

DON'T LEAP TO JUDGE

...LOOK TO HEAL

by Dorman Followwill

One of the things Blythe and I love to do is read a novel out loud to each other. One of our favorite novels we have ever read together is *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. Given the uncontested fame of the movie version, it is certainly one of the most widely known stories of our times. One character in that story stands out in my mind Melanie Wilkes. It is a portrayal of a Christian influencing a community. Two scenes about Melanie are particularly significant for me in the movie. In the first scene, Melanie and Scarlett and Mrs. Mead are leaving the Confederate hospital after a long day of nursing wounded soldiers. As they leave, a gaudily dressed woman approaches them on the steps of the hospital, wanting to speak with Melanie. The woman is the town prostitute, Belle Watling, complete with dyed red hair, low-cut dress, and heavy make-up. Scarlett tells Melanie not to talk with her. But Melanie receives her with complete kindness, and then graciously takes Belle's contribution for the hospital, which neither of the other women would stoop to accept.

The second scene is one of the dramatic high points of the movie. All through the story, Scarlett nurses secret dreams of running away with Melanie's husband Ashley. One day, Scarlett and Ashley are caught embracing each other in the lumber shop. The two women who see them together scandalize the whole town with the news. Later that night, Melanie throws a surprise birthday party for Ashley. Rhett demands that Scarlett go to the party as invited, so that Melanie can have the public satisfaction of throwing Scarlett out of her home. Scarlett arrives at the door dressed up in a red gown, wearing plenty of rouge. Her eyes glitter coldly like the eyes of a cat in a corner. The fiddler playing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow* suddenly stops playing, and all the guests gasp at her appearance. All eyes turn to Melanie, to see what she will do. But Melanie walks all the way across the room, greets Scarlett with open arms, and asks her to help receive the other guests. Then Melanie takes her by the arm and escorts her through the gauntlet of people in the room who had all judged her and wanted to see her thrown out.

In *Gone With the Wind*, Melanie Wilkes as a Christian never judged another person, even when it appeared she had every right and opportunity, even when her whole town would have cheered her if she had. When she died at the end of the movie, Rhett said simply, "She was the only truly kind person I have ever known." Both Blythe and I love this character.

A day of righteous judgment is coming, when Jesus will stand as the true Judge

Oh, to be a person who showers God's grace on all, who does not leap to judge, but looks to heal! Jesus speaks powerfully on this subject through the bold words of Matthew 7:1-6 in the Sermon on the Mount. Here this great sermon takes a turn from Jesus' piercing examination of the hearts of his hearers in Matthew 5 and 6, to a great dissertation on judgment in chapter 7. In verses 1-6 Jesus disallows any human judgmentalism, but he will clearly outline for his listeners in verses 13-27 that a day of righteous judgment is coming, and he himself will stand as the true Judge. This outline of the chapter is important: we have no need or right to judge others, in light of his judgment that is surely coming.

Do not judge, Matthew 7:1,2

Jesus begins with an unequivocal command:

"Do not judge...."

This command (a statement in the imperative mood in Greek) means, "Do not speak or think ill of, decide against, or judge." This is not a suggestion Jesus makes for our relationships with others, nor is it something we might do for spiritual extra credit. This is a command from our King, and we are to obey it. Jesus does not mince words here. He does not say, "Do not judge unless the sin is really heinous---then lambaste them." Nor does he say, "Do not judge unless your brother commits one of the big three sins: practicing homosexuality, child abuse, or adultery---then you can nail them to the wall." No, Jesus simply says, "Do not judge...." no matter what they do or say. No allowance is given for us to judge others. Period.

Unfortunately, I am convinced that this is the most often disobeyed command in the Christian church. We have judging others down to a science. Somewhere along the way, we have forgotten that judging others is disobeying Jesus Christ; it is a serious negation of his Lordship over us. Simply put, judging anyone for anything is sin. But the way our society today feels judged by us Christians makes me weep. All too often we are the salt of the earth, all right---rubbed right into the wounds of the people of the earth. Too often when confronted by someone else's mistakes, we leap to judge them. I find myself doing this, which breaks my heart.

But Jesus tells us that leaping to judge others is a very foolish thing. He says,

"Do not judge, that you may not be judged, for by which judgments you judge will you be judged, and by which measure you measure it will be measured to you."

In the text of each of these three similar phrases in verses 1 and 2, there is a shift from the active voice to the passive voice. In other words, I make an active choice to judge someone else, but I will be passively carried away by that very same judgment myself, no longer having any choice in the matter.

After David sinned with Bathsheba, Nathan brought a case to David to judge. It was about a rich man with many sheep who stole the only ewe lamb of a poor man. David was very angry, and his judgment against the thief was harsh: "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die." Then Nathan said, "You are the man!" David's angry judgment blew up in his face. There is a deadly reciprocity when we judge others, because our judgment inevitably comes home to visit us.

Why does this happen? It happens because we typically judge others most harshly in areas where we ourselves are the weakest, but are in denial of our weakness. I find myself harshly judging very busy people, yet I am way too busy myself! This has become a diagnostic tool for me in my spiritual life: I ask the Lord to help me hear myself, so that when I find myself judging someone else with intense passion, I need to look at that very same area in my own life. One way to visualize this is that when I point the finger in judgment at someone else, the other three fingers folded back in secret in my own hand are pointing right back at me.

This basic principle that our judgment of others will be applied to us is also God's ingenious way of erasing our infamous double standards. We like to apply a harsh standard to everyone else's sin, but a very lenient standard to our own sin. Our lies are only "little white lies," but we are indignant and judgmental when someone lies to us, calling into question the integrity of every area of their life. But over and against our double standards, Jesus warns us: "Beware when you set yourself up in the judge's chair, because you will actually find yourself in the chair of the condemned."

Now we all know this, but we still leap to judge others. What makes us so judgmental? Judging is profoundly arrogant, and arrogance in turn is rooted in our deep insecurity. Moreover, our insecurity represents a still deeper denial of God's good word about us: We stubbornly choose to believe our own critical self-assessment instead of what God says about us. In his eyes, we are kings and queens in his royal household! But because of

our insecurity and deep self-criticism, we pick at others to try to shore up our own sagging self-worth. All of this is nothing other than sin playing itself out in our lives, imprisoning us and condemning others.

Because of our insecurity, we feel we have to protect ourselves. So we want to deny any weakness or sin in ourselves, because that would be a chink in our armor. This is the root problem. At the core, judgmentalism is a failure to admit our own sin. This is why Jesus told the men who brought the adulterous woman to him in John 8 that the man without sin should cast the first stone. When we consider our sin first, we find we need help ourselves and are in no position to judge anyone. But what usually happens is that we turn a microscopic eye to others' sin, never even stopping to consider our sin. I hate to admit it, but I see this so often in my own marriage: If there is something going wrong, I immediately leap to blame and judge Blythe; or if Blythe is innocent, then I start exploring my case against God himself (just as Adam did in the Garden). But in the vast majority of the cases I myself, through my selfish sin, am the guilty party and the cause of the conflict.

But the Scriptures are clear in Romans 1-3 that "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...." We are all under a death sentence because we are all under sin, and sin brings death. How can one person on death row pass judgment on another person on death row? It is a moot point. Rather, the one redeemed from death row should have compassion for his or her former comrades in crime, seeking only to be used by God to redeem all others on the death row of sin.

Thus, there are two principles here in regard to judging. First, leave any and all judgment to Jesus Christ. He makes it clear in Matthew 7:21-23 that he will judge in the end. He doesn't need us to judge for him in the here-and-now. In fact, he himself forestalled all judgment on others during his life in Israel two thousand years ago, according to his own word in John 3:16,17: 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.' Jesus was not leaping to judge, but seeking to save. Today, living in us by the Holy Spirit, Jesus still is not leaping to judge, but seeking to save. We must leave all judgment to him, and be available for him to compassionately save others through us, by the kindness of God that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4).

We have a great opportunity to apply this truth right now. Now is a season of real spiritual searching in our country, as witnessed by this week's cover article in *Newsweek*: "The Search for the Sacred: America's Quest for Spiritual Meaning." The article says, "Maybe it's a critical mass of baby boomers in the contemplative afternoon of life. Or anxiety over the coming millennium. Or a general dissatisfaction with the materialism of the modern world. For these reasons and more, millions of Americans are embarking on a search for the sacred in their lives." Oh, that we may forestall all judgment on our lost seekers in our communities, and receive them with open arms and acts of kindness, that God may lead them to repentance through us!

The second principle in regard to judging is this: Where judgment is needed, let it begin with me. So often in my marriage, in my work here at PBC, and in my family, I find it so easy to find anyone else to blame and judge, and to pass over my own part of the problem. But I need to humbly turn myself over to my Lord and Judge, and let Jesus Christ deal with me first. In the case of judgment, having a "me first" attitude is perfectly okay.

So Jesus begins by telling us, Do not judge lest our own cutting edge of judgment comes back to cut us to the quick. Jesus next tells us....

Judging is sheer folly, Matthew 7:3,4

One significant change in the Greek text from verses 1,2 to verses 3-5 is that Jesus addresses two different audiences. All his commands in verses 1,2 are spoken to "you all," the second person plural, or the large audience as a whole. But his words in verses 3-5 are spoken to "you personally," the second person singular. He

now wants us to focus on ourselves privately and individually, on how we judge others and how ridiculous it all is.

Jesus asks each of us individually two questions in verses 3,4:

"And why do you look at the sawdust in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, 'Let me take the sawdust out of your eye,' and behold the log in your own?"

So who is Jesus placing opposite to us in this scene? Jesus says this person is our brother. Why does he say brother here, instead of neighbor or friend? It is because, unfortunately, we are the most judgmental of those closest to us, which is tragic when you consider that they are precisely the ones to whom we should be giving the most elbow room. Often within families, where the love runs deepest, the sharp criticism runs just as deep. Often within the family of God, where we are all brothers and sisters, the judgment runs deep. The trick is to understand this as painful truth, accept the judgment against you as a simple but painful reality, but insofar as you are able, refrain from judging in return. Thus you will be a part of the solution, not a part of the problem.

Now, what is in my brother's eye? Literally, a piece of sawdust, a very small particle of dry wood that would be a tremendous irritant. I wear contacts, and any little speck that gets into my eyes drives me crazy! Imagine what a sharp piece of sawdust would do. My brother is in great pain in this scene.

But Jesus says that while my brother's eye is watering from the irritation of the sawdust, I am flailing about with a log in my own eye! There are several things to be noticed about this tragi-comic scene Jesus draws for us here. First, the log in my eye renders me blind to see anything. Thus, my "looking" at the faults of another to weigh them and judge them is obviously ludicrous. Second, I am totally oblivious to the gross problems in my own heart, because my eye is so critically focused on my brother. Thus, I am blind to my brother because of the log, and blind to myself because I am totally focused on my brother. Thus, in seeking to set myself up as the judge I am utterly blind. Third, the log is infinitely larger than the speck of sawdust. Such a comparison implies that having a heart that is judgmental and therefore arrogant and blind to its own faults is an infinitely larger problem than anything for which I judge my brother. Fourth, I actually hurt my brother when I ram him with the log in my eye as I try to closely inspect the sawdust in his eye.

So what is the main problem here in verses 3 and 4? It is profound blindness! This blindness is seen in the command of the log-infested eye doctor in verse 4: "Let me fix your problem." We forget that we can't fix anybody. Only the Lord can solve others' problems, and he won't use a blind man who is so unaware of his own arrogance and personal penchant to sin that he commands someone else to let him fix their problem. This blindness has gotten to the point of being ridiculous! In the end, if we want to become a part of Jesus' salvation of the blind in this world, we must go to him to utterly remove our own blindness. Thus, once again, we must leave all judgment to him. And let judgment begin with me first.

Blythe and I have been praying about our own "kitchen conversation" in our home. It can be so easy to criticize and judge others, looking to fix them. But we have been praying that God will nip all this critical talk in the bud. We want the table talk in our home, which our children overhear, to be gracious and not cutting.

Look to heal, don't leap to judge, Matthew 7:5

Now Jesus erases this tragi-comic scene from our minds and soberly redirects our attention to ourselves and how we are the foolish eye doctor:

"Stage actor, first take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the sawdust out of your brother's eye."

In our English text, Jesus addresses the person here as "hypocrite," which transliterates the Greek term *hupokrita*. But that Greek term literally means "stage actor." Thus, Jesus says, "Stage actor---you who are trying to play the role of the true judge of all living---you need first to be judged by me...." This word is a chilling reminder that when we try to judge someone else, we are actually trying to play God in their lives, both in the sense of judging them and in the sense of trying to fix their problem. This term "stage actor" is very convicting indeed!

But the next word in this verse is my favorite word in today's text: "*First* take the log out of your eye...." If we would only heed this little word "first," it would stop virtually all judgmentalism. If we would stop to consider the state of our own sinfulness before God, we would have to turn to him for forgiveness, we would be humbled, and we would not turn a judgmental eye on another. However, our human antipathy to admitting our own sin makes us focus on our brother first and look at all his problems. Again, this is especially true in the marriage relationship or other key relationships, where we get into great conflict at times because we blame, judge, and condemn the other person without first stopping to consider what God needs to change in us.

Jesus gives us another solemn command here in verse 5: to look at our own eye, and through confession and prayer to take the log out and lay it before God so that he can burn it upon his purifying altar, thereby destroying it.

Once this happens, the magic of God's handiwork can be seen: "...You will see clearly...." for the purpose of taking the sawdust out of the eye of your hurting brother. Thus, the only way it is right and godly to go to a brother to mention the sawdust in his own eye is after we have first gone before the Lord to confess and purge the log from our own eye. This will remove all arrogance, replacing it with humility and a true sense that our brother is our brother and we are both under God together. From this platform of humility and personal integrity, we earn the right to speak about the sawdust in our brother's eye. And because our own eye is cleared by the Lord, the Lord may well use us to help heal our brother.

Again, the sawdust in our brother's eye is a small thing, but the resulting pain is large and immediate. To see it and to remove it is a delicate operation requiring prayer, a great deal of gentleness, and a lasting commitment not to hurt by judging, but to heal.

Three years ago a friend of mine shared with me the true story of Teddy Stallard, who by his own admission was an unattractive, unmotivated little boy in school. He was one of those little boys the teachers find it difficult to like and easy to judge as "the problem child." Teddy was a source of great frustration for his fifth-grade teacher, Miss Thompson, who all day long faced his deadpan, unfocused stare. Although she said she loved all her students, Miss Thompson had to admit that deep down, she wasn't being honest. She didn't like Teddy, and she even received a certain perverse pleasure in marking his papers with red ink and writing big fat F's on them with a flourish. Her view of Teddy was already distorted by her judgment of him, but she should have known better. As his teacher, she had his records, and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit:

First Grade: "Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but he has a poor home situation."

Second Grade: "Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home."

Third Grade: "Teddy is a good boy but is too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year."

Fourth Grade: "Teddy is very slow but well behaved. His father shows no interest."

At Christmas, Miss Thompson's class all brought her presents in pretty wrappings, and gathered round to watch her open them. She was surprised when she received a gift from Teddy. It was crudely wrapped in brown paper loosely held together with tape. When she opened it, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with half the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume. The other children began to giggle, but she had enough sense to put on the bracelet and apply some of the perfume to her wrist. She asked the class, "Doesn't it smell lovely?" When school was over and the other children had left, Teddy lingered behind. He slowly came over to her desk and said softly, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents." When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher, for Miss Thompson had become a new person. She was no longer just a judgmental teacher, she had become an agent of God seeking to heal. The log in her eye was gone, and she had a clear eye to see how to help, by the grace of God. She was now a person committed to loving all her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. By the end of that school year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement and had caught up with most of the students.

After that she did not hear from Teddy for a long time. Then one day she received a note that said: "Dear Miss Thompson: I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy Stallard." Four years later, she received another note: "Dear Miss Thompson: They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stallard." Finally, she received another note: "Dear Miss Thompson: As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Miss Thompson went to that wedding. She deserved to sit where his mother would have sat; she had earned that right. God had removed the log in her eye, given her clear vision, and by his Spirit in her had done something for Teddy that changed his life forever. And all of this happened because one Christian stopped leaping to judge and looked to heal.

Don't leap to judge---but *do* discern, Matthew 7:6

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before the pigs, lest they will trample them with their feet and turning may tear you in pieces."

Good heavens, just what is this verse about hogs and dogs doing in Jesus' great teaching about judgmentalism? This verse makes Matthew 7 an outlier's nightmare!

First of all, the verse begins with another command "Do not give what is holy to dogs...." But what is holy here, and who are the dogs? Holy in the Gospels means "belonging to God and authorized by God." More specifically, this term refers to sacrificial meat, hearkening back to Leviticus 22:1-16. The image Jesus is trying to paint in the minds of his listeners is of sacrificial meat consecrated to God torn off of his holy altar and given to dogs who ravenously consume it. To these hungry dogs, it is just good cooked meat, not something holy before God.

Now dogs in the Old Testament are the *goyim*, the Gentiles. The word dog was used by Jews in the first century AD to designate the heathen, an idea seen also in Matthew 15:26,27 when the Syro-Phoenician woman identified herself as a dog hoping to get the scraps off the Jews' table. But this example of the Syro-Phoenician woman's story in Matthew 15 is the opposite of the issue stated here: She saw herself as a dog, and thus was freely given what was holy. What Jesus is commanding us against here in verse 6 is laying out what is holy and

sacred before those who are arrogant and disdainful of anything holy. These will only snarl and howl with no regard to its holiness.

When I was a management consultant in the financial district of San Francisco, my first supervisor was a man like one of the dogs pictured here in verse 6. He was an arrogant man who, although married, openly chased the women in the firm, and who did what was right in his own eyes at all times. He was quite disdainful of my love for Jesus Christ. He was also a very aloof person, so I was wanting to make some connection with him. One particular day I was trying to reach him, so I decided to be vulnerable and share with him from my heart what mattered most in my life. I was going to share how I viewed myself as a living sacrifice to the Lord, as a means of opening for this man a window into my relationship with my Lord. But every time I would launch into the conversation, we would get interrupted somehow. As the day progressed, the Lord brought this verse into my mind. It dawned on me that maybe the Lord was causing the interruptions, because there are some things too innocent and holy to put before a "dog" who won't appreciate them, but will tear them apart in an obnoxious and painful way. I realized the truth that it is appropriate to discern whether the person you are about to share holy things with is able to hear them, or will just chew them up and spit them out.

Now, what about the pearls Jesus mentions here? What makes this term interesting in this verse is the pronoun: *your* pearls. We just saw that what is holy to God, that which belongs to him personally and is offered to him by those who love him, cannot be given to dogs. Likewise, that which is a personal treasure or personal secret kept close to your heart should not be shared with just anyone. This is particularly true when you consider what a pearl is. The pearl stands alone among gemstones as the product of a living organism. A grain of sand or some other foreign object comes into the shell of an oyster, and the oyster then covers it with layer upon layer of nacre to lessen its pain, until the irritant becomes a pearl. Thus, the pearl is hidden and is of great value, but it comes at great cost or great pain. The "pearls" Jesus is speaking of are the secret things of your heart, which must not be shared with just anyone, because there are hard hearts and gossiping tongues out there.

And what about these pigs? The main thing to know about pigs is that in the whole of the Bible they are viewed as unclean. They are also vicious, and in the wild they can turn and kill someone by cutting him or her with their teeth and tusks, which are so fouled by the muck they wallow in that they poison the victim. It is the poison that kills the victim, not the cuts. Thus, the imagery Jesus is using here is very vivid: If you choose to cast your personal pearls before pigs, don't be surprised if they are trampled, and those same swine turn on you and tear you to pieces.

I watched a young married woman in our church handle a "pearl" of her own in quiet dignity, choosing very carefully with whom she shared her heart. She was a woman married for eight years, who had not been able to have children during that whole time because she had endometriosis. Then she underwent an operation to eradicate the problem, but for more than two years after this, she still could not have children. And I noticed that she did not publicize the great pain in her heart about this, but covered this terrible irritant in her life with a great deal of prayer, like an oyster covering the grain of sand with the colors of the rainbow. But she had a wonderful ministry of praying with and comforting other women in the church who were also having trouble getting pregnant, or who had had miscarriages. So she shared this pearl of hers with a select few to whom the Lord directed her. I've watched her over the years with deep respect. And a few months ago, she and her husband came to our house and announced that they were pregnant. What a delight!

So how does verse 6 fit in with verses 1-5? It is the balance, like the saying "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." It represents two sides of one equation. We are not to judge others, but we are to discern hearts before we share things of God and deep things about ourselves. Without this balancing wisdom, we would often get hurt. Jesus Christ is such a compassionate Lord: He doesn't want the hearts of others lacerated by our judgments, nor does he want our hearts trampled on when we are not discerning. Behold our Lord's compassion for others and for us!

Jesus Christ is full of compassion, and all we who know him personally have felt his compassion and kindness extended to us in our sin. Let us who have been shown such grace, who know this Lord of compassion and kindness in all our many mistakes, be available to him to shower his compassion and grace on those whom we might have judged before. Let us no longer leap to judge...but look to heal!

Catalog No. 4414

Matthew 7: 1-6

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Twelfth Message

December 4, 1994

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