Jesus’ Litmus Test – Matthew 7:1-5

The message I’m going to attempt to deliver this morning is a wonderful litmus test Jesus gives us, that we can self-administer to detect our spiritual diseases.

Just as we can administer a medical litmus test, a little strip of paper treated with chemicals to detect blood sugar issues or some other condition, so Jesus gives us an **attitudinal** litmus test that can detect destructive spiritual diseases that cut us off from God’s Healing Love.

I’m going to re-read the verse time from *The Message* translation. Jesus says,

7 1-5 “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It’s easy to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, ’Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It’s this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

So Jesus is trying to teach us, that when we judge, criticize, label, condemn and compare, we’re cutting ourselves off from Heaven’s healing, redemptive work in our lives. We’re cutting ourselves off from God’s Grace and Relationship, and actually externalizing our own spiritual diseases.

We only judge in others, our own biggest fears, inadequacies and sins. We apparently ignore the ones we don’t have an issue with, or are in different categories.

Jesus says we notice the splinters in the eyes of our brothers when we have that same plank in our own eyes, or in this translation, the smudge on our brother’s face, when we have an ugly sneer on our own.

**A young couple moved into the house of lady who busybody.** A few days later, that busybody called her husband into the kitchen. She peered out the window, "Look at our neighbor hanging the wash out on the line. It’s still dirty! She doesn’t even know how to wash clothes properly. Disgusting!"

Week after week the woman would look out the window and comment on the neighbor’s dirty laundry hanging on the line. And she’d complain about it to her husband, disturbing his breakfast.
Then, one morning she looked out the window and exclaimed, "Look! That lazy woman's finally got her clothes clean! I wonder who finally taught her how to clean?"

The husband smiled and said, "Nobody did. I got sick of hearing you complaining, so I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows!"

When we get that plank out of our own eyes, we see others differently.

In Luke 6:37 Jesus says, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven."

So, Jesus tells us that the highest criterion for receiving God's healing forgiveness is our own decision to forgive others, and I sure need God's forgiveness.

Just as gravity is just the way things work in this universe, if I want to be successful as a physical being, I better factor in gravity. If I don't, the next time I decide to fly off a building will be my last time. God will lovingly hear my prayers all the way down to the ground until I splat.

God set up gravity in the physical world. In order for there to be a physical world, there must be gravity.

So, in the spiritual world; God will hear our prayers, all the way until we go splat, but God's forgiveness doesn't work while we hold onto a judging, critical, unforgiving spirit.

Ya' don't forgive, ya' don't get forgiven. Ya' don't factor in gravity, gravity gets ya'!

In Romans 2:1-3, Paul writes, "Therefore you have no excuse...every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things."

Here, Paul is clarifying Jesus' litmus test. He asserts that we are actually externalizing our inner worlds when we pass judgment on others. We condemn ourselves, "because you, the judge," Paul writes, "practice the very same things."

If I hate a man, say, who is a racist, I'm still a hater of a human being created in God's image. Only when I get rid of the hatred within me will I be effective at compassionately helping that man overcome the ignorance and blindness of his racism.

Psychology Lee Jampolsky writes:
“Imagine a world where no one made negative judgments. What a sense of release and total peace would come from meeting yourself and others completely without negative judgment.”

You know that’s a pretty good definition of heaven. Can you imagine the problems in this world that would be banished if we were to meet heart to heart without judgments, and in their place – compassion, desire to understand the pain, or fear, or rage, or ignorance that are the causative factors behind another’s harmful behaviors.

If we compassionately saw someone using self-defeating, harmful behaviors as uniformed, we could then help them, lovingly instruct them, with their best interests in mind. But if we judge and label them as fools, we’d want to shame them, teach ‘em a lesson! Compassion verses judgment.

Dr. Jampolsky continues to write:

“While you are judging, you cannot love.
While you are loving, you cannot judge.”

He inquires, “Have you ever felt love and judgment at the same time? Judgment sentences you to guilt, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy. If you are constantly comparing yourself with others, you can never allow love to set you free.”

He goes on to assert, “When you look at judgment carefully, you see that whenever you make a negative judgment you are making a choice to experience conflict rather than peace.”

Wow! Well I thought it was the other person’s fault that I got out of sorts, because they were so stupid, or infuriating, or wicked, or closed-minded! Nope! My own choice to judge them or to extend loving empathy is what most affects my inner peace.

If you’ve ever wondered whether or not God is in the judgment business, let me set the record straight. No! God is in the saving business. God is Love, and Love only!

John 3:17 “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Remember when Jesus came face to face with an individual fresh from the ultimate act of betrayal – adultery. She had betrayed sacred vows to a spouse, brought shame upon her family, possibly even destroyed the childhoods of her offspring. The
people who brought her to Jesus were convinced that this was a no-brainer, that he wouldn’t even hesitate to condemn.

But Jesus disappoints them. He staunchly refuses. Thank God he won’t judge. He just loves. In fact, he stands up for this woman and saves her life, because the community is so angry they want to kill her. Jesus stands between them and her, and even convinces her accusers to walk away, contemplating the acts of sin and betrayal within their own souls that fueled their inability to look upon her with compassion.

And if the woman was in any doubt, Jesus then plainly tells her he does not judge and will not condemn her. God is Love and Love only.

Love and compassion cannot coexist with judgment and condemnation; they’re oil and water. They’re mutually exclusive.

Judgment leads to loss of peace, loss of relationships, loss of esteem, production of spiritual pride, burdens of guilt, addictions, walls between our sisters and brothers, walls built within our own souls, walls that effectively shut out even God’s Grace.

Loving - ourselves and others - leads to restored peace, healed relationships, recovery of esteem, humble gratitude, unburdening of guilt, surrender of our addictions, walls knocked down between our sisters and brothers, and within our own souls, and wide gateways leading to the very throne room of God's Grace and Forgiveness.

So let’s use Jesus’ litmus test, discover the particular type of spiritual sickness within us, and take some medicine for it.

Step 1 is we must Observe – notice when we’re comparing, labeling, denouncing, losing our peace, or our temper, or our minds. We’re out of sync with God, who is the giver of peace, self-control and sound minds. Observe! Catch ourselves when we’re just beginning to judge.

Step 2 – Find the Root of the Judgment. Both Jesus and the St. Paul wisely instruct us that when we’re judging, we’re hiding something within. We judge the very things that we have issues with.

If we’re judging someone’s opinions, or how they communicate those ideas, let’s examine the root of those negative condemnations. How do we have similar types of closed-mindedness, short-sightedness, poor listening skills, etc.

If we’re judging someone’s appearance, what do we need to accept about our own appearance?
Step 3 – Give ourselves and the other person Love for hate, compassion for criticism, and forgiveness for judgment. This gets rid of the splinters and planks in both sets of eyes.

That’s the medicine! And that’s the hard part. We’ve even been conditioned to judge ourselves and others. Compassionate Self-acceptance is difficult, when we’ve spent years comparing ourselves to others, which always ends in despair.

I’d like to give a modern day example of the difference between Compassion vs. Judgment on the criminal mind from the Restorative Justice Movement. It’s a movement that has been piloted in parts of the world with repeat offenders when the retributive justice system isn’t working.

Dr. Marshall Rosenberg is a leader in the field; with a technique he calls Compassionate Communication.

He developed a style of listening and communicating that deletes judgments from the equation with amazing results. He’s brought together tribal peoples, who have retaliated against one another for generations, and brought them into loving dialogue and resolution.

He’s condensed his process into four basic steps in working with repeat offenders.

1. The Perpetrator listens to the Victim share their pain, without judgment. They share their loss, fear, and the disastrous consequences in their lives.

2. The Perpetrator shares their reaction to that pain, without judgment. They’re not allowed to shirk responsibility for their actions, neither are they allowed to blame or condemn themselves. They must only share their feelings in response to the Victim’s pain.

3. The Perpetrator shares the original motivations for their actions, without judgment. Here Dr. Rosenberg gets the repeat offender to empathize with his or her own self, helps them unearth the needs that drove them to take these self-defeating, violent, destructive actions.

4. The Perpetrator searches for new behaviors that meet their normal human needs without causing future pain to others.

The results are noteworthy, with Restorative Justice Programs, according to a report by Sherman & Strang in 2007, “significantly more effective than the traditional justice system at lowering recidivism rate (or repeat offending).”
Marshall Rosenberg tells of a conversation between a perpetrator and a victim. He advances that he has seen similar results in thousands of instances over the past four decades in his global work.

In this instance, he sat down with a repeat rapist and one of his victims. The man was slated to be released within the next few months.

Dr. Rosenberg asked that the perpetrator listen while the victim shared her feelings, encouraging her to avoid blame, just share her naked pain, her shame, her ensuing loss of relationships, the downward spiral in her life that had occurred after that fateful event.

The perpetrator listened. He had expected angry insults, but when those were short-circuited and replaced by her honest feelings of desperate agony, his defensiveness dissipated and he was able to empathize.

Then came Step 2, for the man to share his reaction her pain. He began by self-condemnation, but Dr. Rosenberg steered him away from condemning himself. Instead, he guided him to simply share his deep feelings in response to what he had heard.

The man began to weep and cry very loudly and begged to be allowed to condemn himself.

Dr. Rosenberg asked him, “Did you know that rape was wrong before you did it?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Did you know it was going to bring shame, imprisonment, and denouncing by society, before you did it?”

“Yes, this is the third time I’ve been jailed for it.”

“So, judgment, hasn’t deterred you from doing it.”

“No.”

“Let’s try my way then, getting in touch with your feelings, listening both your victim’s and your own pain, instead have denouncing, judging.”

In time the man began to share his heart wrenching reactions to the woman’s agony that he had caused, and it hurt. He said would have rather be executed rather than to deal with her pain.
He still wanted judgment, because true Compassion is more difficult, and more painful, but it has the power to transform.

At the Third step, the Perpetrator was asked to identify the underlying needs that prompted him to take such violent actions upon another human being, to actually offer love and empathy to himself.

Here too, the man started by saying, “I did it because I’m dirt! I’m an abomination!”

Dr. Rosenberg stopped him again telling him judging was too easy. The man was stuck.

Here, the victim was able to help out. She offered some suggestions, “Do you think this act was a way of regaining some power? Maybe you felt unsafe as a child, and you bullied other to try to take care of yourself?

This was the turning point. The victim herself, compassionately listening to his pain, helped him identify his inner needs, gave him Loving Empathy. Together, they began to figure out the inner motivators to his self-defeating, destructive, violent behaviors.

Then Dr. Rosenberg invited him to take the Fourth Step, the transformative step – find new behaviors to meet those needs. With great compassion the Victim herself shared suggestions, and helped him to make doable plans to get those needs met in healthy ways that would never harm anyone again.

So, we see Jesus’ Litmus regarding Judging others, for what it is, the most powerful tool in self-diagnosis of our own spiritual sickness.

Step One - Observe, catch ourselves when beginning to Judge, Step 2 - Analyse, Find the Root, the fear, the anger, self-defeating attitudes we’re masking by the critical judgment - the plank in our own eye.

And Step 3 – Give ourselves and the other person the love, dignity and respect that replaces hate with Love, criticism with compassion, and judgment for both others and ourselves, with forgiveness.

This week I wrote a few verses in line with this message. I set it to music and hope it can help cement this powerful gift of Jesus’ Litmus Test!