



Parkway Fellowship

The Elephant in the Church • One Bite at a Time • Romans 7:15-19; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 13:10-17 •

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Main Point

Jesus wants us to deal with hypocrisy one bite at a time.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you saw or heard the title of our new 2-part sermon series, "The Elephant in the Church," without hearing this week's sermon, what would you guess this study might be about?

How do you tend to handle "elephant in the room" type situations in real life—ignore the elephant and hope it will go away, embrace the elephant and make it your pet, set a clever trap for the elephant, sedate the elephant, poke the elephant as often as you can, other?

Explain.

As a church, it wouldn't be healthy if we were to allow problems to dominate our fellowship. That said, we shouldn't ignore problem areas or call attention to them in a way that is unhelpful and only causes them to grow. Instead, we must all acknowledge our issues and deal with them in God-honoring ways so that we can thrive as a gospel community. Following Jesus requires that we have self-awareness that identifies and acknowledges the sin in our own lives and works to remove it immediately before it becomes rooted there, spreading to and disabling the rest of us in the process. Only then will we have the humility and grace to spiritually encourage and challenge others—not in judgment, but in love, grace and truth.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Romans 7:15-19.

How is it possible for a Christian to still sin? What does Paul have to say about this dichotomy?

When is the last time you could relate to Paul's statement: I do not understand what I do? How do you usually respond to that feeling?

"You may be the only Jesus some people will ever see" is a commonly-made statement among believers. What can and can't people know about Jesus from any human being?

After more than 20 years of being a Christian, Paul had come to the realization that neither knowledge (v. 7:9), personal effort (v. 15), or salvation (vv. 22-25) were enough to remove his struggle with sin. Paul's story in these verses is the story of every Christian who ever lived. Unfortunately, becoming a Christian doesn't completely destroy the sin natures we were born with. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus delivered us from the penalty and the power of sin, but not sin's presence. Because of sin's presence and our propensity to give in to it, we should not judge Jesus based on His followers.

| Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 7:3-5.

As we judge others, what sins may take root in our hearts and minds that merit God's judgment? What does Jesus' analogy reveal about the way sin compromises our vision and perspective?

In the command not to judge, Jesus calls us to question the motivation behind our often misplaced focus. Calling attention to someone else's sin, be it ever so small, often avoids the task of removing the log from one's own eye. Verse 5 indicates that we do have a responsibility to help our fellow believers overcome temptation and sin in their lives, but our motive for doing so is important. If the motive is to make ourselves feel more righteous, then we are in no position to speak truth, and are guilty of replacing God's righteousness with our own. Instead, our motivation should be rooted in humility and a desire to help our brothers and sisters in Christ stay in right relationship with God.

How might removing the sin in our own life enable us to see the struggles of others' lives more clearly? How might it fill us with compassion and grace?

What stories about Jesus interacting with people do you remember and value most? Did He seem to be judging them?

On the other hand, did He ever compromise truth by sweeping sin under the rug as if it didn't matter? How would doing so actually have been uncompassionate?

When we take it upon ourselves to make critical and disparaging judgments about the moral failure of others, we are not living as true followers of Jesus. This type of judgment is ultimately a form of idolatry, as we put

ourselves in the place of God. Jesus goes on to warn that the measure we use in evaluating others' actions is the same measure we should expect to be measured to us. Before we attempt to point out another's sins, we must be aware of our own and remember that only God has the wisdom and authority to judge. When we see ourselves and others as broken individuals in desperate need of God's grace, His love and compassion become our natural response to others—especially in their sins.

Many of us seem to be better at identifying the sins of others than the sin in our own lives.

Why might this be the case? Why does Jesus call us to do the opposite?

| Ask a volunteer to read Luke 13:10-17.

In your natural self, which do you tend to love more, people or rules? Explain.

In your own words, how would you define “hypocrisy”?

In addition to rule following, what other things cause us to miss opportunities to meet people's needs?

What do we learn about God's expectations for His followers from this passage?

This was an obvious teaching moment for Jesus. In Luke 12:56, Jesus called the crowd “hypocrites” because they refused to respond to the evidence that He was the Messiah. In this passage, He called them “hypocrites” because they refused to meet people's needs on the Sabbath. To make His point, Jesus called attention to their care for their animals on the Sabbath, but their lack of care for their fellow man. In so doing, Jesus humiliated the synagogue and religious leaders. The crowd responded in joy because they recognized what Jesus was doing for people, especially those who had no other defender against the religious system.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The three points from this week's sermon were: Don't judge Jesus based on His followers.

Learn to plank. Love people more than rules. Of the three, which stands out to you the most right now, personally? Explain.

How can you make sure you're paying more attention to dealing with your own issues than you are to the issues of other people?

Pray

Thank Jesus that who He is doesn't depend on how people who follow Him act. Ask Him to give you a realistic view of your own sin so that you might truly appreciate God's grace and then be able to lead others to do the same.

Commentary

| Romans 7:15-19

7:15-16. Believers face the oftentimes confusing, frustrating reality in which despite our best efforts, we fail to live for God as we want to do and instead do the things we hate. Our “want to’s” are lined up with God’s Word, but our fleshly nature still tugs us toward sin. Paul explained that this inner struggle in which our actions go one way while our “want to’s” pull us toward God’s Word is one more piece of evidence that the law is good. Paul’s revulsion at sin is an affirmation that the law . . . is good. Again, the law serves the function of revealing sin. In this regard it is good. As a means of salvation, however, it is completely inadequate.

7:17. Interestingly, to struggle against sin also serves to confirm a believer’s salvation is genuine. Unbelievers well might live as good citizens by obeying the nation’s civil laws, but they don’t struggle against sin. They are in bondage to sin and are spiritually dead (see Eph. 2:1). The believer, on the other hand, can truthfully say, “I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me.” Such a statement should not be misunderstood as a skirting of accountability. Rather, it reflects that genuine believers never want to sin and do not make plans to sin. We falter, however, when we yield to the tug of sin’s power remaining in our fleshly nature.

7:18-19. Thus the struggle believers have against sin is caused by the continuing influence of sin through the fleshly nature. We have the desire to (always) do what is good, but not the ability. Too often we fail to do the good we want to do and instead practice the evil that we don’t want to do. This might aptly be called a believer’s spiritual “growing pains.” Verse 19 repeats the substance of verse 15. Paul’s behavior bewildered and frustrated him. The tense of practice indicates an ongoing struggle.

| Matthew 7:3-5

7:3-5. Jesus now illustrates the foolishness of most judgmentalism with the hyperbole of the speck and the log. He is clearly not concerned about literal pieces of foreign matter in people’s eyes but about His followers’ moral failures. How often we criticize others when we have far more serious shortcomings in our own lives. Such behavior offers another example of hypocrisy (6:2,5,16), especially when we treat fellow believers this way, whose sins God has already forgiven. The speck can mean a small speck of anything. The repeated reference to your brother refers to fellow disciples (5:1-2), meaning that Jesus had the Christian community primarily in mind. But the principle is also applicable to anyone. Jesus’ own familiarity with the carpenter’s shop and the frustration of sawdust and small particles in one’s eye personalizes the illustration.

Verse 5 makes clear that verses 3-4 do not absolve us of responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather, once we have dealt with our own sins, we are then in a position gently and lovingly to confront and try to restore others who have erred (see Gal. 6:1). Jesus used the term hypocrite to describe a religious fraud. In the ancient Greek theater, a hypocrite was one who wore a mask while playing a part on the stage, imitating the walk, talk, and behavior typical of the character being portrayed. The term easily lent itself to one acting a part in life, pretending to be something one is not.

Generally, a hypocrite is one who intentionally seeks to deceive in order to gain some kind of personal benefit or advantage. In the religious arena, the hypocrite presents a front of being a devout and good person while inwardly being insincere and wicked. In other words, a hypocrite is a religious con man (or woman). Matthew 7:5 and its counterpart, Luke 6:42, are the only instance in which Jesus used hypocrite in relation to His followers. They would be self-deceived or deliberately deceptive hypocrites if they pretended to be without fault while seeking to minister to a stumbling believer.

7:6. Verse 6 seems cryptic and unconnected to the immediate context, but it probably further qualifies the command against judging. One must try to discern whether presenting to others that which is holy will elicit nothing but abuse or profanity. In these instances restraint is required. This warning balances the first (7:1-5), and attempts to head off another misconception Jesus' listeners might have taken away from the sermon. At first glance, this verse is difficult to interpret because the terms what is sacred, pearls, dogs, and pigs are not explained. But the verse does guard against our tendency to oversimplify the do not judge (7:1) statement, instructing us to be discerning about the character of other people.

Dogs and pigs (wild and unclean) likely refer to people who are not only unbelievers but also active enemies of the gospel (see 15:14; Luke 23:8; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 2 Pet. 2:22). The most likely interpretation is to take what is sacred and pearls to refer to the gospel or truth, and to take pigs and dogs to mean any person who persistently rejects the gospel or truth, whether Jew or Gentile. Jesus was teaching His people to use discernment when sharing the truth with others. To persist in sharing with a resistant person wastes time and energy. It can also destroy a relationship that might prove fruitful later. It could even (in the climate of growing persecution) result in harm to the believer; it could tear you to pieces.

What are the holy and valuable things the dogs and the pigs shouldn't receive? Jesus' point may be applied in a number of ways. For example, Christian discipleship and teaching should be offered to those who value it and who desire to benefit from it. Individuals who resist repenting from obvious sin—who have shown they consider the precious things of the gospel to be worthless—waste our time. When we offer the priceless teachings of the kingdom to those who consider them rubbish, we may end up cheapening the gospel. Furthermore, we might even end up being hurt ourselves if we become involved in offering counsel when it isn't wanted.

Taking care with whom and how we share truth is an important principle for believers to grasp in their evangelistic efforts. When we share with our neighbors, we tend to feel we have failed if they do not accept the Lord on the spot. We need to be patient, giving our own lives a chance to speak as a testimony for Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to take His time to work the truth we have shared into the heart and conscience of the unbeliever (see John 16:8-11). However, we should not be lazy or inattentive to signs that the unbeliever might be ready for more. There is an art to walking the line between pushiness and apathy.

| Luke 13:10-17

13:10-13 The mention of the Sabbath as the time of this healing calls to mind the earlier controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders (6:1-11). The woman He healed had severe curvature of the spine, caused somehow by a demon (an evil spirit). The healing involved two acts: (1) the casting out of the demon, and (2) the straightening of the spine. This verse does not imply that deformities or illnesses are commonly caused by demons. This was apparently a very rare case, reflective of the heightened spiritual warfare during the time of Christ's earthly stay.

13:14-16 The leader of the synagogue rejected the healing as it was work done in violation of the Sabbath day. Jesus' use of the plural hypocrites shows that He knew the leader spoke for many others who shared his view. He revealed their hypocrisy by showing that it was necessary for everyone to do some work on the Sabbath, notably related to the tending of farm animals. Should not a Jewish woman (daughter of Abraham) under bondage to Satan for such a long time also be untied on the Sabbath?

13:17 Those who had sided with the leader of the synagogue were humiliated because it made them look as if they had more compassion for animals than for a demonized, disfigured woman.