

## “blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd” - changing your mind

### “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen

Excerpts from chapter 36: Elizabeth Bennett has angrily refused Mr. Darcy’s proposal. She accuses him of interfering with her sister’s romance with Darcy’s best friend, and for mistreating dashing militiaman Mr. Wickham, who told Elizabeth of Darcy’s jealous refusal to honor his late father’s will to give Wickham an inheritance. A day later, Darcy finds Elizabeth, handing her a letter that explains all:

1. He *did* break up the relationship between his friend and Elizabeth’s sister, because the sister did not seem to act in love, and apologizes if he was wrong. But also, Elizabeth’s other family members acted so foolishly that he did not think it was a good match.
2. He did *not* hurt Mr. Wickham: Wickham refused the inheritance—called a “living,” which came with a job in the church—and wanted money instead ... spent it all on gambling and women and loose living ... then came back for the property ... and once he was refused this, tried to seduce and elope with Darcy’s innocent young sister!

Elizabeth proceeds to process the information in this letter:

She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, “**This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!**”—and when she had gone through the whole letter, though scarcely knowing anything of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that she would not regard it, that she would never look in it again.

...

So far each recital [of both Wickham and Darcy] confirmed the other; but when she came to the will, the difference was great. What Wickham had said of the living was fresh in her memory; and as she recalled his very words, **it was impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side or the other.** ...

...

Of his [Wickham’s] former way of life, nothing had been known in Hertfordshire but what he told himself. As to his real character, had information been in her power, she had never felt a wish of inquiring. **His countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue. She tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence,** that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for those casual errors, under which she would endeavour to class what Mr. Darcy had described as the idleness

and vice of many years' continuance. But no such recollection befriended her. She could see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address, but she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess.

...

At one time she had almost resolved on applying to him [a cousin of Darcy who Elizabeth knows, who could back up Darcy's claims], but the idea was checked by the awkwardness of the application, and at length wholly banished by the conviction that Mr. Darcy would never have hazarded such a proposal, if he had not been well assured of his cousin's **corroboration**.

...

She perfectly remembered everything that had passed in conversation between Wickham and herself in their first evening at Mr. Philips's. Many of his expressions were still fresh in her memory. She was *now* struck with the **impropriety of such communications to a stranger**, and wondered it had escaped her before. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct.

...

She remembered that he had boasted of having no fear of seeing Mr. Darcy—that Mr. Darcy might leave the country, but that *he* should stand his ground; yet he had avoided the Netherfield ball the very next week. She remembered, also, that till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, he had told his story to no one but herself; **but that after their removal, it had been everywhere discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr. Darcy's character**, though he had assured her that respect for the father would always prevent his exposing the son.

...

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that **she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd**.

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried. "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameless distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. **Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away where either were concerned**. Till this moment, I never knew myself."

What is Elizabeth's first reaction to the news that her understanding of recent events, and her view of two men, is wrong?

Describe the different steps she goes through before arriving at the conclusion that she has indeed been wrong.

How does Elizabeth contrast Wickham's words and Wickham's actions?

What things made Elizabeth predisposed to believe Wickham and doubt Darcy? What could have protected her from the mistake?

What mindsets and responses can keep us from being "blind, partial, prejudiced?"

How can we ensure we respond appropriately to information counter to what we believe?