

FOCUS ON FAITH

TAKING A FRESH LOOK AT – JUDGING EACH OTHER

It's almost a year since I started writing these articles and the other day I had a quick look back over the subjects we've covered. No, I wasn't being narcissistic – I just wanted to make sure I didn't repeat myself.

Fat chance of that I hear some of the regulars at Bridgnorth Baptist Church muttering under their breath!

Seriously though, we've looked at a number of different topics – the church festivals of Easter, Pentecost and of course Christmas, but also topics relating to our attitudes and behaviours like joy; truth and encouragement. In virtually every article I've challenged us to review and re-evaluate our approach and to take a fresh look at the way we tackle everyday issues. This week is no exception and I'd like us to briefly consider our attitude towards judging other people.

God doesn't treat us on the basis of our appearances, or where we grew up, or the colour of our skin, or the mistakes we've made

All of us have the potential to judge others. We can make snap decisions about people based on their appearance, their language or their behaviour, especially when the other person is behind the wheel of a car!

And if people don't look like us, act like us or have the same opinions as us often we dismiss them as either "cranks" or "crackpots" or even worse.

One day the Disciples met a man who had been blind from birth and they asked Jesus a question. ***"Whose sin caused this man to be blind – his own or his parents?"***

What a question to ask – right there in front of the man. After all he was blind, not deaf so he could hear what they were saying. And it wasn't a very intelligent question anyway – that's me judging already! How could it have been his sin that had caused the problem if he'd been blind from birth?

Of more concern though was the fact that the Disciples didn't really care about the man at all and that he needed help, or that he was living a life of total blindness. They just wanted to debate an unanswerable question and to label this man rather than love him. We label jam jars and other containers because we want to know what's on the inside – the Disciples saw what was on the outside and made assumptions about what was on the inside.

As I said earlier, we all have the potential to judge other people.

- Just because that young person walking down the street is wearing a "hoody" doesn't make him an urban terrorist who will mug you without a second thought.

- The chances are that those teenagers with the skateboards under their arms aren't going to career recklessly across the road and vandalise your car.

- The man who introduced himself to you as an accountant isn't necessarily going to be boring

- The unemployed person selling the *Big Issue* isn't automatically a scrounger.

I'm so thankful that God doesn't treat us on the basis of our appearances, or where we grew up, or the colour of our skin, or the mistakes we've made. *"Don't judge a book by its cover,"* we say but the Bible says, ***"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"*** (1 Samuel 16: 7).

Jesus saw the blind man as an opportunity waiting to happen rather than a victim of circumstances or fate. The Message Version of the Bible says that Jesus told the Disciples, ***"You're looking for someone to blame...look instead for what God can do"*** (John's Gospel 9:3). Then Jesus healed the man and that got him into even more trouble (read the story for yourself and find out why).

Jesus told us that the Greatest Commandment was to love God with every fibre of our being and that we should also love other people as much as we love ourselves.

Perhaps it's time to take a fresh look at how we evaluate other people and scrutinise our attitudes. Being a Christian is more about accepting others (even with their differences) rather than judging and criticising; of caring instead of condemning and of serving rather than waiting to be served ourselves.

In fact that's just the way God treats us.

If you'd like to find out more about the real, radical Christian faith, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk which has details of local Christian Churches and contact details.



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