

My father used to give me this advice, “Don’t believe anything you hear and only half of what you see.” Of course I realized that his cynical counsel was mostly tongue-in-cheek.

But there is some wisdom in it too: don’t rush to judgment.

We all pass judgment on others, even if it’s only in our thoughts.

- Jesus was quite adamant about avoiding the practice of judging others. That’s because we all have a tendency to make wrong judgments.

Our judgments are based on what we see. Often that’s only a tiny part of the big picture.

As the Jewish Talmud puts it, *We see things, not as they are, but as we are.*

In the temple courts Jesus addressed a crowd that was critical of him. They approved of a child being circumcised on the Sabbath, but they were angry with him for healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus said to them, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” (John 7:24)

- Jesus didn’t tell us to close our eyes to the faults in other people, and always think the best of people we know to be plotting evil.

Even if you always look for the best in others, you can’t help seeing stuff that concerns, alarms, or disgusts you. But be careful. Judging others can get out of hand.

Your own faults and hang-ups can cause you to misjudge other people. Judging others is often quite precarious.

- In Matthew 7:1-6 Jesus tells us how to go about this difficult matter of formulating judgments about others.

¹ *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*

² *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

³ *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

⁴ *How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?*

⁵ *You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*

⁶ *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.*

In Matthew 7:1-6 our Lord Jesus Christ explains our responsibilities in this volatile issue of passing judgment.

I. BE HUMBLE BEFORE GOD. Matthew 7:1-2

God alone can judge without ever having to give account for his judgment. That’s because he is the final arbiter.

We will be held accountable for our judgments.

¹ *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*

The present continuous tense of the verb here means this is about a habitual tendency to be judgmental.

Jesus condemns an attitude that’s always criticizing and condemning others.

Some people are a lot like vultures. They’re always circling with an eye for something that is weak and vulnerable. They delight in swooping in on anything that’s exposed and defenseless.

They never give people the benefit of the doubt; they always give them the benefit of the dirt.

Jesus warned us to be careful because we will all be judged.

² *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

Jesus didn’t tell them to pretend not to see the faults in others. But if they hoped to receive God’s mercy and kindness, they’d better do the same to others.

When you see all kinds of faults and flaws in others, be careful, because you have a boatload of your own faults.

The only difference may be that you have been able to make sure your faults aren’t exposed.

The apostle Paul wrote, “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” (Romans 14:10)

Remember, others may have just as much reason to criticize you.

Don't be arrogant. You have an all-seeing, all-knowing judge who's got your number. He not only sees what you do, he knows your attitudes and motives.

A few years ago I realized I needed to tell myself that God sees me, and he sees right through me. There is absolutely nothing in my thoughts or actions that I can hide from God.

It's impressive how much there is in the Bible about judging others and being judged by God.

Listen to this from the writer to the Hebrews, *'Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.'* (Hebrews 4:13)

We all must be prepared to give account to God for our own lives.

- On what do you base your confidence as a Christian? Is it the fact that you decided it was a wise thing to place your faith in Jesus Christ? Never!

The only reason you have any hope is because of God's mercy. Were it not for God's mercy expressed in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us, we would be condemned without hope.

That's because God is perfectly holy and just. Because of his holy nature he cannot excuse sin, so he paid the penalty his holy justice required for us.

If you judge others harshly and refuse to forgive, you may repudiate God's mercy in your own life.

Just a few verses further along in Matthew 7 Jesus said, *'So in everything, do to others what you have them do to you.'* (Matthew 7:12)

Make it your practice to believe the best about others unless you have clear facts to prove otherwise.

- What is the proper attitude we all should have as we look at others, knowing that we will have to give account to God for our own lives?

I think David expressed it well in the 51st Psalm as he struggled under the load of guilt of his own sin with Bathsheba: *'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.'* (Psalm 51:1-3)

When you pass judgment on others, remember this, God is looking at you.

You will have to give account to God. So be humble before your God.

II. BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF. Matthew 7:3-5

I don't enjoy being completely honest with myself, do you? I usually find some crud that I'd rather not deal with.

It's easier and more interesting to scrutinize the lives of other people than to dig beneath the surface of my own.

Few people blame themselves until they have exhausted all other possibilities (Unknown)

Jesus compels us to deal honestly with this.

³ *"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"*

This is obviously a hyperbole, a figure of speech depicting something extremely absurd for the sake of emphasis.

I don't think even Pablo Picasso would have painted a picture of someone with a beam in the eye, although much of his stuff comes close. Mrs. Picasso once said, "If my husband ever met a woman on the street who looked like the women in his paintings, he would fall over in a dead faint."

This is the point of Jesus' metaphor: you have such a huge problem in your own life that you'd better deal with it before you try to straighten anyone else out.

At the turn of the 20th century the world's most distinguished astronomer, Sir Percival Lowell, was convinced that there were channels and canals on the surface of the planet Mars, and that these were proof of intelligent life on the red planet. He spent most of his life squinting into the lens of his giant telescope in Arizona mapping the canals he thought he saw. Just about everyone believed him, no one dared contradict him. We now know that he was mistaken, because spacecraft have orbited the planet and landed on it. But how did Sir Percival see so much that wasn't there? Maybe he wanted to see canals so badly that he imagined them. But there's a more likely explanation. He suffered from a rare eye disease that made him see the blood vessels of his own eyeballs. Today the disease is called, "Lowell's syndrome." The poor chap thought the blood vessels in his eyeballs were channels on Mars.

Often what we see in others isn't even there. We just want to believe it's there. What we accuse them of is actually our own problem that we don't want to acknowledge.

⁴ *How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?*

⁵ *You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

Judging wisely is an important thing to do in any church.

The apostle Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to judge the men in the church wisely. Then they could choose only those who measured up to the standards of elders.

You must form opinions about other people. If you don't, you will be taken to the cleaners by ruthless scam artists, scoundrels and swindlers.

But it's so easy to fall into the habit of judging people negatively even if you don't have enough evidence to do so.

We form unfavorable opinions based on something we see or hear—and we may be dead wrong!

Eli the priest misjudged Hanna. He watched her at the temple as she was praying to the Lord for a son. Let me read it for you: 'As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."' (1 Samuel 1:12-14)

- What Jesus condemns in our text here in Matthew 7 is hypocrisy—focusing on the faults in others while pretending not to have any faults in yourself.

He uses the metaphor of a beam in the eye that causes us to judge others blindly—to jump to conclusions without seeing the huge problems in our own lives.

The beam that blinds us to the truth is a synthetic compound of ego "stuff." There's pride, selfishness, jealousy, insecurity self-pity, prejudice, grudges, and other muck.

- Can any of you honestly say you have never harbored any of these vices in your heart?

This is what spawns and spreads vicious gossip.

It may be far from the truth, but we can spin it to make it seem credible. You can believe almost anything if you want to believe it.

- If you know someone who is full of negativity and criticism, and who rarely says a kind word about anyone, beware!

According to Jesus, that person is a hypocrite. So don't be deceived.

A hypocrite is someone who practices what he preaches against.

The things hypocrites criticize in others are usually miniscule compared to the major problems in their own lives.

But God did not anoint any of us to be censors of others, always finding fault and confronting in a destructive way.

- What should you do about things you hear that you cannot verify yourself?

Don't let yourself get swept along by the lies people tell. Don't pass along judgments that aren't true. That's malicious gossip.

The 9th Commandment says, '*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*' (Exodus 20:16)

Before you take the initiative to correct others, be sure that you have submitted to the discipline of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Be honest with yourself first.

III. BE DISCERNING OF OTHERS. Matthew 7:5-6

This term "discern" comes from a Latin word meaning literally, "to separate off." It means to make a separation or a distinction.

You must exercise discernment in dealing with others. You must be perceptive, astute, and use common sense when you judge others.

- Some will respond to loving correction, others will reject correction and be highly offended.

Honest criticism is hard to take only when it comes from a relative . . . or from a friend . . . or from an acquaintance . . . or from a stranger.

In the Book of Proverbs we find these words of wisdom, "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you." (Proverbs 9:8)

- Know who you're dealing with. Don't be a naive doofus when you're dealing with people.

The apostle Paul wrote "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ." (Philippians 1:9-10)

- My wife Liz is very discerning in sizing people up. She had to be. When I met her she was a cop. Her specialty is victim assistance. It doesn't take her long at all to see what's real and what's phony.

My problem is that I tend to give people the benefit of the doubt to a fault.

⁵ *You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

If you sincerely confess your sins to God and refuse to excuse any sin in your life, then you will have the right attitude to see clearly so that you remove the speck from your brother's eye.

How do you do that? Do you just go poking him in the eye and pull out his problem?

No! It takes gentleness, doesn't it? Our eyes are so sensitive! There isn't much that requires more gentleness than getting a speck of sawdust out of somebody's eye. It's a very sensitive task.

You must be gentle, not harsh.

Someone suggested, *make no judgments where you have no compassion.* (Anne McCaffrey)

- Jesus said, as Matthew reports it further on, *'If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.'* (Matthew 18:15)

Jesus doesn't want us to be blind to the faults in others. If a brother has a speck in his eye, he is hurting, and you can see he is hurting.

The word for speck is the Greek term, *karphos*. It meant something quite insignificant. Compared to a beam of wood it was almost nothing.

A speck may barely be big enough to see, but it's enough to cause your brother pain.

That's what you respond to. It's your loving response to another's pain.

When the beam is out of your own eye, you go to your brother to help him, not to hurt him.

⁶ *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.*

The mood of the first verb in this verse has the sense of, "Don't even think of giving dogs what is sacred."

The dogs and pigs here are not cuddly puppies or cute potbelly pet pigs. The dogs and pigs Jesus referred to were mean critters--vicious, wild beasts. They could inflict serious injuries on people. People avoided them and despised them because they were unclean.

- The point of this is, when you reach out and confront someone who has done wrong and try to correct the person's error, be very careful. You could get hurt.

If you have the best intentions and the purest motives and act in love, some won't see the value of what you are doing.

It's like a pig trampling precious pearls under foot, or a mangy dog turning to bite your hand even when you offer it a morsel of food.

- Be discerning of others. When you deal with other people's faults, even the tiniest ones, you're in a very sensitive area. Be gentle. And be careful, some people don't want you to interfere. They might turn on you.

After some people hear a sermon they go away and say, "I needed that. That was just for me." The theme of a sermon like that is probably quite safe; nothing that would prompt someone to think, "Wow, you must have a lot of ugly dirt in your soul to admit you needed a sermon like that!"

I don't expect that anyone will go out into the Welcome Center in a few minutes and say, "I needed that because I've been into heavy duty gossiping and passing along dirt without even knowing for sure if it's true. What I've been judging in others is really stuff in my own life that I've been denying. I've got a humongous plank stuck in my eye socket and it's got to go!"

Maybe you need to say something like that before God, and humble yourself and pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart today . . . See if there be some wicked way in me. Purify my heart. Touch me with your cleansing fire."

This is between you and God, and perhaps some other people too.

Be humble before God. Be honest with yourself. Be discerning of others.