

### Here Comes the Judge

*A man was arrested for hunting and eating an Egret. When he went before the judge, he wanted to plead guilty with an explanation. "I was just trying to feed my hungry family," he told the judge, "and I've never done anything like that before."*

*The judge, being a family man himself, had a soft heart and agreed to let the man go free since he was merely trying to feed his family, and it was the first and only offense on his record. "Before you go, though, I want to ask you a question," said the judge. "What does Egret taste like?"*

*"Well your Honor," the man replied, "it's not as tender as Spotted Owl but it's tastier than Bald Eagle!"*

Of course, judging is actually serious business, and not just for the folks who sit in a courtroom and wear the black robes. We all judge things everyday, deciding what we think of the things people are doing around us. But there is a right way and a wrong way to do this. Let's take a look this week at how we can avoid some of the problems that can come when we judge others.

#### Monday – Judge Not

*"Heaven is above all yet; there sits a judge that no king can corrupt."* William Shakespeare, Henry VII

1. Please read Romans 14:1-4. What everyday activity is the subject of Paul's instructions? What everyday activities do you think we get judgmental about in modern times?
2. What do you think Paul means when he writes, "accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters"?
3. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus had strong words for those that judged others. When have you been tempted to correct someone else's minor problem while you yourself were facing a more serious moral problem?

**Making it Personal:** Identify those things you have a tendency to criticize in others, and ask God to free you from such a critical spirit.

#### Tuesday – Lord of All

*"I belong to Jesus/He is Lord and King/Reigning in my inmost heart/Over everything."* M. Fraser, hymn writer

1. Please read Romans 14:4-9. In your own words, describe Paul's argument against judging others.
2. Verse 4 packs a powerful punch. How does it help you to think twice before launching into judgment of another?
3. How do these verses help you understand what it means for Jesus Christ to be Lord of all?

**Matter of Prayer** – Take some time to confess any judgmental spirit that the Lord reveals in you.

#### Wednesday – Equality before God

*"Death comes equally to us all, and makes us all equal when it comes."* John Donne, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. English pastor

1. Please read Romans 14:10-11. How could you use these verses to respond to someone who thought that some Christians are more special in God's sight than others?
2. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Galatians 3:28-29 and Colossians 3:11-14. What common theme do you find? How do verses 12-14 of Colossians 3 relate back to Romans 14:10? How does this related to judging other believers?

**Digging Deeper:** Read Isaiah 45:16-24 for the prophecy underlying Romans 14:11. There is only one place to find "righteousness and strength." Where do we find these? According to Isaiah 45:22, who is invited to turn to God?

#### Thursday – Accountability

*"What will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?"* Job 31:14

1. Please read Romans 14:12. Based on verses 1-11, what is the subject of the account we will give to God?
2. What does Jesus say in Matthew 12:35-37 that helps you understand Romans 14:12?
3. In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells a story of what it means to honor God with what he gives us. How can you honor God in the way you treat the people he puts in your life every day?

**Making it Personal:** Do you identify more with the servant who received 5 talents, 2 talents or 1 talent? Why?

#### Friday – Sheep and Goats

*"They serve God well, who serve his creatures."* Lady Caroline Sheridan Norton, The Lady of La Garage

1. Please read Matthew 25:31-46. Why do you think Jesus placed such great importance on such simple acts? How do those acts compare with the necessities Jesus identified in Matthew 6:25-32?
2. Look at Matthew 10:42. What characteristic marks a follower of Christ?
3. "A cup of cold water" serves as a powerful metaphor. Brainstorm the kinds of actions that act like a cup of cold water to those who are in need (e.g. sending an email of encouragement to someone who is discouraged).

**Making it Personal:** We don't serve others to earn our salvation, but rather we serve others because we have been saved (Ephesians 2:8-10). Ask God to strengthen you to do his good works to those around you, and to do it without judging them.

**For the Weekend:** Re-read Isaiah 45:16-24 and consider all that God has done for you, then look again at Romans 14:1-12 and consider how you should in turn treat others.