

February 24, 2019
Sermon by Rev. Mark Moline
The Very First Page

Do not judge, do not condemn. I've noticed that Christians who do condemn others, usually use Holy Scripture as their preferred weapon of condemnation. This sermon simply asks you **not** to do that. And, of course I am preaching to myself every bit as much as I am preaching to you.

My mother didn't have or wear a gold wedding band until she had been married nearly thirty years. Why? Because the Wesleyan Methodist Church back then, took seriously the second chapter of First Timothy where they read, "Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness."

The good folks of that and other fundamentalist congregations judged any woman who braided her hair and wore gold jewelry as a "**SINNER**." An absurd example, you say. Yes, it is, and times have changed, But I sometimes think we have just moved on to bigger and better damnations.

We simply don't understand scripture well enough to consign our neighbors to hell on the basis of our biblical literacy. And that goes for those who seem to be constantly quoting memorized scripture to you. Those folks major in "Picking and Choosing." They don't understand the whole word any better than we do.

Then too, God's word written is too sacred to be reduced to a mere tool of **our** petty judgement of others. Let's let God be the judge. He is a very capable judge, and has received a very high job performance rating in that area of endeavor.

When we open our bibles to the very first page, the first line we read, "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**" and we all say," that's difficult to comprehend and impossible to conclusively prove to others." Then we turn to the very last page of the bible, the final Chapter and we read, "**See, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end,**" and we all admit," that's difficult to comprehend and impossible to prove."

We know from the moment we pick up the bible just what it is from cover to cover. We know we are holding a collection of writings that appeals to far more than mere intellect alone. We know it is a work requiring both objective thinking and subjective thinking, both faith and reason which does not (contrary to popular opinion) always automatically and instinctively clash or conflict with either faith or reason.

I am speaking here of **faith**, not speculation; I probably quote 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard too often, but he wrote: "**Speculation reflects on tangible things abstractly -- while Faith reflects on abstract things tangibly.**" When we use scripture to condemn the souls of others, I think we abandon our real faith to mere speculation. As such, we can reduce

scripture to appear to be little more than speculation, especially to those whom we set out to condemn in the first place.

We walk in to a book store and find a Bible and some want to put it back on the fiction shelf. Others insist upon returning it to the non-fiction section, and still others want to place it back in that vague and murky section called “Religion,” whatever that means.

Then there are those who simply buy it and buy into it. They take it home, read, mark and inwardly digest it, even fall in love with its **truth** and make it a part of their very essence. Still we dare not use it as a weapon against others. The more we understand it, the more we understand how little we do understand.

We may not sufficiently understand it, but we do know what this book is before we ever pick it up. We know this book is full of Lazarus being raised from the dead, the sea being parted, Moses bringing forth water from a dry rock in the desert, a large fish swallowing Jonah, an iron ax head floating in the water of the Jordan, Jesus walking on water, calming the storm, being transfigured on the mountain. We struggle to understand and reason. But Paul warned us, “**For now we see in a glass dimly, but then face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully.**”

Now We know only in part. We know our limitations and yet some insist that they know it fully now, especially as it applies to others. It is arrogance to think that we the created are entitled to know everything the creator knows right now today, just so we can judge others! Do not judge the faith of others based upon your own approach to and interpretation of Holy Scripture. Our appointed Psalm for this morning tells us to: “**Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.**”

Again, Let the judge be the judge. He is a capable judge and will someday execute great justice. Meanwhile the choice belongs to each individual. You can't use scripture to force that choice upon others.