

Bock (609) summarizes verses 39 to 49 well. He says,

There is a warning about the ineffectual guidance that a blind person provides for other blind people (6:39). There is recognition that a pupil becomes like the teacher (6:40). And there is the exhortation to proper self-evaluation before moving to evaluate others (6:41-42). So one should choose one's teachers carefully, make sure one is going in the right direction, and not be too quick to set others straight. This subunit is more proverbial in character than parabolic. Jesus is giving general counsel.

The next subunit makes the point that what one produces reflects what one is spiritually (6:43-45). The expectation is to examine the quality of one's inner spiritual condition by examining one's product. The product reflects the heart. Again we are dealing with proverbial truth here, since Jesus will also mention that false teachers are like wolves in sheep's clothing, so that what one sees from them is not necessarily what is inside (Luke 10:3; Matt. 7:15; 10:16). This proverb, however, is not so much concerned with how we are to look at others, but how we are to examine ourselves. Jesus' remarks in this are introspective, and the failure to recognize this emphasis can lead to a false understanding of the text.

The final subunit is a serious call to heed Jesus (6:46-49). The comparison is between two types of people: the person with the house on a rock (i.e. the one who practices Jesus' teaching) and the person with a house on the sand (i.e. the one who only hears the message but does not practice it). The stress is on introspection and application of what Jesus says. Jesus closes his sermon by saying, in effect, "Will you as a disciple put into practice the love ethic proclaimed here?" His desire is not so much to have His audience examine if people around them love, but to have them look honestly at themselves. Unfortunately, the words often have not been applied in the way they were designed.

6:39 And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?"

Verse 39 consists of two rhetorical questions, the first which expects a negative answer.

The proverb of the blind leading the blind and both falling in a pit was well known throughout the ancient world, but was particularly applicable in the land of Israel where the constant search for water left the land pockmarked with pits, wells, and cisterns (depressions that held runoff water). Pits were also dug to trap animals. Of course, dried wells were not filled in or fenced off so both people and beasts would slip into them from time to time. In Matthew 12:11 Jesus had asked, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?" Empty cisterns were also sometimes used as prisons (Jer. 38:6 Lam. 3:53 Psa. 40:2 69:15). Thus, overland travel at night was perilous, but it was even worse for the blind.

The picture is of poor spiritual guidance. Jesus was particularly referring to the spiritual leaders of Israel (Matt. 15:12-14; 23:14-39). The danger of spiritual blindness is that the spiritually blind often believe that they can see. They think they know where they are going when they do not.

One needs to take heed of who they follow or both will end up in ruin. But this is also true of anyone who leads; one must make sure they can see before they lead others.

6:40 "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.

To solidify the first warning Jesus states the importance of choosing the right teacher. In those days, a pupil wasn't considered someone who just gleaned information from their teacher; they were expected to adopt the teaching of the teacher as their own. The student's highest hopes were to become like his teacher; some would even excel beyond their teacher. Jesus made it clear that He could not be exceeded (Matt. 10:24-25; Jn. 13:16; 15:20).

6:41 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

6:42 "Or 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.

Once again, Jesus' advice is intended to be introspective. It plays on the image of sight as verse 39 did. Those who are too busy examining the faults of others fail to see their own faults correctly. Very often the slight imperfections of others are more obvious to us than our own glaring imperfections. Just as the spiritually blind have a false confidence in how well they can see, so do those who spend most of their time looking at others and not themselves.

In these verses the "speck" is larger than a dust particle; it is used of a small flake of wood, chaff, or straw. The "log" is the main beam of a house. The point is why would one be concerned about something in someone else's eye when a beam is protruding from your own? One should resolve the major problem first. One should be self-critical before being critical of others. Obviously, if one looks at themselves first they would approach others differently.

Notice that Jesus does not say that we should never address another's sins; rather, he says that we need to take care of the sins in our own life first, then we will be in a position to help others. Proper introspection will put us in the proper position to help others. See James 3 for a close comparison.

Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

After humbly examining ourselves we can see more clearly and will approach others with humility and love instead of condemnation. In Matthew 7:3-5 Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Jesus is probably warning the disciples not to be like the Pharisees. To be a teacher who can see and lead others, one first needs to be able to see clearly himself.

6:43 "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit.

6:44 "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.

The "for" beginning verse 43 indicates that verses 43 and 44 explain why we need to examine ourselves (look at the plank in our own eye); namely, because self-examination reveals who we really are. A person's heart is revealed by what comes out of it. That is, the type of fruit produced reflects the nature of our being. We produce what we are, not something different from our nature. Just as men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush, so we cannot produce fruit out of accordance to what we are inside. Only a plant that is inwardly a fig tree can produce figs and, only a grapevine can produce grapes. In the same way, only those who are good can produce good.

Many places in the Bible use fruit to illustrate the product of one's life:

- Hosea 10:13: "You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, You have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors,"
- Isaiah 3:10: "Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, For they will eat the fruit of their actions."
- Jeremiah 17:10: "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."
- Jeremiah 21:14: "I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds, declares the LORD; I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is around her."

In other words, we need to take note of what we produce if we really want to see what we are inside. It should be stated that this includes thoughts as well as actions. Note that in Mark 7:21-23 Jesus includes evil thoughts, coveting, envy, pride, and foolishness as things that proceed from the heart. These sins are not always expressed outwardly, but they are still the fruit of an evil heart. If we do not look at what we feel, think, and do we never see who we really are.

6:45 "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

The previous two verses find application in two types of people. Good people, like good trees, produce good fruit (Morris, 148).

The heart refers to the deepest thoughts and being of the person. In this case, it is analogous to a storehouse. What comes out of the person comes from the heart (the storehouse). Matthew 12:34-35 says, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil."

6:46 "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

In concluding the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a call to obedience. The question is why give Jesus a title of honor or respect when we do not do what He says? Confessing Jesus as Lord and not obeying Him is a contradiction of terms. "To call someone 'Lord' is to admit that allegiance is owed. To repeat the address is to put a certain emphasis on the admission. But words are no substitute for obedience" (Morris, 148).

6:47 "Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like:

6:48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

6:49 "But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."

Two people are contrasted: the one who comes, hears and obeys, and the one who hears and does not obey. The one who comes, hears and obeys is like a man who digs through the topsoil and lays the foundation of his house on bedrock. The other is like a man who built on the ground without considering the stability of the foundation. In Matthew it says he built upon the sand which is even less stable (Matt. 7:26).

In the land of Israel there were often flash floods due to the lack of vegetation and the compactness of the soil. There were wadis, dried waterways carved into the landscape, that instantly filled with water at the first sign of rain. A house built on rock has no soil under it which would cause it to become unstable. Therefore, it can withstand the torrent of water created by a heavy autumn rain.

The specific reference is to the judgment. The one who has built his life upon Christ (who obeys what He has said) will stand at the judgment.

Professing Jesus as Lord is far different than coming to Jesus, listening to what He says and acting. The first is meaningless; the latter avoids judgment.