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He Slammed His Fist on My Desk!

Written by Bill Perkins

Jesus struck at the root of pride with a sharp ax. He said, "How can you tell someone, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye, when you don’t see the beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, then you’ll see clearly to remove the speck from someone else’s eye. “For no good tree produces rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree produce good fruit." (Luke 6:41-42).

Jesus said we have no business judging others because we're not effectively dealing with our own weaknesses. To make matters worse, that which we condemn in others is often a problem we possess to a larger degree. The "plank" Jesus referred to was a large piece of wood that a carpenter would shape into a beam. As the carpenter worked on the plank, chips of wood would fly into the air. In essence, the "speck" was a small piece of the "plank."

The Sledge-Hammer

Pride causes us to hate in others the very flaws we possess, often to a greater degree. I remember a man once accusing me of gross insensitivity. An observation made in the past by my mother, father, wife, children, best friends, casual acquaintances, and strangers. I had no problem with his insight since I already knew this about myself. One thing did bother me though. I disliked the sledge-hammer way he delivered the message.

I told him I'd pray about his insight and get back to him. A few days later he dropped by my office. This time he traded in the sledge-hammer for a more powerful jack-hammer. After he had banged away at me for a while, as gently as possible, I suggested perhaps what bothered him about my personality flaw was that he possessed it too.

A Harpooned Shark

Never in my wildest dreams could I have anticipated his response. He exploded with the rage of a harpooned shark.

All reason fled.

He slammed his fist down on my desk. "How dare you suggest I'm like you?" Veins stood out on his bull neck, strong hands, and powerful arms. Only the desk separated me from his wrath.

Turning, he stomped out of my office, slamming the door behind him.

After he left, when the adrenaline had washed out of my system, I remember wondering how he could continue to deny the truth about himself. He hated in me what he possessed to a greater degree.

Of course, I could just as easily tell you about the occasions when I disliked in someone else a flaw I possess to a greater degree. It happens to us all. We're wired that way because we're infected with pride. It is the ugliest of all sins because it is the root of all sins. Such awareness should drive us to follow Jesus' advice and humbly deal with

our own weaknesses rather than focusing on those of an adversary.

You Insist You're Different

Does it trouble you to be told you possess what you hate in others? "How could you make such a comparison?" You may insist you're not like him. You're different than her.

"My father abused me." "My wife betrayed me." "My partner defrauded me." "I don't have their defects!" you insist.

I know how you feel. My pride prickles at the thought that I'm like him or her. But it was no pop psychologist who made the observation. Jesus did. Would you accuse him of making a mistake?

Such a thought smacks of . . . hmmm. It smacks of pride, doesn't it? Don't underestimate the persuasive and deceptive power of pride. It urges us to view our weaknesses through a telescope and our enemies through a microscope. Humility turns it around.

Maybe that's why Jesus described the person qualified to correct a brother. He said the individual who recognizes his own flaws and is actively dealing with the "plank" in his eye may help remove the "speck" from his brother's eye.

Not With Pliers

I don't remove a speck of dust or lint from my eye with pliers. I first try to wash it out with water. If that fails, I'll gently remove it with a soft corner of tissue paper. Or, I'll ask a trusted friend or family member to remove it. Only one who knows the sensitivity of the eye, and possesses unimpaired vision, will I allow to remove that speck. Once my vision is clear, I'm able to gently remove the speck from someone else's eye.

Why is it that I'm only qualified to help someone else deal with their faults when I'm actively dealing with my own? It's because then, and only then, do I know that I'm like the man or woman I despise. I had, and continue to have, painful planks and specks in my eye. I know first-hand the discomfort they cause. Instead of seeing the speck in my brother's eyes as a cause for hatred, it reminds me of my own frailty and imperfection.

Rather than wanting to destroy his eye because it possesses a speck, I want the speck removed. And I understand that the heart is as sensitive to correction as the eye is to touch and so removing the speck takes tenderness. Are you ready to admit you may possess the very flaws you despise in someone else? In fact, you may possess them to a greater degree? Such an admission allows you to see your nemesis as someone like yourself . . . someone in need of love in spite of their flaws.