

Moral Visual Impairment

The text this morning is about trying to pick specks out of other peoples eyes while having a load of lumber in our own eyes. The fancy word for this type of illustration is hyperbole. It is exaggeration to drive home a point. The Greek allows some room for the choice of words. I am not certain what the word “mote” meant in the King James Translation, but speck or speck of sawdust is good and the idea of a beam or log in our eye is also fine. In short, we tend to find and want to correct the faults we see in others while oblivious to the faults in ourselves. All of us who are married have a long list of the faults in our mate and a very short list of our own faults. Every child has a long list of the faults in his 'old fashioned ' parents who will not let him do what “everyone else is doing,” or at least “what everyone else is doing” in homes with parents who are completely indifferent.

I have made it to being a geriatric or an “old codger.” The faults of old men are racism, sexism, and a big word from Sociology called xenophobia. One of the few words that begins with an “x.” Xenophobia means a morbid fear of strangers and people with strange ideas. For example it is a loathing of people who speak Spanish, or young people, or people who do not agree with all of our ancient ideas. Old codgers do not want to deal with the faults of old codgers. We really are interested in the problems of young people, especially young women. This is what the scripture is talking about. Another good example is how men can ignore basic biology and talk about women's problems as though men are not the major cause of most of the problems.

On a national scale, we know the faults of every nation except our own. We have frustration lecturing other nations whose vision is the inverse of ours. They see our faults but not their faults. The Scripture starts with “Judge not that you be not judged” and goes on to suggest that we are picking at specks in the eyes of others while carrying

a load of lumber in our own eyes. We need to major in our own faults. We might find that we have enough problems and shortcomings in ourselves to stay busy. If we want to change others we should probably start with ourselves, with our community, and with our country. The big problem is that it requires more honesty than we want to hear and more honesty than others want to hear. Over the last 130 years, the major problems that have vexed the Brethren have been men shaving, wearing store bought clothes and having a piano in the meeting house. These issues caused division that have not healed. In retrospect, there was a lot of picking at specks. I am on the Unity Commission of the Colorado Council of Churches and the Roman Catholics became more and more disturbed by the Episcopalians and the United Church of Christ on their dealing with human sexuality. Finally, the Metropolitan Church of Denver joined and they were very "Open and accepting." The Roman Catholic Church pulled out of the Colorado Council of Churches. The irony is that with a supposedly celebrate male priesthood they have more problem with the issue than any other group. The plank in the eye affects us all and perhaps the religious leaders most of all.

This summer, the Brethren are going to deal with the issue of homosexuality. The ultra liberals and the ultra conservatives are determined to force everyone to agree with them. I know a number of people who are really hot on one side or the other. None of the people with the final answer have the problem. While we were in Nigeria, the students complained about a well known Brethren doctor who was supposedly leading marriage enrichment seminars but was pushing the "open and accepting" position. He came to visit us. I tried to avoid the subject, but he brought it up and after his lecture, I said that I had taught Social Psychology and I had read the literature and that it did not seem to agree with his beliefs. He never learned what I thought but hurried his wife out the door and when I extended my hand, he refused to shake it. A couple of months ago, he had a letter in the "Messenger" with his position. I do not have an answer to the problem, but I do not have the problem. I think that I have enough problems of my own that I need to

focus on and that will keep me very busy.

A very fine Church of the Brethren Theologian named Dale Brown once remarked to me that the Conservatives think that they know everything about the Bible and the Liberals do not care what the Bible has to say, it is for those of us who are not in either camp to study the Scripture for guidance. All through the New Testament there is the repeated theme about judgment, sin, grace and redemption. When people get to arguing all of these themes get ignored or distorted. We are not to judge others because the judgments we render come back to haunt us. Let God judge. In Revelation, it is only the Lamb that was slain that is worthy to open the seals and reveal the final judgment. If the hosts of heaven are not worthy to open the final judgment, who are we to pass judgment on others? Jesus, the apostle Paul and the writer of the Book of James tell us not to be judgmental. When Christians in any group including our own, get to arguing they become judgmental and intolerant and forget the Gospel. The writer of the Book of James says: "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or sister and judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-- who are you to judge your neighbor." James 4:11-12

The real issue for the Church has not be heresy. It is not shaving beards or wearing store bought clothes, it is not pianos or sexuality, the real issue is being judgmental, intolerant and divisive!

The next big issue is that of sin. We do well with other people's sins but ignore our own. Jesus Christ came to save sinners. If you are not a sinner, you cannot be saved. The Letter of John says "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and

purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim that we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” I John 1:8-10

The Church is where we are to accept all others as sinners. We have to love others because Christ loves others despite their faults, despite their shortcomings and despite their sins. Church is where we go desperately hoping that others will accept us despite our faults, our shortcomings and our sins. Above all, we hope that God will accept us as we are for when we take the plank out of our eye, what we see is inadequate to save our souls.

As a congregation you have a high level of Biblical and theological literacy. Understand that the religious leaders of Jesus' day and the Church hierarchy across the ages has had difficulty with the New Testament teachings on judgment, sin and grace. At Conference there will be distinguished leaders arguing that sinners should be excluded from the Church and leaders arguing for inclusion by denying sin. The New Testament does not allow either position. The New Testament only allows including sinners. If God did not condemn us but sent his own son into the world to save us, we should not be persnickety or judgmental or self-righteous.

First, let God do the judging, He is the only one who knows what He is doing! Second, admit to your sins. You can try all sorts of self-help, but none of them will be adequate. Believe me I know from experience. Third, rely on God's love and forgiveness. It is the only answer. It is wiser than wrapping ourselves in self-righteousness and focusing on everyone except ourselves.