

First Things, First
Luke 6:36-42

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you are going to attack any task, you start at the very beginning. A contractor would not put the roof on a house if there were no foundation. In fact, there would be a few steps in between the laying of the foundation and the putting on of the roof.

A parent would never give the keys to the family car to a 12 year old and tell them they could take the car to Chicago. You see, there are always some first things that must be done first.

Our text today contains a verse that is quoted very often – judge not, lest ye be judged. OK, that is actually not a verse in any translation of the Scripture. It is however, an oft-quoted MIS-translation of a verse in our text. But, that is how people like to quote it, for it suits their purpose. If someone comes and claims that something is a sin, they will reach for and misquote that part of our text, "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Homosexuality is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Living together without the benefit of marriage is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Gossip is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Drunkenness is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Unwillingness to forgive or reconcile with someone is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Cheating on your taxes is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Doing 85 in a 70 zone is a sin... "Judge not, and you will not be judged."

Boy, isn't it convenient how people can trot out that one misquote from our text to justify what Scripture clearly calls sin. It is especially true when a pastor has pointed at particular sin and then falls into that same sin himself. This is something we have seen with a number of prominent TV preachers who have fallen into public disgrace because of sexual sins.

But are those who misquote and drag these words of Jesus out of context correct? If we consider what else they say, we can see they are not correct. Those who scream the loudest about tolerance just want people to be tolerant of their behavior. They do not want anybody to call them to repentance. Nobody is to make the claim that God's Word calling such things sin and calling sinners to repentance is correct. Instead they will scream, "Judge not, and you will not be judged," and they continue, live and let live. What they mean is, "What you call sin, I do not believe is a sin."

The words Jesus speaks, "Judge not, and you will not be judged," are absolutely correct. You and I do not sit in judgement over anybody. When we have an attitude of judgementalism, or pointedly speak in a condemnatory way at specific sins and act as if we are somehow superior, then we will be held to the same standard.

Dear friends of God, we dare not take these words out of context. And furthermore, let this be

clearly understood here – the context of this verse is not just Luke 6, it is the entire counsel of God's Word. Sin is indeed labeled as such. Those who continue in openly unrepentant *SIN* until their last day will indeed find themselves condemned on that day. They will not be condemned by us, but by God.

Therein lies the truth of God's Word. Therein also lies the approach we are to take with all sin and all sinners. Sinners are to have their sins pointed out to them, in order that they may repent and bask in the forgiveness purchased for their sins and ours by God's own Son Himself, Jesus Christ.

First things are first. We see that clearly in the Divine Service. In this service we are first brought to understand that we are here in God's house, that He called us by name in the waters of baptism and given us His own name. Even as little Elijah is baptized into God's name – In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – cleansed of all sin, and made holy. So, we are to be holy in His sight. It is for this reason that we confess our sins. When we have confessed our sins, the purpose for our confession is made clear as the blood of Christ's sacrifice is poured out upon us in the words of the absolution, and our sins are forgiven.

Jesus clearly explains this in our text. *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.*

When we confess our sins and trust solely in the forgiveness purchased by Christ to make us holy, we have done exactly this – we have removed the speck from our own eye. That is what it means to do the first things first. Upon gazing into the perfect mirror of God's law, we are led to confess our own sinfulness, that is, to see the log that is in our own eye. When we gratefully hear the absolution, trusting in the work of Christ to purchase our forgiveness, the log is removed.

There are those who have made the claim that I am guilty of judging others. Indeed, it may appear that I have come across in that manner. I proclaim, without apology, God's law – His perfect law – which does indeed identify, label, and call sin exactly what it is. Sin can eternally damn, if left to continue without repentance.

But calling sinners to repentance is not the same as standing in judgement over others.

First, I call myself to repentance. Each day, I look into the perfect mirror of God's law. I see there my sinfulness, the log that is lodged deeply in my own eye. I am far from perfect. I am a poor, miserable, sinner. My sins distress me and drive me to my knees. I confess my sinfulness, knowing full well that I am the man. Christ's perfect life was given as a sacrifice to pay for *my* sin.

My baptism united me to Christ's death and raised me to a new life in Him.

The blood He shed to purchase my forgiveness is poured into my ear in a Word of absolution.

Forgiveness is placed into my mouth as I eat of Christ's body and drink the very blood He shed for me for the forgiveness of sins.

The log is removed from my eye.

I cannot live by the Law. While I may try, I will fail – time, and time, and time, and time again. Instead, I live in repentance. To live in repentance is to believe and confess boldly that I am a sinner who trusts not in myself, but in the grace of God, earned by Christ and given to me in Word and Sacrament. God's own Son makes me holy and pleasing to God, for I am robed in Christ's righteousness.

It is only then, filled with Christ, as He is at work in me, that I can begin to live as God would have me to live.

That is what it means to put first things, first. The first call to repentance is aimed at ourselves, that we trust not in our own goodness or holiness, but in the works of Christ that He graciously desires to give to us. Freed from the condemnation of the law, filled with the Spirit of Christ, we can then love God and our neighbor as God has loved us.

It is then, and only then that we can call others to repentance. After we put first things first, only as we know our own reliance upon God, it then and only then that we can then call others to repentance.

When we have removed the log from our own eye, when we know our total reliance upon Christ, we can look at the speck in our brother=s eyes and lead them to the perfect mirror of God's Law. There, the Holy Spirit will show them the speck in their own eye.

When they see the speck, we can point them to Christ. We do not scorn them! We do not deride them! We do not act superior! In fact, it is in humility, only in knowing our own shame and sinfulness that we point them to our joy and hope, Jesus Christ. It is He alone who gave His life to remove the speck from their eye, to cleanse them of their sin and make them holy. He will do this for them, even as He has done if for me and for you – in the Word of absolution and the meal of His body and blood.

Dearly beloved of God, these are the first things of God that He desires to make first in our lives. Let us each live our own lives in God's grace. Let us rejoice in those marvelous gifts He has given by which we are made new, and holy, and righteous, in His sight. Let us make receiving these gifts the first priority in our lives.

And then, let us lead others to know them as God's gracious gifts to give them forgiveness, life and salvation. Amen.