

Panthers:

Have you ever struggled with how you should *go* to others with the gospel of full surrender to Christ? When a person is caught in his sin (desiring life apart from God), we tend to go to him in one of two extremes: either we *condemn*, or we are *careless*. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the *be-do-go* of full surrender. Jesus taught that who we are to *be* (Matt. 5), determines what we are to *do* (Matt. 6), which determines where we are to *go* (Matt. 7). The master communicator elaborated on the heart and mannerisms of an effective carrier of His gospel message. Jesus conveyed that we should not *go* to the world either *condemningly* or *carelessly*, rather, we should *go connectedly* with the Spirit of God (Matt. 7-12).

Do not go proudly with a hard heart of stone. Jesus commanded, “*Do not judge*” (Matt. 7:1). Jesus was communicating that we should not *condemn* because we will be condemned by God and others (Matt. 7:2; cf. Lk. 6:37-38). Paul said that when we condemn others we pass judgment on ourselves because we do the same things (Rom. 2:1). Jesus indicated that the judgment of God is predicated on how we flesh out His heart with others (Matt 5:7). A hard heart of stone is judgmental and it requires a severe tool to be shaped.

Are you condemning others? Jesus linked a condemning heart with the eyes, or one’s perspective. Borrowing an illustration from His construction days, He said that the antidote to a condemning heart was to take the plank out of our own eye so that we can see clearly enough to help someone with the speck in his (Matt. 7:3-5). The plank in our own eye is our personal sin of pride, and it leaves a blind spot (Eph. 4:18). Paul told the Galatians to go to restore someone caught in sin with total humility as if they were capable of committing the same mistake (Gal. 6:1).

Do not go proudly with a hard heart of sand. Jesus warned of the opposite kind of pride, one that is *careless* and loose with the gospel message, naively scattering it to cynics who would automatically reject what they hear. Jesus painted the image of wild, ravenous dogs and pigs who would not give any consideration to a pearl of wisdom (Matt. 7:6). Proverbs teaches of the same dilemma that occurs when one attempts to argue with a fool (Prov. 26:4-5). A sand heart is loose and licentious and requires a storm to be malleable.

Go humbly with a soft heart of clay. Jesus said that we should go to others with a heart of humility that is first *connected* with God. He commanded us to *ASK* – Ask, Seek, and Knock. Jesus described a progressive intensity of humility in prayer, one’s heart *connected* with God’s. He promised that if we ask humbly we will receive, if we seek (making our muscles move with our prayers) we will find, and if we knock persistently, the door will be opened (Matt. 7:7-11).

You might ask, “Receive what? Find what? Open what door?” In Luke’s parallel passage, we discover that the answer is not *what*, but *who*. “*Your father in heaven (will) give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him*” (Lk. 11:13, parentheses mine). The Holy Spirit

removes the plank from our own eye and gives us wisdom to discern but not condemn (Col. 4:5-6). He offers us a clay heart, one that is malleable in the hands of the Potter.

Finally, we need to ask others. Jesus sums up the Sermon on the Mount with the main thing, “*So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets*” (Matt. 7:12). The Law and the Prophets were designed to *connect* others to God. Jesus communicated that if we ask others about their needs, then we are better equipped to meet them in order to *connect* others with God. We won’t know how to serve them in the way that they want to be served unless we humbly ask and listen. Solomon said that anyone who answers before listening is foolish (Prov. 18:13). Jesus described this humility toward God and others as the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:37-40). Paul said that the entire law was summed up in one command, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Gal. 5:14). He told the Romans that love fulfilled the law. Jesus’ half-brother James agreed (Jas. 2:8).

This week, trade the *condemning* heart of stone or the *careless* heart of sand for a soft heart of clay that is *connected* with God. ASK the Holy Spirit to take the plank out of your own eye so that you can clearly see the speck in others. Ask others how you can serve them. In everything, act with Christ’s heart of humility, and His Spirit will *connect* them with God.

Clay,
Mitch