

INTRODUCTION

Today I want to talk to you about four laws. In this context, I am making a distinction between God’s Commandments and these laws. I told you several weeks ago the New Testament only contains two commandments: Love God and love your neighbor. Commandments are sometimes called “laws,” but I’m using the term in a different sense today. I’m using the term “law” in the same way we use it when we speak of “laws of nature.” For instance, there is the law of gravity. You can be thankful today for the law of gravity because we are all being held in place by this law. Without it we would all be weightless, which actually sounds pretty appealing after all the holiday eating! But as our astronauts can testify, being weightless makes even the simplest task very difficult. There is also a law of nature that states when water is cooled to 32 degrees Fahrenheit it becomes ice (at sea level and standard atmospheric pressure). When these two laws, gravity and ice come together, you have an ice storm that can wreak havoc on trees and power lines.

In the 17th century, Sir Isaac Newton was one of the first to observe and catalogue some of these natural laws such as the movement of heavenly bodies, gravity, and the laws of motion we are still taught in basic science classes. To Newton, these universal, natural laws provided clear proof there is an intelligent Creator who designed it all. His observation is a stinging rebuke to modern, agnostic scientists who attribute the development of our universe as simply an accident, pure chance. At the end of his Principia (second edition) Newton wrote: “This most beautiful system of the Sun, Planets, and Comets could only proceed from the counsel, and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being, a God, in fact.” Newton has often been called the father of physical science because he was one of the first to use these “natural laws” to show a certain action produces a predictable outcome.

Just as there are laws operating within the physical universe, there are some unbreakable laws operating within the personal and spiritual realm as well.

In this passage, Jesus mentions four of these universal spiritual laws. Jesus only uses 24 words to state the first three laws; they are given with no elaboration. But then, He uses 34 words to state and explain the fourth law.

Do not judge and you will not be judged. (Law One) Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. (Law Two) Forgive and you will be forgiven. (Law Three - and here is Law Four) Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:37-38)

Notice that the first two laws are stated negatively: Don’t judge and don’t condemn. The third and fourth are positive: Forgive and Give. But look again. The first three are all reactions to the behavior of someone else, don’t judge, don’t condemn, and forgive. I believe these first three laws are not just randomly stated, one leads into the other. They are sequential. The fourth law is a positive action: Give.

With this introduction, let’s examine these four laws. For each law, I want to state it as Jesus stated it, then I want to paraphrase it, translating the words into what they mean in our world today. Then we’ll take it a step further and make a personal application to our lives.

LAW 1: DON’T JUDGE OR YOU’LL BE JUDGED

This law gets my vote as the most misunderstood and the most misapplied statement Jesus ever made. How many times have you heard some say, “The Bible says, ‘Judge not?’” And they take it to mean we should not make a moral judgement about the behavior of another person.

Let’s imagine you know a co-worker who is stealing from your company and even cheating on his wife, and you have the courage to confront him about his behavior. There’s a good chance he is going to say something like, “Who are you to judge me? You call yourself a Christian, and doesn’t the Bible say, ‘Judge not?’” (I’ve found if there is only one part of the Bible some people know it’s the part that says, “Judge not!”) Does that mean that you are to remain silent and let this person continue to ruin their lives, just so you won’t be “judging them?” That’s not what Jesus meant here.

Let’s imagine you have a rebellious teenager. She comes home with various parts of her anatomy pierced and she is running with a crowd that is constantly getting in trouble. You confront your teenager and she responds by saying, “Stop judging me or my friends! The Bible says, ‘Judge not.’” Does that mean you are to remain silent and let her continue to sink into more trouble? That’s not what Jesus was talking about here.

21ST century translation: A hyper-critical attitude always comes back to bite you!

The word Jesus uses for “judge” is *krinete*, which means to “criticize harshly.” It is the root from which we get our words “critic,” “criminal,” “in-criminate,” and “dis-criminate.” It would be better translated “do not pronounce judgement” on others and you will not become a defendant yourself. Jesus is warning about the danger of the kind of hyper-criticism that leads to condemning others. If you live that way, you will become the target of criticism and condemnation yourself. It’s almost like Jesus turns the Golden Rule around that He stated a few verses earlier (Treat others the way you *wish* to be treated), and says, “When you treat others the wrong way, you will be treated the same way.”

Sadly, there are people who feel they have the gift of criticism and they are called by God to call attention to everything they don’t like. The only exercise they get is “jumping to conclusions” and “running people down.” A hyper-critical person makes life miserable for everyone else. If you are a server at a restaurant, or in sales, a hyper-critical customer can ruin your day. A hyper-critical person can also make a marriage a disaster zone. In the 30+ years I’ve been preaching, I’ve observed that a few hyper-criticals can destroy the unity and love in a church. My unofficial observation is that hyper-critical people never comprise more than about 10% of a church membership, about 90% of the folks are loving and positive. But those 10% of hyper-critics account for 90% of the trouble. Get two of them together, and they think they represent the feelings of the entire church! Jesus is warning against being hyper-critical.

Personal Application: You must form wise opinions about others but only God is qualified to “pronounce judgement”

This verse doesn’t prohibit you from forming opinions about others, judging them in a sense. Down in verse 43, Jesus speaks about people when He says, “a good tree is known by its fruit.” He is talking about good people and evil people. We must make wise character judgements about people. It’s like examining a piece of fruit. If you are holding an apple that is rotten and moldy, you are going to make a judgement about it and I hope you are wise enough not to eat it. That’s a judgement call. If a man who has been convicted of child molestation asks to take your daughter to get some ice cream, I hope you make a wise character assessment and say, “No way!” You and I are not to pronounce judgement on anyone but we must be wise fruit inspectors.

LAW 2: DON’T CONDEMN OR YOU’LL BE CONDEMNED

This word takes the root word “judge” and adds the particle *kata*, meaning “against.” It is literally translated, “don’t pronounce judgement against.” This universal law states that when you have a critical, condemning spirit, that’s the way you will be treated as well.

21st century translation: “Putting down” others only tears you down as well

It has become popular in our culture to coin the perfect “put down.” Don Rickles made an entire career of putting people down. Winston Churchill was the master. You probably know he and Lady Astor carried on a continuing relationship of animosity restrained only by British manners. Once at an official function, Churchill consumed too much Scotch. In front of the entire group, Lady Astor said, “Mr. Churchill, you are despicably drunk!” To which Churchill replied, “You are right, Madam, and you are despicably ugly—but in the morning, I shall be sober.” We laugh at that, but it illustrates the law. When you make a habit of putting down others, you are always hurt in the process. You can’t throw mud without getting your own hands dirty. Condemnation is like a boomerang. Did you hear about the Australian kid who got a new boomerang for Christmas? The only trouble was he couldn’t throw away his old one! A condemning spirit is like a boomerang—it always returns to strike you.

You say, “Okay. I’m supposed to discern the character of others. How can I do that without condemning those who are evil?”

Personal Application: You can oppose sinful behavior without condemning the sinner

It’s the old adage, “Hate the sin, but love the sinner.” You can speak out against evil behavior and you should. Don’t let these two statements from Jesus prevent you from calling sin sin. Some people read this passage and decide they will just keep silent about sin. Don’t ever call something wrong—that’s judgement. Don’t ever tell anyone they are doing something wrong—that’s condemning. To the contrary, we must continue to hold up God’s standard of what is right and wrong, while at the same time, showing compassion and acceptance toward sinners.

Perhaps the best illustration of this comes from the life of Jesus. In John 8, we are told a group of Pharisees interrupted Jesus’ teaching by dragging in a woman who had been caught in adultery

and throwing her at His feet. My first question is “Where was the man?” Obviously, this was a “set up.” Jesus immediately knew they were using her to try to trap him. Each man was holding a jagged rock in his hand as they challenged Jesus. “The law says a woman caught in adultery must be stoned—what do you say?” There were many people witnessing this scene, and the accusers knew Jesus was trapped. If He answered, “Let her go,” then He would be a law-breaker. He would be finished. If, on the other hand, Jesus said, “Go ahead, stone her,” the common people (who also recognized the trap) would never follow a man who consented to the death of a woman in such circumstances. The Pharisees must have cackled with glee. Finally, they had Him trapped! He was damaged if He did and damaged if He didn’t!

I love what Jesus did next. Without saying a word, He bent down and started writing in the sand. They kept on demanding He answer. Finally Jesus stood up and simply said, “If any of you is without sin, let him be the first one to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7) Then He stooped down and kept on writing in the dirt. We don’t know what He wrote. It could have been He wrote one of the Ten Commandments in front of each man, one they had broken. He could have written the names of the men in front of them, making them wonder, “If He knows my name, what else does He know about me?” Or He may have written the name of a woman in front of each man—a name that wasn’t his wife! Whatever He wrote, it worked. One by one, they dropped their stones and walked away. Finally Jesus looks up and asks the woman, “Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Now comes the tricky part. Jesus was the only one present who had the authority to judge and condemn her, the only Sinless One. But His next statement is priceless and it may be that He is speaking to you today, “Then, neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:10-11) Notice Jesus didn’t approve her behavior; He called it sin. He told her to repent of it, to quit. But He didn’t condemn her so what right to do we have to condemn others?

Many Baptist Churches used to have something called a “church covenant” often pasted in the front of the hymnal. It forbade certain things Baptists have traditionally called “sin” that the Bible doesn’t call sin. Today, we almost laugh about how Baptists used to call dancing a sin but it was taken seriously years ago, and appeared in many of these church covenants.

Years ago, when Dr. George W. Truett was pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, a certain woman was publicly accused of breaking the church covenant because she had been seen dancing. Some deacons were calling for her expulsion from church membership for this offence. Dr. Truett moderated the business meeting in which they were going to vote her out. Dr. Truett silently asked the Lord for wisdom, so just before the vote, he said, “Let us also call the church treasurer to read the giving record of every member at this meeting. Let us also vote to expel every member who is guilty of covetousness and greed.” Ouch. The meeting was dismissed with no vote taken. Remember, I said that these three laws are sequential? They go together. If you aren’t to judge or condemn, what can you do?

LAW 3: FORGIVE OTHERS TO BE FORGIVEN

For a Christian, forgiving others is not an *option*; it is a *requirement*. In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus says, “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, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

21st century translation: A willingness to forgive others is simply a mirror image of our own forgiveness from God

When some people read these words of Jesus, they think their salvation is dependent upon whether or not they forgive others. They read these words and wrongly assume, “*First*, I forgive other people, and then *second*, God forgives my sin.” To them, God is delaying His forgiveness until they forgive other people. That’s totally backwards. That’s just another form of “salvation by works.” If you follow this backward understanding, it means you think you can earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others. Wrong.

The truth is that once you have truly experienced God’s forgiveness, then you will find it part of your nature to forgive others. Be sure, nobody is ever going to sin against us any more than we have sinned against God. Our sin sent His Son to the cross. In other words, our willingness to forgive others is proof we have been saved. Consequently, if you claim to be a Christian and you refuse to forgive someone who has hurt you, you are deceiving yourself and you have never been saved! That may upset some of you and part of your problem could be that you don’t understand the true nature of Biblical forgiveness.

Personal Application: You have forgiven someone when you “let go” of the desire to personally hurt them for what they have done to you

In the Bible, the word for forgive is *apoulete* which means to “release.” It is exactly the opposite of the word “condemn.” You see, before you become a Christian, God’s condemnation rests on you. Unless you accept His forgiveness, you are “bound” to suffer the consequences of your sin, eternal separation in a place the Bible calls hell. When God forgives you, He “releases” you from condemnation. You are set free from the penalty of sin, hell. He is no longer going to “punish you” for the sin you committed against Him. When we forgive others it is the same thing. Forgiveness is not forgetting. When you hear someone say, “forgive and forget” they are only half right. Outside of dementia, hypnosis, or brain damage, it is impossible to forget what other people have done to hurt you.

You forgive someone who has hurt you when you “release” the desire to punish them for the pain they have caused you. It doesn’t mean you are bosom buddies for the rest of your life; you just don’t want to make them suffer any longer. Forgiveness is not a feeling—it is a decision. Some of you struggle with this because you think you haven’t forgiven someone because you still think about what they did and you don’t like them for what they did. That’s natural. Maybe this new understanding will liberate you so listen carefully: If you have decided in your heart that you no longer wish to hurt that person, then you have forgiven them!

Let me give you an example from literature of a Christian who reflects these first three laws: Don’t judge; don’t condemn; forgive. Years ago, I read Margaret Mitchell’s classic book, *Gone With the Wind*. 95 percent of the time, I would rather read the book than see the movie because you learn so much more about the characters by reading the novel. When we think of Scarlett O’Hara, we see a scheming, shrewd survivor who did anything to get her way—but she never found happiness. I must confess my favorite character was Scarlett’s antithesis, Melanie Wilkes. Although she may be too sweet for many modern women, she demonstrated Christian virtues I

have always attributed to a true Southern lady. Two episodes prove my point. In one scene Melanie, Scarlett, and Mrs. Mead are leaving the Confederate hospital after nursing wounded soldiers all day. A gaudily dressed prostitute, Belle Watling, confronts them on the steps of the hospital. Her hair is dyed a color Mammy has never seen before and her makeup is overdone. Scarlett and Mrs. Mead tell Melanie not to speak to her, but Melanie receives her with kindness and graciously accepts her contribution. She doesn’t judge her or condemn her; she shows her kindness. Her action has a profound influence on Belle.

The second episode demonstrates forgiveness as well. Of course, Scarlett has secretly dreamed of marrying Melanie’s husband, Ashley. Melanie recognizes this, but still loves Scarlett. One day, Scarlett was caught embracing Ashley in the lumber shop, and the two women who saw them spread the gossip around Atlanta. Later that night, Melanie threw a surprise birthday party for Ashley and Scarlett was been invited. She refused to go, but Rhett demanded she go so Melanie could have the public satisfaction of throwing her out of her house. Sensing a battle, Scarlett arrived wearing a red dress, with plenty of rouge on her face. Her dark eyes were glittering like a cat caught in a corner. The band was playing, “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow” but when Scarlett arrived, there was silence. Everyone waited for Melanie to publicly disgrace Scarlett. She deserved it and Melanie had every right to do it. But Melanie walked across the room and opened her arms to greet Scarlett, telling her how lovely she looked. Then arm in arm, she escorted Scarlett into the party. That’s true Christian kindness. You may recall, when Melaine died later in the story, Rhett Butler said, “She was the only truly kind person I have ever known.” You don’t have to read *Gone With the Wind* to find that—it’s right here in God’s Word!

LAW 4: GIVE AND IT WILL BE GIVEN UNTO YOU

There are plenty of bad words called “four lettered words.” But to me, there are some wonderful four lettered words as well. “Love” is a great word. “Give” is another good one. Those two words are connected. When you love, you will give. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. A man once jokingly said to me, “Every time I go to church, that’s all I hear, give, give, give!” I said, “Thank you for giving me the best one-word definition of the Christian life: give.” “For God so love the world that He gave His only son.” (John 3:16)

In verse 38, Jesus introduces an amazing law, and then He goes on to explain it. If you give, you will receive a lot more in return. The more you give, the greater the return. In Jesus’ Day a person could grab the bottom corners of his robe and lift them up forming a folded “basket” with a great capacity. This is the picture Jesus employs when He speaks of a “good measure, pressed down, shaken together will be poured into your lap.” It is a picture of abundance and it comes as the result of giving.

21st century translation: Life’s best investment is giving away to God and others. The more you give, the more you receive.

Some of you are very interested in the stock market because you have invested money there. Technology stocks have not performed well this year, with the Nasdaq composite index losing 39 percent in 2000. The Dow lost only 6 percent during 2000, rebounding 1,000 points above its low last March. The S&P 500 lost 10 percent last year. Some are wondering if this bull market,

the longest in U.S. history, is losing steam. People are looking harder than ever for good investments.

I’ve got a great investment tip for you in 2001. It’s an insider tip, because the Holy Spirit lives inside me. The very best investment you can make is to give to God. Sir John Templeton, the founder of the Templeton family of Mutual Funds was once asked what was the best investment he had ever made. Templeton, a committed Christian, responded by saying when he started giving 10 percent of his income to the Lord, that was the best investment.

How much will you invest in God this year? Let’s say you knew for certain you could buy a certain stock on Tuesday for \$6 a share and within twelve months it would split twice, selling for \$60 a share. How many shares would you buy? One? Ten? No, chances are you would buy several thousand shares, even if you had to sell off some of your personal property to do it. The same is true of this heavenly investment. Jesus said the measure you use, will be used on you. Jesus said when you give to God you are “laying up treasures in heaven.” You’ve heard people say, “You can’t take it with you.” That’s true, but I’ve got news for you. You can send it on ahead!

Personal application: Where there is a shortage in your life, give more of it away

I have found this universal law applies to any resource you need. Does it seem like you have a shortage of time? Does it seem like you are always behind and you never seem to catch up? Try getting up earlier and giving God the first 30 minutes of the day. You’ll be amazed at the time you have to do what you need to do. Do you need more physical energy? Do you seem to be lifeless and tired all the time? Here’s what you do. Devote 30 minutes a day to some kind of exercise—give away that energy. You’ll soon find you have more energy than before. It’s also true for material possessions. Proverbs 3:9 says, “Honor the Lord with your income, and you will find that your containers will be overflowing with resources.” (author’s paraphrase) I believe with all my heart if you give God the first 10% of your income, then you will ultimately find you not only have enough, you will have more than enough. I repeat, according to the words of Jesus, the very best investment you can make is in giving. However, if you think this is simply another get-rich-quick scheme, there is a very important

INVESTMENT DISCLAIMER

Warning: If you only give to get—no return is promised. But if, in the evaluation of the Investment Manager, you give out of a spirit of love and generosity, your return will be more than you need, so you will be able to give even more which leads to even more return, which enables you to invest more ... *ad infinitum*.

You see, God can judge the motives of your heart. If you are giving because you love God, the promise works. But if you are giving simply because you hope to get more in return it doesn’t work! Here’s the guarantee in God’s prospectus:

“This generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can give away, which grows into full-

formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.” (2 Corinthians 9:10-11 *The Message*)

God is not interested in your money. He wants you. He wants you to be a part of what He is doing.

Unselfish giving always produces a good return. Once an Arab sheik died leaving 17 camels to be divided between his wife and only son. His wife was to receive half the camels and his son was to receive one third of the camels. But no one could figure out what one half and one third of 17 was. Finally, a friend of the dead Sheik came by and offered to solve the problem. He would unselfishly give his camel, making a total of 18, an easier number for those fractions. So the wife got one half, or nine, of the camels, and the son got one third, or six, of the camels; a total of 15. Then the unselfish friend rode off on his original camel, plus two more! When you give something to God, you never lose it and there is always a good return!

In Malachi 3:10 God says, “Bring the whole tithe into my storehouse ... test me in this and see if I will not pour out a blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” Go ahead. God invites you to test Him in this one area. You’ll never see the miracle of tithing until you try it. Those of us who have been tithing for years *know* our 90% remaining income miraculously goes farther than the 100% ever could. That’s a miracle of God and He wants you to be a part of it. It has nothing to do with money. It’s God’s invitation for you to see Him work. The great preacher, S.M. Lockridge once said, “The God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills just plain don’t need your money! But aren’t you glad that He has given you the opportunity to be a part of what He is doing?”

As we stand at the end of another year, it’s a good time to reflect. How much have you given to the Lord in 2000? Some of you are living proof of the validity of this promise. You keep giving and God keeps giving back. Others of you have had a tough year financially. Let’s turn this promise around. If you are remiss in giving to God, it will always seem you never have enough. In a few days our financial office will mail out your giving statement for this year. If you took the total amount you gave in 2000 and multiplied it by ten, could you live on it? That’s what it seems some of you are doing—without knowing it. Your best financial strategy for 2001 is to put God first.

CONCLUSION

These four laws are irrefutable. They cannot be broken. If you jump off a 50-story building, you don’t break the law of gravity—you only demonstrate it. Do yourself a favor and observe all four of these simple but profound spiritual laws: Don’t judge; don’t condemn; forgive; and give! It will make all the difference in your new year.

OUTLINE

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“This generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.” *II Corinthians 9:10-11 The Message*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes