

Regarding others as no better or worse than ourselves

It is interesting that many Christian Universalists, including myself, often accuse non-Universalists of Phariseism, legalism, and being excessively judgmental. As a Universalist, I often find myself being excessively judgmental of those who do not support my position. This is a trap that we all tend to fall into, often with the noblest of intentions. When we engage in debate with those who differ with us, we need to be very careful how we phrase our arguments and be as gracious and loving as possible in our responses. It's OK to take a position and point out the fallacies of opposing arguments, but it must be done very carefully and thoughtfully. The same is true when attempting to "correct" perceived faults in another person's ethical behavior.

What Jesus was getting at when He told us not to judge was to avoid hypocrisy. Take the log out of your own eye before attempting to remove the splinter from your neighbor's eye. In other words, when trying to help someone see the error of his/her ways, we need to tread humbly and lightly. It is helpful, when trying to "correct" someone, to regard ourselves as no better than the one we are trying to help. We are the way we are, and believe the way we do, largely because of our DNA and the unique life circumstances which have combined to "shape" our characters and belief system. So, we are not better or worse than anyone else, only different. We did not create our own uniqueness. We are all in the same boat, sinners saved by grace. So when we seek to help people overcome a sin problem, or correct a faulty belief system, we need to approach them humbly and lovingly and in a non-judgmental fashion.

We need to relate to people in the same way as God does, with impartiality and grace (grace = unmerited love).

In this regard, we can learn from, and seek to emulate, a process that works very well in secular workplace settings. When evaluating the performance of a subordinate or a peer, it is helpful to first point out what they are doing well, and then suggest ways they might improve their performance. When attempting to resolve a conflict, it always helps to focus on areas of agreement before discussing the differences. Begin by expressing agreement and empathy. Then, it's OK to suggest another way of looking at things. You could say something like this. *"I understand where you're coming from. In the past, I felt and believed exactly the same as you. Here is how this negatively affected my life, and here is how I personally was able to resolve the problem."*

Try this approach sometime, when responding to unkind accusations or negative comments in an on-line discussion forum or in your personal life at home or at work. Most of the time, you will not win the argument, but you will feel much better about yourself afterwards.