



REFLECTIONS

November 20, 2016

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7:12

Do Not Judge—Part 2

A helpless feeling fell on the player like a curtain at the end of a show. Indeed, it was the end. He could hear the coach's warning rising above the screaming crowd; but by then, little could be done. He was out of position and could only watch the ball sail through the air toward the place he was supposed to be. His opponent *was*—Game over.

Likely you have found yourselves in such a fix in some setting or another. You've been told how to play your position. You even heard the coach's warnings when you were not where you were supposed to be. You didn't follow instructions—Game over.

Jesus began the wrap-up of his Sermon on the Mount with a coach's warning. "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged,*" (Matthew 7:1) His message isn't a command to avoid discerning good from bad as we often think it to be. Discernment requires an element of judgment. Rather Jesus is warning us of the consequence of criticizing others.

We tend to measure others' behavior against our own heritage, values, traditions, and experiences. But don't others also interpret *our* behavior against theirs? When we examine our own failings, we position ourselves to better understand the failings of those we want to criticize. Understanding is the pathway to compassion, compassion leads to mercy, and tucked away somewhere inside mercy is the doorway to forgiveness.

It's all about position—doing the right thing to get in the right place. That's the point of the fifth Beatitude. "*Blessed are the merciful/for they will be shown mercy;*" (Matthew 5:7) And the point of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" (Matthew 6:12) And there is more.

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, [you will find yourself out of position for] your Father [to] forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15, my brackets added.)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45)

In these passages, Jesus is coaching us to position ourselves to serve him. When we fail to have mercy, we find ourselves out of position to receive it. When we fail to forgive, we find ourselves out of position to be forgiven. If we fail to love our enemies, or to pray for those who persecute us, we are out of position to be sons of our Father in heaven. "So," Jesus says, "*in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.*" Just follow his instruction. Get in position; then—Game over. This time you win.

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