

Small Group Leaders Notes

Matthew 7:1-6

Context

- **Hypocrisy** - Hypocrisy was a key theme in chapter 6 (6:2, 6:5, 6:16) and we find it again here in chapter 7 (7:5.) In chapter 6 Jesus was warning us against religious hypocrisy. Now in chapter 7 Jesus warns us against being hypocrites in our relationships.

Structure

- These six verses break down into 3 sub-sections;
 - **v1-2 - 'Don't be Judgmental'**
 - Notice the careful structure in these verses. First comes the principle "Do not judge." Then comes the consequence "...or you too will be judged." Then in v2 comes the reason "For in the same way..."
 - **v3-5 - 'Don't be Hypocritical'**
 - Notice in v3-4 how Jesus uses questions and a clearly absurd scenario to make a very serious and powerful point. You would never be more concerned about a speck/splinter in someone else's eye if you had a plank of wood in your own eye. Of course you would deal with the plank in your own eye first before then helping them with the speck.
 - As you lead the study don't flatten the tone that Jesus is using here.
 - **v6 - "Don't be 'Undiscerning'"**
 - We will say more about this verse under 'Tricky Bits' below. For now just notice that Jesus uses two parallel pictures of throwing sacred/holy things to dogs and pearls to dogs. Jesus isn't saying two different things he's making the same point. This is clear from the second sentence where there is just one outcome.

Tricky Bits

- **"Is Jesus forbidding all judgement?"**
 - Is Jesus forbidding his disciples to be discerning? Are Christians never allowed to make any judgments? Are we not allowed to say that Hitler and Stalin did truly evil things? Is that what Jesus is forbidding here? The immediate context of the rest of chapter 7 shows that this cannot be what Jesus is saying. In 7:6, 7:15 and 7:20 Jesus is clearly teaching that his disciples are to be discerning and make judgments.
 - This helps us to see that what Jesus is teaching in v1-2 is that we are not to have a judgmental spirit. We are not to be those who are quick to pass judgment, always automatically condemning. Jesus is urging us to be generous where possible and not quick to judge recognising the grace that God has shown us.
- **"Who will judge us?" (v1-2)**
 - There are two possibilities. Jesus could be saying that other people around us will be more judgmental of us if we are judgmental ourselves. That is very often the case. The other option (and in my opinion the more likely) is that this refers to God judging

us. This fits with the wider context of the Sermon on the Mount (see 5:7, 6:12, 6:13-14.)

- This then raises the question that we have dealt with several times of whether we are then saved from judgment by our works? As we have said previously that is not what Jesus' teaching. Instead he is consistently making the point that a judgmental attitude shows that we have not really received God's grace. One of the marks of those who are thankful for God's grace to them is that they no longer have a judgmental spirit towards others because they are so aware of how much they deserve God's mercy.
- **“What is the relationship between v1-5 and v6?”**
 - At first v6 might seem to float on it's own neither connected to v1-5 or v7-12. I think that it is connected to v1-5 by the theme of judgment. In v1-5 Jesus has taught us to not to have a judgmental spirit. The danger with this is that we become wishy-washy and never making a call between what is clearly right and wrong. That is why in v6 Jesus now tells us that whilst being non-judgmental we are not to be undiscerning.
 - Jesus is warning us not to be indiscriminating *“especially in our choice of people to whom we present the wonderful riches of the gospel”* (Carson.)
 - Remember that dogs in a 1st century Jewish context are not cuddly pets. They are rabid scavenging beasts. Similarly pigs were unclean animals like wild boars rather than cuddly cartoon characters. Both dogs and pigs could do real harm.
 - Jesus is telling his disciples;

“... not to share the richest parts of spiritual truth with persons who are persistently vicious, irresponsible, and unappreciative. Just as the pearls were unappreciated by the savage animals, but only enraged them and made them dangerous, so also many of the riches of God's revelation are unappreciated by many people. And, painful as it is to see it, these rich truths may only serve to enrage them.”

- We might be quite uncomfortable with this but we find this principle in the rest of the New Testament. When Jesus sends out the twelve in ch10 he tells them *“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.”* Similarly when Jesus speaks about certain Pharisees he says, *“Leave them; they are blind guides”* (15:14.) We find Paul using the same principle in Acts 18:5.
- Jesus is teaching that we are to be discerning in who we share the gospel with and when we do this. We are not to be judgmental but we are to exercise sensible judgment and discernment.
- We need to recognise the balance of these 6 verses. Jesus spends 5 verses telling us not to be judgmental and only one verses telling us to be discerning. There's a balance here that we should pay attention to.

Big Idea - Don't be judgmental but do be discerning

Applications

- ***Beware having a judgmental spirit***
 - Are you quick to disapprove? Do you instinctively look for faults in others? We might think that such attitudes are 'just the way I am?' but Jesus says such attitudes are sinful and need repenting of. So often it is those who are 'theologically sharp' who

can be so harsh and judgmental. Yes we are to be discerning but we are not to let that be an excuse for being judgmental.

- ***Let God's grace shape your attitude to others***

- Throughout the Sermon on the Mount we must remember that our behaviour is to reflect the grace and mercy of God to us.

- ***Make dealing with your sin the priority***

- It can be so easy to focus on the sin of others whilst ignoring or being blind to our own sin. Jesus is clear that our priority is to deal with our own sin first. We might condemn bankers for their greed but what about our own greed? We might condemn actors for their high profile sexual sins but what about the sexual sin in our own hearts? We lambast politicians for their lack of honesty but what about our own half-truths?

- ***Help others with their sin***

- Notice the word 'first' in v5, it is really important. Jesus doesn't say that we are just to deal with the plank in our own eye and then leave the speck in the other person's eye. We are to deal with the plank in our own eye so that we can then 'see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.' We are to deal with our own sin so that we can then help others. We are to avoid the apparently pious thought that says, 'Because I'm such a sinner I could never say anything about someone else's sin.' It is actually those who are aware of their own sinfulness and are seeking to deal with it who are best placed to help others with their own sin however big or small it may be. The person who has removed the plank from their own eye will not only see clearer but also be more compassionate as they help someone with a speck or a plank in their own eye.

- ***Be discerning about who to share the gospel with and when and how to do it***

- Where someone just wants to mock and argue we need to be discerning. According to Jesus sharing the gospel with such people only makes things worse.

Questions

In the questions that follow I have focused mainly on v1-5. If you have time you could consider some of the applications that flow from v6. For example you could discuss when it is wise to share the gospel and when it might not be so wise?

Starter - Think of the sorts of stories that have been in the news in recent weeks and months. Which sins are we often quick to denounce?

Which sins are we blind to? Which sins do we often turn a blind eye to?

As always the starter is here to get people thinking. We are often quick to denounce 'public' sins such as the sexual sins of celebrities, the greed of bankers and the lies of politicians. Yet we can easily be blind to our own sins.

With these questions we're trying to explore what are the specs in other people's eyes and what are the planks in our own eyes.

1. Have a go at summarising the main thrust of v1-5?

You could do this in 2s and 3s. The passage isn't very long and there is one main theme so it would be good to get people digging into the text for themselves. Encourage people to try and write a summary sentence in their own words. What's the big idea? Have a go at doing this yourself before the study?

2. In v1-2 Jesus tells us not to judge but in v6 he tells us to be discerning. Where is the line between wise discernment and a sinful judgmental attitude?

In this question we're trying to understand exactly what Jesus means by 'judging others'. We need to make sure we help people avoid the two extremes. On the one hand we need to see that a harsh judgmental spirit is not appropriate for Christians. On the other hand we need to see that it is not 'Christian' to never condemn sin. Not judging is not an excuse for never showing any discernment. God has given us minds to make decisions.

3. V3-5 tell us that we are to deal with our own sin first. Why are we to do this? (Why will this make us better able to help?)

There are a couple of right answers to this question. First and foremost we are to deal with our own sin first so as not to be hypocrites! But there is more that we need to see. You can help people by drawing their attention to the word 'first' and the phrase 'then you will...' We are to remove the plank from our own eye so that we can then be in a better place to help others. We are not to just remove the plank from our own eye and then leave the spec in our friend's eye. We are to deal with both but our priority is our own sin.

See the application section for why we will be better placed to help others with their sins having dealt with our own.

4. What holds us back from helping others with the specks in their eyes?

Immediately some in our group will be feeling uncomfortable at the idea of getting involved with other people's sin. They will be thinking 'it's not my place to do that' or 'what right have I, as a sinner, to say anything about their sin.' Others will be thinking, 'I've got

enough problems of my own to deal with so how can I help someone else with theirs?' Others might be thinking, 'I don't know people well enough to be of any help?'

It will be good to recognise the reasons why we often don't really get involved personally in one another's lives and helping one another with our sin. Yet these excuses must not allow us to ignore what Jesus is saying. The clear implication of what Jesus is saying is that we will help one another to remove the spec from each other's eyes. This leads us on to the next important question...

5. How can we become better at helping one another to deal with our sin?

This is a vital question. We can't leave our discussion on the previous question. We must talk practically about how we can actually help one another. Firstly we need to be those who are growing more and more aware of our own sin and getting into the habit of ruthlessly dealing with whatever planks or specks there may be in our eyes. Second we need to actually get to know people and open up with one another. That's what home groups are for. We will not necessarily be open about our struggles with everyone in the church but home groups should be a safe place to be honest about our struggles so that we can help and pray for one another. You won't like me for saying this but it starts with us as leaders. If our groups see us being open and honest about our sin then it will help them to have the confidence to follow. We need to lead on this. So where have you been judgmental recently? Where do you struggle with a judgmental spirit? Could you share this with your group and ask for their prayers and help? Helping one another could be as simple as praying for one another's sin not just our material or physical circumstances? It could also involve ringing or texting during the week to ask how particular situations have gone? What other practical things could we do to help? Think of several before the study.