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Breaking the Power of Pain



Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.

Matthew 7:1 is probably one of the most misinterpreted of all Scriptures: *"Judge not, that ye be not judged."* We do not know how to make it through our daily lives without judging everybody and everything around us. We think we are walking in wisdom! We think that we are discerning and that our judgments will protect us from future pain, but nothing is further from the truth. Instead, we create a world of conflict and suffering through the very judgments we think will protect us.

It is true that some events have the power to bring momentary emotional pain. However, in order for something to become an abiding torment, we must first attach significance to it. It is this significance that takes a single event and turns it into a life of suffering.

Judgment Is the Bottom Line

It seems impossible for the majority of our pain to be the product of judgment rather than events. We are so sure that the wrongs we have suffered have imprisoned us in a life of pain. But the truth is that accepting this reality—that our judgments produce our pain—is the only way out of the maze of lifelong torment.

If the events of our lives were the source of our torment, then we would have no control over our future. We would be doomed to “coincidence.” Or, what is worse, in an attempt to understand life’s circumstances, we would convince ourselves that God brought or allowed these things into our lives for some purpose. Of course, subjectively determining that purpose would cause us to decide *why* God allowed it. In other words, we would have to judge God.

Nothing that happens outside of you has the power to hurt you *until you judge it*. Only when you judge something does it bear significance in your life. Let me say it another way. When people do something, you judge why they did it; you decide what their motive was. Once you determine (judge) the motive, you give that event significance, or power.

In Luke 17:1 Jesus said to His disciples, “*It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!*” From Scripture, we can quickly ascertain that being a disciple and following Jesus does not mean that problems will not come. The religious mind thinks that trouble comes only to those who deserve it. Not so. Jesus said trouble will come. So don’t waste your time trying to figure out why; doing that puts you right back into a judgment situation.

I know people who no longer walk with God because they judged that God caused or allowed certain events to happen. In light of their judgment, they thought God had rejected them.

As a result, they began to feel rejected. Their false feelings confirmed God’s “rejection” and so validated their false judgment. In the end, they grew angry with God and rejected Him.

I repeat, Jesus never said that becoming His disciple would protect us from circumstance. However, He did teach us that if we are His disciples, we can build our lives on His teaching and live above the control and devastation of circumstance. This is precisely what He was teaching in this passage in Luke 17.

Our Reaction Is the Determining Factor

Jesus did not focus very much attention on what befalls the violator. Instead, He went to great lengths to help us learn the process whereby we can protect ourselves when an offense comes. He showed us that our concern should not be about the fate of the offender, but our own.

In Luke 17:3 He continued, “*Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee....*” We may ask, “Why should I have to take heed? I am the victim! My offender is the one who should take heed.” This is the very response He warned against.

We do not fall accidentally. We fall in response to events and circumstances. It is true, there are people out there who wrong us by deliberately attempting to make us fall. However, most offenses have nearly nothing to do with us. People are not doing things because of us; they are doing things because of who they are. In our haste to judge, we assume that they do what they do because of us. Actually, we are so self-centered that we think everything a person does is because of us. It is a shocking reality for some to discover that they are not that important to anyone!

When the opportunity for offense comes, our reaction is the determining factor. Only when we react in an unscriptural way does the offense bring pain to our lives. Jesus told us what we

should do when we are offended. He explained how we should not discuss it with anyone. We should not get others involved. Instead, we should rebuke the offender (not judge him).

A Rebuke—Not Judgment—Can Bring Healing

The word *rebuke* comes from two Greek words. One means "upon," and the other means "to fix a value or to honor." (See *Strong's Concordance*, #G1909 and #G5091.) Some translate it as "to charge strongly." It could be that rebuking is nothing more than making a person aware of the *value* of their actions. To say to a person, "I know why you did this," is not a rebuke but a judgment. All we can say in a rebuke is this: "This is what you just did, and this is the effect (value) it had on me." Nothing more, nothing less. We cannot attach significance. We cannot use that action to judge what kind of person she is. We can tell the person that she has done this thing often. But we cannot judge the motive, the intent. We simply say, "This is what you have done; this is how it affected me." Most people are surprised when they learn the effects of their actions.

The remainder of Luke 17:3-4 gives us what should be our motive for the rebuke: "And if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Our goal should be to bring the offender to repentance. The goal cannot be punishment. Punishment is the penalty that we think a person deserves based on our judgment. Judgment precedes vengeance. Until we pass judgment, we have no desire for vengeance. Remember, we have no right to vengeance. God said vengeance belongs to Him alone (Romans 12:19). The mere fact that we are seeking vengeance indicates that we have already passed judgment.

In most cases, when someone learns how his or her behavior is affecting us, the reply will be, "I didn't know." Then a person

gets to learn how to be more tasteful in his or her behavior. At that moment a healing can happen that sets us free from the pain of the offense. Seldom does a confrontation of this sort become aggressive—unless the offended person passes judgment.

True healing happens when everyone benefits from the event.

When a person offends us, we can take it as an opportunity to experience the grace of God. We can use it to grow in love and mercy. Through it we can experience in God something that we may have never had before. The offender, too, can experience something from God through the situation that he may have never experienced. For many people, this can be the input they need in order to stop offensive behavior.

Sometimes, when we confront others, we discover that we are "too touchy." In other words, there was no reason that the action should have hurt us. The Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is not touchy or oversensitive. Even when the issue at hand turns out to be our problem, we can still win. We can gain insight into our beliefs and actions and have an opportunity to experience healing and freedom.

When we handle offense by using sound communication and relationship principles, we stop pain before it becomes torment. In a *scriptural* confrontation, everyone has a chance to grow. Everyone has a chance to experience healing. The cycle of pain and torment can end for everyone involved.

no ill intention, yet they can have devastating effects. There can even be actions that people intend for good, but that can create massive amounts of pain. When such events happen, we think, *They are doing this to me.* The truth is, regardless of people's intentions, we are doing it to ourselves.

It All Depends on Significance

I grew up in a rough and violent situation. I saw violence at a young age as my father physically abused my mother. At some point very early in my life, my father threatened to burn the house down with my family in it. I was around eleven years old the first time I was ever knocked out. My stepfather was beating my mother, and I stepped in to protect her. When I was eighteen years old, after being away from home for five years, I went back to spend a couple of nights and visit with my family. While I was there, my stepfather attempted to kill me in my sleep.

Sometimes, when people hear parts of my testimony, they say, "I can't imagine how you can be even close to normal." They think that those circumstances should have had a greater abiding effect on my life. Although I do have emotional issues that I have not yet fully realized, the events I have described have no real significance in my life today.

What I experienced was overt rejection, which is possibly the simplest rejection to deal with; it is open and straightforward. There are few hidden agendas and little emotional manipulation in this type of rejection.

The situation with my stepfather was simple. He hated me and wanted to drive me out of the house. I hated him, and I did not want to stay in the house with him. That is easy to understand. Before I received Jesus as my Savior, I was very bitter and filled with hate for my stepfather. I thought of murdering him. After I was saved, I released him from my judgment and freed myself from the pain. Although his actions were the cause of

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The Power of Significance



It is not the intensity of the pain, but the significance you attach that determines the effect.

Jesus warned us that others would judge us with the same standards we use to judge them. The difference, however, is that they will give back a lot more than we gave. Then He went on to say, "*With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again*" (Matthew 7:2). The measure, or effect, that comes back to us through any event is based on two factors. The first is the significance we attach to the event. The second is our motive when we do these same things. If we measure something by giving it value, size, and significance, then that measurement determines its effect on us.

The effect of another person's behavior has little to do with his or her intent. But that effect has everything to do with our judgment, or how we measure it. People may take actions with

much of the pain in my life, my judgment was the source of abiding torment.

People who come to me for counseling have experienced events that were much less dramatic, yet had a more severe influence on their lives. To be honest, in the early days of my ministry, I had no compassion for these people. In my smug self-righteousness, I thought, *Get real. You haven't been through anything compared to me.* What I offered as help for those people was probably not very helpful. Eventually I came to realize that it is not the intensity of the offense that determines the pain; rather, it is always the significance we attach that determines our pain. This being the case, one person could have an extremely intense experience with very few destructive results, while another could go through an apparently harmless experience and, because of the significance attached to it, have devastating results.

In reality, it was the subtle, manipulative rejection I experienced from my grandmother that had more lasting effects than the violence I endured from my stepfather. Covert rejection is usually more difficult to resolve than overt rejection. Covert rejection has much more emotional challenge, even though it may not be as intense as open rejection. It is even more difficult to handle when it comes from people we love and trust. Being rejected by a person we hate has relatively no effect compared with being rejected by someone we love. The action is the same, but we attach significance because we pass judgment on why he or she did it.

How Would You React?

Many times someone does something as simple as not speak to us. Perhaps someone important to us fails to compliment us. Or maybe we are not praised for an accomplishment, or a parent is overprotective. We think they're angry, that they don't love us,

that they don't think we're pretty, or that we don't know how to do anything. Any one of those simple events could become life-changing based on the significance we attach. For example, when a mother is overprotective, thinking she is showing love, the child usually judges it to mean, "She thinks I am stupid." Although that judgment may be incorrect, the results are demoralizing.

Imagine how the following event could become devastating. On Sunday morning, unknown to you, the pastor had to deal with a crisis situation—one that would make the difference between life and death, heaven or hell, or a saved marriage instead of a broken one. As he rushes into the church, where the service has already begun, his mind is totally occupied with that crisis. You speak to him as he walks past. He seemingly ignores you.

Nothing negative actually happened; he simply did not speak to you. However, through your feelings of inadequacy you begin to think about it and attach significance to it; you begin to measure it. You create a judgment. You ask yourself the "W" question: "Why didn't he speak to me?" Based on how you answer that question, your self-talk could continue like this: "I don't think he likes me. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure he ever really did like me!" You attach significance to insignificant actions, and now, based on your judgment, it is measured back to you as pain and rejection. That event now has power in your life. —TEXTURE

At this point, the matter could easily be resolved. You could approach the pastor, describe the event—without judgment—and learn that his actions had nothing to do with you. Because he was lost in thought at the time, it would not have mattered who was standing there; he would not have noticed anyone who spoke.

Or maybe you go home angry and frustrated (perhaps after withholding your offering). Then it goes a step beyond that, as

you begin to tell others what the pastor did to you. "I've been faithful and loyal to that church, and the pastor has never liked me! And on top of that, he's rude to me!"

You are really hurting now. You have real mental pain and anguish, but it is not based on what the other person did to you; it is based on the judgment you passed. "*With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again*" (Matthew 7:2).

Two things begin to happen. First, the way in which you relate to people, as a whole, will be the way in which other people relate to you. Then there is a quantum leap from that to "the measure that you mete." This crosses over into the realm where it has nothing to do with how anybody else responds to you as much as how it affects you in your own heart because of the significance you attach.

Since we spend our lives judging people—relating to people based on our judgments of them—our lives are full of pain and dysfunction. We don't have meaningful relationships or communication because we are always judging the real motives behind what people say or do. And it all is based on our judgment.

All it takes to break free from this destructive cycle is to refuse to judge, to refuse to attach significance to the actions of others. When another person's actions affect you negatively, simply ask if there is a problem. Don't assume, and don't attach significance. When you can learn to observe rather than judge, you can stop the pain before it becomes suffering.