

Judgement

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today at both of our services, we've been looking at two mistakes that we can often fall into as humans that can affect every part of life.

Don't worry at all if you weren't able to listen this morning. I can just recap to say that this morning we considered the mistake whereby we can often think that we're bad at something when in reality we are quite good at it.

As an example, we said that very often you have people here in Lewis who are outstandingly good at playing the bagpipes, but they won't do it in front of anybody because they just don't feel that they're good enough to perform at that level.

We applied that mistake to the specific issue of friendship. It's so easy to think that you're not going to be a good friend or that people won't really want you as a friend or that it's just something they were not that cut out for.

And yet the theological truth that the Bible reveals to us is that friendship is something that you've been made for. It's one of the ways in which we bear the image of God.

[1 : 2 0] So this morning we were thinking about the mistake of thinking that you're bad at something when actually you are quite good at it. Tonight we're going to think about the opposite mistake when we think that we're good at something when really we are not.

And we also used the illustration of bagpipes for that. Sometimes if you go to Edinburgh you'll find some not so amazing bagpipers playing away on the Royal Mile for everyone to hear.

Again tonight we're going to focus on a specific issue and this is a massive issue. It's one that dominates our society and it's one that's caused huge damage in the church of Jesus Christ.

Tonight we're going to think about judgment. And as we do so we can turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 5 where Paul writes, therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes.

Who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart, then each one will receive his commendation from God.

[2 : 4 1] And now when I say that what I mean really is when we judge other people is a massive part of life today. The news headlines are full of judgments.

So a great example of that in the past week has been Dominic Cummings in fact over the last few weeks. He is dishing out scathing judgments on Boris Johnson.

Political parties as a whole are constantly passing judgments on each other's decisions and 99.9 of them, those judgments are negative. And all the big issues of the news, things like racism, sexism, hate crimes, all of these things start with judgments.

And even in the last week the organizer of the Olympic Games opening ceremony had to resign because of jokes that he had made 25 years ago.

In the 90s he had made jokes about the Holocaust. Back then he had judged that the suffering of the Jews was worthy of a joke.

[3 : 48] Today that action is judged as totally unacceptable. If you look at the news and ask yourself how many of these things are about judgments, it's everywhere.

But it's not just the national headlines where judgments are made, it's the same locally over the past few months I've heard so many judgments on Kalmack, on tourists, on camper vans, even the clothes we wear, the haircuts that we have are shaped by judgments.

Fashion is a massive industry, it's all shaped by judgments as to what is and what isn't acceptable. Here's a really important research question.

How many men, drop into the men at the moment, how many men in here and how many men in Carlaway have got centre partings? I'm intrigued looking at everybody, I can't see a single one.

About 25 years ago when I was 13, I would have been, virtually no teenage boy on this island would have been seen dead out of doors without a ruler straight centre parting and I was one of them.

[5 : 10] Judgments are everywhere, everywhere. And sometimes they're good, so it was wonderful to see that when Marcus Rashford the footballer was racially abused because he missed a penalty, there was a huge response condemning that action.

That was a good judgment. But so often the judgments we see around us are bad.

And it's important that we remember that not only do we make judgments, our judgments make us do certain things.

Let me say that again, not only do we make judgments, our judgments make us do certain things. They lead on to a whole pile of other sins, gossip, complaint, quarrelling, hostility, envy, resentment.

They all start with bad judgments. It affects every part of life, the news, social media, workplace, communities and even the church.

[6 : 26] About three years ago, I was in a meeting in Edinburgh, maybe about two and a half years ago it was, and it was with a company that was going to be giving the free church some advice in terms of public communications, particularly in relation to dealing with the press.

I was on a committee that was sort of related to this, not directly, but the committee I was on was kind of related to it, so I was asked along to the meeting. So we were meeting this company, which was all about advising how best to deal with the press because very often we get bad press.

And I asked these people, what's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the free church of Scotland? And do you know what their reply was?

Judgmental. And I want to suggest tonight that judgment is an example of us falling into the mistake of thinking that we're good at something when in actual fact we're not.

And what I want us to recognise is two crucial things. First, judgment is something that we are bad at.

[7 : 41] But secondly, judgment is something that God is utterly brilliant at. So first of all, judgment is something that we are very bad at.

And when I say we, I don't mean just us, I mean the whole Christian church throughout her history. It's an issue that's been there from the earliest days of the New Testament church, and we can see it so clearly in 1 Corinthians.

The church in Corinth was very, very messy. And if you read through 1 and 2 Corinthians, you discover that Paul is having to deal with a whole host of very, very difficult issues.

There's sexual sin, there's Christians taking each other to court, there's chaos when they're coming together for the Lord's Supper. It was a mess.

But one of the biggest issues of all was division. That's what Paul tackles at the very start of the letter. He says, it's been reported to me by Chloe's people that there's quarrelling among you, my brothers.

[8 : 47] What I mean is that each of you says, I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ. At the root of these divisions was what?

Judgment. Some judged Paul to be the best. Others Apollos, others Peter. And consequently, there was quarrelling between these groups where one would look down upon the other and see them as being in the wrong.

Paul responds to this, and his response is superb, because he doesn't stand for any of it. He tells them that those divisions are ridiculous, because it is only through God that anything has been achieved.

We read that in verses 5 to 7 of chapter 3. He says, what is Apollos? What is Paul? They're just servants through whom you believe as the Lord assigned to each.

I planted Apollos' water, but God gave the growth. He who plants, neither he who plants nor he who waters anything, but only God who gives the growth.

[9 : 50] So, the Christian Indians were full of judgments about Paul, about Apollos, about Peter. They were full of judgments about one another, full of judgments about who was wrong and who was right.

And so Paul addresses this, and he sums it all up in the words of our text. He says, therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time.

And even in this one verse that's on the screen there, we can see six crucial differences between God's judgment and Iwash, and I want to just whiz through them very quickly together.

So differences between God's judgment and the kind of judgment that these Corinthians were doing and that we are at risk of doing ourselves. So number one, God's judgment will be at the appropriate time.

It will be then, on the day when the Lord comes. In other words, God's judgment is going to be in the future at His appointed time.

[10 : 59] Whereas we make judgments every day about ourselves, about our colleagues, about our families, about our neighbours, and sometimes we can make a momentary judgment that will last us for the rest of our lives.

So often our judgment is premature. That's not what God does. Second difference is that God's judgment will have eternal consequences.

It will be when the Lord comes. God's judgment will be on the last day when the history of this world comes to its close, when the dead are raised, when the eternal separation between heaven and hell is set, and the consequences are massive.

They are eternal. But we judge people about their clothes, or their political party, or their football team, or their opinion on matters in church or in life that are embarrassingly trivial.

That's not what God does. The third difference is that God's judgment is informed. He will bring to light the things that are now hidden in darkness.

[12 : 18] God's judgment is always based on a full and complete knowledge of the facts. Our judgment is based on assumptions, on a little bit of information, on rumours, or on conclusions that we've come to before we've even listened to anything.

I remember once, and to my shame, years and years ago, in a different congregation to this one, long before I ever came to Carlyway, I knew an elder who wasn't very regular at church, and I thought that that was a bit of a poor show, to be honest.

Years later, I discovered that he carried a huge burden in his personal life that meant that it was amazing that he was at church as much as he was at all.

So often our judgment is uninformed. That never happens with God. Difference number four is that God's judgment looks right into the heart, as you can see there.

So often our judgment is based on externals. So sometimes we might hold somebody in the highest regard, because on the outside they do everything right, but on the inside things might be very different.

[13 : 46] Likewise, when someone makes a mistake, especially one that's public, we judge them, and yet we've got no idea the burdens and bruises that they are carrying in their hearts.

So often our judgment is superficial. God never does that. Fifth difference is that God's judgment equalizes everyone.

Each one will be judged. There's no partiality, no exceptions, no inconsistency. God judges everyone equally and fairly.

And so for that reason, his judgment is very unifying, because we all have to give an account to God, whereas our judgment is divisive and elitist.

We put some people in one category, we put other people in others. Sometimes we judge people, some people very harshly, and other times we gloss things over completely. And our judgment is often inconsistent, never with God.

[14 : 45] And then sixth, God's judgment will commend faithfulness. Each one will get their commendation. And as verse two shows, what God is looking for is that we would be faithful.

God's not looking for celebrity status or for astonishing success, or for a church to be pulling in the crowds and making a huge name for itself. So often our judgments are based on success and status and charisma.

God just does not do that. He's looking for faithful stewards of his life-giving word.

And all of this shows that judgment is something that we are not really very good at. Now, I'm not saying this to have a go or to be critical or to be depressing.

I'm not saying that at all. I'm just saying because it's something that I have to recognize in my life. I have misjudged people and circumstances so many times.

[15 : 46] I've fallen into this trap of thinking, oh yeah, I know it all. I know why this person's doing that. I know why they're not doing that. I think they're this. I think they're that.

And I am almost always totally wrong. I've made the mistake of thinking I'm good at judgment, and yet very often judgment is something that I am rubbish at.

But I also want to say that that judgment can work both ways. It can be exercised towards others, but it can be also pronounced upon ourselves.

Sometimes we can be hard on the failings and mistakes of others, but often we can reserve our harshest judgment for ourselves.

And maybe we fall into both traps. Maybe we judge others too much, but maybe you judge yourself far too harshly as well. And it's not a subject I really want to raise or dwell on, but the most tragic example of this is when someone takes their own life in suicide.

[17 : 03] Because suicide is when somebody simultaneously thinks that they are the only judge whose opinion counts, and their judgment is a death sentence.

But it's the most awful example of someone who thinks that they're good at judging when in reality they're desperately bad at it.

All of this is reminding us of the fact that judgment is an example of the terrible bagpiper on the Royal Mile, of thinking that we're good at something when we're actually bad at it.

And that's why it is no surprise that Paul says, don't do it. And that command is repeated throughout the New Testament.

You see it in James 4, you see it in Romans 14, and you see it in the words of Jesus himself on the Sermon on the Mount. As Christians, we're given a very clear command, do not judge.

[18 : 09] Now when I say that, it's really important that we don't go to the other extreme. And without one extreme in our Christian lives or in our behavior, it's so easy to kind of think that we should correct that by going to the other extreme.

And I'm absolutely not saying that. I'm not saying that you should just turn a blind eye to sin. I'm not saying that you should just watch people do whatever they like and say, well, I'm not going to judge.

I'm not saying that at all. Because the command, do not judge, is not given because judgment doesn't exist.

And most certainly does exist. The command, do not judge, is given because the judge is not me.

And neither is it you. We must live every day remembering that judgment is coming and that God has shown us what he requires of us all, but we must also live every day of our lives remembering that judgment is God's prerogative and not ours.

[19 : 22] And that I think is the key point that lies behind these commandments. Because when we pronounce judgment on people, we are taking a role and a responsibility that belongs only to God.

And that makes perfect sense. I want you to imagine a courtroom. I don't know if any of you have ever visited a courtroom in the public gallery or if any of you have watched a court scene on TV or seen one in the movies.

If you imagine a courtroom, there are loads of different seats in that courtroom, aren't there? So there's the place where the accused sits.

There's the place where the jury sits. There's the place where the prosecution sits, where the defense sits, and where the public sits. There's lots of seats. I want you to ask, what's the hardest seat to get into?

So you think, well, the accused seat, it only takes one mistake to get into that. You think of the jury, well, it only takes one letter through the post to put you on to jury duty.

[20 : 20] You think of the defense of the prosecution. They're more difficult, but you can go and train and become a lawyer, a criminal lawyer and or a civil, whatever you call them, lawyer, and you could get into that seat.

And the public seat, of course, is easy enough to get into if you want to go and watch. The hardest seat to get into, the one that takes the longest, the one that requires the most knowledge, the most experience, and the most qualification, well, you know the answer, don't you?

It's the judge's seat. You can't waltz into the court of session or into the high court in Edinburgh and say, I think I'll be judged today.

And if we can't do that with the criminal and civil courts of Scotland, why on earth do I go around thinking that I can do it with God?

So when I met that company in Edinburgh, and when the woman said that the word that came to her mind was judgmental, that implies that in certain contexts the thing that we are most known for is something that the Bible forbids us from doing, and that cannot be right.

[21 : 37] But the opposite is also true, because I also once saw a video made by a Christian charity that helps homeless women, and it does a wonderful work to help women who are homeless and struggling.

And in the video that had an interview with one of the clients, and do you know what she said? She said, I love coming here, because this is the one place where I can come where I don't feel judged.

And we've always got to keep asking ourselves, can the people of Carlyway look at our churches, both of them, and say, there's the one place I can go where I know I won't be judged.

This week is going to be full of opportunities for you and me to judge others. It's probably wise to remember that judgment is something we can easily think we're good at when the truth is we're very often bad at it.

But that's not the only thing I want us to remember tonight, because what I also want us to remember is that judgment is something that God is utterly brilliant at.

[23 : 04] The comparisons that we drew between our judgment and God's judgment in verse 5, they don't just tell us that we're pure at judging, they also tell us that God is just brilliant at it.

Because God knows the time, he knows the consequences, the information, the extent, the criteria for judgment. He's the perfect judge. And that reminds us of so many of the things that make God amazing.

It reminds us of the knowledge of God. He knows all things. You think of a court case, and you think particularly of a high profile court case, you think of the time that it takes gathering and presenting the information that the judge is going to need to make a verdict.

It can take months, maybe even years at times. There's this painstaking exercise of gathering information, of presenting it, so that the judge can grow enough in knowledge in order to reach a verdict.

God knows it all. And that means that his judgment is never guesswork. It's never based on fake news or misinformation, and he can never, ever be conned.

[24 : 27] It reminds us of the wisdom of God. As we said, the church in Corinth was so messy, and so often life is messy.

And when it comes to our judgment, it's so easy to be black and white. I've made that mistake so many times in my life, but it's just been black or white, and I've just pronounced a judgment. When in reality, life and circumstances and people are so complicated, imagine that courtroom again, and imagine that standing in the dock is a 21-year-old single mum who's in court for possession of drugs, for prostitution, and for neglect of her child.

Is she just an idiot who deserves whatever she gets? Or has she grown up in desperate circumstances and been the victim of awful suffering herself?

These are the situations where we just don't know what to do. Life is so complicated, God has the wisdom to always know what to do.

It reminds us of the justice of God. The fact that God is judge is a wonderful reminder that God will not turn a blind eye to wrongdoing.

[25 : 46] So often there can be injustices in life. So often we see people prosper at the expense of others. So often we can see a tiny minority who are just, I'm going to say, disgustingly rich, and you see masses and masses of people who've got next to nothing.

And the gap just seems to get bigger. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. All sorts of corruption and exploitation takes place right across the world.

The fact that God is judge means that that kind of injustice will always be called into account on that day.

God will not stand for injustice and wrongdoing. So we see the knowledge of God, the wisdom of God, the justice of God, and most of all, the fact that God is the perfect judge reminds us of the love of God, because that's what we saw in the wonderful statement from Jeremiah that we opened our service with.

He says that, him who boasts in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

[27 : 05] God's judgment is never detached from his steadfast love. And that makes him the perfect judge, because it means that his judgment will never be cold or heartless.

And God's justice and righteousness is always tied to the fact that he is the God of astonishing steadfast love. And that's why we can trust God to always be a perfect judge.

So when we aren't sure where someone stands in terms of faith in Jesus when they die, God the judge will do what's right.

When we aren't sure about people who haven't heard the Gospel, God the judge will do what's right. And when we are hurt by others who seem to get off scot-free, God the judge will do what's right.

He will never be unfair. He will never be inconsistent. He'll never be unloving. He is the perfect judge. And that's why leaving judgment to God isn't just a command that we must obey.

[28 : 21] It is a huge comfort for us to rest in. If you ever feel overwhelmed by the mess that sin creates, either in the world or in the community or in your own life, never forget that God the judge is big enough to sort it all out.

And the place where we see proof of this, proof of the fact that justice, righteousness and steadfast love are always held together, the place where we see proof of that is in Jesus Christ.

The Bible makes clear that the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son. You can see that in John 5.22. I think we can say that that works in two ways.

The Son executes judgment. He is judge. He is the Son of man, the one with power and authority to judge. And on the last day, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

And He will do so with justice, with righteousness and with love. But before Jesus comes to execute judgment, Jesus came to experience judgment.

[29 : 46] And on the cross, we see righteousness. We see the requirements of God's law being fully met.

On the cross, we see justice, the penalty of sin, fully paid. But on the cross, we also see steadfast love because the one who is experiencing judgment is hanging there instead of you.

And because of that, we can be delivered from condemnation. We can be justified for the day of judgment. We can be forgiven for all of our sins, not because judgment disappears, but because judgment has been placed on Jesus instead of us.

That's why at the heart of Christian salvation is a deliverance from being judged. And we're so thankful to God that for everyone who puts their trust in Jesus, you're not going to be judged according to what your sins deserve.

At the heart of Christian salvation is a deliverance from being judged. That's why it is no wonder that at the heart of Christian discipleship is a deliberate command against being the judge.

[31 : 21] Because Jesus experienced judgment so that we don't have to, he also executes judgment so that we don't have to. And both of these truths mean that a huge burden comes off your shoulders if you're trusting in Jesus.

Because in Jesus, you don't need to be the one to never put a foot wrong and to always get things right because we can't.

But also in Jesus, you don't need to be the one to fix everything when you've got it wrong or when others have.

God is God's work. He will carry the burden of making judgments instead of us.

He's also carried the burden of being judged instead of us. That's why for every Christian in here, for everyone who becomes a Christian, there's so much comfort to be found in the fact that God is an utterly brilliant judge.

[32 : 43] Very often life will make us cry. That's not fair. When it does, we can rest in the truth that God the judge will sort it out.

Life will make us cry. That shouldn't have happened. God the judge will sort it out. Life will make us cry.

That's a mess. God the judge will sort it out. Life will make us cry. I have no idea what to do.

God the judge will sort it out. But I've also got to say that if you're not willing to follow Jesus, then the fact that God is the perfect judge means that tonight you've got to think very hard about how you are going to explain to Jesus that his call to follow him and that his promises to love you weren't worth listening to.

We've said tonight that judgment is something that we've often thought would go bad, but actually were bad at it. We've said that people have looked at the church and seen it as judgmental.

[34 : 05] And I know that I've contributed to that myself over the years. I'm sure we all have to acknowledge the same. But I want to close by saying this.

Today in 2021, if you go home tonight and turn on the news or turn it on tomorrow morning or whenever, if you look at politics, if you look at social media, if you look at this class structure in our society, even if you look at the grapevine of gossip that runs through our village and through the island, in all of these places there's a huge amount of judging going on.

The world around us is judgmental. If we were to ask what's the first thing to come into your mind when you think of Facebook, I think the word judgmental wouldn't go wrong at times.

And so often the judgments in these places are brutal and merciless. That's why it's no wonder that James and Paul and Jesus all said don't do it.

And I've got no doubt that you will see brutal judgments around you in the week ahead, maybe from colleagues, maybe from friends, maybe on social media, maybe in the news, you will see it.

[35 : 21] Our role as a church is to be different. Our role is to stand out from that judgmental world and be beautifully different.

We want to be the place that exchanges sneers for smiles. We want to be the place where you swap gossip for grace, where whispering is exchanged for welcoming, where complaint is replaced with kindness and where cold harsh criticism is eclipsed with Christlike warmth and love.

May God grant that our colleagues, our neighbours, our family, our friends, may God grant that they can look at us as individuals and as a church and say, there's one place where I know I won't be judged.

Amen. Let us pray. Dear Father, we confess that we live in a world that is so full of harsh, hasty judgments.

We see it all around us and we see the harm that it causes. We also have to acknowledge that we have fallen into that trap many times ourselves and we see from your word how harmful that can be.

[37 : 03] And so we come to you tonight in repentance, praying that you would take away the urge and inclination to be judgmental and that we would replace that with just a fuller and fuller grasp of the fact that you are the perfect judge.

And so thinking about these things that we've thought about today help us to recognise that judgment is something that we've mistakenly thought that would good at but often we're bad at it and help us to remember that we need to leave it to you.

And with friendship that we spoke about in the morning, help us never to think that that's something we're going to be bad at. Help us to remember it's something that you've made us to be good at.

And so for the week ahead and for the rest of our lives, may all of our lives be full of friendship and empty of judgment.

All to your glory. Amen. So this is how we communicate our needs and God's spirit and procrastinate.