

What's the difference between holy and holier than thou? By Thailer Jimerson

What's the difference between being holy (as we should be) and holier than thou (which we often have a reputation for being)? I think it's the difference between being an inward-facing Christian versus and outward-facing one. As a preacher, I used to think Christianity, and consequently my preaching, was all about the outward issues, what everyone else was doing in the world, and all the moral ambiguities of the day. Like a prophet of old, I would stand up before my congregation of admiring onlookers (the proverbial "choir" I was preaching to) and denounce the evil in the world – never realizing that "the world" simply wasn't there to hear any of my preaching, so it never really made a difference. Actually, I won't say that. It taught my church to be as condemning as I was. That was the difference I was making.

But then I opened my eyes and saw what the Bible actually taught. I saw that the prophets preached alright, but they preached against whom (mainly)? The "world" they preached against were their own people: Israel. They mostly called their own churches to repentance and action. Then I considered Jesus – who did he bring the fire to? Was it the world? No, usually he handled them with grace and gentleness (one thinks of the woman at the well in Jn.4, or the adulteress in Jn.8). No, he brought the fire to the Pharisees and those who knew better – those who were supposed to be the most religious, and Bible-believing. As a matter of fact, do you know who the Bible actually tells us to judge and to judge often? You would think by our reputation it was the world – but it's not. (There's actually a place in 1Co.5.12 where Paul tells us that we have no business judging the world.)

The Bible tells us to judge *ourselves* (1Co.11.31; 2Co.13.5; etc.).

So my question is simply this: are we an outward facing, or inward facing church? Are you an outward facing or inward facing Christian? Because this is the difference between being truly holy in yourself and being "holier than thou".

I think Jude's letter gives us the proper balance, he says in vv.22-23: "And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to other show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh." The church's business is *mercy*. The Church is not in the business of pushing people off the edge while screaming "You should know better!" Here's what we should do instead (and this is a lesson Jeremy Dehut, who used to preach at Avon, taught me very well): consider 2Ti.2.24-26, because it details your job versus God's job:

Your Job: 24 And the Lord's servant[a] must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **25** correcting his opponents with gentleness...

God's Job: ...God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Our job is to be patient, kind, and gentle. And God's job is to actually push people into repentance. Let's take that lighter burden and make sure we're inward facing, truly holy people who shine the light to those in the world.