

Am I Seeing Clearly?

Scripture Text: Matthew 7:1–5

Introduction

In this sermon series, we are learning about having peace and making peace. God wants us to be at peace with Him and with each other. He wants us to be makers of peace, or as Jesus put it, *peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9). Peacemaking is not optional. We are commanded to make peace. Peacemaking is crucial to our testimony as followers of Jesus. Peacemaking is also hard work, but well worth it as it provides opportunities to honor God, to serve others, and to grow to be like Christ. How can we make peace with others, especially when they may not want to be at peace with us? Last week, we looked at the first step to peacemaking, the first of four G's, which is *Glory to God*. Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we should seek to please and honor God. It is the goal for all that we do. This means whatever will bring praise to God and declare Him great is what we should do! By depending on God's wisdom, power, and love, by faithfully obeying His commands, and by seeking to maintain a loving, merciful and forgiving attitude, we can and should bring God glory in the midst of conflict. But, there is a slippery slope in how we respond to conflict.

The Slippery Slope

Whenever we are in conflict with someone else, our response to that conflict either draws attention to ourselves and to our circumstances, or it draws attention toward God. Oftentimes, however, bringing glory to God is not how we *choose* to respond to conflict. We often choose a response that either focuses on us or our situation. There are several ways we can respond to conflict and it is called the *slippery slope*.



Escape Responses: *Denial* (pretend a problem does not exist), *Flight* (run away from the problem), *Suicide* (lose all hope and take one's own life).

Attack Responses: *Assault* (using force or intimidation, both verbal and physical), *Litigation* (taking the person to court), *Murder* (killing those who oppose you).

The above responses do not resolve conflict or make peace between people. Rather, these responses oftentimes make a situation worse. But, there are ways to respond to conflict that at least *attempts* to make peace with others. These responses are below:

Peacemaking Responses: (2 Kinds)

Personal Peacemaking: *Overlook an Offense* (a form of forgiveness where you choose to not dwell on the issue), *Reconciliation* (resolve issue through confession, correction, and forgiveness), *Negotiation* (seeking to reach a settlement that satisfies each other).

Assisted Peacemaking: *Mediation* (asking someone else to help them voluntarily resolve the conflict), *Arbitration* (appointing someone else to listen to your arguments and render a judgement for you), *Accountability* (fellow church members lovingly intervene to hold you accountable to Scripture and promote repentance).

Peacemaking responses seek to resolve an issue between two parties and bring restoration to relationships in a way that brings *glory to God* in the situation. Seeking God's glory in a situation is, of course, the *first step* in making peace. It is the "why" to everything we do! Now, we will look at the next step to peacemaking which involves judgement - judging others and judging ourselves rightly.

Judge the Right People Rightly

We will now look at a passage that may be one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. It has to do with judging others. Should we ever do that? Let us look at it.

Matthew 7:1–2 ¹ *Judge not, that you be not judged.* ² *For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*

People love this passage. People love to tell others about it. Usually, those who love to quote it are those who do not want to be judged. It is those who do not want to be accountable to God's demands. It is those who do not want others telling them what God expects of us. And, to be honest, we ought to be careful to not judge other people. This is a clear warning from Jesus about judging. But, should we ever judge others? Is there anytime when it is OK to judge someone else? Matthew 18:15-20 clearly gives us a process to judge those who have sinned, and the consequences for not repenting of some. It is important to realize that Jesus was referring to church members holding each another accountable. The church has the right and the duty to judge one another

within the church in order to correct false doctrine and deal with unrepentant sin that threatens to destroy the unity and the purity of God's people. Look at the following.

1 Corinthians 5:12–13 ¹² *For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."*

Yes, the church has a duty to judge one another *in the church*. In the Matthew 7 passage where Jesus is telling us to "judge not", He refers to "brothers". It evidently refers to one's fellow member of the community of disciples, e.g. the church. What Jesus probably meant by "judge not" was judging another with undue harshness. It is a judgmental attitude towards others that fails to account for one's own sin. It rears its ugly head when people forget their own failures and focus instead on those around them. We see it in Scripture when Jesus was reclining with the sinners and tax collectors and the Pharisees complained, thinking they were better than others (Matthew 9:10-11). We also see it with the woman who was caught in adultery.

John 8:7–9 ⁷ *And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.*

What happened here? Was the woman falsely accused? Was the crowd's judgement wrong? There is a type of judgement that thinks one's self is better than others. It fails to examine one's own sin before telling someone else their failure. Jesus was saying that God will judge people according to the same standards they apply when judging others. Those who judge harshly, will be judged harshly by God. Because we have received grace, we should extend grace to others. We should never judge another church member without humbly recognizing our own sin and need for forgiveness. We should look honestly at our own selves before we judge another person. Believers have a responsibility to help each other, but...they must first examine their own lives.

Conflict Between Members of a Church

What does all this have to do with making peace? Let us return to the story about Bob and Joe, who are members of the same church. If you recall, Joe and his wife hired Bob to build them a home. Things went well at first, but problems started to happen. Joe and his wife noticed several things wrong - the kitchen cabinets were not installed correctly, and the master bathroom was smaller than they had wanted. While Bob fixed those issues, it was not as quickly as Joe's wife would like, who is expecting a baby. This adds to their conflict. Bob put them off for a while, and even told Joe that he will get to it "when he has time". More serious, however, was the living room floor, which was not level. Bob tries to correct the problem the best he can, but the real issue is that the foundation to the house needs to be fixed. This is going to take more time, more money, and puts the project behind schedule. Joe and his wife do not think Bob

is working hard enough or fast enough, and begin to seriously question whether Bob can actually fix the problems. Joe's wife starts telling others in the church about their "problems with Bob" and encouraging them to not hire Bob to do any work. She even tells some in her Sunday school class that they are thinking about suing Bob. Were these appropriate responses to the conflict? How should both parties respond?

Get The Log Out of Your Eye First

In the parallel passage from Luke, Jesus also told the crowd a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39). This is an instructive way to teach this peacemaking principle. Are we the blind trying to lead the blind when we judge others? Jesus mentioned in this passage about a "log" in our eye, clearly an instance when one is not *seeing clearly*. Look at the following verses.

Matthew 7:3–4 ³ *Why do you see 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,' when there is the log in your own eye?*

Obviously, this does not refer to an actual log in one's eye. That would be impossible. Jesus may have drawn on His background as a carpenter for the metaphor of a *log in your own eye*. Perhaps, Jesus had used many logs in His lifetime to do His or His father Joseph's work. Jesus' use of the log and the speck refer respectively to *blatant sins* and *minor shortcomings*. A speck describes something so small that it is almost irrelevant. Picturing one's sin as a log in one's eye stresses the inability of fallen human beings to render just judgment. How can someone whose vision is totally obscured by a log in his eye render a just assessment of another person's minor vision problems that are due to a speck or a splinter? And how can the person with the log in his eye think that he is capable of rendering assistance in removing the speck from his brother's eye? The log in one's eye is meant to humble us so as to rightly judge *our own sin* before attempting to judge the sin in someone else's life. Therefore, we should examine our own attitude, and evaluate our own sin and responsibility to a conflict before we judge someone else. Some may think they have never sinned, but God tells us something different.

1 John 1:8–10 ⁸ *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

How often do we criticize others when we have far more serious shortcomings in our own lives? Instead of attacking others or dwelling on their wrongs, we can take responsibility for our own contributions to conflicts—confessing our sins, asking God to help us change attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused. Some may be tempted to say that we never have a right to judge anyone because we will never "see clearly" enough to render a just judgement. Verse five makes it clear that this passage does not absolve us of responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should help our fellow brothers or sister in Christ.

Matthew 7:5 *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.*

First, to render inappropriate judgement on someone, judging someone else without first examining oneself, is hypocritical. It is pretending to be something you are not - a righteous person who can clearly see someone else's faults. But, when we see clearly, when we have come to the throne of grace and have been forgiven, when we realize our own failures, then we will be able to judge the speck in someone else's eye. Jesus does not forbid all judgment of others, for ultimately the one who feels grieved and humbled over his own sin can help remove the "speck" from others. What Jesus does rule out is pride that views oneself as better than others. Once we have dealt with our own sins, once we have humbly sought the Savior and His forgiveness, we are in a better position to help someone else turn from their sin. It also follows that once we have dealt with our own contribution to a conflict or problem, then we are in a position to gently and lovingly confront and try to restore others who have erred (Galatians 6:1).

What is a Log and How Do We Get It Out?

In terms of resolving conflict and making peace with others, there are two ways to have a log in your eye. They are as follows:

- *A critical, negative attitude*
- *Actual sinful words and actions*

Attitudes can be critical, negative, or oversensitive. Our attitudes underlie our words and actions and fan the flame of conflict.

Words that feed conflict include the following: grumbling, complaining, gossiping, unloving criticism, lies, or exaggerations.

Actions such as failing to do those things we should, failing to keep commitments or responsibilities, resisting godly advice, or withholding mercy and forgiveness.

We can remove the "log" from our eye by confessing our responsibility to a conflict. One way to confess is to follow the pattern established in the 7 A's.

- Address everyone involved, all those whom you affected.
- Avoid "if", "but", and "maybe". Don't try to excuse your wrongs by using words that shift the blame, or minimize your role.
- Admit specifically, both attitudes and actions.
- Acknowledge the hurt. Express sorrow for hurting someone.
- Accept the consequences. Willingly do what it takes to restore the other person to wholeness, such as making restitution.
- Alter your behavior. Change your attitudes and actions.

- Ask for forgiveness and allow time for forgiveness and healing to occur.

Conclusion

In the previous scenario, what are those things that both Bob and Joe can do to “get the log out of their eyes”? Bob could admit that he did not take seriously the problems the house had or empathize with Joe and his wife’s situation. Joe and his wife could admit that they did not work with Bob, but rather, they attacked Bob (not the situation), and verbally abused him, even threatening to take him to court. Both parties should pray about how their situation could bring glory to God and how they should respond graciously to each other. They could commit to pray with one another and *for one another*. Remember, how we respond to conflict is an opportunity to point people to ourselves and to our problems, or it is an opportunity to point them to the living God of the universe. What response will you choose?