

Introduction:

Jesus has made it very clear throughout the Sermon On The Mount that there is a difference between true righteousness and self-righteousness as demonstrated by the Scribes and Pharisees. True righteousness is demonstrated in the qualities described in the Beatitudes: Poor in Spirit, Mournful, Meek, Hungering and Thirsting after righteousness, Merciful, Pure in Heart & True Peacemakers. Scripture reveals that those who demonstrate these qualities are often hated by the unrighteous world and suffer persecution for their righteousness.

This was stated throughout chapter 5 as Jesus exposed how the Scribes & Pharisees consistently twisted the Scriptures by focusing on following the laws and traditions strictly while disregarding the spirit of those laws. In **Matthew 15:6** Jesus rebukes them strongly for this by saying, *"And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition."* For many of the Jews the traditions had actually replaced the authority of the Scriptures themselves.

The self-righteousness of the Pharisees is also seen throughout chapter 6 as Jesus contrasted the proper practice of giving alms, praying and fasting with the attention drawing methods of religious leaders who were more interested in the praise of people than the praise of God. Jesus also promotes true righteousness with his command for us to not store up treasures on earth but instead to store up treasures in heaven. Many of the Scribes and Pharisees claimed to be servants of God, but their hearts were set on the things of this earth. They thought they could serve both God and the things of this world, but as Jesus said so plainly and forcefully, *"you cannot serve God and money."*

If you value the things of God, then your heart will be with him and the things of this world will be less important. When you trust God, you can relax in his care, confident that he will provide for your needs.

This background is important because it provides context for the lessons of Chapter 7. Too often passages from the Sermon on the Mount are taken out of context and misinterpreted which leads to a fundamental misunderstanding of what Jesus is teaching.

Analysis:

¹ "Judge not, that you be not judged."

² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

4 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?

5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Most of us have heard someone use the first verse of this passage to say that believers should not condemn or criticize anyone for anything and certainly we should refrain from calling someone's behavior sinful. Unfortunately, this mindset has also infiltrated into the church, which has had a stifling effect on the practical teaching about what it means to live a holy and righteous life.

People defend themselves from proper criticism by saying, "Don't tell me what I am doing is wrong for the Bible says that we are not to judge one another!" People use it as an excuse to tolerate sin saying, "I don't think what they are doing is right, but who am I to judge?" Ultimately, we become like the church in Corinth which Paul rebuked for their tolerance of sin:

I Corinthians 5

- 1. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife.*
- 2. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?*
- 3. For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this*

We most often think of sin as wrongdoing or transgression of God's law. But sin also offends people; it is violence and lovelessness toward other people, and ultimately, rebellion against God. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that sin involves a condition in which the heart is corrupted and inclined toward evil.

- ❖ *The Bible typically describes sin as:*
lawlessness, disobedience, impiety, unbelief, distrust, darkness as opposed to light, a falling away as opposed to standing firm, weakness not strength, unrighteousness, faithlessness.

Jesus continued the prophets' work of deepening the concept of sin in two ways. First, he said God requires more than obedience to standards and traditions. People sin by hating, despising and lusting even if they never act on their desires. People sin if they do the right things for the wrong reasons. Jesus' harsh denunciations of sin show that sin cannot be overlooked. It must be confronted, unpleasant as that may be otherwise, the sinner dies in his sins.

Sin has three chief aspects: breach of law, violation of relationships with people and things protected by the law, and ultimately rebellion against God. The essence of sin is not a substance but a relationship of opposition. Sin opposes God's law and his created beings. Sin hates rather than loves, it doubts or contradicts rather than trust and affirm, it harms and abuses rather than helps and respects.

Sin is elusive. Sin has no substance, no independent existence. It exists only as a parasite of the good or good things. Sin creates nothing; it abuses, perverts, spoils, and destroys the good things God has made. In some ways sin is an absence rather than a presence: it fails to listen, walks past the needy, and subsists in alienation rather than relation.

Did Jesus mean that other Christians are not to confront us when we stumble into sin or that we are to be tolerant of the sinful practices of others because we may have sin in our lives? Absolutely not! This is why the context tells us that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees if we are to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. True righteousness mourns over the sin of others and is always merciful.

Jesus taught that we should not compare ourselves to others and conclude that we are better. This is unrighteous judgment which can be recognized when someone is always eager to hear something unpleasant about others, when a person judges based on prejudices rather than the principles and precepts of Scripture. Perhaps the most easily overlooked example of unrighteous judgment is when we condemn someone simply because they do something in a way that we wouldn't. Whereas unrighteousness judgment is negative and destructive we must remember that true criticism spoken in love will always be beneficial and help the other person draw closer to God

God will judge us. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount we were told "*Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.*" The reason we are not to judge in a self-righteous manner is because one day we will stand before God and this passage reveals that we will be judged according to the manner that we have judged others. True righteousness does not neglect the standard of holiness but seeks it while relying on God's grace and mercy for themselves and others.

Get the log out. The flow of verses 1-5 reveals that we are permitted to give proper criticism of others only after we have examined ourselves first and put away the sin of self-righteousness.

The word speck here (karpfos) does not mean something small like a particle of dust, but instead something the size of a small stalk, twig or possibly a splinter. Though small in comparison to a log, it is not an insignificant object in the eye. Jesus is not comparing a very small sin or fault with one that is large, but between one that is large and one that is huge. The point being that the sin of the critic is greater than the sin of the person being criticized.

Some have tried to list rather minor infractions as the sins that would constitute the speck while putting gross, indecent, and repulsive things as the log size sins. But the context here indicates that the log size sin is that of being self-righteous, which Jesus has been speaking against throughout the sermon. Self-righteousness is always blind to its own sinfulness and seeks to justify its failures while condemning others.

The Pharisee in **Luke 18:10-14** is the classic illustration of the man who sees the specks in others but is blind to the log in his own eye. *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

The Pharisee in this parable was supposed to lead people toward God, but until he removed the log of self-righteousness out of his eye, he wouldn't be able to help his brother get the speck out of his. **Verse 5** tells us plainly that the log is to be taken out first and then the speck worked on.

We must help each other. Although Jesus condemns self-righteous, unmerciful, prejudiced and unwarranted condemnation of others we still have the responsibility to be involved with one another and to help each other overcome sin. To leave a person in their sin violates Scripture's command to us and demonstrates that we do not love them.

Paul said it this way in **Galatians 6:1,2** *"If any man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself, let you to be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ."*

Summary:

Let us not fall into the trap of thinking that Jesus' teaching here to *"judge not that you be not judged"* means that we are to refrain from condemning sin. We must remember this passage within its context and make sure that we examine ourselves and that the log of self-righteousness is removed from our eye so that we can help our brothers and sisters remove the speck in their eye. Let us make sure that we always judge sin based on the Scriptures and not on manmade traditions. Moreover, we must strive to speak the truth in love, rather than condemnation and to approach others with humility, grace and mercy, rather than arrogant, self-righteous pride.

Romans 15: 1& 4

1We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

4.For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

