

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
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The Sermon: JUDGE NOT, THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-5

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye: and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

Nobody loves a critic who is always pointing out the faults of others, blaming, censuring, criticizing, disparaging, depreciating, condemning. Such a man or woman is usually heartily disliked by his family, his neighbors, and even by the members of his church congregation. Such a man or woman is seldom or never at peace with himself or with those about him. He carries with him a contentious spirit. If other people will not accept him as a leader, and toe the mark which he draws for them, his attacks become more impassioned and violent; his words become more vitriolic. He loses his friends; but still he refuses to see that he is doing anything wrong, and sets himself up in his own mind as a martyr to the perversity and wickedness of those who will not accept his criticism.

It was this kind of criticism that Jesus had in mind when he said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." It is this kind of critic to whom Jesus directed that ludicrously exaggerated illustration of the mote and the beam. The "mote" of this verse is literally an infinitesimally small splinter, a speck. The "beam" is one of the great logs used as a beam for the houses of Palestine. The ridiculousness of a man with a great log-like beam of wood in his own eye pretending to see clearly to remove a speck from his neighbor's eye gives this illustration much of its power and impact. The man with the greater sin cries "Repent ye," and sets himself up as a guide to morality and spirituality. He cries "Follow me," but being blinder than those he condescends to guide, both guide and guided fall into the ditch.

When Jesus said "Judge not, that ye be not judged," he was not forbidding a proper kind of judgment. There is hardly a situation in life which does not call for a certain amount of judgment -- of informed discrimination. We must judge, and choose the things we eat. We consider the various qualities of clothing, and choose what we shall wear. We judge people, and select certain ones to be our friends. Even more carefully we judge our fellow man when it comes time to pick out a husband or a wife. We have to exercise a degree of judgment when we choose a home, a place of employment, or a church. We have to judge men if we are to vote intelligently for those seeking public office. We may be called upon to serve on a jury, or to sit in a civil or ecclesiastical court.

Jesus was not necessarily forbidding this kind of judgment, if it is kindly, intelligently discriminating, and humbly rendered in love. John's gospel records that on one occasion when the Pharisees bitterly criticized him for healing on the Sabbath, he replied, "Judge not according to the appearance (or according to your tradition) but judge righteous judgment." We must judge every day, but the important thing is that we judge righteous judgment.

The great fault which is a beam in the eye of the chronic critic who wants to correct everybody else is primarily a lack of love; and Jesus said that the two first greatest commandments were to love God, and to love neighbor as self. The man with a censorious spirit does not love those he judges so harshly. Be-

cause he does not love them, or want to know them, he does not know them. He never tries to understand their weaknesses, their temptation, or their struggles; he never glories in their triumphs and achievements. The chronic critic who is possessed with a censorious spirit and a full size beam in his own eye, is constantly calling attention to the motes in other people's eyes to distract attention from the size of the beam in his own eye. He is willing to sacrifice the good name of others that he may appear right. As long as the critic can keep up a clamor and an uproar about the sins of others, his own are not so apt to be noticed, or at least, so he hopes.

Any useful criticism of others must begin with self-appraisal, self-examination, and self-reform. It is foolish to try to improve others when one's own faults are obvious. This is the sin of many reformers, and even of many ministers -- that they do not love enough, that they are not saintly enough to command the respect of those whom they would lead to repentance and righteousness. Reform begins at home. One who is intent on perfecting himself, reforming himself, overcoming his own sins, is on the way to becoming a saint. But one who is primarily interested in correcting the sins of others is a reformer -- in the odious and unlovely sense of that word. No one loves him, for he loves no one but himself. The saint sees the sins of others, and sees in them a reflection of himself, saying perhaps, "There but for the grace of God go I." The reformer gains a feeling of righteous virtue and superiority by criticizing and condemning others, but he will not confess or face or remedy his own sins and failures.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul lays down an excellent principle to be followed by those whose duty it is sometimes to point out the faults of others. Paul writes: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's

burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." James advised the saints to "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another" The humble, saintly man is not too hypocritical to confess his faults before his brethren. His own faults are his chief concern, even though he may sometimes find it necessary to point out the faults of others in a spirit of meekness and brotherly love, and lend his help and support to the overcoming of those faults, even as his brethren help and support him in overcoming his own sins.

If we are interested in making the world a better place with more kindness, more love, more patience, more gentleness, more justice, more peace, we can all begin with ourselves. This demands brutal honesty and ruthless self-evaluation and self-judgment. It demands that we forget our concern for the sins of others, that we make our own moral vision clear by removing the beam from our own eye, that we banish the spirit of carping, self-righteous, malicious censoriousness, and love and help and serve each other as we struggle together towards perfection. If we judge ourselves with righteous judgment, then with that same judgment God will judge us in the last day. If we judge others with bitter, malicious, self-righteous, hypocritical judgment, and judge ourselves in willful, stubborn blindness, then we may expect God's judgment to catch up with us, "for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Though we may sometimes be forced by circumstances or duty to judge others, we should remember always that God is our judge, and that all men are his servants. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" wrote Paul to the Romans. "To his own master he standeth or falleth.""We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" by failing to remove the beam from his own eye.