

Of all the wonderful wisdom Jesus gave us about Christian living, surely the most thoroughly ignored would be His instruction, “Do not judge so that you will be not judged”.(Matt.7:1) Judgement is what other people do. Helpful advice is what we give. Because we miss what He said, we suffer the judgement of others exactly as He warned we would. What a problem our critics have with judging! And what huge damage happens in our families, churches and communities as a result.

It always helps in looking at a simple statement, the significance of which we miss, to look at the context, what comes before and after. Jesus had spent the last two chapters leading His disciples through the revolutionary idea that instead of demanding justice when we are wronged, as the Law permitted, we should exercise mercy. He illustrated this by the outrageous exhortation to let the person who tries to take your shirt keep it.(Matt.5:40) Then He went a step further and said that we should let him have our coat also, and so demonstrate grace. Judgement by contrast is only about justice.

Jesus went on in chapter 6 to develop the idea He had presented in chapter 5, that real Christianity is about the inside not the outside. This revolutionary change in our thinking begins with our relationship with God in giving to the needy and in prayer. Following the Lord’s Prayer He highlighted the first step in giving as forgiving, which is mercy in action. He continued with the liberating proposition that when we are no longer bothered about appearance on the outside, which is what others will judge, we can stop worrying.

But returning to the instruction not to judge, we need to address the practical question that so much of our well meaning judgement is designed to help improve the lives of others. How on earth then can we do this if we are not going to point out what they said and did that was wrong? Jesus continued in Matt.7:6 with the advice not to ‘give what is holy to dogs’ or to ‘throw your pearls before swine’. We have traditionally seen this as instruction not to continue to preach to those who do not want to listen. But in context He could have been talking about our supposedly helpful judgements of others which are not accepted or fruitful because they are only our opinions. He then went on to encourage us to ask, seek and knock.(Matt.7:7,8) We could see this as simply more promises about prayer but again in the context of our observation of others, Jesus could be reminding us, before we open our mouths to criticize, to ask for wisdom,(James 1:5) to seek for His opportunity with the lost,(Ezek.34:16) and then knock on the door of someone’s heart to introduce them to our friend Jesus.(Rev.3:20) And so we would be giving God’s gift of Truth to His children instead of our condemnation.(Matt.7:9-11) This is exactly how we would like to be treated by others.(Matt,7:12) He continued in the rest of the chapter bringing this novel idea alive with illustrations about wide or narrow paths, wolves in sheep’s clothing, various fruit trees and building houses on different foundations.(Matt.7:13-27) The listening crowd recognized this teaching as coming from God not the religious prejudices they were used to hearing in the synagogue.

When the Lord is allowed to speak through us of mercy and grace, those who hear us will also be amazed and blessed instead of hurt and angry.(Matt.7:28,29)

On Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> February we plan to hold our 5<sup>th</sup> Bible Conference. Our theme is a strange one, 'Who stole our village?', based on the African proverb, 'It takes a whole village to bring up a child', and a child's question to her grandfather, 'Who stole our village?' The question for us is how teaching the gospel of the grace of God can put Christ back into a community in such a way that children are loved, protected, taught and shown truth, starting with their parents but supported by the wider community. The public hear a great deal of condemnation of child rearing and of troubled young people. We know there is a better way. We would love you to join us and bring with you anyone who might be interested in this topic and what we do at the Lodge. Most of our lecturing team will contribute 20-30 minutes to the programme. We will share lunch.

During January we will have a series of three 5 day Water Week camps at Taihoa, Nick's small farm on the Waioeka River near Opotiki. Please pass the word to young people you know who would benefit or who could help us. E-mail Nick for brochures on [nickjhanne1982@hotmail.com](mailto:nickjhanne1982@hotmail.com). The cabin at Taihoa has had a major upgrade in the last few weeks with help from various students and friends from Auckland, and the local people from the marae. There is now a large, beautiful deck which will greatly enhance the character of the already magnificent setting.

Talking of the village raising a child, our involvement in finding sponsors for children in villages in Eastern Uganda, South-East India and Pakistan has continued to grow during the last year, though we would love it to happen faster. Various combinations of poverty, oppression and neglect produce horrific conditions in which children die or are driven into rebel armies, crime or prostitution. Caring families who can help if they are given even minimal resources can be God's means of rescuing these kids. Contact Christine on [christinehanne@clear.net.nz](mailto:christinehanne@clear.net.nz) for Uganda, or Albert on [albert.ruijne@woosh.co.nz](mailto:albert.ruijne@woosh.co.nz) for India and Pakistan, if you want to join with us.

Every year for many years we have reported that the past year has been wonderfully fruitful, which it always has, but every year has been strikingly different. This past year has been no exception. What has been unique has been the number of residential families who came because of various needs. We have seen the Lord meet many of those needs and strengthen them in Christ. We have been able to be a 'village' standing with each other.

For us as a family, 2011 has been a very fulfilling one. Pete has graduated from his 2 year diploma in outdoor education instructing and in the process won another medal. He is now doing further training in emergency help with the ambulance service and with land search and rescue. Nick has completed his honours year very successfully and will continue into a Masters degree next year. Christine and I made another visit to Fiji to help in a leadership training programme. The combination of Bible School and medical practice is as exciting as ever. We would love to know how the year has been for you. Have a wonderful Christmas! Our love in Christ, Tony, Christine, Nick and Pete