

A while back one of the studies talked about judging fairly (#33). I had some more thoughts on the subject and wanted to share them this time.

If judging negatively is defined as believing the worst about someone, then it encompasses a myriad of other types of behavior that we know deep down as wrong.

All insults, even in jest, are forms of judgment. I grew up in a home that used mocking, teasing and ridiculing as a form of humor. We knew that the person saying it did not mean it as an insult but just to be funny. That worked (to a point) because we all knew when it happened it was just for fun. However, when I became an adult out on my own I continued the practice and these people didn't know that I was joking. I offended some people and hurt others because I had not learned that not everyone knows the art of frivolous insults and didn't appreciate it either. Having grown up in that environment I still catch myself once in a while doing it.

If we like an assertive woman, we may describe her as "bold and self-assured", but if we don't, we will judge her negatively by calling her "arrogant and loud-mouthed". A man may simply be uninformed, but when we call him "stupid" we have judged him negatively. James says, *"Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother judges his brother."* (James 4:11)

Gossip, one of the most prevalent methods of judging through out the ages, relies heavily on negative judgment. People who love to gossip usually have a habit of looking for wrongdoing in another person's life in order to share it with others. It is a form of putting another person down while building themselves up – because *"you know I wouldn't be caught dead doing that"*. Criticism, cynicism, and complaining are all based on searching out the negative everywhere we can find it. Even people who struggle with chronic anger can often find the root of their problem in always looking for something wrong in another person life.

*In other words, since they have not considered God worth knowing, God has given them up to worthless ways of thinking; so that they do improper things. They are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and vice; stuffed with jealousy, murder, quarrelling, dishonesty and ill-will; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God; they are insolent, arrogant and boastful; they plan evil schemes; they disobey their parents....* Romans 1:28-30 (CJB)

Unfortunately, most cultures are filled to the brim with "negative judging". Politics seems not to be able function without it. When have you heard a politician say; "my opponent is a good and honest man". Editorials are filled with cynicism about the evil motives of the government, inept handling of international affairs and the wasteful use of our tax money. Tabloids, comedians, and political talk shows delight in finding prominent peoples' faults and holding them up for ridicule. Unfortunately, we don't notice that participating in that kind of judgment slowly fills us with the same ugly attitude toward others, even to the point of poisoning our relationships with loved ones.

It even invades the Body of Christ when we don't judge another congregation or denomination fairly. A Case in Point – the Eucharist. Even the name it is given causes negative judgment. Not to mention how often should we eat at the Table – once a year, or month, or week, or daily? Whole denominations have split over this negative judging of other people's inner motives for being at the Table.

People who formerly expressed their love for God in traditional Christian ways suddenly feel that those who observe differing Christian traditions are practicing paganism, and become angry and accusatory of them when the true intent of their hearts may be to lovingly worship God.

We emphasize sexual fidelity, and rightly so, but while promiscuity damages some marriages, probably no marriage has ever escaped terrible wounding from unfair accusations and judgments. Some children grow up scarred from physical abuse; many more grow up scarred from relentless criticism from parents who did not judge them favorably. The worst judges are often those who never received mercy themselves, and never learned to extend it to others. We should realize this, and even refrain from condemning even the most judgmental; because we don't know how much criticism they have endured themselves.

Too often we Christians reflect the pervasive habit of condemnation that is part of our world, one we hardly realize is wrong. Christians would do well to focus more on the ethic to judge favorably.

Jesus tells us to: *Show mercy and compassion for others, just as your heavenly Father overflows with mercy and compassion for all.* (Luke 6:36)