
REMOVING SPECKS AND PLANKS

George Battey | 3/8/14

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What makes some sins worse than others?
- 2) What does the "eye" represent in Mt 7:3?
- 3) Does one man simply notice the speck in his brother's eye or is he staring at the speck?
- 4) How did someone get a splinter in their eye?
- 5) What is the purpose for removing the plank from our own eye first?
- 6) Jesus said, "Remove the speck from your brother's eye." What is implied about our brother?
- 7) What was indicated by divided hoofs and chewing cud?
- 8) What are the "holy things" which we should not cast before dogs and swine?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 7:3-6

³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the 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.

⁶ "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.

Some men have tremendous fault: they judge and condemn other people for their minor flaws, while they themselves are guilty of greater.

Matthew 15:1-3

¹ Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,

² **"Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?** For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

³ He answered and said to them, **"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God** because of your tradition?"

Jesus addresses this problem in the *"Sermon on the Mount."* He began in Matthew 7:1 by saying, *"Judge not."*

At first this seems like an absolute statement: *"Don't judge anyone, in any way, for any reason."* But now Jesus is going to explain what He meant.

TEXT (1)

Matthew 7:3-4

³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the 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?

speck – a small object; NIV translates this as *"a speck of sawdust"*

plank – of course is quite large a *log*

Notice that both of these objects are made of the same material: **wood**. Both men have the same problem; they have wood in their eye. But one fellow has a much larger piece.

This leads me to conclude that there are ***degrees of sin***.

All sin results in spiritual death (Rom 6:23), but some sins are greater in the sense that:

- Some sins become **more flagrant**.
- Some sins have **greater ramifications**.

John 19:11 (Jesus before Pilate)

¹¹ ... the one who delivered Me to you has **the greater sin.**"

Matthew 10:15

¹⁵ ... **it will be more tolerable** for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!

We've heard all our lives that "*sin is sin; there's no such thing as big sins and little sins.*" Well, that's not quite true. Jesus taught some men do have "*greater sins.*"

THE EYE

Q: What is the significance of the eye?

When we study the Biblical use of the "eye" we find it represents ***a man's outlook, or his way of looking at things.***

Matthew 6:22

²² "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

Now the man with a splinter in his eye is a man with a slight defect in his ***outlook.***

BUT, the man with a plank in his eye is "*way off base.*" This man has no business correcting anyone.

THE SPECK

Alright, we know:

- the eye – a man's outlook on life.
- the splinter – a fault, a defect, an error.

Now there's a curious thing about this illustration Jesus is giving. ***Why is the splinter in the man's eye?*** Usually men get splinters in their hands, or sometimes their feet.

- How did this man get a splinter in his eye?
- What in the world was he doing to get a splinter in his eye?

ILL: Like going to the doctor with a bean stuck in your ear.

Well, that's the question that is puzzling the hypocrite.

behold (βλέπεις) – present, indicative. Lit: "Why do you keep looking at the speck? Why are you staring at it?"

A splinter is so small that a person would have to hunt carefully and diligently to even find it. It makes us wonder how a man with a plank in his eye could:

- even see the splinter to begin with
- much less attempt to remove it

But this hypocrite not only sees the splinter, he is staring at it. It's as though he cannot believe his eyes! He's flabbergasted! He thinks, "*That's the silliest thing I've ever seen in my life! I can't believe it! What was this man doing that he got a splinter in his eye of all things?*"

It's as though all the good things about this brother is being ignored and only the tiny flaw can be seen.

Jesus doesn't tell us how the man got a splinter in his eye. That's not important. He just wants us to see the folly in hypocritical judging.

THE PLANK

The text goes on to say that this hypocrite not only is staring at his brother's speck, but he does not "consider" the plank in his own eye.

consider (κατανοέω) – "to observe, mark, contemplate, to discern"

This is the same word used in Lk 12:24:

Luke 12:24

²⁴ **Consider** the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. ...

The idea is to ***meditate upon them***, not just glance at them. Again:

Hebrews 3:1

¹ Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, **consider** the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

This is not a casual thought. This is an exhortation to think long and hard, to contemplate and meditate about Jesus.

The word consider in Mt 7:3 is a present, indicative. Lit: "Why do you not keep on considering the plank in your own eye?"

This hypocritical judge is aware of the fact that he has a plank in his eye, but he has not bothered to meditate about it. He does not let his mind dwell on this major fault of his own.

- Is he astonished at the plank in his own eye? No!
- Is he flabbergasted by his plank? No!
- Does he stare at his plank in amazement? No!
- Does he wonder how in the world a plank got stuck in his eye? No!

None of these things amaze him. Yes ... he knows the plank is there, but he is not going to meditate on that. Why? Because he's too busy staring at his brother's speck!

The bewildering thing to him is not the plank, but the splinter!

A BIBLE EXAMPLE

This is a tremendous illustration, but does such a thing really ever happen? Are people really that blind to their own faults? The Bible answers this question, "Yes." There are several Biblical examples we could give, but one is particularly outstanding: King David.

- David committed adultery with Bathsheba.
- Then he murdered her husband Uriah.

2 Samuel 12:1-7

¹ Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor.

² The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds.

³ But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him.

⁴ And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

⁵ So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die!

⁶ And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! ...

David could see the injustice of stealing a man's sheep, but that's a speck compared to stealing a man's wife!

There is a tremendous defect in a man's outlook if he thinks stealing a sheep is worse than stealing a wife!

LUKE'S ACCOUNT

It is interesting to notice in Luke's account of the gospel Jesus spoke about specks and planks right after He said:

Luke 6:39

³⁹ ... "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?"

Only those who have corrected their own faults are fit leaders to help others out of sin.

ILL: I know people who worried themselves sick over other people's spiritual lives, but they themselves are not faithful at church.

To the elders of the church Paul said:

Acts 20:28

²⁸ ... take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, ...

Notice the order there: ***yourself first***, then the flock.

TEXT (2)

Matthew 7:5

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.

Removing a speck from an eye is a delicate operation and requires keen eyesight. Jesus, then, instructs that we clear our own eyes first before operating on others.

Matthew 5:19

¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Notice the "*doing*" was placed before the "*teaching*." That was no accident.

Q: Why do we remove the plank from our own eye first?

- Do we correct our eyesight just so we can stare better at our brother's fault?
- Just so we may see more critically and criticize better?

NO! The purpose is corrective: in order that we might remove the speck from our brother's eye.

Salvation is not a selfish thing. A man does not become a disciple of Jesus just so he himself can be saved! He becomes a disciple so he can help others become saved also.

NOTE: These are commands, not suggestions. Two things are commanded:

- Remove the plank from our eye
- Proceed to help our brethren remove specks from their eyes

NOTE: Jesus indicates it is possible to have your own eyes clear enough to remove specks from other's eyes!

(I mention this because a lot of times when you try to talk with some people they snap back, "*Who do you think you are? You think you're perfect? What right do you have to tell me anything?*")

But Jesus is saying it is possible for us to have clear enough eyesight to assist others.

Leviticus 19:17 (NIV)

¹⁷ Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

Psalms 51

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, ...

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

Jesus told Peter:

Luke 22:32

³² ... when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

SUBMISSION

To remove a speck implies: our brother is willing to have it removed.

It would indeed be difficult to remove a splinter from an eye when a man is resisting us.

Jesus, then, implies that we must be willing to submit to correction.

Proverbs 13:18

¹⁸ Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction,
But he who regards a rebuke will be honored.

Proverbs 15:32

³² He who disdains instruction despises his own soul,
But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

Ecclesiastes 7:5

⁵ It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Perhaps we would do ourselves a favor by asking brethren if they see any splinters that need removed.

(Maybe we ought to ask brethren if they see any planks that need removed from our eyes!)

When is the last time you sincerely asked someone if there are any improvements you need to make? Perhaps they can see a "*splinter*" that we cannot.

TEXT (3)

Let's notice the final verse of our text which at first seems disconnected from the previous verses:

Matthew 7:6

⁶ "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.

This verse clearly shows that the command, "*Judge not*," (Mt 7:1) is not absolute. We must to some degree judge and determine who are dogs and swine.

- We must not be **hypocrites** in judging
- But neither are we **simpletons**

We must not treat ***a dog like a priest*** who deserves the holy food of the altar

We must not treat ***swine like kings*** who deserve ornaments of pearls.

DOGS

Let's start with these dogs and say a few things about them.

dogs (κύων) – "a cur; a mongrel; an inferior dog." A scavenger that hunts through heaps of garbage looking for food.

(This is not a house dog – not "Fifi"; this is **a tramp!**)

The dogs Jesus had reference to were:

- fierce
- half-famished
- ran in packs
- fed on carcasses

This word dog came to symbolize treacherous men:

Psalms 22:16

¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. ...

Sometimes the Bible used "dogs" as a symbol of homosexuality:

Deuteronomy 23:17-18

¹⁷ "There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel.

¹⁸ You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of **a dog** to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.

Revelation 22:15

¹⁵ But outside are **dogs** and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

When Jesus said not to give what is holy to the dogs, He was alluding to the meat offered on the altar. Because it was an offering it was considered holy meat. Any leftovers were to be burnt with fire (Lev 7:15ff).

Unclean men were not even allowed to eat this meat.

Leviticus 7:20

²⁰ But **the person** who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that belongs to the LORD, **while he is unclean**, that person shall be cut off from his people.

It would be profane to take this holy meat and offer it to a dog!

SWINE

The swine was of course an unclean animal to the Jew:

Leviticus 11

³ Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud – that you may eat.

⁷ and **the swine**, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, is unclean to you.

I'm not really sure why God insisted on these qualities in animals, but I read something that made sense. One man suggested:

divided hoof – indicated *a clean walk*

chews cud – meant to ruminate, or reflect on matters

Some men are like:

dogs – who do not split the hoof (i.e. make no claim to a clean walk), nor chew the cud (i.e. reflect on spiritual things)

swine – though they split the hoof (i.e. profess a clean walk, masquerading as a disciple), yet they chew no cud (i.e. they are filthy in their thoughts and intents)

Not only are swine unclean to Jews, but they can become quite vicious. If you scatter a bucket of pearls in front of hungry hogs they will probably think it was grain. But once they discover you've tricked them they will madly rush upon you in rage!

Those who would offer pearls to pigs know nothing about:

- the value of pearls, or
- the nature of pigs

IDENTIFYING DOGS AND SWINE

The only hope of identifying who these dogs and swine really are is to examine the context.

NOTE: You cannot determine a hog by his skin color! There are white pigs as well as black. The same goes for a dog: there are black dogs and white dogs!

(We cannot withhold the gospel from people just because of their skin color! Skin color is not what makes someone a dog or a hog!)

In v5 Jesus implies a person must be willing to have a splinter removed from his eye. However, some men would not be willing to have the speck removed and Jesus here tells us what to do.

v3-5 – tells **how to correct** other people

v6 – tells **who** to correct

"that which is holy ... pearls" – the reproof and correction we attempt to offer people.

We are not to pull specks out of the eyes of dogs and pigs.

Psalms 141:5

⁵ Let the righteous strike me;
It shall be a kindness.
And let him rebuke me;
It shall be as excellent oil;
Let my head not refuse it. ...

Reproof is like holy oil. Isn't this the "*holy thing*" Jesus said not to give to dogs?

Proverbs 25:12

¹² Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold
Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.

Reproof is like ornaments of gold. Isn't this like the "*pearl*" Jesus said we should not give to pigs?

Proverbs 9:8

⁸ Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you;
Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Isn't this what Jesus was telling us in Mt 7:6: "Do not correct a scoffer (dog / swine), lest he hate you"?

Here is a general principle: **Don't waste time in presenting the gospel, or anything holy, to people who don't want it.**

Matthew 15:14

¹⁴ **Let them alone.** They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

NT EXAMPLES

The NT supplies many examples of how men applied this principle.

- 1) **Jesus refused to give additional signs to the Pharisees (Mt 16:1-4).**
- 2) **Jesus refused to perform miracles for Herod (Lk 23:8-9).**
- 3) **Jesus taught the apostles not to waste precious time on hardened sinners:**

Matthew 10:14

¹⁴ And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

- 4) **Paul refused to waste time on men who were dogs and swine:**

Acts 13:46

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

SUMMARY

Jesus is teaching a principle:

We do not purposefully sow the precious seed upon soil we know to be rocky, thorny, or hardened.

The Biblical example for evangelism is to concentrate on the most receptive areas. It is true that if enough time, effort and money were invested a few people might be converted in any given city. But the Biblical example is to concentrate on the most receptive places.

- Paul spent a few days, maybe weeks at Athens, but
- He spent a year and a half in Corinth (Acts 18:11).
- He spent two years and three months at Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10).

CONCLUSION

As we look back on this section of Scripture we see a delicate balance.

- We are not to judge men hypocritically and unjustly, but
- We are to use discretion and not waste precious time by offering correction to vicious men.

Remember, **5 verses were devoted to judging**, only **1 to indiscretion**. This shows us where the greater danger lies.