

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Approving and Disapproving of What Others Are Doing – Part I."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 9:49**.

As I worked on this sermon, I realized it needed a counterpart:

- This morning we're going to see how the Lord wants us to view others who are serving Him but aren't **"with us."** The overall tone of the message is very approving of what others are doing, almost to the point of lacking discernment.
- Next week's sermon will provide the balance, as we see that there are other times we must be disapproving.

Go ahead and look with me at **verse 49**...

49 John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us."

There was a man who was not one of the twelve disciples, and he was successfully casting out demons, and there are a few things I want you to notice about this...

First, notice the use of the word **we**: **WE saw someone...WE tried to stop him**. Even though John is speaking, all the disciples tried to stop this man.

Second, notice what they were trying to stop him from doing: **casting out demons**.

It would be one thing if they were trying to stop the man from:

- Stealing...
- Lying...
- Interrupting Jesus' teaching and ministry...

But they tried to stop him from casting out demons. Whenever people cast out demons, you don't stop them. You let them do it! 😊.

And notice it says demons...plural! He didn't just cast out A DEMON, he cast out DEMONS! This man was a soldier for God's kingdom, and they were trying to stop him doing what Jesus did, and what Jesus told the disciples to do.

Third - just so there's no question that the man really was on the Lord's side – notice the words **in your name**:

- This wasn't a magical formula. This isn't describing what the man said.
- This is describing what the man DID. He cast demons out IN JESUS' NAME.

The fact that he was doing this shows he was a follower of Christ, and he was doing it with the power and authority that came from a relationship with Him.

Fourth, notice it says **we TRIED to stop him**, versus **we STOPPED him**. Not even all 12 of the disciples working together could top this man.

Briefly look back at **verse 40**...

The man with the demon possessed son told Jesus **And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.**"

1. They had been unable to cast a demon out, but then they tried to stop this man from doing what they had been unable to do.
2. I'm completely serious when I say this: maybe they should've watched him so they could learn from him!

Finally, notice, said they wanted to stop the man **"because he does not follow US."**

It bothers me that they said **US** versus **YOU**:

- It would be one thing if John and the other disciples were upset the man wasn't following Christ, but they were upset the man wasn't following them!
- We should never have the desire that people follow us. If we're ever upset people aren't following us, we know something's wrong.
- Jesus was the Teacher and the disciples were the students or followers. They were supposed to make other disciples that followed Christ...not them.

Interestingly, the fact that John said this to Jesus shows He thought they did something good! He didn't say something that He thought was going to get him corrected. He said something that He thought would impress Jesus. But look how Jesus responded...

50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

There's a lot we can learn from this one statement from Jesus...and this brings us to Lesson 1...

IT IS MISGUIDED (LESSON 1) TO THINK ONLY CERTAIN PEOPLE CAN SERVE THE LORD.

Unless God's Word has forbidden something – like for example women being pastors – it's often misguided to stop God's work b/c we think it must be preserved for what we consider to be "the right people."

The disciples thought this man wasn't qualified to perform the ministry he was engaged in. They thought they were the only ones who should do what he was doing. But Jesus made it clear if the ministry is good and right, the work should be encouraged, not hindered.

Paul made the same point. Listen to these verses from **Rom 12:6-8 (BSB)**...

Rom 12:6 [We have] different gifts according to the grace given us. If someone's gift is prophecy, LET HIM USE IT in proportion to his faith; 7 if it is serving, LET HIM SERVE; if it is teaching, LET HIM TEACH; 8 if it is encouraging, LET HIM ENCOURAGE; if it is giving, LET HIM GIVE generously; if it is leading, LET HIM LEAD with diligence; if it is showing mercy, LET HIM DO IT cheerfully.

If you have gifts, you should be encouraged to use them. God gives us gifts and He wants us using them for His glory and the edification of the saints.

I want to share about a season from my life that helps me appreciate this account. I'll break the story up over two lessons...

I got saved when I was teaching elementary school in Marysville, CA. My classroom was right next to Elwyn's, and he was a big part of my conversion.

- Prior to becoming a Christian, I loved teaching.
- I used to stay late after school and go into the classroom on the weekends. You could say I didn't have much of a life 😊.

But soon after I became a Christian my passion for teaching elementary school started decreasing, and my passion for ministry started increasing. I couldn't believe how quickly some things that had previously been so enjoyable for me, seemed stale and mundane.

I was attending Calvary Chapel, and God opened the door for me to start leading a young adults' group. It was the highlight of my week. I loved studying and then telling everyone what I learned.

Then I moved to Lemoore, which is where I was until coming to WA. Since Calvary Chapel was the only Christian church I knew, I looked for another Calvary Chapel. But it was a town away, which made it somewhat inconvenient to invite my students and their families to church.

I really wanted to be involved in ministry again, but it seemed like the pastor thought I wasn't called to ministry. I had lots of questions, and I think he thought I was annoying.

It was really discouraging, but then one day something happened...

Pastor Joe called my house looking for my roommate Shawn. He said he had a part-time youth pastor position available at his church, and someone had given him Shawn's name. Shawn had moved away, so Pastor Joe and I started talking and the rest is history.

- Grace Baptist was in Lemoore, so I was able to live, teach, and go to church in the same town.
- The position was part-time and worked wonderfully with my schedule. I had summers and holidays off with the youth.

The next step was for me to receive my pastor's blessing to pursue the position. Since it seemed like he thought I shouldn't be in ministry, I figured he'd let me go. Instead, he told me to stay at Calvary Chapel where he could raise me up. So we did that, but six months later I still wasn't any more

involved. I went back to talk to him again about the position, and he discouraged me again. We waited again, and by this point Katie and I were sure the position would be filled by someone else.

Then about a year after I first learned of the position, Katie ran into someone from the church who said the position still wasn't filled...and I still wasn't involved at Calvary Chapel. I went back to the pastor, and said that I was going to pursue the position.

As frustrating as the situation felt to Katie and I at the time, we look back on it and believe God kept me from getting involved at Calvary Chapel so I could receive that position at Grace Baptist and be mentored by Pastor Joe.

The main point of this story is I'll never forget how discouraging it felt to want to serve the Lord and be unable to do so. One positive thing God brought forth from that season is I think it made me want to be sensitive to others in the body of Christ to see their gifts be used.

There's a little more to the story, which I'll get to in a moment. For now, look at Lesson 2...

IT IS MISGUIDED (LESSON 2) WHEN WE DON'T CELEBRATE THE LORD'S WORK.

We need to be thankful for the work all of God's people are doing for Him and His kingdom. We need to be thankful for the advancement of the Gospel wherever it's happening.

I've told you a number of times before that much of what took place in the NT was prefigured in the OT, and there's an event in the OT that parallels the events in Luke 9.

Let me explain the parallel, b/c it helps reveal the context:

- During Jesus' earthly ministry, He was crushed beneath the weight of all the people who needed Him. He didn't have time to eat, drink, or sleep. Every time He turned around there were more people pulling on him.
- The one person in Scripture with the most comparable ministry is Moses. He was leading an entire nation – millions of people – and he was crushed beneath the weight of all the people who needed him. It was so unbearable he even asked God to kill him.

God graciously poured out His Spirit on seventy men so they could help him. Listen to what happened...

Num 11:24 Moses...gathered seventy of the elders to the tent of meeting. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied.

26 Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They...prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

This **young man** thought Moses was the only one who should be prophesying, so he's alarmed. But he's not the only one. Listen to who else is concerned...

28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them."

The **young man** and **Joshua** look a lot like the disciples. They had the same zeal for Moses that the disciples had for Jesus.

Listen to Moses' response and how similar it was to Jesus' response...

29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Moses was thrilled to see people serving the Lord. He said, *"I'll take all the help I can get! I wish God's Spirit fell on every last person in the camp!"*

The problem we're seeing with the disciples is as old as the Old Testament. It stretched back to the first time God's people had a prominent leader over them.

- When there's a prominent leader it's almost as though people become afraid of that person losing prominence if other people serve.
- This happened with Paul in the early church too.

Listen to him explain his feelings on the matter...

Phil 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Paul said:

- *Even if they preach Christ to compete with each other...*
- *Even if they preach Christ hoping to add to my affliction...*
- *Even if they preach Christ while spreading lies about me...*

I rejoice that Christ is preached!

Paul decided to leave all the motivations to God to sort out...and we should too!

- Some people preach the gospel for financial reasons...
- Some people preach the gospel for attention or fame...

But we can still rejoice the gospel is being preached and leave it up to the Lord to judge hearts.

The next lesson we can learn from this...

IT IS MISGUIDED (LESSON 3) TO THINK WE'RE RIGHT AND EVERYONE ELSE IS WRONG.

At the beginning of this lesson, let me first say what I'm not saying...

- I'm not saying we don't assess churches and denominations and what they teach.
- I'm not saying every church and denomination is right in what they do and believe.
- I'm not encouraging a lack of discernment. We'll talk about this more next week.

Jesus is warning against an attitude of intolerance and exclusivity. There are:

- Different churches...
- Different denominations...
- Different non-denominations...

That are very different from us, and they can still please the Lord.

John and the other disciples wanted to reject this man b/c of his affiliation:

- This was a problem in their day, and it can be a problem in our day.
- We make this mistake when:
 - We think our church or denomination is right and everyone else is wrong.
 - We think God is only working in our church - or in churches like ours – and not other churches.

Let me briefly discuss my religious background to share a mistake I made....

When I was Catholic I thought Catholicism was right and everything else was wrong. I became a Christian at Calvary Chapel, and then I made the same mistake that I made in the Catholic Church: I thought Calvary Chapel was better than everyone else. If people didn't attend a Calvary Chapel, I thought they could be Christians, but I thought they could be better ones if they attended a Calvary Chapel.

Then I started working for Grace Baptist – which had a number of differences from Calvary chapel – and:

- It was a wonderful church.
- There were lots of wonderful Christians.

And I made the same mistake at Grace Baptist that I made at Calvary Chapel and in the Catholic Church.

Then I came to WCC – which has a number of differences from Grace Baptist – and, I try not to make the same mistake I made a number of times before:

- I think WCC is a wonderful church.
- I'm thankful to pastor here.
- But:
 - I don't think we have it all figured out.
 - I don't think we're the only ones who are really serving the Lord.
 - I don't think we're better than all the other churches out there.

- I know we have weaknesses.
- I know there are things we can do better, and things we still need to learn.

The body of Christ is much bigger than our church. We're a very, very, very small part of a much larger work God is doing across the world.

I've engaged in a limited number of speaking engagements at churches and conferences over the last two years, and it's allowed me to see the ways other Christians worship:

- There's definitely been some stuff we didn't like. There have been times we walked away and the first opportunity we had, Katie and I looked at each other and said, "I am so thankful for WCC."
- But there have been other times people do things differently than we do them at WCC, and we were blessed and encouraged.

Although it hasn't happened that often, it has saddened me when I've met people and I ask them if they're a Christian and they say:

- "I'm a Baptist," or "I'm a Presbyterian," or "I'm a Calvinist," or "I'm an Arminian," as though that's somehow better than being a Christian.
- I suspected one of my principals was a Christian, and when I asked him he said, "I'm a Southern Baptist." I guess to him being a Southern Baptist was even better than being a Baptist.

If people ask if you're a Christian and you think there's a higher title you can give yourself, you're probably making the same mistake the disciples made.

There are some people, and simply b/c I pastor a non-denominational church – they think less of me. I can think of two criticisms I've received:

- One person told me their previous church considers me a "dead-faith preacher."
- Someone else told me that according to his church's leadership I'm "in the wilderness."

If I can take you back to the story I was telling you earlier...

When I told the pastor I was leaving Calvary Chapel to pursue the position at Grace Baptist, you'd almost think I abandoned the faith. I'm not saying everyone in Calvary Chapel is like this, but for a few people – including our pastor at the time – it was like I committed the unpardonable sin. Even to this day I think I lack credibility simply for pastoring a church that's NOT a Calvary Chapel.

If I could be honest with some of these people I would say:

- There is salvation outside of your church.
- We're not under the Old Covenant that had razor-sharp precision.
- We're under the New Covenant that allows for an amount of liberty regarding the ways we worship.

And this brings us to our next lesson...

IT IS MISGUIDED (LESSON 4) WHEN WE DON'T ALLOW FOR DIVERSITY.

Under the Old Covenant there was little room for diversity, but the New Covenant introduces an amount of liberty:

- Not liberty to sin or pursue unholiness.
- But liberty associated with:
 - The way we worship...
 - The way we conduct our services...
 - The way our church obeys the New Testament.

Listen to these verses...

1 Cor 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are (and here it is...) VARIETIES OF ACTIVITIES, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

You can't miss the repetition of the word **varieties**. The word occurs in each verse.

There's a lot of variety in the body of Christ. This is why we see:

- Some churches are more liturgical.
- Some churches recite prayers...or confessions...or verses.
- Some churches have more – or less – music...or prayer...or teaching.
- Some churches have more – or less – instruments than others.
- Some churches do communion differently.
- Some churches are more formal, or what's known as high church.
- Some churches are less formal, or what's known as low church.
- Some churches have home fellowships...while others have midweek services...while others have both.

And there's liberty in these areas.

I'm thankful for these differences, b/c there are so many different people. Just to give you two biblical examples - one from the Old Testament and one from the New:

- Think about Elijah and Elisha:
 - Elijah was very fiery and seemed to have littler interest in people.
 - Elisha seemed much less fiery and much more relational.
- Think of Jesus and John the Baptist. According to Jesus' own words in **Luke 7:33 For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'** **34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'**
 - John lived a very restricted life with few relationships. You'd probably never catch him at a social function.
 - Jesus lived a very relational life, engaging in plenty of social activities like weddings and feasts.

There are different people, who have different preferences, and this produces a lot of diversity in the body of Christ, and churches aren't better or worse regarding many of these differences.

Finally, let me get you to look at the end of **verse 50**...

[Jesus said], "The one who is not against you is for you."

Jesus meant the disciples should support this man's work b/c he was going the same direction as them.

The reverse of these words is found two chapters later in **Luke 11:23**. Please look at that verse...

Luke 11:23 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

So you put these two verses together and you've got:

- **Luke 9:50 The one who is not against you is for you.**
- **Luke 11:23 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.**

These verses complement – rather than contradict – each other to make a simple, but important point...and this brings us to our last lesson...

IT IS MISGUIDED (LESSON V) TO THINK THERE'S NEUTRALITY WITH CHRIST.

Both verses make the point that there's no middle ground with Jesus. We're either for Him or against Him.

I think this is important, b/c many people think they're on the fence with Jesus. They say things like:

- *Well, I'm not really for Jesus, but I'm also not against Him.*
- *I wouldn't say that I'm living for Christ, but I also wouldn't say that I'm NOT living for Him.*

When people say things like this they're revealing that they are against Him.

Next week we'll talk more about when we have to disapprove of others, but this brings some balance to the end of the sermon:

- We can't embrace everybody's diversity because some people aren't with Christ.
- To embrace people's liberty in Christ, they have to be **IN** Christ...they have to be **FOR** Christ.
- When people aren't **FOR** Christ, He says they're **scattering abroad**...which is a simple way to say their work isn't being done for Him.

So how do we decide when people are for Christ and we should be approving of what they're doing?

The Gospel itself is a great litmus test:

- While we affirm liberty and diversity in Christ, we aren't affirming a false gospel.

- People preaching a false gospel are not with Christ. We have to disapprove of them.
- But when churches get the gospel right, then we can approve – and celebrate – most of what they're doing.

But when people are faithful to Christ, we want to approve of their work, support them, and receive them. We might not agree with everything they do or believe, but if they're for Christ and they're preaching the Gospel, we should approve them.

Let me close by asking you...

Where are you at with Christ?

- There's no middle ground.
- You're either for Him or you're against Him, but as long as you're "undecided" then you've decided to be against Him.

If you have any questions about anything I've taught this morning, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we would consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to speak with you.

Let's pray.