



"No Judgment, Just Neighbors"

A post card advertising a local church was delivered recently to my mail box. Printed on this card was a catchy slogan, "No judgment, just neighbors." I can imagine that this catch phrase would have some appeal to certain people. After all, who wants to be looked down on or condemned? Apparently this church wants to communicate the idea that people can come to this church without fear of being made to feel guilty.

"No judgment, just neighbors." Is this an appropriate way to advertise a church? Perhaps so, if favorable public opinion is the sole aim. But the Bible teaches us that our aim must be something more. Our goal is faithfulness to the Lord (I Cor. 4:2). We need to love people and seek to help them. But we love people by modeling Christ's virtues and by telling them the truth. And the truth is, that apart from Christ, each of us is guilty before God and subject to His judgment (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 3:19).

If "no judgment, just neighbors" means the people of this church do not think themselves better than others, then that is wholly appropriate. Christians are in no position to look down condescendingly on others because of their sin. If we would judge others, we must judge ourselves. Christians count themselves sinners, undeserving of God's favor and saved by grace alone. Paul reckoned himself the chief of sinners (I Tim. 1:15). He confessed, "but by the grace of God I am what I am" (I Cor. 15:10). God help us if we ever look down with pride on others because of their sin. A warm welcome should always be available for people whose lives are marked by wickedness, because "all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), and "God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16).

"No judgment, just neighbors." Surely, Christ came not "to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (Jn. 3:17). But this does not mean that Jesus did not come to awaken

men's consciences. On the contrary, the fact that people rejected Christ - His truth, love, and holiness - was a clear evidence that they were evil and in need of repentance and forgiveness (Jn. 3:19-21). Christ came not to condemn the world, but to die for the sins of a guilty world. But He will come a second time. And when He does, He will come to judge sin and sinners (II Thes. 1:8).

If "no judgment, just neighbors" means that you will never be made to feel guilty here - that this church offers no evaluation that we fall short of God's standard - then this is the opposite of what God wants and what people need. There is a strange, unbiblical idea common today that because born again Christians are "not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14), no one is held to an account by God. Christians are not under law because Christ died for our sins, fulfilling the Law's just demands for us. Those who do not know Christ abide under the Law's condemnation. Martin Luther preached, "The Law must be laid upon those who are to be justified, that they might be shut up in the prison thereof until the righteousness of faith come - that when they are cast down and humbled by the Law, they should fly to Christ." As unpopular as it may be, what people desperately need today is to be "cast down and humbled." All people need to realize their guilt in order that they might come to Christ Who alone can provide forgiveness. As well, to suggest that a Christian or anyone else is now free to live in any manner they wish is gross error. We are now free to become "servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). We are to live for God's glory and the good of others.

A man I know and respect was once asked how he chose his particular church. There were several Bible-believing churches in his community. How did he decide which one to join? His answer was brief and to the point. He said, "The preaching here convicted me."

Imagine choosing a physician because of the assurance that all potential patients will never be told that they are sick. Amazingly, this is how some people choose a church. And it is how some churches advertise themselves. "No judgment, just neighbors."