

The Log in Your Eye

One of the famous Bible passages that everyone seems to know is “get the log out of your own eye” before you talk to me about the speck that’s in mine. Obviously no one wants to be judged so this is one they remember to use. Most people abuse this passage and make it mean something it was not intended to mean so they can justify their own actions without scrutiny. This passage can be found in Matthew 7:1-5, and is part of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. Part of His audience that this sermon was directed toward was the Pharisees, who were the keepers of the religious law and traditions in that day. Since their religion was built around the Mosaic Law, they judged people by it. Therefore this passage was directed toward their harsh critical legalistic judgment of the people of Israel. They judged themselves as being righteous by keeping the Law. An inseparable corollary of justifying oneself is condemning others.

Jesus had just proven in Matt. 5:20-48 that the Pharisees were not justified by keeping the Law. He did so by giving six illustrations contrasting their incorrect keeping of the Law with His correct keeping of the Law. The subject of Matt.7:1-5 is relationships. Jesus will reveal that the Pharisees’ sin of harshly and critically condemning others is a far greater sin than the sins they were criticizing others for. The Pharisees were usurping the authority of God by putting themselves in the position to condemn others and justify themselves. Thus Jesus was using the figure of speech (hyperbole) of the log in their eye vs. the speck in others’.

Appearances

The religious leaders in first century Israel were primarily concerned with appearances (looks like nothing has changed). My favorite Bible story illustrating our inability to properly judge each other can be found in 1 Samuel 16. God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse to pick out the next king from among his sons. When Jesse parades his 8 sons before Samuel, he admires Eliab and thought, “Surely this is the Lord’s anointed king”. Eliab was a stud---tall, muscular, and handsome. Yet, the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his height, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” You know the rest of the story, God chose the youngest son David who would have been the last choice of men. The moral of this story is that we are foolish to try and judge each other, only God can justify or condemn---this goes for self analysis as well.

Interpretation

In Matt.7:1-5, Jesus is talking about egotistical judgment, unloving, unmerciful condemnation of others. This type of judgment is selfish, critical, and unwarranted. It is a greater sin than whatever it is judging. This kind of self-righteous judgment claims to be both law giver and judge---we are neither. I can think of at least three causes of this improper judging of others:

1. Erroneous view of God---to condemn is to play God. They assume God views people as they do. Only God can see into a person's heart and judge their thoughts and intentions.
2. Erroneous view of others---when we judge we assume we know the whole story, all the facts and motives
3. Erroneous view of ourselves---as the joke goes, he and I have religious differences, he thinks he is God and I don't. Can we really live up to the standard we impose? Most of us are umpires at heart, we like to call balls and strikes on somebody else.

Proper and Necessary Judgment

I think His advice in verse 5 to, "take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." means to **RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN SIN** and be cleansed by the forgiveness of God, then you can see with a humble spiritual vision in order to help your brother. We must make moral ethical judgments, but we do so humbly, lovingly, knowing we are no better than our brother, and but for the grace of God go I.

In every day life we must constantly make moral ethical decisions about others. For instance, when your daughter was a teenager and a boy showed up to pick her up with a Mohawk and tattoos, you have to decide if she can go with him. If he is driving a van with a mattress in back, definitely not, we judge him to be improper for our daughter.

There are biblical commands to judge. Matt. 18:15 says, "if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." These commands to confront sin in others are to be done lovingly with a view of restoring a person to the straight and narrow for his own good. We are supposed to admonish each other for their own good, and we are to stand against false doctrine; but always with an attitude that "I also make mistakes", I also am a sinner. The sin we "reprove" each other for is known objective sin like adultery, stealing, lying, etc. I am not talking about "he said-she said" situations, but clear obvious provable stuff.

Logs and Specks

Obviously no one can have a real log in their eye, so this is a figure of speech to strongly make His point. Because of the context of the Sermon on the Mount directed at the Pharisees, the log in the eye of the person who is wrongfully judging is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who claimed to be self-righteous (see Luke 18:9-14). They had a pious judgmental attitude with a condemning view of others. They saw all the faults of others which are the "specks" in their eyes, and they so harshly condemned that Jesus says in verse 2 that God will hold them to the same standard and they will no doubt fail.

Dogs and Swine

The next verse in the passage, Matt.7:6, is the most difficult of all, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet”. If we are not supposed to judge, how do you know who the dogs and swine are? Jesus is certainly commanding a certain kind of discriminatory judgment upon these “dogs” and “swine”. In first century Israel, they typically did not have house pets like we do today. A good dog was a working animal, and a bad dog was a half wild mongrel who was a street scavenger. Swine of course were pigs that were considered by Jews to be the ultimate in unclean. Therefore dogs and swine were being used as images of undesirable people who not only rejected the “pearls”, which is Jesus’ image of the holy Word of God, but also actively opposed it by seeking to “trample them (the pearls) under their feet.” Who could these dogs be in Jesus’ day but the men who followed Him everywhere and continuously objected to everything He said? He must be referring to the Pharisees or people like them.

The Pharisees were taking what is holy, that is the pearls of God’s Word, and trampling them down, and they were seeking to harm the messenger. In Matt.12 the Pharisees and religious leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah, but they could not reject His great works, they were self evident; so they attributed His works to Satan. From that time on Jesus began teaching in parables. When His disciples asked why, He replied, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” He went on to quote Isaiah to point out that the Pharisees’ hearts were so hardened against the truth that they could not understand.

Therefore the “swine” of Matt.7:6 are people that are so hardened that they will not and cannot understand so as to believe. Jesus spoke the truth to them, but there was a time when the gospel was rejected and ridiculed, and Jesus turned away from them. This is just what Paul did throughout the book of Acts on his missionary journeys as Acts 18:6 says, “when they rejected and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘your blood be upon your own hands. I am clean.’” At some point in time after people have rejected the truth, we should not waste time arguing the truth with people who are antagonistic, ie “the swine”.

Conclusion

The log and the specks are images of spiritual vision. A person with a log in their eye sees nothing, while a person with a speck is troubled, but can still see. In John 9 Jesus healed a blind man, the man then believed in Jesus as the Christ and his sins were forgiven. Jesus then made a statement about spiritual sight---this man could now see both physically and spiritually. Then Jesus addressed the Pharisees and told them that since they could not “see” their own sin, they were spiritually blind. Give me a speck in the eye any old day.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

