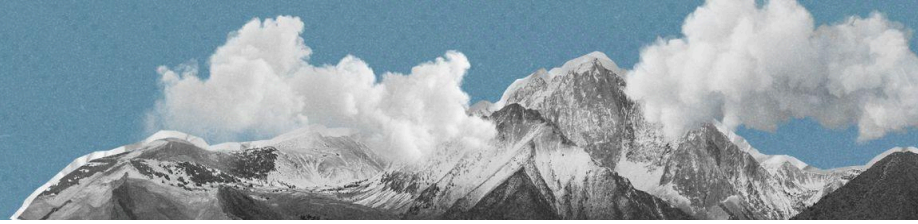


THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW



Matthew 7:1–6 **Judge Not**

We are turning to Matthew 7 today. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus has been laying out a high standard for what it means to live as a Christian. He raises the bar for how we live even beyond the standard set by the Old Testament law, calling us toward perfection.

And while He doesn't expect perfect obedience, we will always be praying, "Forgive us our debts," He does expect true obedience.

Real progress can be made. We should be able to look at a mature Christian life and say that it truly looks like the life described in the sermon on the mount.

A Christian can expect growth and change. Which brings with it a risk. Once we've made some progress, we've parted with some old ways, and we are growing, however slowly, we can easily twist our righteousness into self-righteousness.

Our religion feeds not only our souls, but our egos. And our growth goes to our heads and becomes grounds for smugness.

We can easily join the ranks of the better-than-you church-goer that seems to look down on everyone.

So knowing that potential side-effect of Christian living, Jesus gives us this call in Matthew 7:1-6:

Matthew 7:1-6 [1] “Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. [3] Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? [5] 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. [6] “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.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:1 “[1] **“Judge not, that you be not judged.”**

This is one of the most frequently quoted and frequently misunderstood passages of scripture. It’s often used to get out of a hard conversation or to avoid responsibility for our actions, it’s used as a pass sometimes for really bad behavior. I do something reprehensible, you sit me down to talk to me about it, and I say, “You’re not supposed to judge.”

Some people have thought this prohibits all judgments of any kind.

Tolstoy went as far as to say that people should not set up any courts of law where judgments would be made.

He also said we should never judge right or wrong:

“It’s not given to people to judge what’s right or wrong. People have eternally been mistaken and will be mistaken, and in nothing more than in what they consider right and wrong.” – **Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace**

And, taken by itself, verse one could be thought to mean that.

[1] “Judge not, that you be not judged.

But there are lots of kinds of judging, not all of them are in view here. There’s judging in courts, there’s being discerning and wise, there’s being judgmental and critical, there’s evaluating - what does he mean?

We know he can’t be calling us to not discern between right and wrong - we’re called to do that all over the Bible. There would be no ten commandments if we couldn’t judge what behaviors might be right and wrong.

And even in this context, Jesus calls us to judge that some people are in His categories of “dog” and “pig” - we’ll get to the meaning of that a little later!

But obviously we are called to make some kinds of judgments.

So what is forbidden? We look at the context, Matthew 7:2:

Matthew 7: [2] For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

So he is forbidding judging others in a way that that we would not want to be judged. This is the golden rule applied to our assessment of others.

The golden rule is coming up in

Matthew 7:12 “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Jesus has already said we are to forgive others as we want to be forgiven.

And now He is saying we should only judge others as we would want to be judged.

We all make assessments of other people.

And Jesus calls us here to never try to do that without judging ourselves first, and by the same standard.

Our default mode, especially if we begin to think too much of ourselves, is to exaggerate the sins and weaknesses of others, while minimizing our own sins and weaknesses.

John Stott writes, “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. Indeed, what we are often doing is seeing our own faults in others and judging them vicariously. That way, we experience the pleasure of self-righteousness without the pain of penitence.”¹

Judging others allows us to enjoy a little self-righteous smugness. And avoid the difficult work of repenting ourselves.

We apply standards to others that we wouldn't want to apply to ourselves, and we do so in ways we wouldn't want them to be applied to us.

But Jesus says we will be judged by the standards we apply to others.

So here are some applications of thisL

1) We Only Judge the Words of Others As We Want Our Words to Be Judged

¹ Stott, John. The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (The Bible Speaks Today Series) (p. 189). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

To obey this command when it comes to judging the words of others, we need to recover the principle of charity.

And this is an old word for this idea. Charity isn't, in this use, giving money to a cause.

Two non-Christian guys named Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianov wrote a book called the *Coddling of the American Mind*, a really excellent book overall, and there they write:

“The principle of charity...says that one should interpret other people’s statements in their best, most reasonable form, not in the worst or most offensive way possible.”²

It is interpreting a person’s words how we would want ours interpreted. We don’t twist words, we overlook minor offenses. We laugh off little things that would offend us if we were hypersensitive.

We’re not looking for a weapon against people, we’re overlooking as many minor flubs as possible and striving for unity and love.

Proverbs 10:12 “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.”

We twist no one’s words. Not even the words of our enemy.

We’ve received the grace of Jesus, and receiving grace makes you gracious in your speech and your interpretation of the words of another.

Sometimes, when we’re in a conflict or an argument, we will misrepresent the other person’s words, we will argue past each other, and never move toward reconciliation.

² Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, (New York: Penguin, 2018), 55.

You can do this in any relationship. You're in an argument, you hear their argument, and then you misrepresent it in the worst way. You make a straw-man argument. Your wife doesn't like something you said at dinner, so you say, "Oh, so you just want me to sit there in silence!" No, that's not what she's saying.

Instead, you should steel-man her argument: "So when I went into detail about the road-kill I saw while we were eating, you thought that was gross and you'd prefer I not talk about things like that at dinner." You make their case so that they say, "That's exactly what I'm saying."

We don't make straw-men, we make steel-men of their arguments so they feel heard and understood so we can move the conversation forward.

So we judge the words of others how we want our words to be judged.

2) We only judge the MOTIVES of others as we would want our motives to be judged.

When we get judgmental, we assume that our own motives are good while the motives of our opponent must be corrupt.

Yeah, she apologized, but it wasn't sincere, it was just to manipulate.

He is over there serving the church, but he must be motivated by the desire to show off.

My motives are good, but the motives of my opponents are selfish and insincere.

Would I want to be judged that way? Jesus says not to use a standard we wouldn't want applied to ourselves.

So we only judge the words and motives of others as we would want our words and motives judged.

3) We Only Judge Others as Quickly as We Would Want to Be Judged

In our culture, rushing to judgment is considered to be a virtue. If I can speak first, get my take out there first, assess somebody quickly, people will think I'm wise and shrewd and I can steer the conversation.

James 1:19-20 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

4) We Only Judge With the Same Level of Proof We Would Want if Accused

Proverbs 18:17 “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

5) We Only Penalize in Ways We Would Want to Be Penalized

We can be quick to ghost others or give the silent treatment. We cut off without conversation and offer no way of reconciliation. But that's judging in a way we wouldn't want to be judged.

6) We Have the Same Spirit Toward Others That We Would Want Them to Have Toward Us

We aren't supposed to be the judgmental, quick to criticize people that we wouldn't want to be around because we always feel like we're on eggshells around them. We are called to help people with their errors, that's coming up in a second, but that's different than always looking for the errors.

We shouldn't see our main calling as looking for ways to judge and criticize and set ourselves apart from each other.

Romans 14 [10] Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; [11] for it is written,

**“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God.”**

[12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

For however much we should feel a weight to help each other out with sins and errors, we should also remember that God is judge, not us.

1 Corinthians 4:3-5 “3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Gospel implications - we have a judge who commends us in Christ...

7) We Take Care Of Our Sins First

Matthew 7:[3] Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? [5] 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.

And the meaning here is clear. We can obsess over the errors of others while ignoring our own.

This is one of the things we're supposed to do each time we take the Lord's supper.

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 “**27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. **30** That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.[h] **31** But if we judged[i] ourselves truly, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined[j] so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Galatians 6:1 “**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**”

And then this section on judgment ends with a verse that seems out of place:

Matthew 7:[6] “**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.**

What's the connection here? This seems at first glance like judgmental language.

Well Jesus had just said to only correct someone else gently and helpfully after you've removed the log from your own eye.

And now He seems to soften our approach to others who need help even

further here.

Here's what he's saying.

A pig or a dog is not a bad and hostile animal, but an animal nonetheless.

A pig is driven by the needs of its body – all a pig wants is to eat. A pig is not interested in beauty, you don't see a whole lot of pigs going to concerts or movies or art museums. Unless there's food in it for the pig, the pig is not interested. The beauty of the pearl is meaningless to the pig who is only concerned for his belly.

A pig will respond if you offer it food. But if you take something that is infinitely more valuable than a corn husk like a pearl and put it in front of the pig, the pig will spit it out and trample it, and then turn and attack you because it has no use for pearls.

So you take a domesticated animal and actually turn it hostile by putting the pearl in front of it. The pig is not innately angry, but you try to feed it a pearl when all it wanted was a corn husk, and you tick it off.

If you don't have any eye for beauty, a pearl is actually as useless as any pebble you pick up on the road. You might as well feed a pig gravel.

If you're starving out in the woods somewhere and someone gives you a pearl, it is completely useless. If you're just looking to fill your belly, you have no use for something that is valuable because it is beautiful.

The Gospel, the message of Jesus' death to save sinners, is a beautiful thing. But you have to have an eye for it to desire it.

And sometimes we will present the message of Jesus to someone, in an effort to help them to a relationship with Him and eternal life. But that person rejects it, with no eye for the beauty of the Gospel, only looking to satisfy his desires. He might be running after food or drink or career success or fame. And the Gospel seems to be of no use.

We have to judge how it is being received as we go to determine how we

proceed in the conversation.

So you start talking to a friend about Jesus and immediately they get mad and reject what you're saying. They're not concerned about spiritual things and eternal beauty. So you back off, don't keep putting a pearl in front of a person who doesn't want it now.

You don't ram the pearls down their throat. You back off, pray, serve them in love, continue to be there for them when they call. And wait - try again some other time to see if God is giving them eyes for the beauty of Jesus.

The point of all of this is we should bring the pearl of the Gospel to people in the most loving way we can. We shouldn't push it on people in such a way that they can't digest it. So we need to be completely humble and gentle, very discerning (are they asking questions just to argue or because of real interest?), not going too quickly or too slowly in the conversation, being quick to listen and slow to speak.

Because if we try to shove a pearl down the throat of a pig, that's where they get mad and tear you to shreds.

So we are supposed to be so humble, prayerful, and loving in our dealings with people that we wisely craft an environment between ourselves and other people so as not to turn them hostile. Sometimes that's impossible, but we are supposed to discern who the swine are and act accordingly.

And we should be patient with others, as the Lord has been patient with us.

Prayer of Confession

Father, You have called us to only judge righteous judgment, and only after considering ourselves and our own sins and weaknesses. But we confess that often we pretend to be self-sufficient, we get arrogant about our spirituality, and our growth becomes grounds for smugness. Rather than mourn over our remaining sin, we often sit in judgment on others rather than open ourselves to the reality of sin still in our lives. You have said that those

who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness are blessed. Yet we are easily lulled into spiritual pride.

Jesus, we thank you that in your meekness and humility and lowliness of heart you went to the cross to pay for our failures.

Spirit, we pray that our experience of finding the mercy of Jesus would cause us to live like this - while we don't expect perfect obedience in our lives, we can expect real power from you and real obedience that makes us quite different than those without our faith. We ask for real humility, real transparency, and real ability to help one another with our sins, while considering ourselves.

Assurance:

Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) Consider what it means to never judge in a way that we would not to be judged. How would it change your approach to some of your present circumstances if you were to live this way?**
- 2) Discuss the principle of charity (as presented on page 5 of this sermon.)**
- 3) Do you have any experiencing "steel-manning" the argument someone is making against you? How does that help?**
- 4) Why is judging motives of others accurately so difficult and dangerous?**
- 5) Do you ever struggle with having a critical spirit?**

6) What judgments of others should we be making?

7) How can you apply Jesus's teaching that we are not to cast our pearls before swine?