

# Humility versus Hypocrisy

Delivered on Trinity 4  
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ  
June 27, 2021  
Text: Luke 6: 36-42

*Lk.6:41-42 "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."*

It is indeed true that we are quite adept at seeing the specks in others' eyes, but consistently negligent in dealing with the log that juts out of ours. Jesus is, of course, making this point in an exaggerated and burlesque way—but that is often the only way to get through to people. Only then can we see how ridiculous we are when we have neglected our own sins and presume to correct others. If we have something in our eye that is hampering us, then we might be willing for someone else to take a look and to help remove the offending item. But we want those helping us to be able to see well. And in Jesus' story, the person proposing to help doesn't see clearly at all. We must, according to Jesus, be people who humbly and faithfully work on our own spiritual health before we can presume to help others who have fallen short.

Jesus is not saying that one Christian should never help another Christian in addressing his sins; his own words in verse 42 assume that such help is to be offered. Rather, Jesus is calling for self-examination and self-discipline to precede all such efforts to help someone else. In other words, we won't be able to help anybody else unless we are seriously setting our own house in order. This requires the grace of God and honest work, leading to Christian maturity, and humble and accurate self-assessment.

But Christian humility is often presented as avoiding confrontation at all costs and never calling someone out on unchristian speech or behavior. This is an understandable strategy in our country these days, given the pervasive vitriol and continual battling over everything from gender expression to which ideas we can consider to who gets to define America. In fact, it's not uncommon to hear people quote verse 37 in the context of today's culture wars: "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

So it's a relief to hear our Gospel today open with Jesus's admonition to be merciful and to judge not. Wouldn't it be nice if no one would judge anyone—especially not us? Besides, with the breakdown of belief in an objective moral reality, we all become the final arbiters of right and wrong anyway. You may have heard the popular slogan, "Only God can judge me." The person uttering this remarkable statement is saying two things. First, "I have a special moral arrangement with God to which no one else is privy." And second, "I come out pretty good in that arrangement." In an earlier time, being judged by a holy and perfect God was terrifying! Now, since our rightness with God has become so publically inaccessible, it is the

height of presumption to point out anyone's unchristian behavior. Thanks to a completely privatized Gospel, we can take refuge in the unimpeachable (and favorable) verdict rendered by our sovereign conscience. "Who are you to question my Christian faith?" This is the ultimate conversation stopper.

But being cowed into silence by this sort of bluster is not really humility—its cowardice. Jesus is not telling us to stop making moral judgments at all—for that is impossible. We are constantly faced with the need to make moral discriminations. Evaluating situations morally and deploying concepts of justice and fairness, rightness and wrongness, seems to be hardwired into us. Though the "official" position of our culture is that moral values are determined by the individual, we don't live that way. Our antennae are always discriminating right and wrong as if they are objective, and we can spot hypocrisy and moral compromise a mile away. What, then, does Jesus mean by this warning not to judge others?

Well, Jesus was talking about a particular kind of judgment. This kind of judgment sets us up as sinless as we condemn others for every fault and failure. From our high horse, we get to heap negative judgments on others, while seeing ourselves as morally pure. It is a short step from there to contempt and disgust of those we are judging. But true disciples of Jesus do not grow by contrasting themselves with others, or by dismissing them as beneath contempt. It would behoove us for a moment to consider other ungodly ways of judging forbidden to Christians.

One of them is the phenomenon called Whataboutism. This has become very popular in the last few years, especially in politics, though it has been around forever. It is the strategy of deflecting any negative moral judgment aimed at you or your group by saying "what about what you did?" It is the equivalent of a teenager trying to distract from his breaking curfew by saying to his mom: "But what about when you went way over the speed limit in the school zone?" The trick is to move attention away from your dubious moral behavior as quickly as possible. Putin recently used it to great effect in the recent summit. He directed us away from his human rights abuses by pointing out America's human rights abuses. This has been a standard move in the Russian playbook since the Soviet era. It insures that no one has to own their moral failings, in contrast to what Jesus commanded his disciples to do. There is no repentance; not even a moment of honest self-appraisal. But one enjoys immediate moral vindication while doing absolutely nothing to deserve it.

Another ungodly approach is so-called "cancel culture," the term describing the attempt by "the morality police" or whatever group is offended this hour to destroy a person or idea seen as a threat or somehow unworthy. If someone or some group doesn't like something, if they are made uncomfortable by it, then they try to "cancel" it. Notice the abrupt, sharp, and unilateral connotation of the word. In former times, disapproval of something by some group might have led to discussion, debate, attempts to persuade through moral reasoning or, failing that, non-violent protest or boycotts, as in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-sixties. Not anymore. Now people or views seen as repellant, immoral, unAmerican, or whatever, must be eradicated and heard from no more. There is no attempt to argue or debate in good faith; no effort to understand the other side's point of view or to acknowledge their experience of the

world; no desire to bring reconciliation or healing. Far from it. The aim of the cancel strategist is to attack any and all perceived threats through misinformation and caricature, using vague “scare words” that embody all the fear and anger he or she wishes to enflame. Doing this makes the practitioner appear virtuous, win approval from his or her cohorts, and generates those all-important social media clicks. Clicks equal money and fame. You get to signal your virtue without actually having any. You divide people and stoke their anger. But Jesus said “blessed are the peacemakers.” Where are they today?

What the aforementioned strategies have in common is the payoff of short-term pseudo-righteousness and unaccountability. One’s moral standing is maintained through misrepresenting and dismissing others, not by giving them a fair hearing and trying to understand their point of view. It is a way of avoiding a real reckoning with one’s own sin by condemning others. But Jesus’s says that those deploying these strategies are claiming a righteousness they don’t really possess. They might believe they are on the side of the angels, but their behavior is not of God, nor sanctioned by Him. They are not truly seeking any righteousness, only their own self-justification.

So while it is impossible for us to avoid moral judgments, it is necessary for us to approach the failings of others (and ourselves) in a godly way. Jesus is not calling upon his followers to be blind to the faults of others; rather, he wants them to help people who need correction lovingly, with care and prudence.

What Jesus taught here is further developed in other portions of the New Testament. He speaks about confronting sin, but the manner in which this is done is vitally important.

*"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matt. 18: 15)*

We should confront someone privately at first, for we are seeking a brother or sister’s well-being, not hoping to parade their failures before others. Isn’t this the way we would want someone to deal with us? Furthermore, Jesus says to "Pay attention to yourselves!" We must examine our motives. The aim is not to be proved right or to win an argument, but to restore your brother or sister. You want healing of relationships and a strengthening of the Body of Christ, not division. To accomplish this, you approach the person as someone you want the best for, not one to whom you feel yourself superior.

Paul says in 1 Thess.5:14, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." Different approaches will be necessary in different circumstances, so we must be careful not to confuse them. Helping others in the body requires wisdom and discernment. A one-size-fits-all approach reveals a lack of concern for where the offender is really coming from and treats him or her more as a thing than as a child of God.

Again, Paul says in Rom.15:1 that "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves." This underscores the point that attending to the difficulties of a brother or sister is not for the purpose of feeling better about yourself, but serving them. Paul doesn't pretend for one moment that every believer is equally strong or

equally mature; he simply points out that the weaker are not in any way to be despised or humiliated, but to be treated as people of great value who stand in need of loving correction.

Paul is also realistic about our weakness, even of those who appear strong. In Gal.6:1-2 he says:

*“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”*

Note well Paul's warning here. The spiritually minded Christian is not immune to all temptation and could himself make the same mistakes. To think that you're somehow better than the other can easily lead to a dangerous self-righteousness and dropping of your spiritual guard. And we are told on good authority that pride cometh before the fall.

Faithful and engaged Christians must tread the path between the two ungodly extremes of indifference on the one hand, and the intrusive busybody on the other. We also must be ready to receive positive constructive criticism for our own good. We do live in a day when any perceived infringement on personal freedom is deemed the greatest of sins. Hyper-individualism has become an idol in our culture, and it doesn't like to be challenged. Hence, many will be reluctant to give spiritual advice to others. If those who offer such correction in genuine love are met with a defensive reaction, they may well not try again and everyone in the church will be the poorer for it.

But Christians should never advise their fellows, whether inside or outside the Church, if they have not repented of and sought to eliminate their flaws, including their desire for controlling others. Avoiding this reckoning will not bring vitality to the Body and will also bring discredit to the Church in the eyes of the secular world. Christian witness will be compromised as was that of the religious establishment in Jesus's day.

In Mt.23:1-4 Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

*“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”*

This could describe many church leaders throughout history. The Church should present a moral challenge to the culture—but not when its house is in disorder. Its leaders exhibit in large letters what we each of us do in small letters—namely, ignore the logs in our own eyes. Institutions, like people, can be hard on others and soft on themselves. They trot out every mitigating circumstance when it comes to excusing their moral compromises; but will give their perceived enemies no quarter. The Scribes and Pharisees had perhaps all the right answers, but they failed dismally because they didn't apply to themselves what they demanded of others. There is a word that describes this sort of behavior: hypocrisy. And no one likes a hypocrite. The secular world certainly doesn't, and they tend to sniff it out very quickly indeed, whether it

be the hypocrisy of a corrupt politician or of a loveless church. The world loves to discover hypocrisy in the Church; it loves to hear of unfaithful pastors and pervasive unChrist-like behavior—for then it can ignore the Church's unpopular teachings.

We followers of Christ realize that we have fallen far short of God's standards and cannot in our own power ever attain them. Only by throwing ourselves on God's mercy through Jesus Christ do we have any hope. We should condemn sin, but not sinners—for we have been forgiven so much ourselves. Loving those with whom we disagree does not mean approving of their beliefs and behaviors. We want the City of Man to prosper, but not by ignoring evil. This loving concern will proceed even in the face of opposition and potential misunderstanding. Aware of our failures, but also aware of the wonderful grace of God, we will seek justice and love mercy, witnessing to a better way to live, and repenting when we fall.

*In the Name...*