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## Matthew 7:1-12

### Love, Judgmentalism, Discernment, and Prayer

#### Intro

Aside from John 3:16, Matt. 7:1 may be the most commonly known and cited Bible verse today, especially among non-Christians. And yet, it is also one of the most frequently *misunderstood, abused, and wrongly applied* verses of Scripture. It is often taken out of context and twisted to mean something *very different* from what Jesus is actually saying here. Many people rush to this verse, “*Judge not,*” and hold it up as a trump card to put to rest any kind of moral judgment or evaluation someone might make about their sinful values, beliefs, or lifestyles. Many quote this verse as if it means it would be wrong for us to acknowledge and address sins of others in the church community

However, that is *not* what Christ says here. We are called to *love one another as ourself*. As we seek to love one another, Jesus assumes that *sin and tension will come up*, and such things have to be addressed. But he warns us against falling into traps on either side: **Judgmentalism** on the one hand, and a **Lack of critical discernment** on the other. But such balanced love is *impossibly* difficult - we cannot do this on our own, but need the grace of God - we must **pray and depend on God's grace** to walk in righteousness. This is what **Matt. 7:1-12 calls us to!**

#### I. We Must Love One Another by Doing as We Want Others to Do to Us (7:12)

In order to understand the main thrust of this passage, let us first look at the very *last* part, the summary statement that the passage works towards, in verse 12: “*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*” This is a very familiar, well-known verse, popularly referred to as “The Golden Rule.” Jesus says that this phrase “*is the Law and the Prophets,*” meaning it is a way to *summarize* the main thrust of what the Law and the Prophets command, pointing us to *the righteous life we are supposed to live*. And we’ve heard this already in the Sermon on the Mount, haven’t we? In **Matthew 5:17**, Jesus declared he came to “fulfill” the “*Law and the Prophets,*” beginning his teachings about how we are to live a *righteous, godly life* as God’s people, especially towards each other. This verse is very similar to the “greatest commandments” Jesus gives in **Matt. 22:37-40**: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the*

*great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*” Another way to phrase that “second commandment” to love your neighbor is the “Golden Rule” of **v.12**: *Do unto others as you want to do unto you.* And so this verse neatly ties off the larger section, *summarizing* how we can obey GOd and live righteously *towards one another.*

And the phrase simply means this: treat others the way you want to be treated; don’t do to them what you don’t want them to do to you; *do to them*, or *for them*, the things that you would want them to *do to or for you.*

This is a fairly simple phrase for us to understand, and yet it has *profound implications* for the way we live our entire lives. It’s so simple a toddler can grasp the concept, so that I can use this to teach my son: “Would you like it if I took your toys from you? Then don’t take them from your sister. Do you want your friends to share with you? Then you should share with them” It’s a simple concept, and yet so profound that all of us need to be reminded of the implications it has for us.

This includes the **negative implication**: *Don’t* do to others what you don’t want them to do to you. Would you want your wife or husband to speak poorly about you behind your back, or to be disrespectful in the way they speak to you in public? If not, then you shouldn’t do that to them. Would you want someone to gossip, slander, or lie about you? If not, you shouldn’t do so to others. Would you want someone to assume the worst or to angrily insult and belittle you? If not, don’t do so to others. The applications are endless.

But this command also means *much more than that* - Jesus calls us to aim much higher, *positively seeking* to do *anything good that we wish others would do to us.* Would you want someone to help you when you’re in need? Then you should help others. Would you want someone to patiently show you grace and forgiveness when you mess up? Extend that same grace. Do you want to be encouraged? Then be quick to encourage others, showering each other with *grace and kindness.* Do you want help growing as a Christian, understanding the Bible, fighting sin, and loving God? Then let us strive to help each other grow in Christ, even by helping each other deal with sin, understand the Word better, obey God, and apply the gospel to each other’s lives.

This is the **positive goal** Christ calls us to work towards: loving each other as ourself. Jesus calls us to frame all of our thoughts and actions towards others in the positive terms of *love: do unto others as you wish they would do unto you.*

Therefore, this summary command frames the rest of the passage for us. Loving one another can be *very difficult* at times, because we're all sinners: *our own sin* and the *sins of others* get in the way. Therefore, Jesus gives us *guardrails* on either side to protect us from falling into ditches on either side in our attempts to love each other. First, he warns again being ***judgmental.***

## **II. We Must Not Be Judgmental Hypocrites (7:1-5)**

In verse 1, Jesus gives the command: "*Judge not, that you not be judged.*" As I mentioned earlier, this verse is often misunderstood, taken out of context, and taken to mean something other than what Jesus meant by it.

So first, let's look at what it *doesn't* mean:

Jesus is *not* forbidding us from making any judgments at all, especially not moral judgments. He himself tells us to. In verse 6, the verse right after this section, he makes a judgment about some people being "dogs" and "pigs," and expects us to be able to discern what type of people fit that category as we go about through life. And as we'll see next week, the second half of this same chapter teaches us about evaluating - or *making judgment calls* - about *good fruit* versus *bad fruit*, and how to spot the "wolves" that he warns us about. As we'll see later, in Matt. 18, we're commanded to make judgment calls about unrepentant sin in the process of church discipline. And in a similar context, we're even explicitly *commanded* to "judge" one another in **1 Cor. 5 and 6**. Obviously, then, the word *judge* can mean different things depending on the context.

So what is Jesus referring to here? What is he forbidding? He is forbidding a spirit of **judgmentalism**, using the word "judge" the same way Paul uses it in **Rom. 14**. We are not to be the kind of people that are *overly-critical*, always looking for and pointing out other people's faults, flaws, and failures. The "judgmental" person is the kind of person who is full of *pride* and *self-righteousness*, even **hypocritical**, as the illustration in **vv.3-5** makes clear. The judgmental hypocrite is always quick to point the fault out in other people or positions, but not the good; always quick to shift the blame to others, but not own up to one's own failures; always able to

see someone else's sin, but blind to his own. John Stott, a famous twentieth century pastor in England, commented on this passage by putting it this way:

“We have a fatal tendency to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize the gravity of our own. We seem to find it impossible, when comparing ourselves with others, to be strictly objective and impartial. On the contrary, we have a rosy view of ourselves and a jaundiced view of others.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus then gives the reason why it is so perilous for us to be *judgmental* towards each other in verse 2: “*For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*” Basically, this means that if we are *quick to judge others*, we are placing ourselves in the place of **GOd**, making ourselves the judge, instead of acknowledging that GOd alone is the righteous judge and standard. If we are quick to tear down, slow to recognize or admit our own fault, and rarely build up others and show grace, then it shows that we have a hardened, unrepentant, self-righteous heart - the opposite of a heart that is humbled before God and utterly dependent upon his grace. Essentially, it's saying the same thing as the Lord's prayer, in **Matt. 6:14-15**, where Jesus warned us that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us. Does this mean our forgiveness - our **salvation and justification** - is based upon our own works of forgiving and not judging? *No*. What both passages mean is that if we are *truly believers - if we have truly experienced the grace of GOd in our lives through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ* - then we have *new hearts* and must live differently.

Jesus drives the point home with an unforgettable illustration: imagine two men in a carpenter's workshop, cutting wood. If you've ever been in a similar situation, then you know how easy it is to get a piece of sawdust or a splinter in your eye - and just how irritating that is! Very kindly, your friend offers to help you get it out - but as he turns, you realize he has a *two-by-four* sticking out of his eye! And he's completely unaware of it! If he were to try and get the sawdust out of your eye, not only would he be too blind to see what he was doing, he would do great damage in the process!

This is the picture Jesus draws for us in **vv.3-5**: “*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?*” These represent our *sins*. Like sawdust in the eye, our sins are *damaging*; we need help from others to deal with them! And yet, like the log in an eye, our sin can also *harden our hearts and blind our eyes*. Jesus continues in verse 5,

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (BST)*, p.178.

driving it home: “*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.*” He is warning us against *hypocrisy*, the state where we either *deny our sin* or are *so self-righteous that we are completely blind to it*. Such hypocrisy is the root of **judgmentalism**, and leads to *damaging and hurting* our brothers and sisters all in the name of “*helping them.*”

We must **avoid and fight against our own hypocrisy**. We must take great care to *examine our own souls and lives* **before** we speak into someone else’s life. If we clearly see the sins of others, even small ones, but are not aware of our own, then *we might very well be blind* to the logs in our own eyes; our sin can make us blind to our own failings, and hyper-critical of others. We must avoid such hypocrisy. Let us search and examine our own hearts; let us regularly *confess, repent from, and deal with our own sin* by taking it to the cross of Christ. No, we will never be perfect; but we **must** strive to be *humble and repentant*, lest we fall into *hypocrisy*.

And so we must **fight against** being **judgmental - being overly-critical, fault-finding, blame-shifting, and self-righteous**. We must take great care that we do not make *ourselves* the standard for what is right and wrong, but only **God and His Word**.

So often, the judgmental person is *most critical* about things that are *not clear sin issues*. If God has spoken a clear, moral judgment about something as **good** or **evil, right** or **wrong** for us as His New Covenant people, then *that is not our judgmentalism, but simply standing firm on what God has said*. We must positively teach, and occasionally lovingly correct and rebuke, one another regarding the righteous life GOD commands us to pursue. For example, it is not judgmental for us to declare that clear sins, such as *murder, adultery, gossip, anger, and selfishness*, are wrong. But sometimes, well-meaning Christians elevate *wisdom issues* to the level of *sin and obedience*, even though GOD has not clearly commanded it in scripture. For example, the Bible does not teach that it is wrong for us to get a tattoo; its an area of wisdom and Christian liberty. We may each have opinions about whether or not it is wise to get a tattoo; but *we cannot judge one another* for coming to different conclusions. If we do, we make *ourselves* the judge, our *own opinions and preferences* the standard, instead of GOD. So let us be very slow to criticize or *judge* one another for different decisions we make in areas of CHristian liberty and wisdom - such as parenting strategies, politics, or whether or not its right or wrong to get vaccinations. Where God’s will and Word is clear, so we must be firm; but where God’s Word

does not directly address an issue, and where Christian liberty and wisdom must be applied, we must be *slow to judge* and *quick to show grace*.

However, this doesn't mean that we can *never address someone else's sin!* After all, it is no kindness to let our brother go on with a splinter in his eye! As **verse 5 concludes:** "*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.*" We are not let off the hook - we still have the brotherly duty to *love our neighbor well enough* to help them deal with their sins as well! To lovingly *rebuke and correct* at times, to help them repent, fight sin, and strive for obedience - the very same things we ourselves need to do and need help with at times!

So what is the solution? *Take the log out of your own eye* - address your own sin and examine your heart before God and look to the cross - and *then* we will see clearly to help our brothers and sisters do the same! **We must deal with our own sin honestly, so that we can see clearly to perform our brotherly duty of love in helping each other with the sin in our lives.** Once we examine and guard our hearts from our own sin, judgmentalism, and hypocrisy, we are free to *perform our duty of Christian love to each other*. We are to help each other deal with sin from the standpoint of the *love and grace of the gospel*: not self-righteous, as if we're better or don't have our own sin, but as those who *humbly confess our own sin, repent, and have experienced the grace of Christ, and eagerly want to help apply that to each others' lives!* Aware of our own sin and need for grace, *we repent*, and go to the cross of Christ, where we receive endless mercy and grace from God our Father by believing in the gospel - that *Jesus Christ bore our sins for us to the full, so that we are forgiven by grace through faith, and that this same grace is sufficient to transform us in the righteousness of Christ!* This grace strips away our hypocrisy and judgmentalism! And it drives us to our brothers and sisters in love, so that when we see them suffering from their own sins, we are compelled to *apply this same gospel of grace to their lives and situations!*

Next, Jesus reminds us of an *opposite temptation* we might fall into:

### **III. We Must Show Moral Discernment (7:6)**

Having warned us not to be *judgmental* - being *too critical* - we are now warned against the opposite temptation: lacking discernment and not being critical enough. I think that's the main point of **v.6**. However, this is a *very difficult* verse, both to interpret and to apply.

Here's what Jesus says: "*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*"

First off, let's understand the illustration:

"Dogs" and "pigs" are not meant here to refer to *cute, friendly* pets - the picture here is of *wild, dangerous* animals. Think of *mangy mongrels* scavenging through the city alleyway, wild and feral. Think of a pack of wild boar, with dangerously sharp tusks and aggressive personalities. Furthermore, both of these animals were considered *unclean*, associated with *gentiles*. We're told not to give them something "holy" - such as meat sacrificed to God in the temple - or to throw them our "pearls" - something valuable. Both are unappreciated, torn apart, and defiled. The wild dog tears apart the holy meat without any consideration for what he's eating, and might even attack you, wanting more food. Or imagine throwing pearls at a group of wild boars; it pacifies them for a second, because they think it's food - but as soon as they realize they can't eat the pearls, they *trample them underfoot and turn to attack*.

So what does this mean? First, I think the "dogs" and "pigs" probably refer to people who are *not believers*, and even more specifically, are *enemies of God and enemies of His people*. The "holy thing" and the "pearls," I believe, are meant to represent the "good news" and teaching of the "Kingdom of God" - this is the most *valuable, prized* thing that Jesus keeps referring to through the Sermon of the Mount; furthermore, think of the "pearl" of great value in **Matt. 13:46** that represents the Kingdom. Rather than repent and believe when they hear the good news and the preaching of God's Word, they *grow angry and hostile* - they *trample underfoot* the immensely valuable Word of God and the Gospel, seeking to defile, mock, and discredit it; not only that, but they turn to *attack, persecute, and damage* God's people - the individual Christian sharing the gospel with them, or maybe even the local church.

Obviously, this is not saying that we shouldn't share the gospel with unbelievers. We never "judgmentally" pre-judge who we think will or will not reject the gospel or things of God's Kingdom; we openly proclaim to and share with all. However, we must use discernment when someone begins to become openly hostile to the gospel and the Word of God, even twisting the things of God to the point of trying to bully and abuse others. There comes a point when a

conversation is not fruitful, nor even possible, and we must simply walk away. This is not being judgmental - we try our best to give them multiple chances and to be gracious in loving in our response. But part of love also means recognizing the hardness of someone's heart, and even being honest about that in the way we move forward with them. While a last resort, this does sometime have to happen in our evangelism efforts with people, when it becomes apparent that they are *completely hardened and hostile* to God, His Word, and the gospel of Christ. As Jesus says elsewhere, there comes a time, regrettably, to "shake the dust" off of our feet.

And I don't think the application is limited just to those who are avowed non-believers. This *may also* apply, again as a last resort, to a professing believer - someone considered our fellow brother or sister in Christ, especially a fellow church member - who proves to be *completely unrepentant* in his or her sin, *twisting and trampling* the scriptures to justify their sinful behaviors and views, and *turning to attack* the church as they become hostile to *loving calls for repentance*. I think that's why this statement comes right after the illustration of helping a brother get the "speck" out of his eye. But what if the brother gets angry and doesn't want to take out that speck of sin? What happens then? Our goal in love is always repentance and reconciliation, but we must also use *discernment* - there may come a point when it is clear the person is unrepentant and hostile to the Word of God; if there is no repentance, there can be no genuine reconciliation, and so we must *lovingly, gently, yet firmly* make that clear; even here, there comes a point where we must *exercise discerning church discipline*, for the good of that person and the good of the church, as other passages, like **Matt. 18** and **1 Cor. 5**, make clear.

Clearly, such selfless love, that is neither *judgmental* or *undiscerning* is very difficult, indeed, *impossible*. How can we hope to have such love? Only by the grace of God. And this is exactly where Jesus turns next:

#### **IV. We must pray persistently, trusting God will give us the grace we need (7:7-11)**

The **key to rightly loving our neighbor is prayer** -having complete dependence upon the power and grace of God alone. And Jesus assures us here that GOD hears and answers our prayers when we pray according to His will.

He uses *three verbs*, "Ask," "Seek, and "Knock," each one telling us to do the same thing: *pray!* The repetition emphasizes that we are to do this *persistently*; what is envisioned here is



not a one time prayer, but a regularly practice of *persistently seeking God and petitioning him in prayer!*

And we're likewise given a *threefold assurance*; "It will be given to you;" "You will find;" and "It will be opened to you." THis emphatically assures us that *God will hear and answer our prayers!* He is not a genie in the bottle; this doesn't mean he will give us *everything we ask*, or in the way we want it - he promises to give us **god gifts**, the things that we truly need.

And so verses 9-11 give us a beautiful picture to drive this truth home for us: a child asks his father for a fish - of course he won't give him a snake! If he asks for bread - of course he won't give him a rock! I love my son dearly - I want him to have the food he needs! If he asks me for something that's good for him, *of course I want to give it to him!* And this is true of me *even though I am evil* - this is even *generally true* of the average unbelieving father as well.

And that's the point Christ makes: *how much more true this is, then, for our **Father in Heaven***, who is not evil, but it *perfectly and loving!* If you are trusting in Christ alone, then *God is your father! Of course He will give you good gifts!*

But only if you *ask him for them.*

And I think the obvious connection for us is to *ask Him for the grace we need to **obey Him, to rightly love Him and each other***, to give us the wisdom and grace we need to *walk in the righteousness of Christ* that we're commanded to strive for in the Sermon on the Mount! ANd we're given the blessed assurance that **God will give us such good gifts if we ask!** No, it's not over night, we must be persistent - and yet, *He will give us every good thing we need to seek His will and glory, in His timing - all for His glory and our good!*

If you're not a believer this morning, and you don't know God as your Father, there is an assurance God gives you as well: *ask God to forgive you of your sins, and He will! Seek His grace, and you will find it!* Simply *turn from your sin in confession and repentance, believe in the gospel of Christ, and trust in Him alone for salvation!* If you have any questions about this, or about how to become a Christian, baptism, or church membership, I would love to speak with you. You can come now, or find me after the service. Let us pray.