Building an Indestructible Life

*Dealing With Your Sins & Helping Others Deal With Theirs*

Matthew 7:1-6

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Most of us, at one point in our lives or another, have gotten something in one of our eyes. It hurts, and we usually try to figure out what’s in it that is causing the pain. We go to the mirror, pull on our eyelid various ways to get a better view, rinse it with water, saline, ask a family member to look, etc. If that doesn’t work and the pain is severe enough, we might go to see a physician, or to a clinic, emergency room, or an optician.

Imagine that’s happened, and you’re in pain, sitting in a room waiting on the doctor to come in and examine your eye. He or she finally comes in and says, “We’re going figure out what’s wrong and get you fixed right up.” And as he turns to look to look at your hurting eye, you see that the doctor has a big stick protruding out of his eye. You can’t believe what you are seeing. What are you going to think? What are you going to do? You’re most likely going to say, “Wait a minute. You can’t work on me! You can’t even see what you’re doing! You aren’t touching me!”

That’s similar to the mental image that Jesus is describing in Matthew 7:1-6. Now in reality, this will never happen, but the imagery Jesus uses is what we would call hyperbole, which is an exaggerated figure of speech that is intended to illustrate a point.

Among people in general, one of the most frequently quoted passages in the Bible is Matthew 7:1, “Judge not that you be not judged!” Often, it’s used in an effort to convince people that they should never tell anyone that they are sinning. But is that really what Jesus was teaching here? If Jesus had only said, “Judge not that you be not judged,” we might draw that conclusion. But He said much more than that.

Let’s read Matthew 7:1-6.

So Jesus actually said much more than “Judge not that you be not judged.” And when we take the entire passage together, we see that Jesus is not saying that we can never point out the sins of another person, but He is saying that we are not to judge others when we have our own problems with sin. And we see from many other passages that there is a right way and a wrong way to go about correcting others.

But for many of us, it’s typically easy to notice and point out the sins of others, but harder for us to see or acknowledge our own sins. In Romans 2:13, the Apostle Paul made this point to the Jews, because they were pronouncing judgment on certain sinners, even though they were guilty of the same kinds of things! He asked, “Do you think you’re going to escape God’s judgment?” Of course, the answer is no.

Matthew 7:2 tells us that the standard of judgment we apply to others will be applied back to us. Luke 6:37-38 is a companion passage to Matthew 7:1-6. It includes the term, “judge not,” but it also includes the positive elements of forgiveness and giving. Notice the terms Jesus uses in verse 38. This is an agricultural type of reference, which would have been a big part of the life of someone living at this time. You would go to a seller of grain and purchase a standard volume of it. It would be measured into a container of some sort, and often poured into a person’s garment, which could be formed into a pocket around a person’s chest, that could be used to carry grain. The seller had some discretion with how tightly he packed the grain. He could give you more by packing down the grain. So what Jesus is trying to say is that we need to be fair and considerate in our dealings with others, and in doing so, we’ll be rewarded back, as one who gets grain that has been packed down and is running over when it’s poured into our garment. Jesus is describing a fair or a good deal. So, Jesus wants us to be fair in our dealings with others.

Why is it so easy to see and point out the sins of others, and not so easy to see our own sins? Let’s look at a few examples.

King Saul: In I Samuel 13, Saul had been told by Samuel, a prophet of God, to wait seven days until he came to offer a sacrifice, which would have included an appeal to God for help with the circumstances they were in. But when the seven days passed, he decided to go ahead and offer it himself. When Samuel asked him why he did this, he rationalized his sin. He said, “The people were scattering from me, and the Philistines were assembling for battle, and I forced myself.”

In I Samuel 15, God told Saul to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites, and everything they had, including people, herds and flocks. But instead, Saul destroyed most of the Amalekites, but he allowed their king to live, and kept some of the better animals. When Samuel confronted Saul about his decision, he tried to claim that he followed God’s orders, but that he kept the King alive. He said the people kept some of the better animals, so that they could sacrifice. Saul didn’t seem to be able to see that he didn’t follow what God said. He made excuses, and he blamed others.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus tells us that in the final judgment, there will be those who did many good things, but will still be lost. Many people believe that the good things they do will make up for failing to completely follow God. It prevents them from seeing how they really are spiritually.

We may be afraid of what others will think or that we may lose standing with others if we admit we are wrong. In John 12:42, the Bible tells us that some of the religious authorities of Jesus’ day believed in Him, but because they feared the Pharisees and were afraid of not being allowed to go to the synagogue, they wouldn’t confess their belief.

Some think that if they strictly follow certain religious rules and practices, and hold to particular doctrines, then that will somehow make up for other failures. It may even blind them from seeing their shortcomings. Matthew 23 contains a number of stern rebukes of the Jewish Pharisees and Scribes, the spiritual leaders of their time. In an effort to stay in compliance with Old Testament laws, they strictly followed a system of rules that had been developed over time. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees strictly followed the rules of tithing certain herbs, as the OT law commanded, but they neglected matters of much greater importance—judgment, mercy, and faith. We have to be careful about this. Just because we are confident that we are teaching the truth on doctrinal matters such as salvation, worship, benevolence, etc., doesn’t mean that we can neglect living righteously, and treating people with mercy. Yet sometimes, we get caught up in this kind of thinking.

If we don’t know what God’s word says, we can’t know how to identify sin. This was true of the Jews in Hosea 4:6, and it is true today. There is so much ignorance of God’s word; many people do not know that they are sinning. They don’t know enough to identify their sin.

We have all seen examples of public figures, such as politicians, or well-known religious leaders, who might be well known for condemning a certain practice or wrong, whose own sins are later discovered and exposed.

Matthew 7:1-6 shows that God sees our hypocrisy. God does not want us to go about correcting others, when we haven’t first dealt with our own sins. This doesn’t require perfection, because we all sin, but this has to do with serious moral failures that we haven’t addressed.

James 1:22-25 says that we must be doers of the word, not just hearers. A “hearer only” is likened to a person who looks into a mirror to see what they look like, and then walks away completely forgetting how they looked. God expects us to address our failings by being doers of the word.

Note that Jesus doesn’t condemn the practice of making or applying all judgments. This contradicts the popular view of this verse. John 7:24 says to “judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment.” If Jesus was saying never to judge, how would we go about showing a person that he is wrong? How would we correct someone? Notice what Jesus says in verse 5. He says, “First take the log out of your own eye, then you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

So when we go about correcting another person, there are some things we must keep in mind.

We must be gentle in our dealings with others. In Galatians 6:1, we are told to restore a person when he is overtaken in a fault. But we must be gentle with him. We must keep a close watch on ourselves, and be aware of our own temptations. 2 Timothy 2:25 also tells us that when we are correcting our opponents, we must be gentle with them, with a goal of helping them change and learn the truth.

We must be careful with how we act and what we say. Often our pride will lead us to speak evil, condemnatory things about another Christian. James 4 teaches us that we cannot speak evil of a fellow Christian, and we cannot put ourselves in the place of God as judge. We have to be careful about jumping to conclusions.

Ephesians 4 tells us to put away wrath, bitterness, slander, and malice toward others. We must be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving toward one another. Keep in mind what we noticed in Luke 6 in the companion passage to our base text of Matthew 7, where Jesus joins the concepts of forgiveness and giving to the same context of “judge not.”

We must also make sure that we are not imposing on others; our own personal scruples on matters in which God has not legislated. Romans 14 addresses this subject. We have to make sure that we don’t try to correct someone else for not following a rule or law that God hasn’t made. The Jewish leaders of the time of Christ had done this. While many of their rules originated from legitimate efforts to carefully follow the laws of God, they had allowed them to develop into laws that they expected everyone to follow. We must be careful not to do this.

When one person sins against another, we must go to the person and attempt to resolve it. There may be a temptation to talk to others about it, or to try to get others to deal with the person, but Jesus was specific in how this should be handled. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus says if your brother has sinned against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he accepts it, you have gained your brother. If he will not, take one or two more. If he will not hear them, inform the church. But if he will not hear the church, withdraw from him. People will often not follow this instruction, and instead talk about another person, or live with anger toward the person for a long time. Jesus is clear about how He wants us to handle this.

In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus says that our forgiveness from God is contingent upon our willingness to forgive others. This can be especially important when dealing with one person sinning against another.

When correcting another person, we must have the right motive. Our pride might cause us to want to win an argument, seek revenge, or “show up” another person. 2 Timothy 2:24 teaches that we must be gentle, patient, and have humility when dealing with others. James 5:19-20 tells us that when we turn an errant sinner from his error, we save his soul from death and cover his sins. That must be our motivation.

Consider the example of the Jews and the woman in John 8. They brought the woman who had been caught in the act of adultery and noted that the Old Testament law required that she be stoned. But they had another motive in mind. Verse 6 says they were testing Jesus in order to find some way of accusing Him of wrong. Another aspect that demonstrates that they weren’t really concerned about applying God’s law is that they didn’t bring the man with whom the woman had sinned. Jesus knew their motivation, and told the Jews that those who were without sin were to take up stones to throw at her. Being quite obviously convicted by their own consciences, they all walked away. Once they had all left, there were no more witnesses left to carry out the stoning as the law required. Notice that Jesus didn’t excuse her sin, or tell her she could continue in it. He said, “Go and sin no more.” We must make sure that our efforts to correct others have the proper motivation. Jesus’ actions demonstrated His love for the woman.

When correcting others, we must remember that the circumstances may dictate how we are to approach them about their sin. Jude 22-23 mentions different situations of dealing with those caught in sin. We are to have mercy on doubters, save others by snatching them from the fire, and to others show mercy with fear.

We have examples in the Bible when a stern rebuke was used in the correction of others. Jesus was very blunt and direct when rebuking the Pharisees. Luke 11:37-52 gives an account of the “woes” Jesus pronounced upon them. They were the religious leaders of their society. Their influence was widely felt, and Jesus felt the need to confront them in a very strong way.

In Galatians 2:11-12, Paul confronted Peter over hypocrisy in his social interactions with the Gentiles. He said, “I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”

In Acts 7:51-53, Steven called the Jews “stiff-necked” and “uncircumcised in heart and ears.” They had long resisted the truth and killed Jesus. Stephen called them out for it.

But we also have far less confrontational examples. We’ve already noticed Jesus’ dealings with the woman caught in adultery. He dealt tenderly with her and told her exactly what she needed to hear.

We see times when Jesus dealt with His disciples in a tender, understanding way. In Acts 1:6-7, just before Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples asked Him, “Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus had made it clear that His kingdom was not of this world, yet they still didn’t get it. Instead of being critical of them, He dealt with them in an understanding way.

The Bible recognizes that Christians are of differing spiritual maturities. A new Christian is likened to a newborn child. Just as a newborn child can only drink milk, new Christians are also limited in what they can understand. While we are never to excuse or tolerate sin, this suggests that our approach in dealing with a new Christian might need to be different than it would be in dealing with a mature, knowledgeable Christian.

What should our attitude be when we are on the receiving end of correction? Proverbs 9:7-8 says that a scoffer will hurl abuse, injury and hatred. A wise person will love the one who corrects him. He will learn from it and become even wiser.

A fool will always consider himself right, but a wise person will listen (Proverbs 12:15).

When one person corrects another, the Bible likens it to iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17).

So what have we learned?

* We must address our own sins before attempting to address the sins of others.
* We will receive back the same standards of judgment that we apply to others.
* It’s often hard for us to recognize our own sins.
* We must have the proper motive when correcting others. We must be gentle, forgiving, and kind.
* Sins between brethren should first be addressed with each other.
* The approach we use may depend on the particular circumstances.
* Our attitude when receiving correction demonstrates our level of wisdom.