

Double-Edged Sword

Consider the following situation:

I lent my notes to a classmate once and he returned them to me very wrinkled with tea stains on them. He did not apologize until I asked what had happened and told him how disappointed I was. If he asks to borrow my notes again I will certainly say no. I take good care of my notes and this fool does not deserve to use them with such carelessness and bad organizational habits.

From that anecdote it is evident that I have made some substantial conclusions about my classmate; he is careless and unorganized and therefore a fool. Because I have been raised to keep my notes amazingly neat, my organizational skills are good and the conclusions I have made are relative to my own perception of what is correct. What I want to establish here is that we make assertions about people's behavior relative to our own values then develop a vision of their personality based on experiences we or others have shared with them. This vision is then used to predict that individual's actions or reactions in forthcoming situations. These visions develop into schemas and can simply be considered as human nature. Schemas are structured clusters of pre-conceived ideas. The aforementioned notion leads to sayings such as, "Oh my God I never would have thought James would do *that*?! Let me call Barbara, Paul, Tom, and Steven to confirm." The shock here is a result of a realization that James has committed a deed that does not correlate with his usual pattern of behavior; had the behavior been acted by my classmate, who is a foolish, unorganized wretch, it would not have been that surprising. How we use these schemas in everyday life is very interesting and it is what this article explores.

"Everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks to change them self." The healthy approach to using information that you receive about a person could be to first examine the self, including behaviors, attitudes and mentality. The disgust I had with my classmate for ruining my notes could be felt by someone else towards me for reasons of which I am unaware. I have a bad habit of not shaving out of laziness. When someone looks at me who has been raised or has developed into a very hygienic person with regards to shaving every day, combing hair, trimming nails and so forth they may be repulsed and even offended by my hairy, unclean appearance.

Could this person ever invite me to their house for dinner? If they are like me and make hasty conclusions then they will say that I am not hygienic and do not shower unless I am stuck in a rainstorm, so never would I be invited to this person's house. The person who has concluded such things about me may also have faults that other people cannot bear. The information we learn and our own interpretations about people and their behavior should be considered an alarm for us to examine ourselves and fix our faults before thinking about others' downfalls. Therefore it is not fair that I consider my classmate to be unorganized because I myself am not as prompt with some habits as I should be. We should focus on removing the spec out of our eye and improving what we can before removing the spec out of another's eye.

Now that I have overcome my faults, in other words, shave and clean my room, my classmate comes to me a second time and asks me to borrow notes again. From my previous experience, I know he has trouble with keeping things in order. I am faced with a dilemma: if I lend him the notes on white paper I may receive them back on brown and if I do not lend him the notes...well, nothing happens except that I did not help him and I have lost a blessing. The trouble here is the idea of the schema; I have developed a vision of how my classmate will act and I am afraid to give him another chance in case he ruins my notes again. Say I decide not to give him notes ever again; this can be very wrong because I am judging my classmate based on our last incident and I give him no chance to demonstrate new organizational skills that he could have possibly developed since my last encounter with him. God knows how we will act because he has created us and He has an inimitable intuition about each one of us; on the other hand, we know absolutely nothing about how a person will conduct themselves in a given situation, even with previous experiences with them. I know a man who was a thief, a murderer and a drunk and I was told this man became a monk later on. Of course I would never have expected this; how can a man do this? The answer is the grace of God: it can take a man who was persistent in an incredibly worldly life and turn him into St. Moses the Black. Hence with the struggles people in our personal lives are going through, the grace of God can do wonders! Unfortunately, it is amazing how often we take away a person's motivation to change something negative about themselves by our stubborn and pessimistic definition of who they are in that fault. By creating these schemas and expectations for people's behaviors and actions we surely compromise and discourage people's belief of the power of the grace of God in their own lives. These people

may feel as though there is no reason to change when they are expected and believed by everyone in their environment to conduct themselves in a certain way. Some of them could be trying really hard to change and to portray this to other people, but we blind ourselves with our preconceived judgments of others. These people should recognize that what they do in their hearts is seen by and done for God and Him only, but the influence of people cannot be ignored. So maybe my classmate has changed then, I should give him the opportunity to bring back my notes in perfect condition because he *was* unorganized last time (just like I did not shave in the *past* and I do now) and this time who knows. But maybe he is still unorganized but so what...? Worst comes to worst I will develop patience. We can help each other grow as Christians by giving more opportunity to those who need it, starting with very simple circumstances. This is not to say that wrong behavior should be acceptable or that we should preach to people; it is to say, however, that we should not expect that people will always carry the same faults, for God's grace and the Holy Spirit are ever powerful and always working in all of us. Think of the tax collectors in the olden days: people despised them and most likely treated them in a way worse than they'd treat others because of their title and the crimes they committed; Jesus on the other hand showed love to Zacchaeus and went to his house to eat. We cannot compare the influence of the magnificent love of Jesus Christ to our own but we can try to show love to others as Jesus did and let Him take care of the rest.

We must learn to open our hearts to all and show love to all, as Jesus Christ did. We need to consider and reconsider our schemas and how we use them to judge others and then we will be able to forgive our brother 70 times 7, we will be able to look past the actions people have committed before, refute convicting thoughts of them as people and give them the benefit of the doubt. Instead of seeing people and treating them by their faults we should try to see people's faults in ourselves and improve those things accordingly. We should pray that God changes us and others into the best they can become.