

Matthew 7:1 – 6

¹ Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³ 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? ⁴ 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? 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. ⁶ Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile*: The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God*: The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced 'the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus' Transformation of the Human Heart*: Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.

Questions

1. Remember a time when you cheated in a class or at work, or lied about something to cover your tracks, or broke trust with a friend. How did you explain yourself? Hopefully you took personal responsibility for it. But you probably also said that you were feeling lots of pressure from other people, or were dealing with something from earlier in your life.
2. In v.1 – 2, what does it mean to be ‘judgmental’ in the way Jesus is talking about here?
 - a. Judgment seems to involve a moral and relational distancing from another person. You look down on them. You use their lower position to bolster your own false sense of identity.
 - b. Somehow the ‘measure’ (whether a cup or yardstick) that we use for others is what we will be able to experience with God. If we are short with other people, we will experience God as being short with us.
 - c. Note: I confess I don’t know all of what Jesus means by this. But what seems clear is that God will really judge each person by the ‘standards’ that s/he professes, no matter what they are. He won’t even use His own standard, but the ones we have used against other people. Consider Paul’s sequence of case studies of humanity in Romans 1:21 – 3:8: first the idolatrous control freak in 1:21 – 32, then the moral judgmental person in 2:1 – 16, then the Jew who claims to live by the Mosaic Law in 2:17 – 3:8. His point there is the same. God will judge us by the standards of measure by which we have judged others. On our own, we will not measure up to those standards. We will fail miserably. For as we grew up, we mostly developed our real standards of judgment defensively to try to control other people by guilt, fear, or anxiety. Only secondarily did we apply them to ourselves. By that time, we probably already broke those standards. Or we overlook our own shortcomings and make exceptions for ourselves time and again. Jesus is our way out of that vicious cycle. In reality, we are all in need of him. That is the only fair judgment.
 - d. In specific, however, it’s a little unclear until you get to v.3 – 5.
 - e. Are only Christians judgmental? Is anyone not judgmental?
 - i. Illus: This is more of an adult story, but a friend of mine went to a ‘women’s night’ with some friends. One of the organizers said, ‘This is a no judgment zone.’ And there was a time for the women to share their stories. Many of them shared stories about sex and relationships. When my friend, who is a single mother, shared something about being committed to abstinence for decades because of her faith in Jesus, there was plenty of judgment. It showed on some other women’s faces: rolling eyes, open mouths. And when another Christian woman offered to pray, some of the other women let out impatient sighs.
 - ii. Illus: This is from Dear Prudence, on Slate.com.

Q. Husband’s inappropriate jokes: Please don’t judge—my husband came home early unexpectedly one afternoon, and my boyfriend went out of the window through the balcony to try to make an exit. He ended up falling from the apartment and was hospitalized. My boyfriend also has a wife, and I have no idea what his medical progress is or what is happening with him. The story made local news—about a naked man falling out of the apartment and injuring himself. My husband, who thinks it happened from a neighbor’s apartment, keeps making vile jokes about the incident (his sense of humor is usually quite dark). It is like a fresh knife through my heart each time I hear him casually joke about my injured boyfriend. I have asked him to stop, but he thinks it’s hilarious. He has told his friends and family about it with me within earshot. I don’t want to make a huge deal out of this, but it hurts a lot, not to mention that I can’t believe my husband makes light of another man’s serious accident. What’s a subtle way to get him to stop?

A: My God, of course I’m going to judge you. What a strange request. It is perhaps a little bit difficult to believe that an ambulance (and presumably police officers asking questions) could have showed up at your apartment while your husband was at home without his coming to suspect anything, but life is a rich tapestry, and stranger things have happened. Your boyfriend was seriously injured as a direct result of the choices the two of you made, and you think your problem is your husband’s off-color jokes. Subtlety is not the answer to your current problems. The first way to get your husband to stop cracking jokes is to come clean and take responsibility, although I realize that’s

unlikely—if you felt like you managed to get away with your secret with first responders at your door, I hardly think a lesser inducement will convince you to start talking.

I'm not especially sympathetic to the “fresh knife through [your] heart” when your boyfriend was hospitalized in an attempt to cover up your affair. If the worst thing you have to suffer over the next few weeks are some uncomfortably close-to-home remarks, count yourself lucky. At least you're not the one in traction. If your hope is simply to keep your head down and go back to life as it once was after your boyfriend nearly died to keep your secret, I think you are seeking a return to the status quo at the expense of honesty, commitment, and courage.

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/dear_prudence/2016/06/dear_prudence_my_husband_was_blackmailed_over_a_nude_pic.html

iii. Illus: There was a really thoughtful article called ‘The God Decision: Christian parents teach their children to believe in God, atheists teach them not to. Who is doing the right thing?’ The author is a professor of philosophy at Florida State University named Michael Ruse. He is a well known atheist. He says, ‘To be perfectly candid, I am groping my way forward here. But for me, belief in God would be immoral.’

<http://aeon.co/magazine/philosophy/is-it-wrong-to-teach-children-to-believe-in-god/>

3. Are Christians especially judgmental? We can be. In v.3, Jesus talks about judging ‘your brother.’ Do you think it’s significant that Jesus is speaking of the ‘brother’ in particular? Who is the ‘brother’?
 - a. Perhaps this is because we judge people who we know better, who are closer to us, who we have more expectations for, or who we are more directly affected by.
 - b. Perhaps it is easiest to judge other Christians, the ‘brother’, since they are supposed to be living by the same teaching we are, which Jesus just spelled out in 5:1 – 6:34. We do this because it’s hard work receiving from Jesus the changes that he brings, and sometimes we congratulate ourselves for taking the high road. We do this because we come to expect to be treated well by other Christians, because we try to treat other people well according to Jesus’ teaching.
 - c. Notice that when Jesus talked about anger in 5:21 – 26, he referred to the ‘brother.’ It did seem to be significant there, as referring to a fellow Christian.
 - d. Who are the people we find it easiest to judge?
4. Why are the speck and the log so disproportionate to Jesus? How come Jesus says it’s easy to have a log in our own eye?
 - a. How does it feel to have a speck in your eye? It hurts. This might be a person who wants to get it out. They might also not be that self-aware (aware of the speck), too, but we might see the symptoms of an irritation or a problem with the way they are seeing. In this sense, the motif of the eye is very important (see also 5:8 and 6:19 – 24)
 - b. A log skews our perception of others; it hurts others; it prevents us from getting close to others. And we do damage to others when we get close to them.
5. What is the log?
 - a. I think it is judgmentalism itself. Judgmentalism is a sense of pride and superiority that is rooted in a thought like, ‘You and I are really different.’ It results in the judger emotionally distancing herself or himself from the other person judged.
 - b. The person with a log can really hurt others. Imagine a baseball bat.
6. How do we help take a speck out of another person’s eye?
 - a. Note: Jesus is using parabolic language. In reality, the other person is also removing the speck from their own eye. And this might take a long time if there is a deep issue in their life. But let’s stay within the language for now.
 - b. It’s vulnerable for anyone to let you touch their eye!
 - c. It implies that the other person trusts you to some degree
 - d. In what ways has Jesus used others to ‘remove a speck’ in your eye to help you grow spiritually? What can we all learn from that?
 - i. Illus: When a mentor did this with me, he told me gently that I could speak to other Christians as if they were on my side, and not against me. I realized that I held uncharitable assumptions about other people, especially other Christians.
 - e. How can we let Jesus use us to heal when we’re tempted to judge?

- i. By having his perspective – he sees through the fault to the need in other people.
 - ii. By creating hospitable emotional spaces for others.
 - iii. By empathizing with others’ struggles, and sharing from our own lives how Jesus helped us remove an irritant from our life.
 - iv. Illus: When I did this with a friend of mine, I told her that I was concerned that she has this pattern of running away from her problems, rather than taking them to Jesus. I shared my own story of running away from my own problems.
 - v. With some people, what has helped is asking people to interpret themselves better so other people know where they are coming from. For example, I said to a Christian who was slowly getting over drug addictions, ‘Just explain to people where you’ve come from. Everyone should be able to understand that you’re on a journey of healing. We all are.’ Or to another Christian, ‘Just explain to people that you’re from the South, and the friendships between men and women there are a little more formal than other places. So what seems a little too casual and flirtatious to you might just be your culture, and not a moral issue. But it still matters to you as something to talk about.’
 - f. If you’re in a concrete situation right now, think and pray through what level of trust there is, whether the other person is inviting you to comment on their life, and whether Jesus has any specific timing for this person.
7. Why v.6? How does that connect?
- a. Pearls are formed in oysters when a grain of sand gets in between their shells. It’s an irritant, so the oyster covers over the sand with layers of pearly material, and forms a pearl. A pearl is something that begins as an irritant, and then becomes something beautiful. That’s how Jesus shapes our story: he takes a pain in us and covers it over and it becomes something beautiful. It has some resemblance to the speck in the eye.
 - b. Probably because when we empathize with others’ struggles, but they are not self-aware or regard it as a struggle, it means we become overly vulnerable ourselves. If someone isn’t really ready to hear that, it might come back to hurt us.
 - c. Dogs and pigs are typically Jewish references to Gentiles and unbelievers. But in this context, Jesus is probably referring not strictly to non-Christians but rather to those who are self-destructive and not able to appreciate the delicate parts of your life that involve Jesus healing you. He may also be referring to people in certain situations.
 - i. Illus: When I worked at Intel, and was going to get married in May 1999, a group of guys at work took me out to lunch. They made some jokes about women and wives that weren’t that flattering to women categorically. As the conversation went on, they increased their sarcasm. I wasn’t sure what to do. I could recognize that they felt insecure about some things and thought they could sound strong by disparaging the women in their lives. And I could understand that myself, since Jesus addressed those things in me. But I didn’t think it was the right time to share deeper ‘pearls’ about Jesus healing me in that context. At least in that context, those guys would not have received it.
8. Application: It’s a lot easier to either judge someone or avoid him/her. It’s a lot harder to care enough to participate in their spiritual healing. Is there someone in your life that you’ve been judging or avoiding, but not contributing to their healing? Ask the Lord to give you a softer heart, and insight into your own self related to how the other person might be struggling. Close in prayer for yourself and that person.

Optional Case Study

Jesse Alexander Helms, Jr. (October 18, 1921 – July 4, 2008) was a five-term Republican United States Senator from North Carolina. But his first career was that of a journalist. He was the executive vice president of Raleigh-based Capitol Broadcasting Company, and gave daily news editorials against the Civil Rights Movement, against anti-war churches, and against liberal news media companies. He called UNC Chapel Hill, the University of Negroes and Communists and suggested that a wall be built around the campus so the rest of the State would not be infected by the university's liberal views. He became a Senator, running on a pro-segregation, anti-Civil Rights platform, among other things. He tried to block the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. He put up a 16-day filibuster on the Senate floor to try to stop the approval of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a federal holiday. In the 1980's, he went so far as to be against Food Stamps, but the outcry against his proposal was so great he was compelled to back down. He had *supported* the Apartheid regime in South Africa. He served as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1995 to 2001 and was one of the biggest opponents of foreign aid to poor countries, including AIDS relief in Africa. That's when Jesus sent a rock star named Bono to his office.

In 2002, just before he retired from the Senate, Helms agreed to meet with the rock star Bono, one of the world's leading advocates for fighting the AIDS epidemic in Africa. Let me tell you where he stood on it before meeting with Bono. Senator Helms had spent years slashing foreign aid budgets. And on AIDS in particular, he had told *The New York Times* in 1995 that the government should spend less money on people with AIDS because HIV was punishment for homosexuality; those people got sick as a result of 'deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct.' But after talking to Bono, Helms apologized and said he was ashamed. 'I have been too lax too long in doing something really significant about AIDS,' Helms said.

What did Bono tell him? One point of discussion was how in Africa, AIDS is spread by heterosexuals and leaves many innocent orphans in its wake. But another point of discussion was what Jesus actually said, according to the Gospel of Matthew. 'Christ only speaks about judgment once and it's not about sex but about how we deal with the poor, and I quoted Matthew, 'I was naked and you clothed me, I was hungry and you fed me.' Jesse got very emotional, and the next day he brought in the reporters and publicly repented about AIDS. I explained to him that AIDS was like the leprosy of the New Testament.'¹ In the last year of his life he became a huge advocate of aid, especially for health initiatives.

Questions

1. Is this how you would have approached Senator Jesse Helms?
2. What were some other ways of approaching him?

¹ Madeleine Bunting, 'Bono Talks of US Crusade.' *The Guardian* (16 June 2005) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/16/g8.usa> > (23 November 2005).