

## Elements Of Judgment (Part Two)

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As we begin this second of a series of sermons regarding judgment, I want to remind us that in John 7:24, Jesus commanded that we make righteous judgments. This is in direct contrast to Matthew 7:1 where God commands us to not judge.

The difference between the two is in the term 'righteous,' because Jesus said, "judge righteous judgments." We are constantly making choices regarding conduct and attitudes. Judging is an integral part of doing so. Factors must be balanced out, one against the other, to ensure the wisest possible choice in each circumstance. Because we have been called of God using His word and especially what people refer to as God's law is central virtually to every choice made in our life if we are going to please Him and be prepared for His Kingdom.

A major hindrance to this process is that this culture we live in persistently teaches that some, if not all, of God's law is done away. That is clearly not what we believe. There is some uncertainty because we know that some laws are no longer required to be physically performed.

I gave an overall principle in that first sermon to safely guide us to understand and have a much better chance of achieving a right balance regarding God's laws. It goes like this (I shortened it a little bit from the first sermon, but it is still essentially the same thing.): We must never carelessly assume that any law of God is done away. That is probably the most important part of this principle. We must never carelessly assume that any law of God is done away. Rather, because God is the author of these laws in scripture, we should assume His laws are in some way still binding and seek ways to apply them, thus glorifying Him in so doing. That is the end of that principle.

It is one that we must have part of our working knowledge of God and His way of life. We cannot assume that anything is done away. As we go through this sermon, I will give you valid reasons why we cannot assume something like this.

Then I gave a second principle helpful to understand and use in the making of judgments. Much of the material in these sermons is regarding this principle. It is this: Not every law of God is on the same level of seriousness regarding His purpose.

Balancing these two principles is an important factor in making wise choices. As we

finished last Sabbath, I was establishing this principle that not all things are equal in the realm of making judgments by showing that love is the greatest of all Godly characteristics. We want to be careful here because people's perception of love is not the same as God's perception of love. In God's perception of love, He lets us know right out front and very clear that His love is the most important of all His characteristics. It is His love that we are to strive to apply in our lives and of course to each other.

Begin with me by turning to the scripture that we left off with in part one. This will be just a little bit of review. This principle, I believe, is very important in regard to showing that God's love is the most important of all His characteristics and the one that we are to strive to emulate most of all.

**I Corinthians 13:1-3** Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am as nothing. Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Remember, he is talking about God's love. God's love is not the same in the realm of definition as this world's love is. For the world, love is having sexual intercourse or love is simply a feeling that one gets. A feeling of effusiveness and having a bit of affection within it. No, that is not quite what God's love is, even though there may be affection within the realm of God's love.

Paul deliberately contrasts love with other highly respected qualities that, to men, seem very important. Eloquence of speech that enables one to be persuasive or knowing the future, having a prophetic gift so that one can rightly direct his steps in wisdom, etc. Love is greater than that. Having the power of great faith to affectively accomplish wonderful things or even making large material contributions and sacrificing oneself in martyrdom in service to a great cause is not as great as love.

Thus, unless one's qualities motivate to produce love, the sacrifices are of little spiritual value. Paul finds them all lacking, paling almost into insignificance, because when contrasted to love, all those other qualities fall far short of Godly significance. In practical application, what Paul is urging us to understand is of major importance to Christian life. It is because we have God's spirit, regardless of whom one is in the body of Jesus Christ (whether that person is an apostle, a recent convert, or elderly widow),

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all have the means to express in their life's experience this most important of all qualities.

God has not left us standing behind the door without gifts. Most of all He wants us to be able to conduct our life in love—*His* kind and *His* level of love. I am not saying that this is easy. I am saying knowing what love is in any given circumstance is not always easily discerned. In a one-on-one comparison, when all other things are equal, God is saying that the one who loves is greater than the person who moves mountains or heals, is greater than the person who knows the intricacies of prophesy, is greater than the person who speaks in tongues or is eloquently persuasive in preaching.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If one judges sin using only Romans 6:23, then our salvation is hanging in the balance with each sin. If you sin, you die. I mean, that is the way it looks if you just use that one scripture. That statement does give one the impression that regardless of the sin, the death penalty hangs over our head every time we break the rules. It could be interpreted this way, if we use just that one scripture.

Let us go to the book of John, just to give another scripture that might stand alone in one's mind, if one is judging.

**John 10:35** If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken).

Is it possible that Romans 6:23 might be able to be modified? It is one of the scriptures; and the scriptures cannot be broken. But, yes indeed, it can be modified when other information (also in God's word) is brought to bear on any given situation.

We will go back to the book of I John.

**I John 5:16-17** If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, [Did you hear that?] he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

Here is the apostle John clearly stating in scripture that there are sins which do not bring the death penalty upon us as others do. That requires making decisions, making choices, and having information available to us which we can use to make a wise choice.

Just taking this at its face value, it begins to become obvious (as it is in man's laws), God does not judge every offence on the same level. Some laws and disobediences are more serious than others. I might add here, looking in Protestant commentaries on this subject is not much help because they do not consider sin anywhere near as broad a light as we tend to do. To them, sin is for the most part narrowly restricted to only the breaking of the Ten Commandments. Even here, though, on the Ten Commandments they waver a great deal. Therefore, in their view, all sin is basically on the same level. They do not often consider the breaking of any Old Testament law of Israel as sin.

Let us look at a definition. We will get two definitions, here.

**I John 5:17** All unrighteousness is sin and there is sin not leading to death.

Righteousness simply means 'right doing.' It means that one has done the right thing. Hold your finger there in I John. We are going to flip back to another well-known scripture. It is going to be in Psalms 119:172 where we get yet another definition. It has a very compelling statement.

**Psalms 119:172** My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

All of God's commandments are righteousness. I do not know exactly how many commands God gives in Scripture, but there are an awful lot of them. All those commandments are righteousness. What if a person believed that a pretty good chunk of the Bible is done away and that we really do not have to pay a great deal of attention to them? Does that mean that God is eliminating some laws that He laid down at one time or another and that they are no longer righteousness? It makes me wonder, if they are not righteousness now, were they ever righteousness? This scripture answers that question. All of God's commandments are righteousness. It does not matter when they were issued by Him, what circumstance they were issued under, and whether they are done away. They are not done away. They are still representative of righteousness. All of them.

Is it possible that there are laws of God that He gave to cover a certain situation good and well, but now that situation no longer exists? People will say that that law is done away. But that law still defines righteousness, should that circumstance ever come up again. Does He not show in the book of Ecclesiastes, in the very first chapter, that basically the very same things keep happening over again all through history. Tie this to the thought about laws being done away. If the same things are going to keep coming up over again, that means that at any given time in the history of mankind, the need for that law people are saying is done away has arisen once again.

If a person believes that laws are done away, then he will not pay attention to that section of scripture. Because, after all, why do it? It is a waste of time. That has been done away. No, it has not been done away. Part of the reason is, as God says, the same things keep happening over again all through the ages. Names, dates, and places change. Things like that, but the same situation keeps coming up. So, if we put Psalm 119:172 into very plain language, all of God's commandments are right-doing; regardless of where they appear in the Bible, they are still describing right-doing. They may be needed. We understand that not all of God's law is in play all the time. The Williams Translation, of verse 17 of I John 5, puts it in the following way.

**I John 5:17** (Williams Bible) Any wrong-doing is sin.

That is very plain. Easy to understand.

**I John 5:17** (20<sup>th</sup> Century New Testament Bible) Every wrong action is sin and there is sin that is not deadly.

Again, that is very clear. With that background of I John 5:16-17, it is very easily seen that not all sins are on the same level of importance to us. With this understanding, we should be able to see that since all of God's commandments are right-doing and God gave all Old Covenant laws, then breaking any of those laws can rightly be labelled as sin within their context. That is not hard to understand. That is what John does when he says that all of unrighteousness is sin.

Even though it is sin, it may not be on the same level as another sin in another context at another time. John could have said, "You will all recognize that what I am going to say are definitions of sin as to what the word, sin, in this place actually literally means; all unrighteousness is missing the mark." You get the point? All unrighteousness is turning aside. All unrighteousness is wandering from the path.

None of that literal translation in any way puts all sin on the same level. This is because all laws are not on the same level. As we will find out just a bit later in other scriptures, the person committing the sin and the attitude motivating the sin are not on the same level of significance either. By the time I am done here, you will probably be confused. Except for one thing, we will at least know, and know that we know, that not everything is on the same level. Not every action, not every attitude, not every word, is on the same level. To rightly discern what wisdom is, one has to be a thinking person. That is what God is aiming for.

Why does He want thinking people as His children? It is because of what He is preparing us for. He is preparing us for rulership, and rulers have to think. They have to judge. They have to make decisions. That is why God has done what He has done. He has made, in some ways, some things fairly complex, and He has done it to train us how to think. We are beginning to see more clearly why Solomon asked what He did and why God was so pleased that Solomon asked for the gift of understanding. Because understanding leads to wisdom. Wisdom leads to right choices.

I want to make sure that you are convinced that when you see things, whether in real life or in the Book, God wants us to think. He wants us to think like He does in parameters of love, as to what the right action ought to be.

Because of all of these complexities, there are a number of factors that one must consider in order to judge this issue correctly. Here is an obvious reference that all law is not on the same level.

**Mark 12:28-30** Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" [If it is the first, then other commandments must be below it.] Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

If we put this question in modern language, he is asking which command is the greatest commandment. Same issue, just change the terms a little bit and we understand it. The greatest of all commandments given to mankind is that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.

**Mark 12:31** And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as

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yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

That is so clear, brethren. Not all laws are on the same level. Some are more significant than others. Some are more important than others. Some bear greater weight than others. We are going to find as we continue through this, the Bible makes this very clear so that we are not in doubt to what God expects of us.

**Mark 12:32-34** So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

I think Jesus was really pleased with what this man discerned in this way. The man's mind was moving in the right direction, if I can put it that way. Though he may not have been completely converted at the time, he was moving in the right direction and that pleased Jesus. He had captured the essence of all the laws of God, and he had narrowed it down to these being the most important of all. In other words, he was already showing Jesus that he was putting things in the right category, in the right place, in the right way, so that he would be able to make wise decisions in relation to his life.

When Jesus responded to the question, He did so by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. That is where Mark 12:30 appears. So here we are, all the way back under the Old Covenant in the Old Testament and the greatest of all laws appears there. Now it appears in the New Testament as well. Jesus has defined from all the laws of God that this is number one and this is number two. That is why I began this sermon with I Corinthians 13 to show the apostle Paul was in complete agreement with Jesus Christ; the greatest of all qualities is love, God's love. Love has to be taught so that we understand God's perspective of love as well. That will come out as well.

After quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, guess where the second greatest commandment is. It is also in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant. It is in Leviticus 19:18. You have that old book that is filled with all kinds of sacrifices and bloody things, yet the second greatest of all laws appears in that book. So people arbitrarily say, "oh, that has been done away." No, it has been in existence from the very beginning

It was recorded first in the Old Testament. The thought that is given in Mark 12:31, "the second is like it," may seem a little bit radical. From what I have already said and what I am going to tell you in my adjustment here is proof that at the top of the heap of all God's laws is not one law. There are two of them. The first one and the second because of what Jesus said in modern language in verse 31, "these two stand together." In other words, they are on their own level together and they are the guide, actually, to all other laws pointing to or describing how those two can be met in one's life. What I just said is the way Jesus put that. What He was saying, translated very clearly, is you want to aim all of your actions toward meeting these two laws and being in agreement with them.

That is not hard. Surely everybody ought to say, "Yes, I want to love God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind; but, boy, my neighbor, I cannot stand him!" No, Jesus said you cannot do that! These two laws stand together. Do not forget, this love has to be defined by God. It is not human love. It is Godly love.

What we are saying here is that these two become one law. It is one law with two aspects, the way Jesus stated it in verse 31. The second like it is this. It is similar to and stands on the same level as the other one. It is almost as though these two laws become one law with two aspects. Neither is to be raised above the other and each depends on the other for its fullest effect.

As we saw in the sacrifices, keeping the one law without the other is not acceptable. I will show you the way God showed this in the sacrificial law. This is easy to remember. That is, whenever a burnt offering was offered on the altar, it was always burned along with the meal offering. First, the burnt offering went on the altar and then the meal offering went on top of that. Both were burned together. What He is teaching us is that these two laws, these two patterns for life, stand on a level above everything else. They both must be operated as if they are one law with two aspects.

That ought to be very clear. God does not categorize everything on the same level. This requires thinking on our part; and it is a guide to our decision making. Richard said in his sermon this morning that the law of God is a guide for life. "This is the way I want you to behave. This is the way I want you to think. This is the way I want you to speak." So, it guides. It is not there to save us. It is there to give us guidance so that we make the right decisions, right choices, and have the correct conduct in our life.

In this section where He categorized these two laws that stand above all the others as if they are one and all other laws hang beneath, these two in rank of importance, does not mean that all those laws that hang beneath are done away. Nothing Jesus said here indicates that. Nothing. They are still hanging on those two big ones. They are still there.



It is always good to remember, in a place like this, to whom Jesus was speaking. The Pharisees were what the world would categorize as legalists. They tended to be very rigid in their judgments. There were no gray areas at all with them. They were very quick to pounce on somebody they felt was breaking the commandment without taking anything else regarding the conduct of these people into consideration because they seemed to judge Jesus as a flaming liberal, which He was not. Not at all.

He was saying that the expression, the manifestation of true religion, the true worship of God revolves around loving God and men as expressed primarily in the Ten Commandments. All other laws like circumcision, sacrificial laws, purification laws, food laws as well, are of lesser importance. They are not in the same category as those two biggies, if I can put it that way. This is confirmed in the way that the scribe reacted to Jesus' comment. He mentioned the sacrifices in verses 32 and 33. The end of verse 33, "more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." The man got it, he understood, he grasped what Jesus was talking about; and then Jesus confirmed that the man was right on tract and that the man had really nailed the issue.

Is there any indication that loving God with all of one's heart and soul did away with any laws of lesser value? Not at all. Jesus was acknowledging that the scribe understood the relative importance of each body of laws as they applied to the worship of God. The man got it.

This is a very interesting section in Isaiah 42. It pertains to what we were just talking about. It is one of those memory verses. We will read one verse, and then I will do a little bit of explaining.

**Isaiah 42:21** The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable.

Here is an interesting teaching from God's Word that is quite a bit earlier than Mark 12. God is giving a contrast between what His true servant says, as compared to what the false representatives claiming to be God's servants say. If you would read this a bit more widely in this chapter, you would see in this context Israel is His servant and unfortunately, His servant Israel has become blind and deaf. You know, blind spiritually and deaf spiritually. He can no longer understand. What kind of servant is that going to be for God, if the servant is blind and deaf?

If one (here comes the contrast) is a true servant of the true God, we will say ordained prophet, apostle, converted Israelite, or Jesus Christ Himself, He will not be proclaiming

God's teaching, revelation of His law, or any aspects of that is done away. Just think that through for just a second. Jesus began His ministry by saying, "Do not think that I came to destroy the law and the prophets." No servant of God is ever going to say those laws are done away! The reason they do not say that is because they are not blind to the truth. They are not deaf to that; they understand it! You do not just do away with the word of God simply because being required to do a certain thing at a certain time in one's life is unnecessary at that time. But the law remains because things are going to turn around and that law will be needed again.

Here is God's own proclamation. His servants will never say that God's laws are done away. They are not blind to that at all. Instead, His servants will magnify the law. They will make it clear, honorable, and understandable. That is exactly what Jesus did. God's word is always wisdom. Though every portion may not directly apply in any given situation, it is always available in His Book to be applied when that wisdom is needed. Again, if one thinks that portions are done away, they will not even think about using it, and they deny themselves the very wisdom of the God that they say they love.

Let us continue in the book of Isaiah. This scripture is helpful for our conduct.

**Isaiah 1:11-17** "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or goats. [We just read in Isaiah 42 why God would say something like this. His servant, Israel, was blind. His servant, Israel, was deaf to the truth. He asks, to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me.] "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?" [A person reading that, who is blind and deaf like His servant, would think that sacrifices are done away. But, oh no, not at all! Remember, this is Isaiah and those sacrifices were still to be applied.] "Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me." [Why would He say such things?] "The new moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good; seek justice; rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

What conclusion can we reach here? The sacrifices are acceptable to God only if they have been preceded by doing acts of loving obedience. It is the keeping of the Ten Commandments by the power of God's Spirit from which holiness comes that matters to God. Otherwise, the loud verbal professions of admiration of Him are hollow noise. The making of sacrifices is not of any value in the kind of context that He shows there in Isaiah the first chapter.

Even though sacrifices were commanded to be done then, He was telling them what they were doing was useless. Why? The reason is because the sacrifices are acceptable only if they are preceded by a righteous life. In other words, they are acceptable only in a narrow context. He does not mean that the people must be absolutely without sin for the sacrifices to be acceptable, but rather they must be showing a consistently high level of obedience, otherwise no acceptable sacrifices would ever be made, including ours.

He does expect us to make every effort to obey Him and then our sacrifices are acceptable to Him. That is in the Book so that we understand. That is why I emphasized this earlier. One of the reasons why Abel's sacrifice was acceptable is because it was preceded by a life of obedience. He was right on target. There is a practical spin-off about what we have just gone through in the book of Hebrews. I want us to go back there.

**Hebrews 9:6-10** Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went in to the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with food and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

The practical spin-off from what Paul is saying is that holiness comes in part from keeping spiritual laws from within a spiritual relationship with God, not merely observing physical ordinances at the temple. In like manner, merely going through the motions of Christian religion, like sacrificing one's time to merely attend services cannot make a person holy before God. Truly religious is to 'actively' love God, which they were not doing in Isaiah the first chapter. To be truly religious is to actively love God and those

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whom God made in His own image, fellow man—not with nebulous sentimentality, which the love of this world is, but with a sincere, serious, and active, submissive commitment in devotion to God that is seeking Him in study, prayer, and in the practical daily service of men.

In Hebrews 9 is a spiritual example drawn from the sacrificial laws that people insist on claiming are done away. But never forget that the burnt and meal offerings reveal the Man, Jesus Christ, keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly in His earthly life. Jesus clearly demonstrated by His entire lifetime of not sinning, but never in His entire life ever offering a single physical sacrifice at the temple; and yet He was perfectly acceptable before God.

What this does (drawn from Jesus' life) is show the relative unimportance of the Old Covenant sacrifices as compared to those personal, day-to-day sacrifices He made during His earthly life. Do you get the point? We are to follow in His steps. Our sacrifices are not things that occur at an altar in a temple, killing a lamb. Our sacrifices are in actual practical service to other human beings. If we are going to be walking in the steps of Jesus Christ—this is what we are going to be striving to do. Let me make it plain. What Paul is showing here is the relative unimportance of the physical operations of giving a sacrifice at a temple.

Again, which is more important? A sacrifice we honestly make for the benefit of our brother in the church, or the sacrifice of sacrificing a lamb at a temple and burning it on the fire. Do you get the point? You ought to be able to see that very clearly. What we do personally and individually in service to others is far more important than burning an animal on an altar!

Jesus' life sorts that out for us. He never made any sacrifice at the Temple, but He was perfectly acceptable to God on the basis of the life that He lived. Does that not tell you that not all law is the same? It is beginning to show you that not all obedience is on the same level. You could obey by making a sacrifice at a temple and it, by comparison, is nothing to laying your life down for a friend. We are beginning to see which is more important, which is of greater significance. These things are arranged in this book so that we can judge properly what is right and good in God's eyes. That is real love. What we do for another human being to make their life better is real love because we are laying down our life for them. Not an animal's life, but our life.

This shows the relative unimportance of the Old Covenant sacrifices as compared to those personal, day-to-day sacrifices that Jesus made during His earthly life. The lesson for us to learn what is truly important is our being a living sacrifice under the New

Covenant, following in Jesus Christ's footsteps.

To do this, we need guidance and that is what His laws do. The physical temple sacrifices are important as a teaching vehicle, but not as a part of our every-day experience in physically performing them. They are still part of Christian living for the wisdom that can be gleaned from them. Know that this material is not always easy to grasp. It is important to making right decisions and to having the right perspective about the law of God. So, Christ's death and all the things that He did, did not do away with those laws. It just showed their relative unimportance regarding living God's way of life.

If a minister starts to talk about love, some will begin thinking and acting as if laws are done away when the Bible directly connects law-keeping and love by definition. What is love? Love is keeping the commandments. What do God's commands do? They define righteousness. Taking these two definitions to an extreme, it means that if God had no laws to literally observe, then there is neither righteousness nor love based on immovable standards. Get that one down in your noggin. Very clearly, keeping God's laws is how love is expressed. Keeping God's laws is how righteousness is expressed. So, doing righteousness is an expression of love. Neither love nor righteousness can be separated from law keeping.

There is a simple reason why confusion regarding God's laws, exist. Here, Richard and my sermon cross paths. He was right in what he said. I am just approaching it from what I think is a little more basic approach. Neither love nor righteousness can be separated from law keeping. There is a simple reason why confusion exists regarding God's laws. It is because His laws are not perceived in the correct perspective. Here is a very brief explanation of why mankind perceives God's laws so negatively. We will begin exactly where he began in Romans 8.

**Romans 8:6-8** For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God [You see that. The carnal mind is at war with God.]; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Right there we see that anyone with a carnal mind cannot please God. They are going to dislike, at the very least, God's law. They are going to want to reject it. They do not want to be subject to it. It is an offense to them. Romans 8:6-8 shows the way the carnal mind thinks. Ephesians 2 adds this.

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**Ephesians 2:1-3** And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, [God has given us His Holy Spirit, but the world has a spirit that works in accordance with the prince of the power of the air.] among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

There is the source of the antagonism toward God by the carnal mind.

**Revelation 12:9** So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

As we heard in Richard's sermon today and also the one he gave on Genesis 3 a few weeks ago, the original sin against God was committed by Satan, not Adam and Eve. Satan twisted their thinking when he confronted them, thus deceiving them into distrusting God's words. This deceitful and powerful, still living, invisible being, continues to influence mankind against the rule of God, even as he did to Adam and Eve. What he did to Adam and Eve, he is doing to everybody under the sway of his power. He and his demons are part and parcel of our environment. It is because of their anti-God influence that our normal human nature has become so influenced toward self-centeredness and against God's rule, that one feels put upon, defensive, and enslaved by it as though God was requiring something of them as being unfair and enslaving.

That deceptive influence is an ever-present reality. It must be confronted and overcome by faith through the reality of God, from within the relationship God has given us with Him. God promises us help to more than enable us to meet the challenge. But it is there! It is an ever-present reality. When perceived correctly, God's laws are simply guides by which people may regulate their conduct in specific areas of life. Not every circumstance in life, as we began to see in I John 5, even in our relationship with God, is a life and death matter.

We will continue to build on this.

**Matthew 23:23-24** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier

Elements of Judgment (Part Two) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides [He called them], who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

I do not know that there is a clearer statement in the Bible regarding law. First note this: justice, mercy, and faithfulness, which could be called trustworthiness or integrity, are all matters of the law. Second, note that meticulously tithing the minor portions of income, which is certainly a matter of law, is not as important as justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Is God putting things in order? Is He putting them onto relative plains in terms of significance? Jesus says that. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness outweigh in importance of tithing on minor things. Again, we normally do not think of them as being matters of law. However, they are matters of God's law of love, which all of God's laws always are.

A third thing to note here is that He did not say that justice, mercy, and faithfulness negated the tithing law. Do you get that? Even though one is more important than the other, the more important one did not negate the less important one. One is still required to tithe and to tithe even on minor income. But at the same time, these other things are more important than the tithing laws.

One of the Pharisee's major problems was this. Their lack of a proper sense of proportion as to what is more important and what is less important, led them to make judgments of both people and conduct that were unbalanced and hypocritical because they were guilty of similar excesses themselves.

In the last sermon, the woman was taken in adultery. How did Jesus judge that? He judged what the Pharisees' did as worse than the adultery that the woman was caught in. Both were sins, but He categorized what they did because of a number of factors which we will probably eventually get into. He categorized what they did. He held them more responsible for that event than He did the woman. It does not mean that He diminished adultery at all. It was serious enough and He forgave her. But He attacked them in His decision and put them in their place saying basically, "you should never have done such a thing. You are more responsible than she is."

Both things were sin. Jesus categorized what they did as worse than what she did. Do you get the point? In other words, you can begin to see that not all sins are on the same level. They thought that they were putting Him on the horns of a dilemma, and He just put them in their place by rightly discerning the important and the unimportant relative. They had no answer because they knew they were guilty. They were guilty because they were being led by their poor sense of judgment.

Let us look at an example. A Pharisee might have a whole field of wheat which he dutifully and rightly tithed. But, he would also have a number of herbs planted for cooking or let us say for medicinal purposes. Maybe only one plant of each one of those herbs, and he would carefully tithe that one plant. There is nothing wrong with that. He should do it. There is nothing wrong with that, but at the same time he would be hard and cruel and arrogant and proud, having no mercy toward the sick, taking oaths and pledges with the deliberate intention of breaking people right down into absolute poverty.

On one hand, he really looked good. On the other hand, to Jesus, their sins were as black as anything that He could think of. Their sense of proportion, their sense of righteousness, and their sense of evil was all out of whack! They were about as hypocritical as you could get, but they were tithing perfectly. Again, which was more important? It is the way people are treated. It is the way people are perceived and what that perception leads one to do. There is nothing wrong with making the judgment, but let us make sure that the judgment is in alignment with what God would do. That is hard to arrive at.

Jesus drew the conclusion that they strained at gnats and they swallowed camels. That is interesting too because both of those animals are unclean. The reference to the weightier, in this case, indicates something that is more central, more decisive, and more important as contrasted to what is peripheral or trifling.

The Pharisees' were guilty of massive distortions of God's will through their failure to understand the law's true intent. That intent is to guide us toward glorifying God in our service to Him and to each other. A real impediment regarding the Pharisees' attitude and conduct is that they had little control over their pride. They thought that they deserved praise from God for their perception of righteousness and evil. There is much they did not understand regarding their judgments of others.

We will continue in another area, showing yet again that not every sin, person, or circumstance is on the same level the next time.