

Aim of lesson

This is intended to be a practical lesson to determine what Jesus meant about judging others and how it affects us.

Bible background

Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 2:1-4; Matthew 6:9-14; Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 6:37-42; John 8:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 11

Preparation required

Read the relevant Bible passages. Think carefully about what your answers would be to the questions on the worksheet. There is not always a right or easy answer when dealing with practical issues so it can be helpful to discuss the topic with others to get a wide range of views.

Suggested outline of lesson

Use the worksheets as a basis for the lesson. Try to draw out the distinction between judging someone's salvation (which we're not in a position to do) and dealing with the practicalities of fellowship for the present, to lead someone who is astray back to God.

Prejudice

We should not have prejudices but we do and all have room for improvement!

Don't Judge?

It is God who ultimately judges. Help the students to recognise how totally dependent we are on God's mercy and that this should affect our dealings with one another.

Forgiving others

Be ready to assure that God is aware of our weakness. It is the effort we put in, rather than what we do (or don't) achieve that matters.

When someone sins

Emphasize the difference between disfellowshipping as a means of correction and condemning as unworthy of salvation. See 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

The young people will presumably not have had any real experience of this sort of situation, and most of what they have heard may have been second hand from people who had an axe to grind. So it is best for you to limit the discussion. Talk about the principles, explain that there are times when regrettably we have to take action when someone sins, and ask them if they have any questions. (There is another lesson in Part 3 about this).

Are you as bad?

The point of this exercise is to help the young people to notice when they are guilty of condemning others and begin to think how they could put things right if it does happen.

When someone confesses to doing something wrong ...and when they don't

The point from these two examples is that if we are to behave to others as God does to us then we should place far more importance on whether someone else is repentant than on how 'bad' was the crime. Similarly, we should not necessarily protect others from the results of what they have done. So in the first example we would forgive our son because of his repentance, but expect him to repay his friend for his stolen bike. In the second, our daughter should be punished, more for her obstinacy than for the theft.

Discrimination

It will be obvious to the young people that we should not have prejudices based on appearance but they may not realise how easy it is to do it unintentionally.

Feeling guilty?

There are three people in this example to whom we could confess. We should certainly tell God. Whether or not to tell the teacher or the boy we copied from will be a matter to discuss. Aspects like whether we have learnt from the experience, how the other people concerned would react and whether any one has been hurt by the situation (which in this case they haven't) should be considered.

Relevance to our lives

When Jesus returns we hope he will look on our shortcomings with love, compassion and mercy. He died for us to obtain our salvation. If we live our lives with this at the forefront of our minds, our judgment of others will be tempered with similar love, compassion and mercy.

Prayer

Encourage students to pray that God will help them to be more compassionate and less judgmental in the dealings with others but most of all to pray for his mercy towards themselves.

Other suggestions for activities

- Discuss whether guilt makes it difficult to forgive yourself and thus difficult to understand that God has forgiven you. How can you rectify this without making yourself blasé about sin?
- Discuss attitudes in the world today that clearly show lack of forgiveness. There may have been a recent public court case you could discuss where people have shown their desire for revenge, their desire for someone to be punished; where people have let their emotions get in the way or have made uninformed opinions.