

Look! There is a Plank in Your Own Eye

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Bible Text: Matthew 7:1-6

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Matthew 7:1-6.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”¹

There are few principles in Scripture that would help us to establish a happy church as the one that is here. The Lord Jesus Christ is instructing his disciples on the mountain, and now he is instructing us in the same principle. This important principle establishes whether there will be love in the church or not. Our Lord puts his finger in the wound of lovelessness in the church, in our hearts. What is here is so significant. It really is the hinge point on whether we love the law of God or not, because love is the fulfillment of the law.

Jesus is instructing his disciples how they ought to love. In doing this He shows them how love is destroyed through a lack of Gospel centered humility in confrontation.

The fragility of love

Love is very fragile, and when people begin to think wrongly about one another through the lenses of unrighteous, self absorbed, hypocritical judgment, then love can die rather quickly. You have heard of “the honeymoon phase.” This is a normal reality in all new relationships. It is the reality of a marriage. It is the reality of a new friendship. It is the reality of coming to a new church. At first there is a honeymoon-like, giddy phase. But eventually reality sets in where the relationship becomes more real. It is after the honeymoon phase that relationships

are tested. Sometimes they fail.

It took six years, you know, to build the twin towers, but it only took 90 minutes to bring them down. And that happens in human relationships and in churches and in marriages as well as when they cultivate the wrong kinds of things. And Jesus here is helping us with that.

A secret sin

I quoted Jerry Bridges on the top of your outline to try to identify what is, I think, the heart of this passage.

“Judgmentalism is one of the most subtle of our “respectable” sins because it is often practiced under the guise of being zealous for what is right.”

And so here the Lord Jesus Christ is instructing his disciples on these matters of judgmentalism. Now think of how important it is that they would learn how to establish communities of love. They are establishing the Church. The Church will be built upon the patterns that they establish. So here the Lord Jesus is establishing a principle that ought to govern all of Church life. These are really critical issues.

Context

Let's place these six verses in their context. They are intimately connected with what has gone before in chapter six. And the flow of the thought is consistent. In chapter six Jesus is explaining two categories of secret sins.

Our Religious Lives

The first category has to do with religious things - when you give, when you pray, when you fast. You can do these things outwardly for the praise of man. You do them because you love yourself and so you do them publicly to get public praise. These are secret sins. When you give for the praise of man or pray for the praise of man or when you fast for the praise of man, generally people don't know, but you know. So Jesus has dealt with this self obsession that makes you pray, and give and fast, but you are really just doing all these things for yourself.

Our Material Lives

And then he turns to the second category of our outer, material lives - how we handle money, the accumulation of possessions and outward appearance. Jesus says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.” And the key phrase is “for yourselves.” We sin when we

are doing it for ourselves. This happens when all of our laboring, all of our accumulating, everything is for ourselves. You can have a little or a lot materially and still be doing it all for yourself. The rich person and the poor person has exactly the same problem – He is either laboring for himself or for the glory of God. And so Jesus is dealing with this whole matter of outward appearance. In this section Jesus exposes what happens to us when we are laying up for ourselves treasures on earth - worry. We become so worried about possessions because our possessions are all about us and not the glory of God.

Underneath the surface appearances

Jesus is getting underneath the outer appearance of things, the way that we present ourselves in the world, the way we pray, the way we fast, the way we give, the way we do everything that we do in life and he is saying, “Wait, there is something greater here,” and it has to do with your heart.

And so far Jesus has been explaining the way that hypocrisy and sin follow you to the offertory, to the place of prayer, and to the marketplace. It follows you into your car that you bought to make yourself look so good. Sin follows you absolutely everywhere.

When we get to chapter 7 we learn that sin also follows you in your personal relationships. And that is what we find in Matthew chapter seven.

So the theme is consistent. He is continuing to deal with the same issues here and he is instructing his disciples on such an important matter and it is this: How easy it is to be self centered. Now, Jesus uses various vivid images to help His disciples understand how ridiculously self centered they can be to those around them. He shows them how this can happen when they are going to their brothers to tell them about their sins. He makes it clear how we can be so self absorbed and forget the whole purpose of what that person’s sin is in your life.

Markers in the text

So, now, I want to give a road map for this text, because there are a number of words that help us understand the pattern and the structure of the text. There are a number of key words that really tip you off on the central idea. There is the word “brother,” “judge,” “measure,” “speck,” “plank” Then there are two questions” The first is “Why do you look.” The second is, “How can you say?” And then, finally there are at the end there are two kinds of people mentioned. There are brothers and there are dogs and swine.

These words define the subject matter that is here. Jesus is wrapping all this instruction about judgmentalism and hypercriticalism around these words.

A veiled sin

This sin of being hypercritical and censorious, hides behind our facial expressions. It hides behind our words. It hides behind our outer dispositions. It is easy to learn how to finesse in order to get our way in the world. But Jesus is not satisfied with the outward appearances of our words and demeanor. He goes below the surface to deal with something greater and something deeper. You can fake people out about how you feel about them, but you can't fake Jesus out.

And Jesus is talking to his disciples about what is going on in their hearts when they speak about the sins of others. And so all of these things can hide a censorious spirit.

We have to understand how critical this is, for love hinges all the law and the prophets. So the Lord is speaking of something of enormous significance.

I. Two warnings, v1-2

Jesus begins with two warnings. "Judge not that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged." There are two categories of behavior here. There is judgment, "judge not," and then there is a measurement, "And with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Those are the two things we are always doing that in our hearts. There are judgments and then there are the measurement tools that we use. We measure people against a standard. We might measure people against the standard of our own perfect lives. We may measure people against the standard of our friend's lives or the standards of our culture. We are always making judgments based on a measuring tool. It is a relational and moral yardstick. And often our yardsticks are flawed because we have grown up in this world. This is one area we have such need of transformation because our yardsticks are often wrong. The only true yardstick is the Word of God.

And so Jesus says, "Judge not." Now this phrase has been often misinterpreted. Leo Tolstoy interpreted this as that it is never right to make a law or punish anybody for anything. Well, that is a complete misunderstanding of this passage of Scripture.

When Jesus says, "Judge not," He is using it the same way He has used it previously in the Sermon on the Mount. When He said, "Do not swear" or "Do not lay up treasures," He is talking about the abuse of these things. So here, in the words, "judge not," Jesus is speaking of a self righteous un-self examined, haughty spirit that is a reflection of a sinful and self absorbed heart. That is the kind of judgment he is talking about.

Classifying Judgment

Jesus also said, “Judge with righteousness judgment.” Well, which one is it? Is Jesus contradicting himself? Do we believe Him when He says, “Do not judge,” or “Judge with righteous judgment,”? He is not contradicting himself at all. He is speaking of a certain classification of judgment. And there are many classifications of judgment that we have to be aware of and Jesus is speaking of one particular classification. He is not wiping out everything that the Bible says about judging with proper judgment. And he is not contradicting himself because in verse seven he says, “Do not give what is holy to dogs.” We immediately recognize that discerning who is a dog and a swine is a matter of making a judgment. So Jesus is not contradicting himself within this text or within Scripture at all. There are several kinds of judgment that God actually requires. It is a false interpretation that argues that Christians should never judge one another. In fact, this passage teaches the exact opposite. The Lord is showing us how we ought to judge, first by taking the log out of our own eye, and then seeing clearly to judge your brother by identifying the speck that is in his eye.

Here are fourteen kinds of judgment that prove that the Lord is not saying that the Christian should never judge anyone or anything.

1. The state in civil affairs is obligated to make judgments between parties. The civil government is appointed by God to make judgments and to wield the sword (Romans 13). This is a biblical category that needs to be understood when Jesus is speaking about judgment.
2. Church discipline (Matthew 18:15-18). It is proper for brothers to make judgments and go to one another.
3. The observance of the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 11:29). We are required to examine ourselves. We must make judgments. And also church leaders are obligated to bar reprobates from the table.
4. Our repentance and conversion to Christ requires repentance which is a function of judgment. We have to judge ourselves.
5. Our relationships within the Church require judgment. Here are some examples:

James 5:19-20

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Luke 17:3

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

6. There is judgment required in our preaching. The very nature of preaching requires making judgments, drawing distinctions and help us understand what is true and what is false.
7. Our relationship with the Word of God is a matter of judgment. It pierces and exposes. Hebrews chapter four says that it pierces to the joints and the marrow and goes to the thoughts and the intents of the heart.
8. Final judgment. *2 Corinthians 5:10: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
9. Judgment of doctrine for false teachers (1 Corinthians 15, 1 John).
10. Judgments against factious men in the Church (Titus 2:10, Romans 16:17).
11. We are required to make judgments in evangelism. From time to time we would have to shake the dust off our feet. That is actually judging.
12. In matters concerning the Sabbath there are judgments that need to be made. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and was correcting those who were misinterpreting it and he said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."
13. Personal training. (Heb 5:14). We are called to have our senses trained to discern good and evil.
14. God is judge: People like to think of God as father, friend, helper, shepherd. But He is also judge.

These various kinds of judgments that are required of us make it clear that there is a right kind of judgment and a wrong kind of judgment.

So when Jesus says, “Do not judge,” he is not saying that we don’t use judgment in other classifications. In this passage, Jesus is only speaking of one classification of judgment.

A conversation with brothers

And also we have to understand he is talking about brothers. Jesus is explicitly talking about relationships between professing believers in Christ. Jesus is delivering instruction for his disciples so that they will know how to treat one another.

The reason not to judge censoriously: It will be measured back to you

So Jesus is instructing his disciples the reasons for the command. He said, “Do not judge.” And then He comes and explains why you shouldn’t. And He continues to explain, through verse five why he said what He did.

Our souls are in danger

Jesus is saying is that our souls are in danger when we make unrighteous judgments, when we have a censorious spirit our very own souls are actually in danger of judgment. We discern sin in someone else and when that happens we have a particular obligation. When we go in the wrong direction there are disastrous consequences for us because there is judgment toward us for the thing that we are judging unrighteously. And we are judged by God. We see this in a number of places in the Scripture where God seems to come and punish someone with the same punishment with which they wanted to punish someone else. In the woman caught in adultery, the men were unwilling to judge themselves by the same standard. That was only one issue. The other was they had not gotten any witnesses. They had not followed the law of God as they ought to have. They had not examined themselves. They came to this woman and they were unwilling to judge themselves by that same standard. They did not come with repentant hearts for their own adulteries. And they did not follow Moses’ law about how to bring an accusation against someone and, of course, they all left.

More examples from scripture

We also see the example of Haman who was hanged on the gallows that he built. He built gallows to hang Mordecai and he was hanged on those same gallows. And we see Adonibezek who cut the thumbs and the big toes off of 70 kings. The same thing happened to him.

So this principle of God meeting judgment out in the same what that men meet it out is just a principle of Scripture.

You know, Jesus has already said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

So there are things that we do that actually draw judgment back to ourselves. And so that is what is Jesus is saying. He is saying, “The judgment with which you judge and the measurement took with which you use, will be judged and measured back to you.”

So the judgment that he is talking about there is the judgmentalism of a censorious spirit. And Jesus builds His teaching around two questions. And so he makes a statement here that in verse two, “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

And then Jesus asks two questions. And I think this is really the heart of the whole instruction that Jesus is giving his disciples.

II. Two questions Jesus asks, v3-4

The first question

And the first question is, “And why do you look? Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank that is in your own eye? So why do you look?” And he is speaking to his disciples, of course, on this hillside. And he is asking this penetrating question. Why do you look? But he brings up the things that we always do. We are always looking. We are looking for people to stumble. We make observations. We are looking at the speck. We get so obsessed about the specks in other people’s eyes.

The problem is that we have a plank in our own eyes – we are blind. And so he says, “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank that is in your own eye?”

So Jesus is using this outrageous example to help him understand how important this is for them to see. And he says, “Why? Why are you doing that?”

It is ridiculous to do that. He has a speck and you have a plank. And he is just explaining the human condition. He is explaining the human personality. He is giving us a psychology lesson. He is helping us understand the way that we are wired. He is unpacking the content of our innermost being and showing us who we really are. He is laying it out on the table by asking this question, “Why do you look at the speck? Why are you doing that?” Because he

knows that this is in our nature. This is how we are naturally inclined.

I dare say there is not a single person in this room who does not have this problem. It is the problem of sinful human nature. And this is the result of the fall, the thing that has destroyed love in the world - sin. And it is come upon us. We have inborn sin. Everyone who has children knows that. You have a child and you know that your children are self righteous and they are trying to blame other people. Everyone's sins are always bigger than theirs.

And so he says, "Why? Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye?" He is simply naming a very obvious quality of human nature. He is talking about me. He is talking about your family. He is talking about this church. He is talking about something that is resident in every single person.

So He asks, "Why? Why do you look there?"

It is so much easier to consider the speck than it is to deal with the plank. One reason - because we are so blind. We are so self-centered. We are so self-absorbed. We are so self-congratulatory. Not only do we pray for the praise of man, give for the praise of man and fast to be seen by man; not only do we work and accumulate possessions for the praise of man, we also in our own hearts do everything we do for our own praise. So we don't even consider the plank that is in our own eye. And so Jesus is unmasking human nature for his disciples.

An outrageous example

Our Lord is comparing two large objects, because a speck in the eye is a large object. But a plank is absolutely ridiculously gigantic.

Just think of how outrageous and unreal this illustration is. You can't even have a plank in your eye. It just won't hold there. It is a physical impossibility. There is just nothing to hold the plank on. But it is there. And the person who has it can't see it.

You might say, "Well, my eye could never hold a plank." Well, that is actually not true. It is a spiritual plank. It is something that is actually there. Other people can see it, but only in the sense that they see the evidences. They know it is very, very large and very blinding. The outside observer can see how it is getting in the way, but the person who has the plank in his eye does not see it, and often cannot ever see it.

Spiritual blindness to your own sin

Remember, we heard Jesus tell us earlier, and I am paraphrasing, “The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is not single, if your eye is not focused on good things, then your whole body will be full of darkness.” And that is the same thing with a plank. When you have a plank in your eye, your heart is full of darkness toward other people. You are blinded. You are not seeing your own sins. The plank makes the light dim. The plank is your sin. But let’s make something very, very clear. The plank represents the things that are actually wrong in your own life. And those things are blinding you from seeing your own sin.

And so this sin of self-righteousness is one that it blinds us and completely distorts our vision. In fact, we don’t even understand that while there is a speck in our brother’s eye, there is actually a plank in our own eye. So it blinds our vision.

Now Jesus is instructing us here about something of utmost importance. I really want us to understand this. In many ways, when we are dealing with the sins of our brothers, we are almost incapable of righteous judgment. That is the spirit with which we ought to ever go with our brother, that we are almost incapable of righteous judgment.

And so that is why he says, “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank that is in your own eye?”

Now, you know how many times someone has come to you to speak about the sin of a brother, and you immediately recognize that it is exactly their sin as well. That is just a parable of life. If you see something that bothers you in someone else, in many, many cases—not every case, obviously—but in many cases that is your sin. And it bugs you because it is in you. And so often this is the way that we are. When we think we should confront someone, we actually ought to be confronting ourselves.

Their sins are more interesting and fixable

It is just so much more interesting to talk about other people’s sins. It is easier to deal with other people’s sins. It is a lot easier to even fix other people’s problems. You can just fix them with a two or three step formula. However, it is much more difficult to consider and identify your own. It is much less interesting to consider your own sins or to deal with them.

So this is... this is the whole problem of having a censorious spirit.

Censorious spirits

Jonathan Edwards wrote a brilliant book called *Charity and Its Fruits* which is an exposition of 1 Corinthians 13. I highly recommend the book. It is absolutely wonderful. And he has a chapter on there on having a censorious spirit

Edwards says that a censorious spirit usually gets wrapped around three things in other people's lives – their state, their qualities and their actions. Check this for yourself. Check this if you are doing this with anyone now.

So a censorious spirit, Jonathan Edwards says, focuses on these three things, their state, their qualities and their actions. Edwards says.

"... It appears in a disposition to overlook their good qualities, or to think them destitute of such qualities when they are not, or to make very little of them; or to magnify their ill qualities, and make more of them than is just; or to charge them with those ill qualities that they do not have." P180, SDG

Persons are censorious when they condemn others as being unconverted and carnal men because they differ from them in opinion on some points that are not fundamental, or when they judge ill of their state from what they observe in them, for want of making due allowances for their natural temperament, their manner, their want of education, or other particular disadvantages under which they labor...

1 Corinthians 13, makes it very clear how we ought to think about this.

"Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not parade itself. It is not puffed up. Love thinks no evil."

So Jesus is asking this question. "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank that is in your eyes?"

That is the first question. Why do you look? So the first problem we encounter is "looking."

The second question

The second question is: "Or how can you say? 'Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye.' And, look. The plank is in your own eye.'"

So you look first and then you start shooting your mouth off. That is the idea. You "look" and then you "say." And Jesus is saying, "How can you ... how can you say that? How?" And then Jesus retorts, "Look." "Look. A plank is in your own eye." "Look." That is the heart of the matter in this passage of Scripture.

I just would love to have heard the tone and the meter of the way that Jesus spoke this to his disciples. Jesus seems incredulous about this whole matter.

A merciful high priest

Do you know why he is incredulous? Because he is a merciful high priest. That is why. He is a high priest who understands our weaknesses. This passage takes us to the heart of the

gospel of Jesus Christ, that our sins are so gigantic, our only hope is the mercy of a faithful high priest who has been tempted in every way that we have been tempted. And our only hope is to repent and to believe in the gospel and to flee to Christ. He is a merciful and faithful high priest.

That is why Jesus says, "How can you say that?" He, the faithful high priest, understands that He is calling his disciples to walk in a manner in which he walked.

Jesus is identifying the problem of speaking before we should speak.

He is not saying, "Don't say anything to your brother about his sin." He is saying that something has to happen before you open your mouth. There is a profound confrontation that must happen before you open your mouth. And he speaks of it in verse five, "Hypocrite. First remove the plank from your own eye. Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

So the cure is to recognize who we really are. We should not be opening up our mouths until we understand who we really are. Jesus is using a very unflattering term here, "hypocrite." A hypocrite is someone who has a double standard, who has two ways. And it is a two faced person. And so, first of all, he names the sin to help them with the cure. And then he says, "First remove the plank from your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Now, remember the objective here is to see clearly and remove the speck. This is a blessed ministry that God has given us with one another. We don't quit talking about the speck, but there is something far greater that has to happen before we deal with the speck in our brother's eye. And the cure begins with our confession, and the confession is focused on the real problem. And the real problem is that we have not confessed our own sins and that we are actually worse than the other person. After all we have a plank in our eye and he only has a speck in his eye.

So when there is personal confrontation, there has to be repentance. There has to be crying out to God to understand our own sins first. That is where it all begins.

Now, if I had a dollar for all the times I spoke to people about their sins without having a thorough self examination, I would be a rich man. Now, I don't know if you are that way. Perhaps you don't shoot your mouth off before you fall on your face and cry out to God for your own sins and see that their sins are also your sins and yours are even greater. Maybe you are the kind of person who has always done that. You may be a wife who has always fallen on her face in repentance before God before you speak to your husband. Maybe that is the kind of wife you have been.

Or maybe you husbands have acted this way towards your wives. You have criticized your wives and you spent an hour on your knees before God crying out for your own sins before you even brought the matter up. Maybe you have always done that. Well, that is what Jesus is saying. The cure is to declare yourself who you really are and then to remove the plank from your own eye.

So to remove the plank doesn't mean that you have somehow achieved perfection. The principle is not you have to be perfect before you deal with the speck. That is an outrageous, ridiculous proposition. So it can't mean that because no one can do that. But he is speaking about an assiduous, humble careful self inspection that actually removes the plank, that first identifies it, that names it and loathes it.

Often the beginning of healing is to put the right name on it. Jesus has just named what you are when you commit this sin. You are a hypocrite. The other problem is the plank. That is a specific sin. It is something that needs to be removed.

Gospel repentance

Now, this is gospel repentance, repentance that does deeds, repentance that actually leads to real changes. And so Jesus is saying that if we are going to deal with the speck in our brother's eye, we had better be about the business of personal transformation and change.

It is very difficult for people to receive criticism from someone who is proud and is not changing. This happens with husbands and wives. This happens with friends. This happens in churches when you have a hard hearted person coming to you and they speak harshly. It is so hard for us to hear when someone is speaking harshly and self righteously.

The moment you sense self righteousness, your brain shuts off. It just goes into sleep mode or it might rise up like a lion and go into attack mode. But one of those two things will usually happen. And so it matters the way that we approach one another and Jesus is saying, "You have to understand who you are. You are a hypocrite." And then you have to deal in a vanquishing way with your own sins. You have to turn to yourself.

Their sin is the theater of your sanctification

The other person's sin has actually become the theater in which God is using to confront you in your own sin. The purpose of your brother's sin is your own sanctification. God is blessing you by surrounding you with sinful people. He loves you so much that he would give you a sinful person next to you in your home, in your work, so that you might be sanctified, so that you might rise up in pride, in hypocrisy to condemn of that sin and then realize, "No, you are a greater sinner than he is."

God has given you these sinners around you not so that you can get away from this so you can have a nice life. The only way you will ever have a nice life is that you understand why they are there. They are there to provide a personal confrontation to lead you to the cross of Jesus Christ so that you will be refreshed and transformed.

Is your husband sinning against you? Is your wife sinning against you? You ought to praise God for the sanctifying grace that he has given to you, for his love toward you, that he would put you next to a sinner so that you could see your own log in your own eye, so that you could wipe away the stupidity, the self absorbedness in all the things that have gripped your heart.

So often, people sin against us or they behave poorly, or there is something wrong with their state or their actions or their dispositions. We don't like it. We want to criticize them about it. But we misunderstand their purpose. They are gifts from heaven that God has sent to expose the plank that is in our eye.

So what begins with an offense ends in the joy of the Lord and a transformed life. First of all, not their life, but your life.

This is what Paul is talking about in Galatians chapter six when he said,

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Consider yourself.”

Oh, how wealthy we would be if we had a dollar for all the times that we went and spoke to our brother about their speck without personal repentance. Imagine the wealth in this church if we had that. It would be enormous.

But consider this. How rich would you be if you had a dollar for every time you spoke to someone about your brother's sin.

So these two questions: Why do you look? And how can you say? Why do you look and how can you say? Jesus is desiring to relieve his people of such poisonous questions in their minds and words on their lips.

He is really declaring his love toward his people in this sense: He desires his children to be treated with such evenness and such care and humility that he actually desires us to not obsess over one another's specks, but to carefully consider the logs in our own eyes.

God desires his children to be treated beautifully. He loves us. He is a faithful high priest

who sympathizes with our weaknesses. And he desires us to be just like that with our brothers and sisters that when we confront one another. We ought to help our brothers with the specks in their eyes, from time to time, because this actually is a case for confronting your brother. It is not a case for refusing to confront your brother, but it is a case for right treatment of your brother, that you would deal with him as a son of Jesus Christ, as a precious possession from Jesus Christ and so that you would come to him in the right way, that you would understand that you have a responsibility yourself before you come.

And that takes us really to this last verse which seems to be out of place, but it is not out of place at all, which speaks about discernment, because this whole passage is really about discernment. But here he brings the whole matter of discernment into center stage.

IV. Two kinds of people, v6a

“Do not give what is holy to the dogs nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces.”

One of the things I want to just pause and say that is sort of off topic here is just to recognize how beautiful and how logical the Word of God is and. This chapter is just another testimony of how important it is to take careful inspection of every word, and to consider all the flowing thoughts and how they fit together. How beautiful it is to observe that these thoughts are placed together, not randomly, but they are placed together to follow a logical sequence, to help us understand the will of the Lord. It is very beautiful. It is such a good argument for careful inspection of the Word of God, to labor over every word and every phrase so that we can see how it fits together. I think this is why David could say, “Oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day.”

So we should always take time to carefully labor over the words, to consider each one as perfect and pure, tried seven times and exactly what we need to hear at a given moment.

Brothers who encounter dogs and swine

So here Jesus comes with this illustration of dogs and swine, what is holy and of pearls. Those are the things that he is using to frame the discussion. And so he has been talking to his disciples about self righteous judgment. And now he is speaking about dogs and pigs and how you relate the truth to them. And this passage has been interpreted in many, many ways over the centuries.

I have in my notes what 10 commentators have said about this. I won't go over them now. Augustine believed that you don't reveal esoteric subjects to outsiders because they won't understand. The *Didache* which was the sort of church manual of the early Church, said it was about giving communion to those who were un-baptized. John of Damascus, the

Church father says that it prohibits us from taking the gospel to the dogs, to the Gentiles. That is a completely ridiculous interpretation. Deitrich Bonheoffer and Luther said that it means you should limit your time with those who are hard hearted. So what does this mean?

First of all it means that there is discernment that is necessary in the confrontation of the bother. He has been speaking of how you deal with the speck in your brother's eye. But there are other kinds of people who are of a completely different category. They are dogs and they are swine and they are of such a nature that one is wise not to contend with them.

After reading 10 commentaries on this and trying to consider the right interpretation, I don't believe that this means that you refuse to take the gospel to hard hearted people. I think what it means is that there is a class of people who are so reprobate, they are so hardened, they are so violent, they are so wicked that you can't even have a conversation. You just can't even deal with them. And Jesus is saying, "We are fishers of men. We are anglers. We are presenting the treasures of the gospel to the whole earth. But there are some that we should not."

And the Lord doesn't tell us exactly what the qualities of them are, except he does tell us what they do. He says that they... that first of all they trample and they tear. They take the message and they trample it under foot. They just trample. That is the first thing they do. And then they turn and they tear you to pieces. That is the kind of person he is talking about. We have to exercise discernment and ask: Is this that kind of person? I believe this kind of person is rare. I haven't run into very many of them. But perhaps there are those that you absolutely should not "give what is holy" or cast your "pearls" because of their vicious and perverse nature, because not only will they trample the message underfoot, but they will tear you to pieces.

And so I think it means that you cannot preach the gospel without understanding who you are talking to, that you don't just preach the gospel from some rote script. Rather, that you consider the person that you are talking to. And there are some that you would just actually refrain from talking to. They are dogs and they are swine.

And so it is important for us to consider who we are speaking to and so it is a very important point of evangelism that we focus our message not on those who are so unusually hardened and blind and hateful that there is no way to have a rational conversation. That is the way I interpret it. There are many propositions for how to understand this, but that is my understanding.

I think it is related vaguely to what Solomon spoke of in Proverbs chapter nine where he says, "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he

will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser. Teach a just man and he will increase in learning.”

We have to have discernment about the way that we deal with people like this.

Application

1. Do you have a critical spirit that you are calling discernment? Do you find fault with everything and everyone? Thomas Boston wrote something that speaks to this problem. He was commenting on, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” He says,

"It is a sign men have no spiritual hunger when they are more for religious disputes—than the practice of piety. Some men feed only on difficult questions and controversies (1 Timothy 6:3,4). These pick bones—and do not feed on the meat. They have hot brains but cold hearts. Did men hunger and thirst after righteousness, they would propound to themselves such questions as these, 'How shall we do to be saved? How shall we make our calling and election sure? How shall we mortify our corruptions?' But such as ravel out their time in frothy and useless theological disputes, I call heaven to witness, they are strangers to this text. They do not 'hunger and thirst after righteousness'."

Do you feed on disputes? Do you have a critical spirit? Are you calling it discernment? All you ever do is dispute matters. If that is all you ever do? If so, you should ask the Lord concerning the condition of your soul.

So, do you have a critical spirit you are just calling discernment and all you ever do is just feed on disputes? You just need to ask yourself if you are that kind of person.

We are, of course, not saying that it is wrong to dispute. It is right to dispute. It is right to consider, you know, particular points so that we would all grow and would understand the will of God. That is necessary.

2. Do you cover a multitude of sins? 1 Peter 4:8 says, “Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’”

And then right after that do you know what he says? He says, “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” Notice, when you are hospitable you get to know people. You know, you are not in a church where you hear a talking head. Everybody leaves. You actually get to know the people and you know the shepherds. You find out their foibles and foolishnesses and stupidities and blindness. You see the specks or the motes that are in the eyes when you start practicing hospitality.

Here is how it happens. You get to know one another. You are in one another’s homes. Someone says something that offends you. They do something that really bothers you. You observe an unseemly quality regarding their state, their qualities or their actions. You have a

golden opportunity to cover their sins because hospitality gives you an opportunity to glorify God in the covering of sins, according to the command of God. When you practice hospitality, fortunately or unfortunately, you see things that you don't always see at church.

Has someone offended you when they have been in your house? Was it something they said, some way they inflected a phrase or something they did? Maybe they were chronically late. Are you covering a multitude of sins?

An opportunity for sanctification

When people know one another in a church they have enormous opportunity for sanctification. This is one great thing about people knowing each other - sin is dealt with more thoroughly in people's lives. We don't have the opportunity to live such a veneer of spirituality.

3. Are you a dog or a swine? Now, there are a couple of ways that I wanted to have us consider this question. One, we need to make sure we understand that according to the text here, a dog and a swine is a hardened unbeliever. Perhaps you are that person who has just been so hard. He can give you a heart of flesh. You do not have to continue forever in your hardness. And maybe God is pricking your heart now and you have seen how hardened you are, how self righteous you are. Or perhaps, you are a very spiritual person. Maybe you pray and fast and give alms. But your heart is really hard and you are actually a dog. You may not be a dog as bad as this kind explained in the text, that will turn and tear someone to pieces and trample the message, but maybe you are trampling in your heart. Maybe you wish you could tear the other person to pieces and you need to be converted. You need the poison to be removed by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Now there is another whole level of this that I want to probe as well. And I want us to listen very carefully about this. Now these swine, these dogs are so hardened that not only does the message even come close to it, the trample it and then they tear you apart. Now often even Christian people do this. When they are confronted, they are so mean when they respond and they find every excuse to dodge the criticism. Are you a dog like that? Is it possible that you are one of those people that people never come to confront you because of the way you act like a dog? You trample the message and you tear them to pieces when someone comes to you.

I know husbands and wives like that who have chronic problems in their marriages because they act like dogs to one another.

A dear wife comes to her husband with an observation of his sin. He responds poorly. He tramples the message, piece by piece and then he tears her to pieces. Are you a dog? Are you a swine?

This sin in its most radical form that is in this passage can happen in a less radical form in believers.

What happens is, because of the way you treat the messenger, you never get the opportunity for sanctification. You never see your sins because people won't talk to you about it because you are so rotten to them when they bring them to you.

So are you a dog or a swine and have just cut yourself off from all criticism because of the way that you respond?

4. Do you jump to conclusions and make rash judgments? Many times obsessing on the speck in your brother's eye and ignoring the log in your own eye happens because we make rash judgments. For example, Eli thought Hannah was drunk. When the children of Ruben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built an altar by the Jordan the rest of the people, they just rashly concluded that they were going to go to war, but they weren't going to war at all. Thankfully the truth got out. Elijah thought he was the only one left, but there were actually 7000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal. We are so rash in our judgments often that we find ourselves in this censorious, critical spirit because we haven't taken time to find out what is really going on. How often has that happened? We jump to conclusions and make rash judgments and become speck inspectors?

5. Do you have any hard feelings for anyone in this room or anyone in your life?

The Lord has already instructed is that if you are there at the altar and your brother has something against you, then you should go to your brother. Leave your gift there. Go your way. Be reconciled to your brother first. It is very much like what Jesus has been saying. First deal with the log that is in your own eye. First be reconciled to your brother.

6. Do you use the sins of others the way God designed? The sins of others are meant to remind us of our own sinfulness and to drive us to Jesus Christ, for repentance, self inspection and real change. Jonathan Edwards in his great resolutions deals with this. Resolution #8:

"Resolved, to act in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I and as if I had committed the same sins or had the same infirmities or the same failings as others and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself and prove only an occasion of confessing my own sins and misery to God."

Do you use the sins of others the way God has designed, to act not as an opportunity for censoriousness and judgment, or for personal sanctification?

There are so many things we often use the sins of others for.

Building block of family culture

Some use the faults of others to be the center of their family culture. They speak evil of others, talking, joking and exposing their poorest things about them and forgetting their good qualities. All of you are building cultures in your family. And if you have a censorious family culture, I just so urge you to turn that around and to stop speaking evil of people. It is a poison that will pollute more things than you can even imagine for a longer time frame than you anticipate. If you have little children in your house you have to understand that you are poisoning them and you are setting them up for many pains and sorrows in their marriages, in their work places and in their churches. If you have a censorious culture in your house, you have to understand the implications of that for many, many generations. It really matters. And it starts with a husband and wife, and the way they speak to one another and about one another and how they deal with their sins together.

God would have it, I pray, that he would give us a family cultures where, when a husband is speaking to his wife, that he is more aware of his own depravity than he is of his wife's; that he deals with her in an understanding way; that he is a sympathetic high priest who understands the weakness because he, too, as a husband does have weaknesses as well.

A letter to a censorious church member

I am going to finish with a letter that was written to a person in a church who had a censorious spirit. This letter was written in 1855, published in a Presbyterian Board publication under the title, "Letters to Church Members."
Here is the letter.

"I have noticed in you, for a considerable time, a growing disposition, which I fear is becoming a settled habit, to deal in undue severity with the characters of your fellow men. It is a rare thing that I hear you speak well of any body. Whenever an individual is mentioned, and especially when anything praiseworthy is said of him, it seems as if your mind was immediately on the stretch for something of an opposite character; and if nothing of this kind readily occurs to you as a matter of fact, you do not hesitate to indulge in unworthy and injurious conjectures. If a person has performed a highly meritorious action, you attribute it to some dishonorable and selfish motive; if he has done something of an equivocal character, you seem to delight to put the worst construction upon it; if he has failed, from considerations of prudence, to act in difficult circumstances, you reproach him for a timid or temporizing spirit; if he takes a bold and decisive step in such circumstances, you charge him with rashness and recklessness. In short you are forever hunting after 'dead flies in the apothecary's ointment.' You seem not to breathe freely except amidst the errors and foibles

of your fellow men.”

The letter ends with this paragraph.

“Let me add, that you will not be likely to reform in this matter, except as the result of great watchfulness, and persevering, vigorous effort. You must obey the inspired direction, to set a watch at the door of your lips. You must resolve never to speak ill of any body, unless upon grounds which you can fully justify to an enlightened Christian judgment and conscience. You must bring yourself under the influence of all these considerations, drawn from a sense of your own manifold imperfections and infirmities, from the precepts and example of Christ, and from your relation to the church and to society, which are fitted to keep in check, or rather to eradicate, this unchristian temper. Above all, you are habitually to ask of God that he will increase your power of resistance to this spiritual foe; and you are never to relax in the conflict, until you can feel that it is finally and forever dislodged.”

“Judge not that you may not be judged.” In this way we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. On the one hand, refusing to rebuke is sinful, but refusing to rebuke with a repentant and broken spirit is equally sinful.

We have been given two warnings about judgment and measurement. We have been given two questions. Why do you look and why do you say? We have been given two solutions, to recognize who we are as hypocrites and to repent and change. And we have been given two kinds of people. We have been given brothers and dogs.

A New Community

And so Jesus here is trying to create a new community. It is a community of love. It is a community that fulfills the law of God through love. The Lord Jesus Christ is desiring to establish a church in the world that would be a source of love and help for all the people who come in to be a part of it. It is a place of repentance and where the Gospel is central.

Gospel Centered Relationships

Here Jesus Christ is really telling his disciples that their entire relationships are based on one single thing, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he has explained what is one aspect of a gospel-centered church. It is a church where people examine themselves harder than they examine their brothers. And it is a place where they repent and change.

And so we end here with this passage of Scripture and God has given us such a blessing to bring it to us so that we would be sons of our father in heaven, we would be like our Lord Jesus Christ who has so sympathized with our weaknesses that He would actually take us in

to His household and make us part of His family. He would call us sons and he would make us joint heirs with himself; He would spend thousands of years preparing a place for us that he might take us in, in a great act of hospitality, to take despicable sinners into himself and His dwelling place and to bless them there for all of eternity.

Let us pray.

Oh Lord, we are so grateful for the love of Jesus Christ, the mercies of such a good Father that we have just been exposed to us here, the good counsels of a shepherd toward his little flock on a mountain and his counsels toward us here in this place now. Amen.