

**Sermon - March 3, 2024**  
**Andy Saylor: *Speck Removal 101***

Just like Cain, we often want to do our will more than his will. At least I do. There are times I'm like Jonah and want to run in the opposite direction from what I think God wants, if it's not what I want.

And just like Cain, I think we're often susceptible to falling short of what God wants for us. At least I am.

To put it another way, we can get just about as confused as Cain about sin. Let's talk about that a little bit.

First of all, what is sin?

The Old Testament has lots of rules about behavior. The Law. What you should do and especially what you shouldn't.

Keep the rules and you're OK. Break the rules and you're not OK – you're sinning.

Then comes Jesus.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, I've kept the commandments. Am I good to go? The scripture says Jesus looked at him and loved him.

And then, well, let me interject something here. I don't know if you've ever watched the TV series Columbo. He was a detective and he'd be talking to a suspect and get them worried he was on to them. Then he starts to walk away and the suspect would think, I'm good. But Columbo would turn around and say, Oh, just one more thing.

And that's what Jesus says to the rich young ruler. "Oh, just one more thing."

"Sell all you have and give the money to the poor."

Keeping the law wasn't enough.

Jesus didn't lower the bar. In a sense he raised it.

Like what he said about adultery. "Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:28.

I often wonder how we're doing with that one. Considering what you encounter sometimes on the internet or emails, unsolicited and unexpected. The temptation to click on it.

Jesus didn't only care about behavior, the outside, the external. He cared about what we think, what's going on in our hearts and minds – the inside, the internal.

And – spoiler alert – he already *knows* what's going on inside us. We can't hide it.

The epistles likewise have broad definitions of sin.

"Anyone who knows the good they ought to do, and doesn't do it, commits sin." James 4:17

“Everything that does not come from faith is sin.” Romans 14:23

“All wrongdoing is sin.” 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:17

Like I said, sin is broadly defined.

If we think we can comply with the 10 Commandments, and be sin-free in our behavior, and that’s good enough, then we are like the rich young ruler. We are missing the mark.

Because if we ask Jesus how we’re doing, like the young man did, and if we really want to know, he will tell us through the Holy Spirit, and it will include what’s in our hearts and minds.

But what I really want to talk to you about today is not *your* sin. It’s everybody else’s.

Ahhh, that’s a relief, right?

We can be pretty good at spotting other people’s sins, whether it’s individuals, or groups, or categories of people.

But what are we supposed to do about it?

I’ve found there are some helpful principles in the scriptures.

Jesus tells us the first thing we are supposed to do. He said: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother or sister’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother or sister’s eye” Matthew 7:4-5.

Step No. 1 is self-inspection. This can be quite humbling. And it slows you down when you’re getting ready to criticize or condemn someone else.

Kind of like when Jesus said, whoever is without sin, cast the first stone. He got them to look at themselves. And that was the end of that. They all walked away, starting with the oldest.

So No. 1: Remove the 2 x 4 from your own eye. Come clean with the Lord. He knows all about it anyway. But don’t *stop* there. Don’t wallow in your unworthiness. We are not worthy, but we are not worthless. There’s a big difference. Keep moving, to the next step.

What’s next? Listen to these two verses.

“If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life.” 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:16. You should pray for them. And 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:8: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” You should love them.

If you believe someone is sinning, here are these three steps. Remove the plank in your own eye. Pray for the person. Love the person.

One other step we can’t forget about. After giving us the Lord’s prayer, Jesus said this: “If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” Matthew 6:15.

So that's another step. Forgive them. This can be done at any point in the process.

There may be additional steps depending on the situation, which most likely you will want to consult the pastor or other trusted believers about.

But sometimes after doing these things, you might find the Spirit is letting you know there is nothing more for you to do. By then you might have a different perspective on that speck you thought you spotted.

Do you remember what I said about doing my will instead of his? Sometimes I'm like, do I have to do this? It's so much fun judging and getting righteously indignant about something someone else did.

So I have to give you notice – doing this can deprive you of that smug sense of superiority that's so much fun. It was for me anyway.

To recap:

Take the plank out of your own eye.

Pray for the person.

Love the person.

Forgive the person.

If we would commit to doing this, I bet we'd turn the world upside down.

The only problem is, we can't. We can't do it. We can't do it *on our own*. But he has given us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives in us! He is there to help us. Romans 8:26. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:14.

So the actual very first step is to ask the Holy Spirit for help.

We're going to hand out little magnets with the 5 steps on. There are enough for everyone. They are to take home. Please take one. One per person. Not one per household. Because then maybe you can have one on the fridge. And you can take one to work. Or maybe one in the car.

Only the first two steps are numbered. That's because I strongly recommend doing those two first. It's really important. The other three steps could be done in any order. But beware, it's very easy to skip the plank step. You don't even realize you're doing it.

This works in a lot of situations, not just sin situations. If you're upset with someone, angry at someone, carrying a grudge against someone, use this.

Lois's father, George, my father in law, was a wonderful Christian. But his next door neighbor built a garage in the backyard. It was well built. It was not ugly. It complied with zoning. But George thought it was closer to his property line than it should have been.

He carried that bad feeling toward his neighbor for a long time. Maybe the rest of his life, I don't know.

Do you have someone you feel that way about? Maybe it hasn't been years that you've been holding onto something like that. Maybe it's months. Weeks. Days. Maybe something happened this morning.

Think of someone who has done something you consider sinful or that you are holding against them.

We're going to use the steps right now. I will walk you through it. It usually takes more than once. Typically it takes time and repetition and persistence.

But as hard as it might be, it's good medicine. It's good heart medicine. It reduces your bad cholesterol. Spiritually speaking.

Let's see what we can do in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, we call on you and ask for your help in this. We can't do it on our own.

Lord, we come to you today knowing, yes *knowing*, we have planks in our eyes.

You didn't say *if* we have planks in our eyes. You knew they'd be there.

Lord, what are the planks in our eyes? Where are we missing the mark? Where are we putting our will ahead of yours? Holy Spirit please speak to each of us about this right now. [pause 30 seconds]

Lord, please bring to mind someone we believe is sinning, or who we are harboring bad feelings toward. [pause]

We each have someone in mind now Lord. It may be hard for us to do this, but we take this time to pray for them. [pause]

Now Lord, help us to forgive them. [pause]

Lord, help us to love them. [pause]

Lord, thank you for your grace. You want the best for us. And the best for us is to do your will. Help us put your will ahead of our will. Help us do a will alignment, aligning our will with yours. May your Holy Spirit help us to pray for, love, and forgive others, as you love and forgive us. Amen.