

The Speck and the Log

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Matthew 7:1-5

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:1-5

If the devil is not able to destroy a Christian's witness by making him apathetic, he will try and do it by making him a fanatic.¹ If spiritual apathy is one side of the pendulum that we want to be careful to avoid, an overactive zeal might be the other. As believers, we must be careful that we do not become sharp and unjust critics of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

PROBLEM #1 – JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT (V. 1-2)

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Matthew 7:1-2

Jesus words, "Judge not, that you be not judged," are perhaps some of the most misapplied words in the entirety of Scripture. How many times have you heard someone use the phrase, "You can't judge me"? Think for a moment about what the world would look like if it were devoid of any judgments. It would be an absolute train wreck. The civil arena, moral arena, financial arena, judicial arena, and the commercial arena would all implode. Kent Hughes says:

The world loves opinionated people. Its darlings are those who are articulate and dogmatic about their positions on politics, art, music, literature, culture – you name it! However, when it comes to matters of individual morality, the world abhors opinionated people, especially if they represent [biblical] morality. In these matters it adores the nonjudging person.²

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1972), 224.

² Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 232.

What is Jesus saying here in Matthew 7:1-5? Is he saying that we should never make judgments? This would be an impossible interpretation given the myriad of biblical texts that tell us that we must make judgments. Let's look at a few of those texts:

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. Matthew 7:5-6

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-16

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

Woe to you hypocrites (v. 13, 23, 25, 27, 29)... Woe to you blind guides (v. 16)... Matthew 23

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. John 7:24

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

These verses make it clear that we as Christians have an obligation to exercise judgment. We are to use sound judgment in matters of truth. Jesus isn't saying that Christians should never make judgments; He is saying that we should be careful to refrain from hypercritical, condemning judgmental spirit. In other words, the sinful human tendency to see the faults of others while blithely overlooking our own. There is a major difference between being discerningly critical and hypercritical, between exercising sound discernment and being judgmental. A discerning spirit is constructive while a hypercritical spirit is destructive.

PORTRAIT OF A HYPERCRITICAL PERSON

1. Searches for faults in others.

Does such criticism arise because there is a profound grief over sin? Is the critic moved by the fact that God is outraged and that great wrong is done? All too often the critic has no sensitivity for sin at all. If his accusations of his neighbor are discovered to be false, and the neighbor is innocent, the critic looks for something else to criticize. Nor is it because of a great love for the

neighbor that the critic makes his accusations and carries his tales. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love does not [maliciously] expose sin...Since we see that there are no positive motives for the criticism, and since the Lord says that the critic is a hypocrite, it follows that the critic is moved by envy, jealousy, selfishness, and all other evil motives that put the poison sac of the asp under the human tongue.³

GOOD EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

A. Is my motive to help or to hurt?

Speaking the truth in love - Ephesians 4:15

B. Do I have my facts straight? Is it true and the matter established?

If it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you - Deut. 13:14

C. Can love cover this difference?

Love covers a multitude of sins - 1 Peter 4:8

D. Have I checked my own life?

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted - Galatians 6:1

E. Am I prepared to grant forgiveness and assistance?

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thess 5:11

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
Ephesians 4:32

F. Am I using God's methods to admonish?

Go to your brother alone - Matthew 18:15

2. *Freely talks about the faults of others (gossip).*

3. *Focuses on things that are of little importance and treats them as matters of vital importance.*

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Romans 14:1-4

³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 226-227.

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. Romans 2:1

4. *Feels a sense of satisfaction at the faults of others.*

The tone of our life will become the tone of our judgment.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 2 Corinthians 5:10–11

PROBLEM #2 – HYPOCRITICAL SPIRIT (V. 3-4)

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? Matthew 7:3-4

Speck – sawdust...

Log – Very large piece of wood...

We find it easy to turn a microscope on another person's sin while we look at our own through the wrong end of a telescope.⁴ We are quick to see the faults in others, but quick to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. We see this in the case of David's response to Nathan when he confronted David about his sin of adultery and murder.

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because

⁴ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, 235.

he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” Nathan said to David, “You are the man! 2 Samuel 12:1–7

RELATING AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS (V. 5)

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:5

1. Speck work requires self-examination.

Jesus calls us to “take the log out of our own eye”. It is only then that we are in a proper position to help a brother with the speck in his eye.

2. Speck work requires tenderness.

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Proverbs 12:18

The procedure for removing a speck from an eye is very delicate. There is nothing in the human body more sensitive than the eye. The instant we touch it, it closes up. What is required in clearing an eye is gentleness, carefulness, patience, and sympathy for the other person. In the spiritual realm, the care is even more delicate, for we are handling a soul... We must be humble, sympathetic, conscious of our own sins, and without condemnation. Remember what Paul told the Galatians in Galatians 6:1:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Galatians 6:1

[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. 1 Corinthians 13:6–8