

demonstrates discernment by recognizing the manipulative motives of the Pharisees and correcting them with biblical truth.

How were the Pharisees trying to manipulate Jesus? How did they hope to trap Him?

What did Jesus “discern” about this situation and the people involved? How does that compare to what the Pharisees “discerned” about Jesus?

What can we learn from Jesus’ example in this story about how we should respond when people try to manipulate us?

Read Mark 3:5 again. What emotions did Jesus feel toward the people who were watching Him?

Discernment is the ability to perceive God’s truth in any circumstance so that we may live according to it. What did Jesus discern about this group of religious leaders?

What evidence do you see that the Pharisees lacked discernment about the nature and heart of God?

Jesus’ reaction was one that all believers should echo in the face of injustice and hatred—anger and sorrow. Jesus combined His justified anger with compassion. He was grieved at the Pharisees’ or religious leaders’ hardness of heart. In Hebrew thought, a hard heart meant a stubborn resistance to God’s purpose. Not only was Jesus angry at the insensitivity of the hard-hearted Pharisees toward suffering, but also at their entire system of legalism that elevated the letter of the law over its spirit. In their concern for legal detail, the Pharisees forgot the mercy and grace God demonstrated to people when He made provision for the Sabbath.

Have a volunteer read Matthew 7:1-5.

When are you most tempted to point out a fellow believer’s shortcomings? What motivates you to do so?

What do we communicate to God when we take on the role of judge?

In light of Jesus’ command in these verses, what must we do about our judgmental attitudes?

Why do you think Jesus set the love standard so high for believers?

What is the point Jesus is making with the speck and the log imagery (vv. 3-4)?

Why is it so easy to be hypocritical, criticizing others for faults that also are ours? What are we trying to convince ourselves of?

What is the opposite of hypocrisy? Why would Jesus value that type of character?

What responsibility, if any, do we have when it comes to pointing out other believers’ sins? Read Galatians 6:1-2 for additional insight.

What does Jesus say is a prerequisite for doing so?

What does taking the log out of our own eyes involve? Why is this so hard to do?

Verse 5 indicates that we do have some responsibility to help remove “specks” from the eyes of fellow believers, but our motive for doing so is important. If the motive is to make ourselves feel more righteous, then we’re in no position to speak truth, and we’re guilty of replacing God’s righteousness with our own. Instead, our motivation should be rooted in humility and a desire to help our brothers and sisters in Christ stay in right relationship with God.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why is it important that disciples of Christ be discerning?

What actions can we take this week to avoid being hypocritical and to move toward consistency between our speech and our actions?

What is the difference between correcting someone with God’s law, and correcting them with God’s grace? How does this look in practical terms?

Pray

Pray for God’s guidance and wisdom as you begin the process of implementing God’s kingdom principles in your relationships and strengthening them for the glory of God.

Commentary

| Mark 3:1-6.

The account does not emphasize the healing but the question of Sabbath observance. Therefore, it ought to be classified as a conflict and/or pronouncement story, although the pronouncement is cast as a question (v. 4). To understand the Pharisaic position, one must realize that Sabbath observance was one of the more important elements in Judaism and one noticeable distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Mark both gave further insight into Jesus’ “liberal” attitude toward the Sabbath and showed how this attitude was a major factor in Pharisaic opposition that culminated in Jesus’ death (v. 6). Likely, Mark intended Jesus’ freedom in observing the Sabbath to justify Christian freedom with reference to that day. Some think the vividness and detail of the account indicates eyewitness testimony, probably that of Peter. This could be, but it is beyond proof.

3:1 Jesus and His disciples regularly worshiped in synagogues, as did Paul later. Inasmuch as this is not really a healing story, the affliction is not described in detail. It probably was some kind of paralysis.

3:2 The “some of them” are identified in v. 6 as the Pharisees. The imperfect tense (paretroun) is probably iterative: “they kept on watching” or “kept on lying in wait for.” Apparently they were more concerned to accuse Jesus than to worship. The scribal rule the Pharisees followed permitted healing on the Sabbath only where life was in danger, which certainly was not the present case.

3:3 The NIV’s “stand up front” is a modernization. The Greek says “get up in the middle” because, in second- and third-century synagogues at least, the seats were stone benches around the walls.

3:4 By His question, Jesus lifted the issue of Sabbath observance above a list of prohibitions to the higher general principle. No one would claim that it was “lawful” or right to do evil or kill on the Sabbath. The obvious alternative is that it must be right to do good and save life. To heal is to do good; to do nothing is to do evil. To heal is to “save” a life; not to heal is the equivalent of killing. For Mark, merely not doing work and resting on the Sabbath or the Lord’s Day was not enough. The day must be used for all kinds of good things. The Pharisees were silent because whatever answer they gave to Jesus’ question would have undermined their position on Sabbath observance.

3:5 Here is a certain reference to the anger of Jesus. In their parallel accounts, Matthew and Luke preferred not to attribute to Jesus an emotion that among humans is often sinful. Jesus’ anger was not sinful, however, because it was directed toward evil and because it was controlled. Perhaps “with righteous indignation” would avoid the offense. “At their stubborn hearts” could be translated more literally “at their hardness of heart,” but the word “hardness” often takes on the additional idea of willful “blindness.” The NEB and REB have a striking rendition here: “Looking round at them with anger and sorrow at their obstinate stupidity.” Jesus was angry not only at insensitivity toward suffering, but at the entire system of legalism where the letter is more important than the spirit.

3:6 In all of ancient literature, the Herodians are referred to only here and in 12:13 (cf. Matt 22:16). One can only surmise that they supported Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. They may have further advocated restoration of Herodian rule of Judea, which was a Roman imperial province governed by a legate, or (as such officials were later called) procurator, during the ministry of Jesus. Ordinarily the Pharisees would have had nothing to do with the Herodians, but common enemies often make strange bedfellows. Perhaps the Herodians opposed Jesus because of His relationship to John the Baptist, who condemned Herod’s divorce and remarriage (6:18).

The first explicit reference to Jesus’ death is in v. 6. The verse concludes not only the present pericope, but all five conflict stories. The Pharisees’ plot to “kill” (apolesosin, which literally means “destroy” as one would do to an animal) One who not only saved a life, but who came to give life to all, exemplifies Markan irony.

| Matthew 7:1-5.

7:1-2. What characteristics of great teachers do you admire most? Making you think hard? Using humor? Giving you vivid mental images? All these and more are evident in this passage. Jesus the Master Teacher challenged His followers to guard themselves against judging others in a critical and condemning way.

Surely Jesus meant for us to think hard about the implications of His command Do not judge. On the surface, Jesus seems to suggest that His followers are to avoid ever evaluating whether the actions of another are right or wrong. (In fact, a number of times, I've had people try to stop me from weighing in with my assessment of a situation saying, "Well, you know the Bible says, 'Judge not.'") Yet this cannot be Jesus' primary meaning. In this very passage, He expected His followers to determine who the dogs and the pigs are! And this, of course, requires some measure of judging. In context, then, what did Jesus intend? He wanted His followers to beware of the natural tendency to exhibit a harsh, judgmental spirit or to engage in destructive criticism against others. These are what Jesus condemned. Whenever we fall into the trap of petty fault-finding and finger-pointing, we shouldn't be surprised when we are judged by those same people. My dad taught me, "Son, when you point a finger at someone else, never forget that you have three fingers pointing back at yourself." He was giving me Jesus' essential message in verse 2. The measure you use in evaluating others' actions is exactly the same measure you should expect will be measured to you. Thus, as Jesus' disciples, we always must be doubly wary before we criticize others.

The Greek verb *krino* (related to our noun "critic") means "to judge" in the sense of thinking through a situation and reaching a conclusion. In the New Testament, it sometimes applies to judging in a courtroom or legal sense, either human or divine (John 18:31; Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:13). More often it is used in a general sense. In such cases it implies a person's selecting, preferring, or deciding for or against someone or something. Paul required believers to judge and condemn immorality within the church (see 1 Cor. 5:12). Obviously human judgments can be flawed; only God judges perfectly. In Matthew 7:1 Jesus warned believers not to judge others hypocritically or self-righteously.

7:3-4 Jesus now illustrates the foolishness of most judgmentalism with the hyperbole of the speck and the log. He is clearly not concerned about literal pieces of foreign matter in people's eyes but about His followers' moral failures. How often we criticize others when we have far more serious shortcomings in our own lives. Such behavior offers another example of hypocrisy (see Matt. 6:2, 5, 16), especially when we treat fellow believers this way, whose sins God has already forgiven. The speck can mean a small speck of anything. The repeated reference to your brother refers to fellow disciples (5:1-2), meaning that Jesus had the Christian community primarily in mind. But the principle is also applicable to anyone. Jesus' own familiarity with the carpenter's shop and the frustration of sawdust and small particles in one's eye personalizes the illustration.

7:5. Verse 5 makes clear that verses 3-4 do not absolve us of responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather, once we have dealt with our own sins, we are then in a position gently and lovingly to confront and try to restore others who have erred (see Gal. 6:1).

Jesus used the term hypocrite to describe a religious fraud. In the ancient Greek theater, a hypocrite was one who wore a mask while playing a part on the stage, imitating the walk, talk, and behavior typical of the character being portrayed. The term easily lent itself to one acting a part in life, pretending to be something one is not.

Generally, a hypocrite is one who intentionally seeks to deceive in order to gain some kind of personal benefit or advantage. In the religious arena, the hypocrite presents a front of being a devout and good person while inwardly being insincere and wicked. In other words, a hypocrite is a religious con man (or woman). Matthew 7:5 and its counterpart, Luke 6:42, are the only instance in which Jesus used hypocrite in relation to His followers. They would be self-deceived or deliberately deceptive hypocrites if they pretended to be without fault while seeking to minister to a stumbling believer.