JUDGING

"Do not judge others unfairly, lest you be judged in a similar way. For by the kind of judgment with which you judge others, you will be judged; and whatever measure you measure to others, it will also be measured to you. Why do you see so well the speck that is in the eye of your brother or sister, but fail to regard the log in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the speck out your eye', while behold there is log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First take out the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother or sister's eye."
Matthew 7:1-5

The sermon turns to the importance of avoiding a judgmental attitude toward others.

There is speculation that this section on judging has been building from earlier portions of the Sermon on the Mount.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."
Matthew 5:7

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."
Matthew 5:9

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."
Matthew 5:22

"But I say to you, lover your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
Matthe 5:44

"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."
Matthew 6:14-15

It is also possible that this pericope corresponds to the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer.

"And forgive our offenses as we ourselves have also forgive those who offend us.
Matthew 6:12

As has been mentioned previously, we continue to see the use of parallelism in the Sermon on the Mount and this section is no different.

"Judge not, that you not be judged." V.1

"With the judgment you pronounce, you will be pronounced by such judgment."
"With the measure you use, it will be measured against you." V.2
"Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye but not the log in your own eye?" V.3

Possibly this reveals to us that Matthew gathered this material from the standard oral and memorized catechetical tradition of the early church.

A collection of sacred writings from the early church contains the same language.

"Show mercy, that you may obtain mercy: forgive, that it may be forgiven you; as you do, so shall it be done to you: as you give, so shall it be given to you . . ."
1 Clement 13:2 circa A.D. 96

"When you expel the beam from your own eye, then you will see clearly to expel the speck from your sibling's eye.
Gospel of Thomas 26.b

"Do not judge others unfairly, lest you be judged in a similar way. For by the kind of judgment with which you judge others, you will be judged; and whatever measure you measure to others, it will also be measured to you.
Matthew 7:1-2

The command - as has been so often misused - should not be taken as a prohibition against all judging or discerning of right and wrong. Elsewhere in Matthew's record of the teachings of Jesus, the judgment of disciples is presupposed.

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gath ered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fru it, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, n or can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their frui ts. Mathew 7:15-20

11 And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. 15 Truly, I say to

you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.
Matthew 10:11-15

Jesus said, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."
Matthew 16:6

Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
Matthew 16:12

For by the kind of judgment with which you judge others, you will be judged;

If you really look at this verse, it assumes that the disciple is making fair or lenient judgments while not prohibiting making judgments altogether.

In fact, if one makes *fair* judgments, then the verse is clearly saying that such a disciple would not be averse to having such judgments placed upon them.

Judgments then should be made with humility in mind first then the judgment rendered stands a better chance to be fair and charitable. If one judges others by the same standard whereby they judge themselves, the judgment is likely not to be as harsh.

The manner is which one measures out judgment to others will be the measure of how God judges them. This viewpoint finds strong Jewish parallels.

Before you have fallen, humble yourself; when you have sinned, show repentance.
Sirach 18:20

Joshua ben Perahiah used to say: appoint for thyself a teacher, and acquire for thyself a companion and judge all men with the scale weighted in his favor.
Mishna abbot. 1:6 (200-230 AD.)

The Mishnah teaches lessons that can be derived from the actions and treatment of a sota. With the measure that a person measures, he is measured with it. For example, she, the sota, adorned herself to violate a transgression, the Omnipresent therefore decreed that she be rendered unattractive; she exposed herself for the purpose of violating a transgression, as she stood in places where she would be noticed by potential adulterers, so the Omnipresent therefore decreed that her body be exposed publicly; she began with her thigh and afterward with her stomach, there the thigh is smitten first and then the stomach, and the rest of all her body does not escape punishment.
Mishnah sota 1:7 (100-190 AD.)

Paul clearly relies on the teachings of Jesus.

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you have condemned yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same thing.
Romans 2:1

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.
James 5:9

Ultimately, God is the acting subject who will judge as judgment is God's prerogative alone.

Why do you see so well the speck that is in the eye of your brother or sister, but fail to regard the log in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the speck out your eye', while behold there is log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First take out the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother or sister's eye."
Matthew 7:3-5

A *speck* is small, likened to sawdust or anything that is small that can get into a person's eye. It is used here metaphorically to indicate some slight or insignificant shortcoming.

The repeated reference to *"your brother"* leads us to believe that the community of believers is the target group being addressed here.

"log" – is meant to be a ludicrous illustration contrasting the minor *"speck"* of sawdust.

What is a tiny flaw in another is seen so clearly by a censorious person, while ironically what is an outrageously huge failure in the latter is conveniently overlooked altogether. It is the self-righteous, censorious person who is particularly eager to correct the failure of others.
Hagner – Matthew, page 169

"while behold" – this makes the point particularly emphatic. After all, it would be impossible to remove a speck of sawdust from another person's eye when a log was the obstruction in one's own eye.

It is taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Tarfon says: I would be surprised if there is anyone in this generation who can receive rebuke. Why? Because if the one rebuking says to him: Remove the splinter from between your eyes, i.e., rid yourself of a minor infraction, the other says to him: remove the beam from between your eyes, i.e., you have committed far more severe sins.
b. Arakin 16b Baraita

Rabbi Yohanan would says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And it happened in the days of the judging of the Judges." (Ruth 1.1)? This indicates a generation that judged its judges. If a judge would say to his defendant standing

before him: Remove the splinter from between your eyes, meaning rid yourself of some minor infraction, the defendant would say to him: Remove the beam from between your eyes, meaning you have committed far more severe sins.
b. B. Bat. 15b

Hypocrite! – indicates that some from of deception is involved in the act of judging, whether of the self or another.

The solution indicated in the *removing of the log from one's own eye to see clearly the speck in another's* means the responsibility of fault remains first with one remedying their own fault. Following this, then one can turn to help with the shortcomings of another.

"see clearly" adds intensity to the meaning.

What should be clear here is that the exhortation of v.5 assumes an awareness of one's own faults which will make fair and lenient judgment of others possible.

In such a case, the wording of the passage could conclude with the last verse pointing us back to a positive use of the first verse.

"First take out the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother or sister's eye. By which you will judge others fairly, and you will then be judged in a similar way."

Thus, there is no need to conclude from the passage that Jesus prohibited judgment.

This passage concerns relationships in the community of faith and may be regarded as one expression of the ethic of love that is the summary of the law and the prophets:

"So whatever you wish others would do for you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."
Matthew 7:12

"And the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
Matthew 22:39-40

Although the disciples cannot avoid making judgments (Matthew 18:15-18), their judgments are to be made charitably and not censoriously. Judgments of faults is to begin with oneself, and one is to be as scrupulous in this self-judgment as one is generous and tolerant in the judgment of others. For the same standard of judgment that we apply to others will in turn be applied to us. The hypocrite ignores the significant failures in his or her own life while becoming preoccupied with the slightest failures of others. Such a person violates the love

commandment.
Hagner – Matthew, page 170