

Last week pastor David began our study of Matthew, Chapter 7, on the subject of “judging.” “*Do not judge so that you will not be judged*” is how Jesus powerfully introduces the subject in verse 1. This is the over-arching principle that will guide our consideration of chapter 7 as we learn how we are to relate to others as kingdom citizens.

We are not to judge another – that is clear from Jesus’ words. But this does not mean that we are not to be discerning of right and wrong. Nor does it mean that we are never to point out wrong in another with the goal of helping to right that wrong. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 6:1-3 (ERV – Easy-to-Read Version) *Brothers and sisters, someone in your group might do something wrong. You who are following the Spirit should go to the one who is sinning. Help make that person right again, and do it in a gentle way. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin too. Help each other with your troubles. When you do this, you are obeying the law of Christ.*

So discerning wrong in another and pointing it out in love with the goal of eradicating that wrong is not the “judging” of what Jesus speaks in Matthew 7:1. “Judging” has many meanings, and it must be interpreted in context. And we find that the context of Matthew 7 shows it is a wrong judging that is condemning of another so as to “put the other in their place.” This is a judging that is playing both “judge and jury” and passing sentence of “guilty” so as to put the other down and place oneself in a more righteous position. This is what Jesus means when he says “*do not judge.*”

This wrong judging is also hypocritical, in that it fails to properly judge oneself first. There is an irony here – do you see it? - We are not to (improperly) judge, and yet we are to (introspectfully) judge ourselves before we (lovingly) judge another. And with that we come to today’s passage.

Matthew 7:3-5 *Why do you look at 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,” and behold, the log is 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.*

I imagine that Jesus said this with a twinkle in his eye and a smile at the silliness of the image. He undoubtedly drew this example from his experience as a carpenter, when getting a speck of dust in the eye was common, and removing it was difficult – especially if there wasn’t a mirror to look into. And imagine Joseph, Jesus’ father, trying to get out a speck of sawdust that had gotten into Jesus’ eye, while he himself had a large splinter in his own eye – ridiculous and impossible.

But we all know that Jesus was not referring to literal specks of sawdust or literal log-sized splinters. He was talking about sin. And here is the irony – he was talking about the importance of “judging” sin rightly – one’s own log-sized sin and others’ sawdust-sized sin. He was not talking about judging sin so as to condemn it (that is “wrong judging”), but about discerning sin so as to remove it (that’s “good judging”).

3 IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS

- 1. Some sins are “bigger” than others**
- 2. We tend to be more tolerant to our own sin than to the sin of others**
- 3. We are to remove sin – not just observe it**

Let’s look at each of these important observations in turn.

1. SOME SINS ARE BIGGER

Yes, I know that *“whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all”* (James 2:10). This is an important Scripture to teach us that even one sin makes us guilty as if we had committed them all. In this sense all sins are “equal” in that committing any one will estrange us from God, worthy of eternal damnation apart from receiving the salvation Jesus offers.

But this doesn’t mean that all sins are the same in proportion or consequence. For example, lying is always wrong and is sin. But we certainly don’t think that it is as far-reaching or “big” a sin such as murder, for example. One is a “log” and one is comparatively a “speck.” The picture of an active murderer condemning another for lying is ludicrous, not to mention hypocritical.

Important observation #1, that might easily be missed, is that Jesus calls some sins “logs” and others “specks” in comparison. Both have to be dealt with, but the “logs” must come first! Prioritize your dealing with both personal sin and the sin of others. Logs first, then the specks.

2. WE TEND TO BE MORE TOLERANT TO OUR OWN SIN

How is it that too often “specks” of sin are more noticeable and bothersome to us than “logs” of sin? – especially in ourselves. Perhaps some poignant quotes will illuminate this.

“Fault-finders seldom find anything else.” **Unknown**

“It is much easier to be critical than to be correct.” **Disraeli**

“Many are like barbers, that trim all men but themselves.” **Thomas Adams**

“So very many hunt down those sins in others which they gladly shelter in themselves. This is like the wolf preaching against sheep-stealing.” **Charles Spurgeon**

The fault we see in another may well be the reflection of our own! It is the fool who never looks in the mirror, for he is too busy helping others to see their faults. Jesus is making the point that we tend to be far more tolerant to our own sin than we are to the sin of others. It is good to help others with their specks of sin, but not before we acknowledge, confess and put away our own sin.

Romans 2:1-4 (ERV – Easy-to-Read Version) *So do you think that you can judge those other people? You are wrong. You too are guilty of sin. You judge those people, but you do the same bad things they do. So when you judge them, you are really condemning yourself. God judges all who do such things, and we know His judgment is right. And since you do the same things as those people you judge, surely you understand that God will punish you too.. But you do those wrong things too. So surely you understand that God will judge you. How could you think you would be able to escape His judgment? God has been kind to you. He has been very patient, waiting for you to change. But you think nothing of his kindness. Maybe you don't understand that God is kind to you so that you will decide to change your lives.*

3. WE ARE TO REMOVE SIN – NOT JUST OBSERVE IT

Perhaps you are familiar with the LifeLock commercial that has been shown so often on television in recent years. In that commercial, bank robbers come storming into a bank yelling, “Everybody on the floor.” As everyone hits the floor a man in a security uniform remains standing and one of the customers whispers, “Do something!” He replies, “Oh, I’m not a security guard. I’m a security monitor. I only notify people if there is a robbery.” After a brief glance around he passively says, “There’s a robbery.” The commercial narrator then says, “Why monitor a problem if you don’t fix it?”

This is the very point Jesus is trying to make in the realm of sin. I am not just to be a “speck-monitor” but I am to be a “speck-remover.” And first, I am to be a “log-remover” if there are those in myself to be found. Yes, this must be accomplished by diligent and often painful introspection – done continuously throughout my life. Sometimes others will alert me to my sin – either lovingly or judgmentally – but if I am alert, I can personally acknowledge the sin, confess it, receive forgiveness for it and work diligently with the Lord’s help to remove it from my life.

And when it comes to others, I am usually an “expert” in observing sin. But with the compassion and empathy of Jesus, having dealt with my own sin, I am to help “remove the specks.” We have all

been to a zoo and seen monkeys painstakingly picking the lice or other pests off the skin of another monkey. Done gently, the other is willing to allow the “nit-picking” for the sake of personal hygiene. In the same way we must be willing to allow the gentle pointing out of faults for the sake of our spiritual hygiene. And we must acknowledge, confess, receive forgiveness and then repent, working actively with the Lord to remove.

Do you notice the key 4-fold steps of sin recovery?

1. **Acknowledge** – that is, recognize that this “fault” is truly in me, mourning that it is so
2. **Confess** – that is, agree with and before God that the “fault” is indeed sin – an affront to God and filthy in His sight and mine
3. **Receive forgiveness** - When I confess my sin, *“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9), but I must accept that forgiveness and forgive myself – believing His Word, that I am restored to righteousness & accepted in fellowship.
4. **Repent** – that is, to work actively with God to remove all trace of that sin from my person and personality.

A COMICAL VISUAL REMINDER

Now I’m going to put on a pair of glasses that has a long stick protruding from my eye through one lens to make a comical visual point. And if I were “wearing” not this prop, but a spiritual “log” in my eye, the following is what I might think and say to you ...

“Oh, I see your many sins. It’s very obvious to me, and should be to you. Over here I see a lot of lies, oh yes, much dirtiness. And over here I see smudges of pride and selfishness – very unsightly. And here there is much self-righteousness – oh yes, you are so sure of your spirituality and secure in your worthiness before God – very filthy, really.”

“Please, let me help you remove that sin from your person. Wait, something’s in my way, and I can’t quite get to it. No matter. Maybe you’d better just look into a mirror – take a good look and you’ll see your sin. What, you say? You want me to look into a mirror? How rude! I’m not the one who is at fault – it’s clearly you. How dare you call me to task when your sin is so obvious. Can’t you see that I’m the righteous one trying to help you?”

Yes, our sin has a way of blinding us to the truth, and making us very quick to criticize others without finding fault in ourselves. May we look often in the mirror of God’s truth and be alert to others pointing out our “smudges.” How many of us are unknowingly walking around with spiritual “logs”?



A LESSON FROM MY CAT

While preparing for this lesson I sat down and my cat, Rango, got up in my lap, wanting attention. I scratched her just where she wanted it and rubbed her gently. Whereas she is often stand-offish,

she was attracted and held in my lap not by my strength, but by my gentleness and by trust that had been earned with long-given consistent love and care.

And what did I see her do – well, “cat-things” like purring, curling up and “kneading” with her light claws. And then she did one more thing I took note of that cats often do when trust is high and defenses are down: she began to groom herself, licking this foot and then that patch of fur.

Strange behavior? – but what a visual metaphor of how to best cause someone to groom themselves spiritually – not by firm compulsion but by gentle and consistent love extended, when defenses are down and trust is high. Selah!

