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- Yesterday we learned about Forgiveness from the Lord's Prayer
- The Lord's Prayer shows us a direct connection between our attitude towards forgiving others, and God's attitude about forgiving us
 - *Forgive us our debts **as we also have forgiven our debtors***
- The Lord's prayer shows us that we need daily forgiveness just as much as we need daily bread
- Jesus seems to take two things for granted in the Lord's prayer:
 - That people will hurt us
 - That we ourselves will need to be forgiven
- It's our responsibility to connect those two things together in our heads, and realize that if we want forgiveness from God, we have to give it to our Brother
- Whether the person hurt us on purpose, or it was just them being insensitive, we should learn to forgive them
- It's important for us to learn this lesson...
 - *But if you do not forgive men their sins, **your Father will not forgive your sins.***
- Today we'll talk about **Playing God**
- That's a phrase that you may have heard before
- It's often used in movies when someone decides who lives and who dies, and the counter-part yells, "*Who gave you the right to play God?*"
- We are talking about **Playing God** in a different sense
- God is the Judge

- Whenever we judge others we are **Playing God**
- We will define Judging as "***un-called for criticism***"
- That is what Jesus means when he says, "*Do not judge*"
- He is not telling us to ignore what is wrong
- He is just telling us not to criticize anyone unfairly or unjustified
- There is a great old acronym that is a helpful reminder when you are speaking about someone else

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- Before you say something about someone, ask yourself if you **NEED** to:
 - N**ecessary - *Is it necessary that I say this? Is it important that I impart this knowledge to the person I'm talking to, or do I just want to?*
 - E**ncourage - *Will this encourage the person? Will it make them feel better? Will they feel better about their Brother or Sister, and the Ecclesia in general?*
 - E**dify - *Does this edify? Will what I say build them up and make them stronger?*
 - D**ignify - *Will this dignify the person? Jesus treated others with dignity.*
- Criticism that is unfair or unjust - **EVEN IF IT'S TRUE** - shouldn't be said
- The fact that what you say is true doesn't make it necessary to say
- Think of it this way: If someone is really, really ugly; do you say, "*Man, you are really ugly*"?
- Judging others is almost always counterproductive

- When you judge someone you might be thinking, *"What I want to do is change this person"*
- But, it has the opposite effect every time!
- Sooner or later the person will become offended, and you haven't accomplished anything
- Being judged is painful, whether or not the accusation is true
- If that isn't enough reason for us, Jesus has given us a pragmatic reason not to judge...

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- Luke 6:37

37) **"Judge not, and you will not be judged;** condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven

- If you don't like being judged yourself, then stop judging other people!
- There are two different ways to read that verse:

Temporal: If we don't judge people, then God will direct our lives and stop others from judging us

Eternal: If we focus on living a life without judgment, then at the time of judgment we will not be punished

- It is **EASY** to criticize
- It is often said that a little bit of learning is a dangerous thing...
- You could also say that a little bit of spirituality is a dangerous thing
- You might just be spiritual enough to see that what others are doing is wrong - and then point the finger at them
- The true test of spirituality is not pointing the finger!

- You might say, *"Well, I have to say something, or no one else will! We have to stand up for the truth! We have to keep our lightstand pure!"*
- So what if no one else says anything?
- The person you are judging isn't really listening anyway - They aren't going to hear it – You are not really helping
- When people are judged they usually feel worse, but they don't change their behavior
- God is much more practical than this:

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- Isaiah 58:9-10

- 9) Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' **If you take away** the yoke from your midst, **the pointing of the finger**, and speaking wickedness,
- 10) if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

- Don't point the finger and gossip - But be generous with the "hungry" - Then your life will be blessed
- The word *godliness* means, *"being like God"*
- There are certain aspects of God's character that he commands us to imitate
- We are told:

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- Matthew 5:48

- 48) You therefore must **be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

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- 1st Peter 1:15-16

- 15) but as he who called you is holy, you also **be holy** in all your conduct,
- 16) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

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- Luke 6:36

- 36) **Be merciful**, even as your Father is merciful.

- But, we are clearly told that Judging is God's sole prerogative
- If we are foolish enough to judge, we should remember three things:
 - 1) God is listening
 - 2) God knows the truth about you
 - 3) God is ruthlessly fair
- Solomon had some good advice about judging:

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- Ecclesiastes 7:21

- 21) **Do not take to heart** all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

- We all spout crazy things out of our mouth sometimes...
- Judging someone based on the stupid things they say may not give you a true picture

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- Ecclesiastes 10:20

- 20) **Even in your thoughts**, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

- Likewise, don't say stupid things... Because someone is always listening...
- AND God is listening and He knows when we judge others
- God knows everything we have done
- God is ruthlessly fair
- Remember that as you begin to say something unfairly critical of your Brother
- We all will be called to give account of what we have done...

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- 2nd Corinthians 5:10
 - 10) For **we must all appear before the judgment seat** of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

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- Romans 14:10
 - 10) Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For **we will all stand before the judgment seat** of God;
- BUT, God is not out to judge us though!
- God wants to forgive us and extend his mercy to us
- But, we have to show an attitude that desires mercy
- We have to not be critical of others
- Do you feel like you are overly critical of others?
- I know that I do
- I love a good laugh, and enjoy making fun... *of others...*

- A lot of humor is often at the expense of others
- Besides that I'm a perfectionist, and I'm demanding in my relationships
- I'm just a very critical person
- Like me, you can change
- You can learn to not be so critical of others
- Pray to God for help and He will change you
- Now there are some times when it is **RIGHT** for us to Judge
- It is never RIGHT to give "un-called for criticism", but sometimes the Brother of Christ is called to make a righteous decision about a moral matter - In many people's eyes this is Judging
- When Jesus says to "*first remove the plank from your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your Brother's eye*", he is not denying that there will be times when we need to remove the speck from our Brother's eye - He is just warning us to be careful when we do
- As we've discussed, sometimes it is absolutely right to warn others about someone's behavior
- The Apostle John is often referred as the "Love Apostle", because he so frequently is the one who says that "*Love is all you need*"

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- But, look what he has to say in 3 John 9-10:
 - 9) I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.
 - 10) So if I come, **I will bring up what he is doing**, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.
- Paul was also not afraid to "call a spade a spade"

- This Brother was not only refusing to fellowship other Brothers and Sisters, but was also dis-fellowshipping those who did
- John rightly “judged” this as completely wrong, and wasn’t afraid to confront the Brother about it

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- Look at what Paul tells Timothy in 2nd Timothy 4:10 & 14:
 - 10) For Demas, **in love with this present world**, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.
 - 14) Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; **the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.**
- It is an injustice when someone who has done harm and can still do great harm to others is at large
- But, there are some basic principles that must be followed when making this type of judgment

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- Matthew 7:3
 - 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?”
- This verse points out our tendency to get upset over small issues in another person’s life, and yet so easily overlook the big issues in our own lives
- This lack of objectivity disqualifies us from being helpful
- When we lose our objectivity, we render ourselves incapable of passing judgment
- What we learn from Matthew 7 is it’s not about what *“gets our goat”*
- It’s not about what upsets us, annoys us, or irritates us

- The Plank that is in your eye simultaneously blinds you to your own faults, and magnifies the minor faults of others
- I know of a Brother who went to Arranging Board to complain about a Sister who was showing up to meeting wearing pants instead of a dress
- Within 6 months it comes out that this Brother had been cheating on his wife and sleeping with other women for the past three years
- Hmm... Speck? Log?
- Sometimes Ecclesias find themselves with "*Professional Speck Hunters*"
- People who get fulfillment by bringing up every little thing that others are doing that is not ideal
- Often they do so because it makes the things that they are doing seem not as bad
- It's important to show love and respect to these people, without reacting too strongly to what they are complaining about
- Judge based on the merit of the complaint, not the reputation of the complainer
- What if you are the one with the speck being attacked by someone with a plank?
- What is someone is finding fault with you, and meddling in your life?
- First, God calls us to maintain a sweet spirit during these times

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- Proverbs 15:1
 - 1) **A soft answer turns away wrath**, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- Second, we are to agree with them!

- Even though they might have a plank in their own eye, they are pointing to a real, honest, existing speck that is in our eye
- You can always find a little bit of truth in what a critic will say about you
- Even if you can't find a way to agree, you can always say, "*I see what you mean*"
- Third, we should thank the person
- This will not only diffuse their irritation, but it will also enable them to save face if they are up to no good
- In addition, we will avoid making an enemy in the process
- What you shouldn't do when confronted is try to defend yourself
- Remember, this is at best, just a little speck in your life - It's not that important!
- Don't fight over it, just thank them for pointing it out, and ask them to pray for you
- Don't you honestly feel that you "*need all the help you can get*"? Every little bit helps...
- What Jesus is telling us is that if you are able to remove the plank from your own eye, then you are set free to remove the speck from your Brother's eye
- If you can retain the objectivity that comes from not being influenced by sin, then you are able to judge your Brother
- Be careful here!
- Usually, the first person who claims that they are qualified to be a judge is the person who has absolutely no objectivity about themselves
- We need to proceed carefully, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't proceed...

- Notice how Jesus doesn't say that every single plank in your eye needs to be removed before you can make righteous judgments
- No one is sinless - Everyone has faults
- The real question we are trying to address today is trying to make sure that the faults that you do have do not affect your ability to judge in the matter under discussion
- But, judgments HAVE to be made, and someone has to make them
- We all face unjust situations every day
- How long are we to tolerate wrongdoing?
- Sometimes, you just HAVE to say something
- But, who is bold enough to say that they don't have a plank in their eye?
- Jeremiah says that *"the heart is deceitful above all things. Who can understand it?"*
- Paul says in Romans 7 that *"nothing good lives in him"*
- Paul continues in 1st Timothy by saying that *"Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst"*
- So, how can imperfect people judge other imperfect people?
- We have to understand that we do not have to be perfect in order to judge
- It is possible to remove your plank in a limited way

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- Galatians 6:1
 - 1) Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should **restore him in a spirit of gentleness**. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

- Let's say that I find out that a Brother in our meeting has fallen to the sin of drunkenness
- I specifically have facts regarding this
- No one whispered it to me, I have witnessed it myself
- No one else knows as far as I know, it's a burden for me to carry
- Am I qualified to approach him about his sin?
- In an absolute sense, NO, because I am a sinner as well
- I fully realize that I could fall to the same type of sin
- But, because I am not struggling with alcoholism myself, then I have, in that particular area, removed the plank from my own eye
- The reason I am qualified to help is because I am not trying to find fault with him
- I may not necessarily turn him around, but hopefully he will not resent my coming to him
- There is a good story about what it means to be qualified to judge...
- Two Brothers were on their way to another Brother's house to confront him about his adulterous relationship
- In the car on the way over, one asked the other, "Do you believe that you too could fall into this sin?"
- The reply was, "No"
- The Brother who asked the question then said, "Turn the car around and go back home. You are not qualified to approach this man"
- Let's read Galatians 6 again...

- Galatians 6:1

1) Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should **restore him in a spirit of gentleness**. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

- You have to approach these issues with a spirit of humility and self-searching
- Your mission of attempting to actually help your Brother depart from his sin will never be successful if you approach it thinking that you are “above” him and his sin
- Only if you are able to walk alongside the sinner, will you ever be able to provide any type of guidance or counsel
- Now, the tricky part is when you are approaching a Brother or Sister about a sin that is not as clear cut as my example of Drunkenness...
- That is why you don’t go trying to take SPECKS out of people’s eyes...
- Would any of us feel right approaching someone about the sin of gossip? Lying? Laziness?
- Do you really think that you can sit there and say, “You should never gossip”?
- Make sure that it really is a plank in their eye, and only a few specks in your own
- A good rule of them to follow is: The one who is hardest on himself will probably be the gentlest with others
- Those who are most acutely aware of their own weaknesses are most likely able to help
- There is a natural inclination to be hard on others...
- One of my favorite verses is:

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- Colossians 4:20-23

- 20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—
- 21) “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”

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- 22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?
- 23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but **they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**

- It’s one of my favorite verses because it points out the natural inclination to make lots of rules for ourselves in an effort to control our sinful desires...
- And how it **DOESN’T WORK!**
- The only way to face the challenge of your sinfulness is to acknowledge your weakness and turn to God for strength and forgiveness
- Now, read that last verse again, and think of the same lesson in relation to the body of Christ

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- Colossians 4:23

- 23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the **body**, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.
- Being SEVERE with your Brothers and Sisters will really have no value in helping them battle their sins
 - It’s a natural reaction to want to set rules and restrict people, but it really doesn’t help them in their walk
 - The one who doesn’t moralize, but encourages others to become more like Christ is the one most qualified to engage in restoration and reconciliation

- A qualified person will avoid becoming emotionally involved in the situation
- A qualified person has no personal ax to grind
- A qualified person can only help if they truly care for the other person - You cannot help if you are irritated or annoyed by them
- Usually, a person therefore who is not personally connect to the situation is the best one to help
- Jesus doesn't tell us how to remove the planks from our own eyes... Maybe because it is impossible to do so in the absolute sense
- But paying accurate attention to your own faults will help us keep from pointing the finger at others or meddling where we don't belong
- Brothers and Sisters CAN and ARE restored by gentle correction or confrontation
- But, Brothers and Sisters are often destroyed by botched confrontation and accusation
- If you see someone drowning in their sin, then you are called to try to save their lives
- And if you take it upon yourself to be the one to visit them, do so in a caring and humble manner