

The Mote/Speck & the Beam/Plank

And why do you look at the mote/speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam/plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Mt. 7:3-5

The picture Jesus drew here is clear and powerful. He asked us to look upon a man with a large beam/plank(*dokos*...(from *dekomai* ... has the idea of bearing ..." Thayer 1385) protruding from his eye leaning over another man who has a speck/mote in his:

karphos "a small, dry stalk, a twig, a bit of dried stick" (from *karpho*, "to dry up"), or "a tiny straw or bit of wool," such as might fly into the eye... in contrast with *dokos*, "a beam supporting the roof of a building" (Vine's NT:2595)

The picture here is humorous on the surface but sad when we consider its terrible application. We have a man with the large beam or plank which bears the weight of the roof or second story protruding from his eye, trying help to remove a tiny piece of dried up material(chaff, splinter, wool) blown into his eye by the wind. The absurdity and impossibility of the picture strikes the heart powerfully. How can a man whose vision is completely obstructed by a beam/plank hope to be of any help to a man with something so small the wind can pick it up and blow it into the eye?

But like the parables, it contains vital information about judging that have been concealed to some and but are clear to others. This story just like all parables, contains truths not always easy to see.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Mt 13:10-14

Many who read these words see only the surface and thus completely miss the point. Analyzing the picture what do we see? What are the pertinent facts that can help see exactly what Jesus intended to teach His disciples?

- 1 The context is still judging. The particle "and" "introduces explanations and separates them from the things to be explained" (Thayer NT:1161).
- 2 The beam/plank is the hindrance that keeps the man from being able to help.
- 3 Until it is removed, all attempts to help the one with the speck is *hypocrisy*(word of condemnation where ones actions are seen in a good light, but the motives/reasons have destroyed it.
- 4 Once this beam/plank is removed, he will be able to see clearly, can help the one with the speck, and all hypocrisy is removed.
- 5 Seeing the speck and wanting to remove it was not the problem/hypocrisy.
- 6 The "beam/plank" is the issue. Once removed all is well and seeing the speck is a blessing.

Any interpretation of this parable without taking all these facts into consideration will lead us to remain ignorant to the truths it revealed. Those who see in this section a prohibition against all judgments are wrong, because with the "beam/plank" one is a hypocrite, but without the "beam/plank" they were able to see and remove the speck. There is no problem in wanting to help a brother with his speck! The problem in its entirety was the "beam/plank!"

What is the Beam/Plank?

Since the entire parable rests on the "beam/plank," once we identify it, the parable will become evident. While the obvious answer is that the "beam/plank" is anything that keeps us from seeing clearly enough to help another with their speck, that doesn't really answer the question. It would not be hypocrisy if it were not an actual problem. Ignorance never makes one a hypocrite! So we must sift the Scriptures and seek for things that have kept otherwise godly men and women from seeing things clearly and drawing the right conclusions.

The first three chapters of Romans were designed to reveal that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God(Rom. 3:23)." The Holy Spirit places all mankind into three specific groups. The first were those we could call "first generation apostates." All those through the centuries who knew God, but rejected him as God and chose instead to follow their own lusts and desires(Rom. 1:18-32). They fell into the many gross and vile sins listed there.

The second group(Rom. 2:1-16) were those who knew enough about good and evil to judge and

condemn those who violated their sense of right and wrong, but feel none of God's wrath and anger upon themselves. The third group (which also included overlapped into the second group) were the Jews (2:17-29; 3:1-20).

Since the second group deals with those whose judging will bring their own condemnation we can learn a great deal about the "beam/plank." These are the individuals who in the midst of judging others overlook their own faults and destroy all hope of seeing clearly and being effective in removing the specks of others.

Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

The Holy Spirit clearly condemned as "without excuse" ("anapalogetos, ... without defense or excuse ... cannot be defended, inexcusable...") Thayer p. 41; 379) all who judge others guilty of violating God's Laws without seeing that they too stand condemned. The spiritual logic is made up of six points.

- 1 They judge others with a sense that they have a higher moral and ethical position.
- 2 They know that the judgment of God is according to truth against all who practice evil.
- 3 They judge those who practice such things, and yet they are doing exactly the same things.
- 4 When they judge others they reveal their knowledge and condemn themselves.
- 5 When they ignore in themselves what they see clearly and condemn in others they reveal the hypocrisy of their own judgment.
- 6 Thus their judgement of others creates greater condemnation in themselves. "With what manner you judge you will be judge and the way you measure will be measured back to you."

These six things form the foundation of the "beam/plank." Whenever anyone can pass judgment on someone else based upon God's word and not see clearly that by that judgment they actually condemn themselves have a "beam/plank" in their own eye, keeping them from seeing clearly. No matter what they see as evil in another, that sense of evil condemns them and should have led to humility and mercy in the way they look upon others. James made this evident when he said:

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. James 2:10-12

For an example, the Holy Spirit used adultery and murder. If someone considers murder to be a terrible sin worthy of death, but then commits adultery with no real concern, because his lusts have blinded him to the evil of adultery he has a "plank/beam" in his eye. Since both these acts violate the same Ten Commandments they are equally condemned and equally evil. To see the evil of murder but be unable to see the evil of adultery is a "beam/plank."

Their attitude toward murder is simply a prejudice against an act they find abhorrent, not a true acknowledgment of the justice of God's law. If it were true justice they would see both acts as sinful and recognize their own guilt. Until they see their own guilt for adultery they will never clearly see and be able to help the one guilty of murder. There is no moral superiority among God's people. Only a humility and sense of unworthiness that keeps them from acting like we are somehow better or in a higher position. Speaking of the same things Paul described in Romans, God lamented to Isaiah, the terrible hypocrisy of His people in judging and the vile "beam/plank" in their eyes. They thought they were better than the Gentiles even as they acted just as the Gentiles acted and were completely blinded to it.

"I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' To a nation that was not called by My name. 2 I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way that is not good, According to their own thoughts; 3 A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; Who sacrifice in gardens, And burn incense on altars of brick; 4 Who sit among the graves, And spend the night in the tombs; Who eat swine's flesh, And the broth of abominable things is in their vessels; 5 Who say, 'Keep to yourself, Do not come near me, For I am holier than you!' These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day. 6 'Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will repay — Even repay into their bosom' — Isa 65:1-6

The Holy Spirit then followed up His identification with three questions that force an answer and when understood can forever remove the "beam/plank" from the eye.

And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who "will render to each one according to his

deeds": Rom 2:3-6

All who judge(*pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong*) and yet do exactly the same things(*violate any other statute in God's Law*) yet are not humbled, penitent and strongly moved to change are doing one of three things and must choose which:

1. They reckon they can escape what God has punished others for doing(an impossibility).
2. They despise God's goodness for they did not take advantage of the opportunity to repent.
3. They are actually trying to store up as much wrath as they can on the day of judgment.

These will be the issues set forth on the day of judgment as God judges each as they have judged and measure back as they have measured. Since they could see clearly the evil of their neighbor's deeds(speck), but could not or refused to see, that the same sense of judgment they felt would also condemn them they were blinded by the beam/plank.

But God clearly revealed here that if they did not change this attitude then they must choose between three assessments of their conduct that would then be measured back to them. Can we honestly believe that our own feelings toward the evil conduct of our neighbor will allow us to escape from the same feelings that God holds toward us? Can we really think that our attitude will not make our own judgement stronger? Do we want to flaunt the arrogance of "I just thought I would get away with it?"

If we don't like that outcome then the second option is to tell God we actually despised and set at nought the goodness and mercy of God who gave us time to repent and all the while we simply refused to see ourselves clearly and take advantage of that opportunity? Even though God had given us a clear understanding of good and evil and a sense of disgust at the wicked conduct of others, our refusal to repent of our own equally abhorrent and disgusting violations of Law we just didn't think it was important enough to apply it to ourselves?

If we don't like this option the only other choice is that we were trying to create as much wrath and anger toward our conduct as we possibly could. This attitude is so abhorrent to God that to do it is to create even more wrath against us. Are we really wanting to live in a manner that will make God even more angry and disgusted with us?

Thus a clear understanding of the equality of all God's judgments against what is evil and what is sinful allows no partiality or prejudice. When we judge the Law itself and categorize sin into what we can tolerate and what is disgusting we have a beam/plank. When we can judge and condemn others for things that are wicked yet can commit equally condemned actions without feeling any need to repent or be humbled, we have a beam/plank.

A Pharisee with a Plank/Beam in his Eye

In another parable, Jesus sought to unmask this plank. How could this Pharisee help remove the speck from this brother's eye when he was so filled with hypocrisy and disgust at the conduct of a man who was actually morally superior to him since he went home justified? The humble penitence of the publican shamed the arrogant assessment of the Pharisee. The plank/beam is blinding the eyes of all "*who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*"

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14

Can the Blind Lead the Blind?

In another parable Jesus compared the blind leading the blind to those who have a "*plank/beam*" seeking to help those who have a speck. True disciples are going to be like their teacher who did not judge and did not treat any with contempt or act in a morally superior manner.

And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? 40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. 41 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye. Lk

Compassion on those who are Ignorant and Going Astray

Since the disciple will be like his teacher, and our Teacher is the great High Priest, who sympathizes with our weaknesses and has compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness, we must do the same. There is no place for a plank/beam in the eyes of those who look at their brethren in the same manner as our High Priest. When we see our own weaknesses clearly, there is no *plank/beam*.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ... 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. Heb. 4:15-16; 5:1-3

A Spirit of Gentleness

The best way to keep our sight clear of all hypocrisy in judgment is to truly “*bear one another burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” We do this when regardless of the trespass or our own personal feelings toward it, we seek to restore in a spirit of gentleness. As we are doing this, we are looking to and considering ourselves. We are watching our own heart.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Gal 6:1-3

No one is above temptation. The best method of being certain that we do not have any beam in our own eye is when all the while we are seeking to restore them in a spirit of gentleness we are looking at ourselves realizing that but for God's grace, we also might have gone.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 1Cor 10:12-13

Nothing Holy to Dogs

While we are not to judge, Jesus here gave us a law that frees us from judging in the terrible difficulties that arise due to persecution. Once the *plank/beam* is removed, and we seek to remove the specks from the eyes of others, we will come upon a specific group of people who are very dangerous. In order to be “*wise as serpents and harmless as doves*” we have to know where to stop. Jesus gave a limit.

“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” Mt. 7:6

When we are persecuted, mistreated and maligned for our love, mercy and compassion, we are allowed to discriminate. Jesus limited our non-judgment, and mercy. When “*brother shall deliver up brother to death, the father his child: children against parents, and cause them to be put to death.*” When we are “*hated by all for My name's sake,*” and “*When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.*” (Mt. 10:21-23).

Thus the dogs and swine who will rend us are those who persecute and hate. We can forgive, we can be non-judgmental, but if we keep putting holy and valuable spiritual things before such people, they will destroy us. Jesus offered each of us a way of escape. This is one area where we are to judge. If we have brought good and holy things to others and they have thoroughly rejected them, at some point we no longer have to do it.

when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Acts 18:6-7

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. John 15:20-22