

## What is judgment and what is pointing out the facts?

### Is judgment different than opinion?

#### Prayer of the prostitute

Letter to a prisoner

2018-07-21

Dear in Christ ...! Your letter was waiting for me when I arrived home on Thursday. I will pray for ... and put him on my list. It is a mystery why things happen, and why people do things. Only God knows the truth about everything. I also heard another tragedy actually the day before I saw you. A volunteer who came often and saw my men killed himself on July 4. There is no apparent reason.

#### What is judgment and what is pointing out the facts?

Well, if you had an uncle that you really loved who had a drinking problem and was clearly getting sick from his drinking and was about to lose his job perhaps and his family, you would go to your uncle and say "Uncle! Please stop drinking! I love you and I don't want to lose you!" You love your uncle, but you know that he has a problem drinking. You have used judgment in determining that he has a problem, but you have not judged him. I think, if someone has a problem and we try to help them in some way – first of all by prayer for them, second of all by personal intervention, and third of all by some other means, then we have used our discernment with love. If we just talk about somebody and their problems but have no intention of trying to help them, then I think that that's just judgment (and "opinion", see below). I'm not sure that we need to "point out the facts" except when we are talking with someone else who may be able to help someone we love. For instance, you might come to me and say so-and-so has this problem and I don't know what to do about it. I would ask you for clarification. And you would tell me things perhaps that are even terrible things, not with the intention of judging the one who's doing the terrible things, but because you want to help him amend himself. In this case, pointing out the facts is merciful. I think just talking about people especially when we joke, or when we in some way have a feeling in our heart that is superior, is judgment. It's a copout to say we are "pointing out the facts" unless we are exposing those facts to someone that we think can help the other person.

You said in your letter that you **associate judgment with consequences**.

I don't do that. I don't think that the Scripture does that either. If you look at the spiritual meaning of this word, I think it is more about discerning someone's problem and out of love choosing to help them. Our Lord does not punish us. He only loves us. Punishment is an ungodly thing. There is no retribution in God's mind. There is correction that God does, and it might even be painful for us. It is not punishment. It is chastisement with the purpose. Our penal system is about punishment. Mankind thinks more about punishment than he does about correction and amendment - this is the major reason, I think that Scripture sometimes uses these terms. Please understand, I'm not saying that someone who sins and does not repent gets a "get out of jail free card". Those who disobey God and do not love Him will be in torments when they are surrounded by Him in the next age. Right now, we see through the glass darkly, including the sinful ones (us), in the unrepented ones (May God preserve us from this is!). In the next life there will be no dark glass, and the light of God will be experienced everywhere. This light will be like darkness to those that are dark.

#### "Is judgment different than opinion?"

I think for a Christian, everything that we believe should then motivate us to some sort of action. If we believe that someone is a creep, then we should at least pray for them. We might also choose to avoid them because they're dangerous, but we would not hate them nor would we gossip about them. I think a lot of people have opinions but don't think that they are obligated by their opinions. **Christians are always obligated to act according to their opinions.** I suppose using the word this way means that I am equating judgment (or, perhaps a better word would be *discernment*) and opinion as being the same thing, or at least they should be the same thing. We should not believe something without it causing us to change our behavior

in some way. Otherwise even moral opinions will be as useful to us and to our soul as which sports team we like the best. It really does not matter what sports team we like, but it does matter how we relate to our fellow man.

I think the most important thing that you have going for you when you are released is that you are Christian and that you know how to pray. You must learn how to pray even better. Certainly, getting out of prison especially the first year is extremely difficult and taxing. Emotionally it is extremely hard. Those who are not ready for those emotions can make poor decisions. I will pray for you to the end of my life. I consider my prayers to be like that of the prostitute that St. Seraphim talked about, but if you know that story, God heard the prayers of the prostitute because of the need of the widow. So, it doesn't really matter in my opinion if I'm worthy or not, God tells me to pray and I pray. I also commemorate in the liturgy. God hears those commemorations for certain, because they are those of a priest, and he does not ignore the prayers even of a sinful priest at the altar.

"You may judge how great the power of prayer is even in a sinful person, when it is offered whole-heartedly, by the following example from Holy Tradition. When at the request of a desperate mother who had been deprived by death of her only son, a harlot whom she chanced to meet, still unclean from her last sin, and who was touched by the mother's deep sorrow, cried to the Lord: 'Not for the sake of a wretched sinner like me, but for the sake of the tears of a mother grieving for her son and firmly trusting in Thy loving kindness and Thy almighty power, Christ God, raise up her son, O Lord!' And the Lord raised him up." <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/47866.htm>

I've heard about these problems the ... unit has. I lost man in the ... unit due to heat prostration. His cause of death was said to be a heart attack. He was an Orthodox Christian from ... He was a good and sweet man. His name was Alexander. He had sad eyes. He had a wife and daughters who loved him, but they were never going to see him again. I think they actually moved back to .... I do not think he was a criminal, just a man who got into drugs too much and end up doing some criminal stuff because of it and went to prison for a long time. I really loved him. He loved his mama too. He kept lying to her and telling her that he was going to get out soon, and his greatest hope was that she would die before she figured out that she would never see him again. Of your charity, I would appreciate it if you would commemorate Alexander in your prayers for the dead. (Note: this is his real name)

I grieve about your medical issues. I think any institution basically decreases in its concern for human beings directly related to the number of people in the institution. Veterans get crappy care (at least for PTSD) also. All I know how to do for you right now is pray for you and hope that God hears my prayers like those of the prostitute.

I understand fully now why there is a market for people washing other people's clothes. Your explanation of the washing process makes it quite clear.

As for the officers who did illegal and immoral things, I am not surprised. In any situation where men have absolute power over other men, there will be crimes. May God protect you. May God protect everyone that I care for in prison. Someday my friend, there won't be anybody planting screwdrivers in anybody's cell, because there will be no cells. There will be no sorrow nor sighing, no lying, no cheating but only life everlasting. I think it is very important that we read the Scriptures and take these promises to heart. Truly we have no enduring city in this life. I suppose what is happening to you or you find out about friends, or even just fellow inmates, it's pretty hard to only think about Jerusalem. I'm not pretending that it's easy, or that I would do it if I were in your situation. I have a definition of the priesthood that I believe works pretty well. **"A priest is a sinner helping other sinners not to sin."** Everything I tell people I believe, and I even do most of it, but if I were tested I don't know what I would do.

I'm glad you like the Evgertinos. I will try to read more stories, and perhaps copy some of them out or find them on the Internet and send them to you guys.

I'm really sorry about your pictures. Truly prison is ingenious in finding ways to hurt people. It's like being eaten by death by minnows. I've come to the end of your letter now I need to get it in J pay in order to make my 48-hour requirement. May God bless you and help you in all things

[http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters\\_2018+what-is-judgment-vs-pointing-out-the-facts+is-judgment-different-than-opinion.pdf](http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2018+what-is-judgment-vs-pointing-out-the-facts+is-judgment-different-than-opinion.pdf)

