’s bad choices or sinful actions. To those who came to him, to those he healed, to those he forgave, he said, “Go and sin no more.” “I have met you here in the dumps where you are. I have forgiven you, I have loved you, now change your heart and life. Now live for me and the glory of my kingdom. Now be transformed. Put away this old life. Be made new.”

**SLIDE 8: Jesus meets us where we are, but he never leaves us there.**

The love of Jesus will always meet us where we are, but his love will never leave us there. He is out to destroy sin in our lives, to restore us into proper relationship with God and with other people.

Maybe you know someone in your life who has taken a turn somewhere. Maybe they have strayed from the narrow path. Maybe they are stuck in a cycle of bad choices. Maybe you fee like you need to say something…but it sure is easier not to…Here is what you can do:

**SLIDE 9: Pray for the person, pray for yourself**

First, pray for the person. Ask God to give them a soft heart and help them to know the truth. Secondly, pray for your own heart. Ask God to fill you with his love for the person in question. Ask him to give you the words to say, ask him to lead you in his timing. Ask for courage to speak. And finally, be sure you should speak up. If there is some part of you that might be spiteful or self-assured by speaking, then you should remain silent and keep biting that tongue.

**SLIDE 10: Say something if it’s the last thing you want to do!**

Chances are, if it is the last thing you want to do, it may be the thing love is demanding of you. Let the Holy Spirit lead.

There is no reason why we as Christians, need to live constrained to this rule that judging is the ultimate sin. Not loving God and others, including staying silent when we should speak is the ultimate sin. It is important to finish the verse mentioned earlier: Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, so that you won’t be judged. You’ll receive the same judgement you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you.” This is a warning against hypocrisy. It’s the same issue Jesus had with the Pharisees who brought the woman before Jesus. They wanted to exercise a law against her that they were not even willing to abide by. If we are going to judge from a hypocritical place, then we need to bite our tongues. But Jesus is not commanding us to stay silent when our friends and family need to hear the truth of God’s love, it’s not a command to dismiss the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Church, let us not be guided by feelings, but rather let us make the harder choice, and be guided by love. Amen.