

ARM Prison Outreach International

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SERIES: "WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH -- WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT" -- PART 7

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the fifth email message of 2009 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers, chaplains, and Christian workers around the world. This issue is the 89th "MM" sent. All are archived -- just [click here](#) to see links to all messages sent since January of 2002.

This month's message is the seventh and last of a series of seven being sent on this theme. Larry Farthing, my older brother, deals with some crucial issues for the church and its reputation in each community. How are Christians perceived by the non-believers in our culture? How are congregations seen by non-members in their communities? It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach, lead, and encourage.

May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

The Mailbag

Rod, Very good message! Steve

You bet -- and let us pray for our nation. Willie

"WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT" SERIES

#7: "You're Too Judgmental!"

INTRO:

Based on survey work done in the last few years among mostly 16 to 29 year-olds, both church-goers and non-church-goers, today's Christians, especially evangelicals, are missing the mark in several ways, namely:

- 1. We're hypocritical; we don't live out the teachings of Jesus;**
- 2. All we care about is getting people "saved"; we don't really care about people;**
- 3. We hate homosexuals;**
- 4. We are disconnected; we don't live in the real world; we live in a "bubble";**
- 5. We're too political; and, finally,**

6. We're too judgmental.

I've already addressed the first five accusations. While they are all true to some extent, because the church is made up of imperfect people – recovering “sin-aholics,” if you please – we shouldn't be “written off” as illegitimate or stamped “null and void.”

As I've pointed out, by and large these negative opinions of us have as much or more to do with the attitude and misunderstandings of these young generations as they do with our failures. These “Mosaics” and “Busters” (or “Gen-Xers” as some call them) have been influenced by a world that is considerably different in its thinking than the society you and I grew up in.

Today I want to address the criticism that we're too judgmental – that we're too quick and too prone to point out what's wrong, that we make people feel put down and inferior to us, that we get off on making ourselves seem better by making others feel inferior, that we have a condemning spirit.

In his book *Unchristian*, David Kinnaman reports that “Nearly nine out of ten (87 percent) young outsiders (non-church-goers) said that the term *judgmental* accurately describes present-day Christianity” (p. 182).

He also points out that “More than half the young Christians between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine (53 percent) said they believe that the label *judgmental* accurately fits modern-day Christianity” (p. 183).

He writes: “...an entire generation of those inside and outside the church are questioning our motives as Christians. They believe we are more interested in proving we are right than that God is right. They say Christians are more focused on condemning people than helping people become more like Jesus” (p. 184).

“...in our efforts to point out sin,” he says, “we often fail to do anything for the people who are affected by sin. . . The perception is that Christians are known more for *talking* about these issues than *doing* anything about them” (p. 184).

Let me ask you: Do you think we have a loving church? Do we accept and love people unconditionally, regardless of how people look or what they do? Do we have a “Jesus love” for anybody and everybody?

IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE BE JUDGMENTAL?

According to our young critics, we can be judgmental in four ways:

First, they say we are judgmental in that we come to conclusions about people that are based on biases, assumptions, or stereotyping.

According to the Kinnaman survey, “Fifty-four percent of Americans ages eighteen to twenty-five have significantly altered their appearance at some point in their life

including tattoos, dying their hair an untraditional color, or piercing their body in a place other than an earlobe. In fact, one-third of all young adults have a tattoo” (p. 187).

What are your thoughts when you see one of these younger generation people? Do you make rather negative judgments about them, even though you really don't know them or anything about them?

Second, they say we are judgmental in that we don't know when to keep our mouth shut. That is, we rightly judge someone, but we communicate it at the wrong time or in the wrong context.

Third, they say we are often judgmental because while our judgment may be correct, our motivation is wrong. They feel that we make judgments without love and compassion.

Fourth, they say we are judgmental in that we practice *favoritism*. They see us giving special attention to particular types of people, and they see us ignore or even shun those less popular or other types.

WHAT DID JESUS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT BEING JUDGMENTAL?

He said in Matthew 7:1-5:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

Does this mean that we are to never make judgments about people – that we are to never point out the “specks” in people's eyes? Of course not. We're supposed to look out for one another. He's saying that we need to have the right motivation (a desire to help the other person). We need to do it with humility (recognizing our own shortcomings), and we need to do it in a way that we would want him to do it for us (mercifully).

The account of Jesus, the religious leaders, and the adulterous woman recorded in John 8 is a good example of what Jesus taught about judging. The religious leaders weren't wrong in their verdict that the woman was guilty of adultery and should be stoned, according to the Law of Moses, but they *were* wrong in their motive. *Why* and *how* the right thing is done is as important as doing the right thing.

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES HAVE TO SAY?

Paul says something pertinent in 1 Corinthians 5. In the case of the man who was having an affair with his step mother, he wrote in verses 9 through 13:

“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.”

“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.”

The message here: It is not for us to judge those outside the church; we are *our brother's* keeper, not the spiritual policemen of the world.

Paul also has some pertinent words in his letter to the Romans. After describing God's anger toward the godlessness and wickedness of mankind in chapter one, he goes on in chapter two:

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”

Then Paul goes on to point out how God's *kindness, tolerance, and patience* have led them to repentance. If the *kindness of God* has led us to repentance, which, in turn, has resulted in our salvation, what then should be our attitude toward the unsaved?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

How do we change the perception of the younger generations that we Christians are way too judgmental?

First, we need to examine ourselves regularly, seeing us as God sees us.

Examine yourself in the light of the four ways we can be judgmental that I mentioned earlier.

Second, we need to make an all-out effort to see others through God's eyes.

This means seeing others through eyes of compassion, love, and mercy – not just seeing what they are or seem to be but what they were created by God to be and through His grace could be.

CONCLUSION:

Mike Foster has written:

I've been meeting every other week at Starbucks with a pastor who had an affair with an employee at his megachurch. A few months ago his actions were found out; he left the ministry disgraced and is now going through a vicious divorce. . . this incredibly popular and well-loved pastor now finds himself abandoned by those in the Christian community. When the ugly news got out about his indiscretions, people stopped calling, the invitations to lunch dried up, and he was asked not to be involved in his small group any longer.

I'm not sure how it happened exactly, but it seems that grace, which is Christianity's most core issue, is struggling to survive. It also appears from the findings of people surveyed, that the church has seriously lost its way on this issue. Our culture doesn't look at us as a faith of second chances but rather as a religion of judgment. . . it appears at some level that the secular world is capable of "doing grace" better than we are.

So how do we become people who are known for grace? First, we must admit that we have a problem. We can't continue to pretend that the church is a place of grace if fundamentally we kick to the curb those within our very own community who screw up. If we can't forgive our pastors, leaders, and friends, then how could we possibly begin to forgive others? My "Starbucks pastor" needs to be embraced, not abandoned. We must begin by loving each other, forgiving each other, and carrying each other's burdens, especially when we fail. When a brother or sister is steamrolled by life, we don't run from them, we rally around them.

Secondly, we must engage with the people whom we have been taught to stay away from for too long. We must boldly enter into the environments where grace flourishes and does its best work. Christian insulation and a safe life are not what you and I signed up for when we said we would follow Jesus. He was never insulated from people's pain, and he sure didn't keep to safe places. He engaged with those who were being crushed by their mistakes and bad choices. Jesus wiped away the tears of the prostitutes, held the hands of outcasts, and touched the wounds of the sick and the crazy. He hung with the not-so-perfect people of the world and showed them what Christianity was all about. He was never concerned about a person's title, society's name tag, or the sign on their place of work. Porn stars or preachers, gay or straight, Republican or Democrat, it doesn't mean a rip to God [in the sense that we are all sinners and HE seeks ALL to come to repentance]. We are his children, and we are all in need of this stunningly beautiful thing called grace. We know what we need to do, now let's go do it (Unchristian, pp. 201-203).

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In 2008, ARM donated almost 40,000 FREE Bible courses to prisoners!