

Jim's Notes
October 25, 2006
The Gospel According to St. Matthew 7:1-6

Matthew 7:1-2

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

This carries the same intent as another passage, "Pass no judgment before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the thoughts of the heart; and then everyone will have his praise from God" (I Corinthians 4:5). Some actions are indifferent, and, since we do not know with what intention they are performed, it would be rash for any to pass judgment on them and most rash to condemn them. The time for judging these actions will come later, when the Lord "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the thoughts of the heart." And in another passage the same apostle also says, "Some sins are manifest even before the judgment, but some sins afterward" (I Timothy 5:24). When it is clear with what intention they are committed, he calls them manifest sins, and these sins precede judgment. This means that if judgment follows them at once, it will not be rash judgment. But concealed sins follow judgment, because not even these will remain hidden in their proper time. And this is to be understood about good works as well, for he thus continues: "In like manner also the good works are manifest, and whatever things are otherwise cannot be hidden" (I Timothy 5:25). On things that are manifest, therefore, let us pass judgment, but with regard to hidden things, let us leave the judgment to God. For whether the works themselves be bad or good, they cannot remain hidden when the time comes for them to be revealed. (Sermon on the Mount 2.18.60)

Matthew 7:3-5

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

Here Christ wants to show the great outrage he has toward people who do such things. For wherever he wants to show that the sin is great and that the punishment and anger for it is great, he begins with an open rebuke. For example, to show that he was provoked to anger he said to the man who was demanding the hundred silver coins, "Wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt" (Matthew 18:32). In the same way also here he says, "Hypocrite." For the verdict that one's brother needs a splinter taken from his eye does not come from concern but from contempt for humanity. Even while one is putting on a mask of love toward others, one is actually performing a deed of consummate evil by inflicting numerous criticisms and accusations on close companions, thereby usurping the rank of teacher when one is not even worthy to be a disciple. For this reason he called this one "hypocrite."

So then, you who are so spiteful as to see even the little faulty details in others, how have you become so careless with your own affairs that you avoid your own major faults? "First remove the plank from your eye." You see that Jesus does not forbid judging but commands that one first remove the plank from one's own eye. One may then set right the issues relating to others. For each person knows his own affairs better than others know them. And each one sees major faults easier than smaller ones. And each one loves oneself more than one's neighbor. So if you are really motivated by genuine concern, I urge you to show this concern for yourself first, because your own sin is both more certain and greater. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 23.2)

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

The word *hypocrite* is aptly employed here, since the denouncing of evils is best viewed as a matter only for upright persons of goodwill. When the wicked engage in it, they are like impersonators, masqueraders, hiding their real selves behind a mask, while they portray another's character through the mask. The word *hypocrites* in fact signifies pretenders. Hence we ought especially to avoid that meddlesome class of pretenders who under the pretense of seeking advice undertake the censure of all kinds of vices. They are often moved by hatred and malice.

Rather, whenever necessity compels one to reprove or rebuke another, we ought to proceed with godly discernment and caution. First of all, let us consider whether the other fault is such as we ourselves have never had or whether it is one that we have overcome. Then, if we have never had such a fault, let us remember that we are human and could have had it. But if we have had it and are rid of it now, let us remember our common frailty, in order that mercy, not hatred, may lead us to the giving of correction and admonition. In this way, whether the admonition occasions the amendment or the worsening of the one for whose sake we are offering it (for the result cannot be foreseen), we ourselves shall be made safe through singleness of eye. But if on reflection we find that we ourselves have the same fault as the one we are about to reprove, let us neither correct nor rebuke that one. Rather, let us bemoan the fault ourselves and induce that person to a similar concern, without asking him to submit to our correction. (Sermon on the Mount 2.19.64)

Matthew 7:6

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

Now in this precept we are forbidden to give a holy thing to dogs or to cast pearls before swine. We must diligently seek to determine the gravity of these words: holy, pearls, dogs and swine. A holy thing is whatever it would be impious to profane or tear apart. Even a fruitless attempt to do so makes one already guilty of such impiety, though the holy thing may by its very nature remain inviolable and indestructible. Pearls signify all spiritual things that are worthy of being highly prized. Because these things lie hidden in secret, it is as though they were being drawn up from the deep. Because they are found in the wrappings of allegories, it is as though they were contained within shells that have been opened. It is clear therefore that one and the same thing can be called both a holy thing and a pearl. It can be called a holy thing because it ought not to be destroyed and a pearl because it ought not to be despised. One tries to destroy what one does not wish to leave intact. One despises what is deemed worthless, as if beneath him. Hence, whatever is despised is said to be trampled under foot. You know that dogs rush madly to tear apart whatever they attack, leaving nothing intact. Hence the Lord says, "Do not give to dogs what is holy." For although the holy thing itself cannot be shattered or destroyed but remains intact and unharmed, what must be considered is the desire of those who resist the truth with the utmost violence and bitterness. They do everything in their power to destroy what is holy, as if its destruction were possible. Although swine -- unlike dogs -- do not attack by biting, they befoul a thing by trampling all over it. Therefore "do not cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and attack you." Thus we may rightly understand that these words (dogs and swine) are now used to designate respectively those who assail the truth and those who resist it.

By saying "lest they turn and tear you apart" Jesus does not say, "Lest they tear apart the pearls themselves." For by trampling on the pearls even when they turn around to hear something further, they lacerate the one who cast the pearls they have already

trampled upon. Of course, it would not be easy to find anything that would please one who would trample on pearls. Who could please one who despises divine truth revealed at such great cost?' But I do not see how anyone who tries to teach such people will not themselves be torn apart by indignation and disgust, for both dogs and swine are unclean animals. Therefore we must be careful not to reveal anything to one who cannot bear it, for it is better that one make a search for what is concealed than assail or despise what is revealed. Indeed, it is only through hatred or contempt that people refuse to accept truths of manifest importance. Hence for one reason some are called dogs, and for the other reason some are called swine. (Sermon on the Mount 2.20.68-69)