

JUDGING AND BEING JUDGED

“Do not judge, or you will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged” (Matt. 7:1, 2)

On May 5, 1995, U.S. district judge Samuel Kent issued a ruling against students uttering the name of Jesus during prayer at a high school graduation, stating, "And make no mistake, the court is going to have a United States marshal in attendance at the graduation." Just to make sure they got the message, Kent declared, "Anybody who violates these orders, no kidding, is going to wish that he or she had died as a child when this court gets through with it." Furthermore, the judge ruled that anyone invoking the name of Jesus at this voluntary religious service would be immediately arrested by federal marshals and jailed for a minimum of six months.

In 1995 Jerry Newcombe was covering this story for the D. James Kennedy Ministries. He now notes two unusual aspects of the story.

- First, the censoring of school prayer in 1995 happened in Santa Fe, Texas. This is where, as you know, 10 people were murdered on May 18, 2018. Early on that morning the 17 year old suspect armed with a shotgun and pistol entered the Santa Fe highschool and began shooting. When he quit 9 students and 1 teacher were dead and 10 others were injured. You can safely assume that during this ordeal plenty of prayers were being said in the name of Jesus. To date, however, the ACLU has not filed charges.
- The second irony involves the “Honorable” Judge Kent himself. In 1995 this paragon of virtue and wisdom waxed eloquent in denouncing anyone who would defy his authority. He arrogantly declared that “anyone” praying in the name of Jesus would be arrested and sentenced to a minimum of six months in jail. He further warned he would make those who defied his orders wish they had died as a child. The irony is that on May 11, 2009 Judge Kent was himself sentenced to 33 months in Federal Prison. Amidst many allegations he finally confessed to lying to investigators about sexually molesting two female employees. He therefore has the “honor” of being the first federal judge to be sentenced for a sex crime. Kent, however, was not happy in prison. He complained that his treatment was cruel and unfair. He resented being “unjustly” labeled as a sex offender and excluded from a substance abuse treatment program. He found it was easier to “give” a sentence than to “serve” one.

In our text Jesus warned that God will hold us to the same standard we demand of others. The prophet Nathan, for example, told King David of a rich man who confiscated a ewe lamb from his poor neighbor to feed a traveler he was lodging. David burned with anger and vowed that the man who did such a thing deserved to die. Then Nathan told David “You are the man”! (2 Sam. 12:7). Because David was king he had the mistaken idea that he could do anything he wanted to. He was wrong! Even powerful people on earth still have to obey the laws of God.

Jesus taught - “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt. 5:7). The way to receive mercy is to give it. James emphasizes this same point by stating “Judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful” (Ja. 2:13). After telling the parable of the unmerciful servant Jesus warned: “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:21 - 35).

Jesus, as you know, was criticized for eating in the home of a tax collector and sinner like Matthew. In response to their criticism Jesus challenged them to “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:9 - 12).

Perhaps that is a lesson that Judge Kent and everyone else also needs to learn!