

Born to Win

The Words of Jesus #12

by Ronald L. Dart

Would you consider yourself a fair-minded person? I mean a person who believes in equity; a person who holds yourself to the same standards that you hold other people; a person who *really believes* that we shouldn't have double standards; a person who's offended when someone judges you for doing something and then does the same thing himself. Well, Jesus basically said that we ought to be fair-minded. He said:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹ Judge not, that you be not judged.

² For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Now, frankly, this little bloodcurdling—but it *is* fair. If I hold you up against a standard, it's only fair that I be held up against the *same standard*. So consequently, I really ought to be prepared to cut you a little more slack, maybe, than I might otherwise do. How are we supposed to take what Jesus said here when he said, “Judge not, that you be not judged”? It's problematic, because we all *have to* judge at times. And Jesus recognized that. Take what he said to one of the churches in the Book of Revelation. He told them:

Revelation 2

AKJV

² I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you can not bear them which are evil [...]

Now, of course, to “not bear them that are evil” you've got to have made a judgment that they *are*, right? And he said:

Revelation 2

AKJV

² [...] and you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars[.]

Now, you can't do that without judging. You've actually got to look at the facts. You've got to judge whether what the man says is true or not. You've got to say to yourself, “Okay, he says he's an apostle. What are the conditions that make a man an apostle? Does he meet those criteria? Yes or no?” And I don't have to kid myself that he does. I don't have to kid myself that I don't know when he *plainly doesn't*. You *are* allowed, Christian folks, to conclude that a liar is a liar. I mean, you have got to be honest with yourself—what you see is what you see. In fact, I think God would be pleased if more of us would exercise our critical faculties and admit that a lie is a lie.

You know, when a *preacher* tells you one thing and you can see the Bible *plainly* says something else, well, you can conclude safely that something is wrong somewhere. You do not have to believe that a preacher is always right even when he tells you that the Bible is wrong. And then take politicians, you know. When a politician is asked a question and then doesn't answer the question, but gives a the kind of prepared speech that may or may not have something to do with the question he was asked, they call that *spin*. Now, it's okay for you, Christian folks, to conclude that *spinning* is just another word for *lying*. Oh, I know, all of us recognize that politicians lie to us all the time, but we sort of think the *other guy's* politicians are the ones that are lying and *our* politicians are the ones that are telling the truth.

Well, truth is an objective criteria and we really ought to be able to tell. But, really, one of the most important ways of addressing something like this or evaluating or judging it is simply to ask yourself the question: When this man was asked a question did he tell the truth or did he *dodge* the question? Did he *spin*? Was it his intent to lead me to this conclusion or that conclusion? And, I'm sorry, politicians on *both sides* do it *all* the time. In fact, the degree to which a person is in power seems to be closely related to the degree to which he is prepared to lie to you. Sometimes, the people who are out of power—the people who really don't have anything to say over anything—can be more truthful about these things than the people who are in. But nearly everyone has got an axe, of one kind or another, to grind in the political world.

So when Jesus said, "Judge not that you be not judged", he didn't mean that you can't look at the facts and arrive at *conclusions* based on the *facts*. What Jesus is talking about is the habitual judgement we make of people *without* all the facts. He's not saying you can't come to conclusions; it's a *caution* against judging people *by your own standards*. Because, the truth is, there *is* a standard out there by which we will *all* be judged—it's the Law of God. It's a fact; it's real. And it's like the Bureau of Standards in Washington. There's a place up there which is constantly climate-controlled, it's air conditioned, it has a constant temperature, and inside this vault there are the standard weights and measures of this country. There's a ruler in there that has exactly 12 inches marked off on it and it's very important that that be kept at the same temperature. Why is that so? Well, because if it gets warmer it expands and therefore we have 12 inches that are a little longer than they ought to be.

We have a Bureau of Standards. Well, the Bible is God's Bureau of Standards. It actually has standard behavior—standard ways of going about life and business. It involves telling the truth, it involves not fooling around with your neighbor's wife, and all those good things that we are supposed to do. So if you hear a man engaged in repeated deception, hey, it's okay for you to conclude he's a liar. You might as well, because you're going to be judged for lying, in any case, if you lie. So being judged by that standard is okay. Just don't hold your neighbor to a *higher* standard then you're willing to live up to yourself. Returning to Jesus' words, he said:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹ Judge not, that you be not judged.

² For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

³ And why behold you the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?

This is a pretty strong hyperbole, here. Just a little tiny speck, and on the other hand we stick a whole *board* in somebody else's eye. It's absurd, of course—obviously that's the point. And his point is, "What are you doing when you've got something in your eye that you can't even see around? Why are you trying to remove a speck from your brother's eyes?"

⁴ Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye?

⁵ You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye.

Now, what's this all about? Well, it's all about how our *own sins* and our *own failures* cloud our judgment. *Who we are* is a part of our judgement. Lawyers know this. I remember, long ago, being called for a jury panel in a drunk-driving case. And, as I was sitting there, the lawyers made their way down the jury members, trying to pick the ones for the jury, and they were asking what you do for a living, and asking if you drink or if you don't drink. And when it came to me, I could almost see the little shift in their eyes take place when they asked me what I did for a living and I told them I was a minister. Well, they didn't want a minister sitting on the jury in a drunk-driving case—at least, they *thought* they didn't. They perceived that I would be more opposed to drinking and driving than the average citizen. (And I think that sells the average citizen short.) I nearly laughed out loud when the defense lawyer proclaimed that, "Now, we're not looking for a particular verdict on this. We're not looking for people who will favor our client. What we want are jury members who will be fair and honest and deal with the facts and make a wise decision based on the facts." He was lying in his teeth. He wanted a jury that would acquit his client; that's what he wanted. And that's why they were asking all these questions. They were looking for jury members that posed the least-possible risk to their client. They would have been very cheerful to have on that jury (they couldn't have got it, because the prosecution would have thrown it out, for cause) but they would've been very happy to have had someone who'd actually gone to jail for drunk driving because he would have been far more inclined to want to let this guy off—at least, that's what they thought—than I would have been.

It's not really, I think, a very good strategy for a lawyer to let the jury know you're a hypocrite right up front. But lawyers do it all the time. I think they'd be smart if they stood up in front and said, "Well now, look, I'm looking for a jury that's going to give my client the best possible chance. That's just the way it is. That's the way the law works. And so, consequently, if I don't think you're going to give my client a fair shake I'm going to throw you off this jury." I can respect an attorney who said that but to stand up and say, "No, we don't care about this other thing, we just want, you know, a balanced, fair jury who will judge by the law." Actually, lawyers want people on the jury who are sinners. They're looking for sympathy.

It's a fact that our own sins distort our judgment and every lawyer knows that. But that's not exactly what Jesus is on about here. His audience included a lot of religious people, who trusted *themselves* that *they* were righteous, and they held themselves to what they considered to be *very high* standards—standards which, candidly, they didn't really meet. And that's why Jesus considered some of them to be hypocrites. Self-righteousness *also* distorts judgment, and that was Jesus' point with his audience. *Who we are* has a lot to do with how we judge. If you doubt this, learn to listen more carefully. Politics and following politics is a really interesting exercise in judgment. With all the scandals that rock politicians and politics—both Congress and the White House—from time to time. You'll find a lot of the talking heads on television are very *hesitant* to judge; they're very quick to make excuses for the people who are in office. And the reason for that is simple: they all live in glass houses. How can you sit in judgment of a politician who's had an affair when you've had one yourself? Look *deep* into the eyes of the reporters, the TV analysts, and the politicians you see on television. As they start making excuses for the president or for some congressman who's under fire—a member of their own party and all these good things—and even, to some extent, for the professional apologists that get on television from time to time. What you need to understand (you can actually see it sometimes—the little doubt in someone's mind or someone's eyes) is that they don't want to come down on this person for what he has done because they have done the *same thing themselves*. And when you understand that, you have to know that the judgment of these people who are talking to you about this is *profoundly distorted*. The entire

political process has become a tissue of lies. Isaiah the prophet—long, long ago—took God’s words and passed them on to Israel. And he said:

Isaiah 59

AKJV

¹³ In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

¹⁴ And judgment is turned away backward, and justice stands afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity [*common fairness*] cannot enter.

¹⁵ Yes, truth fails; and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

You know, the truth is that any politician today who stood up and told the truth would make himself a prey. What he means by “a prey” is like a poor, wild animal—a wounded deer, perhaps—that’s being pursued by a lion. They are after him; the jackals surround him; the hyenas are there. The whole media, the whole news profession, can turn a politician who simply tells the truth—admits his failings and says, “I was wrong”—they can turn him into *raw meat*. When you listen, listen for the lies; look for the facts. It could be an eye-opening experience.

Do you ever feel that your advice is not appreciated? Of course you do. Here’s the question, though: Why do you give it, then? What is it about us that we *cannot resist* giving advice. Someone’s sitting here telling me all of his problems and I say, “Well, you ought to try this or, well, how about trying that?”, and the first thing you know you can find yourself in a game of “Why Don’t You...? Yes, But...”. That’s a game Eric Berne described in his book, *Games People Play*. When someone says, “Well, I have this terrible problem”, and you say, “Well, why don’t you try this?”, and he says, “Well, yes. But...”, and he gives you all the reasons why *that* won’t work. And, if you’re a sucker, you say, “Well, if that doesn’t work, let’s try this”, and he says, “Well, yes. But...”. Now that you know the game is there, you ought to watch for it, because it turns out nearly every day of your life, somewhere, sometime.

You would think that when we *know* someone’s not going to listen, we wouldn’t bother. But no, no, we have to give them our *pearls of wisdom*. There’s an old saw that I try to remember—it goes this way, “Advice not asked for is advice not wanted.” And generally speaking that’s true. This is what Jesus was driving at when he continued in his Sermon on the Mount to say:

Matthew 7

AKJV

⁶ Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast you your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

The saying has nothing to do with pigs and dogs—it’s a figure of speech. It was probably an old proverb that means: advice not asked for is advice not wanted. Now, this and that that goes before it is an admonition to *give up* on trying to straighten out the world. Yeah, the burden of the world is not on your shoulders. You are not required to solve all of its problems. You are not called upon to end every form of oppression that exists. You’re not called upon to straighten out every error, to correct every flaw. You can’t do that, *anyway*. And what Jesus is saying is, “Don’t bother. Take a look at yourself! If you can just get the plank out of your own eye, if you can just begin to get some of these things out of your own life, if you didn’t start *taking your own advice* you’ll be doing a lot.”

Now, people who are so busy trying to correct everyone and everything around them, to save everyone from themselves, and to save the world are *probably* running away from themselves. Because while I’m busy straightening out *your* problems, I can feel virtuous without having to address my *own* problems.

King Solomon chased this rainbow for a very long way, and then one day he came to himself, and he said:

Ecclesiastes 1

KJ2000

¹² I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

¹³ And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this severe burden has God given to the sons of man to be afflicted with.

¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity [*meaningless*] and like grasping the wind.

¹⁵ That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is lacking cannot be numbered.

“There is more of it out there than I can ever correct, and that which is crooked can’t be made straight, anyway.” I keep reading this passage and, in spite of myself, I keep trying to make *crooked things straight*. And I often wonder, “Why am I doing this?” There are places I can make a difference. There are problems I can tackle, that I can actually solve. And they’re usually the ones that have to do with *me, my life, where I am, and what I’m doing*. My question is: Why don’t we apply ourselves to the things we actually *can get done* and let the other ones go? Solomon said:

Ecclesiastes 1

KJ2000

¹⁵ That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is lacking cannot be numbered.

Now, when you’ve heeded all this advice, and you’ve turned your attention to the things that are your business—the things where you might make a difference, the things that have to do with your *own* shortcomings rather than those of somebody else—something *strange* may begin to happen. And this is what Jesus is saying, he says, “Now, don’t worry about these other people. Don’t cast your pearls before swine.” He said, “Whenever you begin to turn around and tend to your own business”:

Matthew 7

AKJV

⁷ Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you:

⁸ For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.

Instead of beating our head against a brick wall, instead of frustrating ourselves over the *failures* of other people, we can actually begin to *see results* if we look for results in the right places. The problem is that we fritter away our lives *playing games*. This game has a name; the game is called “Ain’t It Awful”. It’s another one Eric Berne mentions (I don’t know if I’d say “invented” or “discovered”). It’s a game where we all sit around over coffee and donuts and chew up everything and everyone in sight, “Oh, ain’t it awful? Isn’t it awful? Look what the government’s done, now. Ain’t it awful? They’re going to ruin Social Security. Ain’t it awful? The president’s had an affair. Ain’t it awful.” And then we wonder why we always go around with a *bad taste* in our mouth. Why are we frustrated? Why are we unhappy?

Do you know why other people may seem happier than you? It’s because they have put their shoulder to something they can *actually move*. They’re making progress. They’re actually *getting something done*. They’re not just sitting around, talking about it, and playing the game “Ain’t It Awful”. Jesus went on to say:

Matthew 7

AKJV

⁹ Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

Well, if you're a father, you wouldn't do that.

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹¹ If you then, being evil, [...]

Which is kind of funny. He looks at his whole audience and says, "If you who *really are* evil":

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹¹ [...] know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

But, you see, our problem is that we're not oftentimes, when we go to God in prayer, applying our shoulder to things that will move. We're not *really* addressing the things that are our business, the things that we have a concern about, the things that we can help with and even *do something* about. Because faith without works is dead, you know. If you're going to pray about something, you also need to *try*, with all that is in you, to *do* something about it. And then Jesus said this marvelous, golden rule:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹² Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Isn't that interesting? That part of the law that has to do with loving your neighbor as yourself already boils down to evaluating how you want other people to treat *you*—and then treating *them* that way.

There's a common thread running through Jesus' words at the point, and this next passage in the Sermon on the Mount illustrates it. He said:

Matthew 7

KJ2000

¹³ Enter in at the narrow gate: [*that's the narrow gate*] for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be who go in there:

¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

This is a life principle, and the principle is easily stated as, "the crowd is most often wrong." And it's a funny thing—I don't have any idea where the Dow Jones will be by the time you hear this program, but there's a rule about stock market investing: that the market will do whatever it has to do to prove the largest number of people *wrong*. The thread that runs through this is that you really need to be focusing, not selfishly upon yourself, but upon your life and those right close around you and how that you can actually make a difference in your life and their life in the decisions and the choices that you make. And you make those decisions and those choices based upon what's *right* and upon what's *wrong* not upon what *the crowd* is doing. For the crowd... Well, one of the reasons why the crowd *are* where they are is

because it's the *easier* way to go, or it *appears* to be the more profitable way to go. It can be motivated by greed. It can be motivated by selfishness. But one thing you can count on: it's not motivated by hardcore belief in right and wrong. He goes on to say:

Matthew 7

KJ2000

¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

¹⁶ You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

¹⁷ Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.

¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Now, what do you do with that? You certainly can't just judge by numbers. Jesus has already told us that's wrong. So if there's a church over here that's started off with 50 people and wound up being composed of about 15,000 members, well, that's a crowd—and the whole crowd went that way. And I'm not going to say that they're wrong, but I *am* going to say that, based upon Jesus' words, you can't conclude that the numbers mean that they are on the *right path*, right? Because he said many people are going to be going in at the wrong gate; it's going to be crowded over there.

But what is this thing about a “good tree bringing forth good fruit”? Well, if it's not numbers, what is it? Well, it kind of has to be a changed life, doesn't it—a different way of living, a way that's closer to the teachings of Jesus Christ? And so you have to *compare* what the preacher says to the Word of God. You have to *compare* what a politician says to the facts on the ground. And you have to admit to yourself that, if someone is not telling you the truth, there is *no way* that he can bear good fruit.

Matthew 7

KJ2000

¹⁹ Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

So, in the end, if it's not good it's going to burn.

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²¹ Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

You know, I can't help but think of that when I go into a place of business and I see a sign on the wall that says “Jesus is Lord”. Now, this person is proclaiming to the *whole world* that he's a Christian—that Jesus is his Lord. Now, let me ask you this: Let's say a man buys a small sandwich shop, a place of business, that has a reputation, over a long period of time, of putting out the best sandwiches in town. He comes in, buys the business, slaps a sign “Jesus is Lord” on the wall, and then begins to *cheapen* the product while charging the same price. What would you conclude? Is Jesus really his Lord if he starts cheating his customers? No. Not everyone that puts “Jesus is Lord” on the back of his car or on the wall of his business his going to be in the kingdom of heaven. Who is?

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²¹ [...] he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in

your name have cast out demons? and in your name done many wonderful works?

²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.

Now, I don't want to pick a fight with anyone, but the last word in that passage is *critical*. It comes from the Greek and it means "lawlessness". In other words, it takes the word "law", puts a negative in front of it, and it's talking about people who reject the law. This passage is about religious people who do *all kinds* of religious things but who simply *will not obey* the law of God. You know, it seems abundantly clear to me that there are a lot of Christian people who believe a doctrine of cheap grace, who believe there is *absolutely nothing* they have to do to enter into life. Well, Jesus has this to say to those:

Matthew 7

KJ2000

²⁴ Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock:

²⁵ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

²⁶ And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand:

²⁷ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

May I ask you: Does it matter whether you do anything or not? Does it matter whether you do the sayings of Jesus, the words of Jesus, or don't? Well, *he said* it made a big difference. And thus closes the great Sermon on the Mount with an admonition that those who don't do the words of Jesus are a *pack of losers*.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart, and you weren't born to lose—you were *born to win*.

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