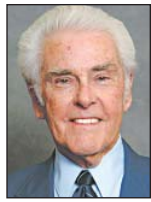


Transformed in my actions

The way we treat others should reflect how we are treated by God. Tolerance is a word that gets tossed around by both Christians and non-



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Christians, even though both sides may have different definitions for tolerance.

Even if our viewpoint is the correct one, Jesus calls us to a higher standard, to treat people as we want to be treated.

Evaluate instead of judging others (Matthew 7:1-6). One translation interprets Jesus' words as, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your neighbor's eye and pay no attention to the 2x4 in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the 2x4 out of your own eye and will see clearly to remove the speck out of your own eye."

Here again Jesus' extreme illustrations teach the private lesson that we all stand under divine judgment. We must not expect more mercy from God if we are not ready to be merciful to our brothers.

It is obvious that v. 6 was not included as a modern judgment against dogs. Whole sections of the Sunday newspaper advertisements include ways to pamper pets when they need care. We must remember that dogs and swine were symbolically unclean, representing the men who could not enter the holy grounds because they could not be given holy things. "As well as the practice of the early Church, we cannot deliver the Eucharist or the Lord's Prayer to men till they were ready for it" (A. M. Hunter, *A Pattern for Life*, p. 84).

This should not prohibit the preaching of the gospel to unrepentant persons, for this is the only way that they can have faith activated for them – to come to Christ.

Seek God's wisdom (Matthew 7:7-11). Two basic teachings of Jesus on persistent prayer relate to

these two verses. We need to pray to receive God's wisdom, and for help to obey all that Jesus has previously commanded. The lost are unclean, scripturally described as separated from God, and need "the cleansing of the blood" to cleanse their sin separating them from God. We need to seek God's wisdom for directions of how to reach them for God.

God treats people better than we treat each other in the daily walk of life. We make mistakes but God judges perfectly. As we must pray and seek his direction. James instructs us, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (1:5). Solomon asked God for wisdom to judge properly (1 Kings 3:9). If we are to have spiritual discernment about others, we must keep on asking God and continually seek his will.

Ask, seek, knock (Matthew 7:7-12). At the heart of this section is teaching us to be open to God when we bring our needs to the Father. There is no promise that we will get all we want. Instead, "one may not receive what he requests, he may not find when he seeks, and the door upon which he knocks may not be the door opened, but there is the assurance that when there is asking there will be receiving, where there is seeking there will be finding, and where is knocking God will open the door" (Frank Staggs, "Matthew," *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, p. 120).

Verse 12 is the negative form of the Golden Rule which can often influence behavior that is not specifically taught by Jesus but is needed in our culture: "In everything, do to others what you have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Susan Vollenweider, in the *Kansas City Star's 816 Magazine* (June 22, 2016), demonstrates how behavior can be changed without adopting the hatred and bitterness of the person she resents:

"(In the aftermath of the Orlando

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shooting massacre) as I watched mothers fearfully sob for missing sons who had gone out for a night of dancing, the thought, "These boys were not much older than my eldest son" ignited a memory flash when my younger son was in first grade and the news was full of the faces of first graders who didn't make it home from school. . . .

"While feeling anger, as well as grief, sadness and pain for parents I didn't know, the news broke for a commercial that made me fight to hold down my muffin.

"A man was telling me his fed-up-with-politics-as-usual reasons why I should vote for him for governor. I could have gotten behind the first sentences, but then I saw him holding a weapon frighteningly similar to the one used in the dance club massacre from the news stories I had watched.

"And then he shot that weapon and blew up something, action movie style. . . .

"My first instinct (to a person criticizing her opinion on a forum by calling her a name) was to type a response to put him in his place with both logic and extensive vocabulary while mirroring his tone. . . .

"Then the change switch flipped. Just because I was offended I didn't have to mirror his approach. I thought differently so I should act differently.

"That moment, I decided to try to take every opportunity to practice kindness in the face of rudeness. I realized that I could be just as angry as the guy calling me names, but could practice being an example of calm and rational debate in a situation where calm is the last thing I wanted to be."

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