

Judgmental? Me?

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While visiting the bank recently, I heard a teller and a customer discussing another person. The conversation went something like this. "What do you think of her?" "I don't like her at all!" "Oh, do you know her?" "No, I don't." "And yet you don't like her?" "That's right. She might be a nice person, but I just don't like the way she looks. That's just my personal opinion."

I have to say that as I stood waiting to be served, I began to examine my own thinking. Had I been guilty of making casual judgments about others based on their appearance, race, or gender?

I'd like to tell you that the answer is no. But I recall the time I decided an elderly man would be a bad driver because he was wearing a hat! Then there was the day when I thought that a teenage boy of another nationality was likely to be a purse snatcher. And what about the occasion when I viewed someone as a beer-drinking member of a gang because he had tattoos and rode a motorbike?

It seems so easy to condemn others rashly. Yet suspecting people or resenting them for no reason other than how they look, is the result of allowing fear, ignorance, or prejudice to govern one's thought.

In taking a stand against this kind of thinking, I've received a great deal of help from the example and guidance of Christ Jesus. Although he moved among people of many backgrounds and nationalities, he never feared, judged, or despised others. Instead he spoke and acted with compassion, bringing comfort and healing to those in need. This kindly affection is what Jesus encouraged in his followers. He told them – and all who wish to follow his example – to love one another (see John 13:34). He also said "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (Matt. 7:1,2).

For me, carrying out Jesus' instructions in daily life means treating every individual as the child of God. Each of us is very precious to our Father. He loves us. He made us to be like Him. Everyone's real nature is thus spiritual and good. It is therefore natural for us to be loving and merciful. It is not natural for us to be critical or judgmental. As God's offspring, we naturally respect each person, no matter how different from us he or she may appear to be.

Putting this into practice, though, sometimes takes courage, especially when fear leads us to wrong conclusions. Yet even when we're faced with another's hostile behavior, we can refuse to react in kind and, instead, judge that individual to be the much-loved child of God.

I had occasion to do this while working in a hardware store. A woman came to the service counter where a number of us were on duty. In a thick European accent she indicated that she wished to purchase timber molding to make picture frames. Not quite understanding her request, we all hesitated. Suddenly she burst out with a tirade of abuse. The others all stepped back a pace, leaving me squarely in front of her. Although her manner to me was rude, I escorted her to the section where the materials were located. While we were there she continued her obnoxious behavior.

At this point I decided that I had a choice to make. I could think of her as an awful customer and deal with her as unkindly as she was dealing with me. Or I could refuse to condemn her and treat her as God's child.

I recalled Jesus' compassion in never condemning people (see John 8:1-11 and Luke 19:2-10). I also remembered this statement in *Science and Health*: "Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man, who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals. In this perfect man the Saviour saw God's own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick" (pp. 476-477).

I, too, needed to see this woman as the image of God, perfect Love. This is who she really was. Hostility is actually no part of anyone's true nature. As God's likeness, she could only reflect divine Love's grace and goodness. I didn't have to react to ugly words. They are powerless to hurt. I knew they could never destroy our unity with God, Love, and with each other. Nor could they wreck a friendly business transaction. I could love her as God loved her. His children aren't at war with one another.

Aware that things had grown quiet, I turned to the woman. She was standing there with tears running down her cheeks. She explained that she'd had a terrible argument with her husband before coming to the store. She sincerely apologized for treating me badly. Putting my arms around her, I comforted her and said that everything was all right. I wasn't offended. She returned my hug, and we walked back to the service counter, smiling and on the best of terms.

I will never forget the looks of sheer astonishment on the faces of the other staff at the transformation they had witnessed. After her departure, they asked what had happened. I explained that she was actually a nice woman who came into the store angry and upset. I just remained calm and treated her with gentle kindness. This restored her good nature.

How grateful I am that Jesus left us this important Christian counsel: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). As we follow this Christlike way of thinking and acting, we won't condemn others but will love them regardless of the outward appearance.