

Matthew 7:1-5

1 "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while 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 neighbor's eye (NRSV).

The Sermon on the Mount is rich in faith formation. It is the word of God spoken by Jesus, it emphasizes moral teachings, and provides the essential tenets of discipleship. The Beatitudes are expressed as blessings with each phrase coming from Old Testament context. Jesus gives a new understanding of these concepts and focuses on love and humility rather than force and power. The highest ideal of Jesus teaching is compassion – the Golden Rule, treat others as you want them to treat you, love your enemies, and turn the other cheek. This is in direct contrast to such thoughts as an eye for eye.

Seeing clearly is a matter of looking at the highest ideal – compassion - and realizing that we live in a society that claims to be Christian but does not live by the Lord's lessons on compassion. Seeing clearly is a matter of staying focused on compassion, instead of judgment and condemnation, which come from a need to control and a desire to feel superior. People don't see how simple it is. When your life is in order spiritually, you seek the Kingdom of God first not some superficial power or materialism. Then there is no judging, no need to be in a hurry, no competition, and no worries. Your life becomes one of eternal satisfaction and internal satisfaction.

Jesus condemns judging others and explains that judging others is a 100% positive correlation to your own judgment. Jesus hits hard and firm with no exceptions - do not judge and you will not be judged. If you judge others, you will be judged. The judgment you make will be the judgment you get. It is tit for tat; quid pro quo. One of the problems that Jesus faced was that organized religion of the day was dominated by judging others. However, people could not see the hypocrisy of their judging. They could see the faults of others but ignored their own faults. Seeing clearly is a matter of understanding that what was true then is true today. Concern for righteousness becomes a crusade to correct the faults of others while ignoring our own shortcomings. This violation occurs repeatedly in contemporary society.

The real-life examples that I have been using from *Reasons People Leave Organized Religion* are about someone other than you or me addressing the same old problem within the realms of contemporary society. Seeing clearly is a matter of realizing the seriousness of what Jesus said and making sure we follow his instructions – accept others as they are and love them like Jesus loves them. We are to judge ourselves and accept each other instead of judging one another and accepting ourselves. Today's example is a good case for showing the problems of judging others within contemporary society. In fact, all of the examples involve hypocrisy and judging and they are all due to Christians and Christian organizations that are not following the teaching of Jesus.

I was raised Christian and attended church multiple times per week. My mom was told she couldn't sing in the choir because she was divorced. My sister was sexually assaulted and murdered by her step-father and the church asked, 'What she did to tempt him? My half-sister's dad was excommunicated because his wife cheated and married the guy, but she wasn't excommunicated because the new husband was really wealthy and joined the church. I could go on and on for days. I consider myself religious in my own way, but I don't believe I'll ever formally be a member of a church again.

There are three scenarios in this one example. A person can't sing in the choir because she is divorced. We can learn a lot from Jesus. **Mathew 5:32** "But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (NRSV). Jesus addressed the law but notice what Jesus was teaching here. We typically take it word for word as a literal interpretation. However, seeing clearly is a matter of digging deeper and looking further into what Jesus is saying. In the patriarchal society, men control women completely. They had the free will to divorce them and then blame them for not satisfying him. Then they could marry another woman for his own gratification, leaving his divorced wife poor and destitute. Jesus does not condemn her. Jesus blames the man. The men judged and condemned the women while ignoring their own faults. Jesus shifts the guilt back from the women to the men. It is the men that caused the adultery. Jesus says nothing about restricting the activity of a divorced woman in the life of ministry. The other two situations are about a female victim that is assaulted and murdered and the victim is blame for temptation. This is the continued patriarchal mentality of the male blaming the female. One of the main tenants of Jesus teaching is to undo the damage of patriarchal control and mentality. The third scenario is where a man is excommunicated and replaced with someone that has financial resources. Once again the problem is one of hypocrisy, judging others, and not following Jesus.

When we truly pay attention to what Jesus says and does, we realize that he replaced hypocrisy and judging with love and acceptance. Jesus exchanged the old way with the new way. The old way is full of negative emotions both for the one doing the judging and the one being judged. The new way is one of positive emotions and a prescription for spiritual happiness. Jesus flips the conventional wisdom of a corrupt system that victimized the weak. God blesses you; not the perfect, not the pure righteous, not those without sin. God blesses you. The pure of heart are those that do not judge and love everyone as they are as individuals. A lot of organized religion sees the faults of others and ignore their own faults. The world needs to see there is a place where the focus is on Jesus and the people follow his commandments of replacing judgmentalism with acceptance.