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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“OF SPECKS AND PLANKS”

Luke 6:37-38, 41-42

What is it that attracts you to Christ?

What draws your heart to Jesus?

Isn't it his boundless love, his extravagant kindness, and his tender mercy?

○ **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”** (John 3:16-17).

○ {Ro 5:8} **“God demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners”** – {Ro 5:10; 8:7-8; 5:8-10} **“When we were God’s enemies,”** when our **“sinful [minds were] hostile to God”** and we were **“controlled by the sinful nature,”** unable to **“please God”** – **“Christ died for us”** **“that we might be reconciled to [God] through the death of his Son.”**

□ Our Savior’s incredible mercy and love form the foundation of his teaching in Luke 6:37-38 and 41-42.

■ Verses 37-38: **“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

Allow me to make three observations.

⚙ Observation 1) Christ Jesus is not saying we earn mercy and forgiveness by being merciful and forgiving. If we could do so, it would not have been necessary for him to bear our sins on the cross!

He is saying **his followers are accountable to act toward other people as God has acted toward them.** Since we {Mt 10:8} **“have freely... received”** mercy and forgiveness, so we must **“freely give”** it.

⚙ Observation 2) this is not a prohibition of all moral and spiritual assessment. Elsewhere, the Lord warns us to {Mt 7:15-16a} **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”** If we are to identify a preacher or teacher as true or false we must judge their message and conduct.

Christ Jesus is prohibiting a critical, fault-finding spirit and a self-righteous attitude.

The problem is, it is not always easy to discern our own motives. Thank God, he gives us four clear imperatives about what and whom not to judge.

○ Romans 2:1: **“You...have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”**

✍ First Imperative: Do not pass judgment if you are guilty of the same sin. Make no hypocritical judgment.

- Now, Romans 14:1-3:

Accept those whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat everything, but another person, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted that person.

✎ Second Imperative: Do not pass judgment on debatable matters.

Of course, fault-finders tend to think everything is cut-and-dried, to them nothing is debatable. Even the non-judgmental disagree about what is disputable. Still, a commitment to flexibility on secondary issues goes a long way to preventing sinful judgments.

- On to First Corinthians 4:5: **“Judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of people's hearts. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”**

✎ Third Imperative: Do not pass judgment on unspoken motives.

How often does someone speak a careless word and we react as though they planned it?! Could it be that they are just having a bad day?

How often do Progressives accuse all who oppose same-sex marriage of hating homosexuals?! Might not

some hold to the traditional definition of marriage for reasons other than hatred?

How often do Conservatives speak as though Progressives are plotting to destroy America?! Could it be that they simply have different ideas about how to achieve liberty and justice for all?

- Next is First Corinthians 5:12-13: **“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.”**

✎ Fourth Imperative: Do not pass judgment on unbelievers.

☑ Casting Crowns nails it with this song:

**Jesus, friend of sinners
We have strayed so far away
We cut down people in your name
But the sword was never ours to swing**

**Jesus, friend of sinners
The truth's become so hard to see
The world is on their way to You
But their tripping over me**

**Always looking around but never looking up
I'm so double minded
A plank-eyed saint with dirty hands
And a heart divided**

**Jesus, friend of sinners
The one whose writing in the sand
Made the righteous turn away
And the stones fall from their hands**

**Help us to remember
We are all the least of these
Let the memory of Your mercy
Bring Your people to their knees**

**No one knows what we're for
only what we're against
When we judge the wounded
What if we put down our signs crossed
Over the lines and loved like You did**

**Oh Jesus, friend of sinners
Open our eyes to the world
At the end of our pointing fingers
Let our hearts be led by mercy**

**Help us reach with open hearts
And open doors
Oh Jesus, friend of sinners
Break our hearts for what breaks Yours**

**You love every lost cause
You reach for the outcast
For the leper and the lame
They're the reason that You came**

**Lord I was that lost cause
And I was the outcast
But you died for sinners just like me
A grateful leper at Your feet**

The Lord prohibits judgments made from a critical attitude or self-righteous posture. He explicitly forbids us

from passing judgment on others whose sin is the same as ours, on debatable matters, on hidden motives, and on unbelievers.

☼ Observation 3) Christ Jesus is elaborating on the love command. Luke 6:27-36, which immediately precedes this text, is all about love: **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you....”** Skipping down to 35-36, **“The Most High...is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”**

Forbearance, mercy, and forgiveness are *αγαπη* [agape] love in action. If that sounds crazy, consider this:

☑ **“There is someone I love, even [when] I don't approve of what he does. There is someone I accept, though some of his thoughts and actions revolt me. There is someone I forgive, though he hurts the people I love the most. That person is me. There are plenty of things I do that I don't like, but if I can love myself, without approving of all I do, I can love others without approving of all they do.”** C.S. Lewis wrote those words, but he speaks for me.

■ Finally, let's take a look at verses 41-42:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, 'Friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the

plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.”

It is a silly image, ridiculous really. Yet it happens all the time, whenever one believer judges another for their speck of wrong thinking or wrong doing about worship style, spiritual gifts, the End Times, or some other secondary issue of theology or politics or economics or culture – even while they fail to love God with their entire being, fail to love other people as themselves, fail to trust in grace and rely instead on their own rightness.

The way to avoid this is simple: it is to focus on removing what is in our own eye. That requires humility, a teachable spirit, honest self-examination, and repentance.

But it will clear up our vision. Then we will be able to help our brother or sister with their speck, not with an attitude of false judgment or self-righteousness, but of genuine compassion and mercy.