

## Scripture Reading

### Matthew 7:1-12

<sup>1</sup>"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

<sup>3</sup>"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

<sup>6</sup>"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

<sup>7</sup>"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>9</sup>"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup>So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

## Message

### **“The Good and Beautiful Life: Living with Compassion & Understanding”**

As summer begins to wind down we are also coming close to the end of our summertime message series based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount teachings. Throughout these central teachings Jesus calls his followers to live beyond the letter of the law; what had become the “religion” of their day; so that their character, their influence, their righteousness, their piety and ambition all single them out to be followers of Jesus.

Now as He ends his message, Jesus concentrates on relationships. And as one respected commentator writes:

***For the Christian counter-culture is not an individualistic but a community affair, and relations both within the community and between the community and others are of paramount importance.***

Source: Stott, John, *Christian Counter-Culture*. IVP 1978, p. 174.

**This Sunday we will focus upon Jesus’ teachings concerning our relationship with brothers and sisters in the faith, then our relationship with people who have rejected the gospel, then our relationship with God as we come to Him in prayer, and finally, a broad relationship teaching we are to apply to all people.**

### **1. A Relationship Lesson for Christians Regarding Other Christians**

Unlike many of us who entered the Christian community with idealistic expectations of effortless peace and harmony, Jesus assumes that there

will be relational tensions among His followers and relational problems needing solutions within the body. For while Jesus would indeed die for our sin, the process of sanctification is a long one, requiring frequent apologies and many opportunities for forgiveness. By living through such times and exercising such options we become more Christ-like and we create an ever more gracious community.

So amid the reality of imperfect but transforming relationships, Jesus offers us two very specific prohibitions about how Christians are to relate to one another:

- a. **Don't judge one another**, and
- b. **Don't be hypocrites.**

**a. Don't judge one another**

**When our Lord says that we are not to judge one another, we must be very careful, for he is not telling us that we are to disengage ourselves from critical assessment.** Repeatedly, throughout his Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls his followers to be “different” from the world around us;

- we are supposed to be more righteous than the Pharisees,
- we are to do "more than others" through the standard of love we adopt,
- we are neither to be like the hypocrites in our piety, nor like the heathen in our ambition.

You see, we simply cannot implement Jesus teachings unless we analyze the performance of others, and then make sure that ours is different from theirs.

In just a minute we will examine Jesus teachings concerning our relationships with those who reject the Gospel, where again Jesus calls upon our critical discernment in order to recognize those about whom he is speaking.

So then, if critical assessment is okay, what does Jesus mean when he says that we, as a brothers and sisters in Christ, are not to judge one another?

In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, John Stott, uses the word "ensorious" to help us understand the "judgment" of others.

***The censorious critic is a fault-finder who is negative and destructive toward other people and enjoys actively seeking out their failings....***

***Worse than that, to be censorious is to set oneself up as a censor, and so to claim the competency and authority to sit in judgment upon one's fellow man.*** ibid p. 176

More directly, Stott declares;

***To be censorious is to presume arrogantly to anticipate the day of judgment, to usurp the prerogative of the divine Judge, in fact to try to play God.*** ibid p. 177

For some Christians there is a very fine line between knowing God's Word and speaking judgment on his behalf. And when we cross that line, we threaten our relationships with one another. Jesus says, "Do not judge."

After all, can't we all think of uncomfortable times in our own lives when our behaviors were confronted by someone else's opinion that what we were doing was wrong? "Judgment" is not easily received. In fact, **judgmental language builds walls rather than bridges.**

The issue here is not the message being conveyed, but the method by which it is conveyed. **While believers are called to be convicted by the Holy Spirit, censorious Christians seek to be that convicting power by making judgmental statements.**

Jesus tells His followers to not to judge one another because we are not God; a truth that is all too evident in our own sinfulness.

So, can you remember a time when the brother or sister in the Lord approached you, and either through a direct word of judgment or through an attempt at humor, they conveyed to you just how wrong you are in doing what you are doing? If you can remember such a time do you remember your actions?

- My guess is that whether you said it out loud or kept it to yourself, you are thinking, "Who in the world are you to talk about sin?"

- My guess is that at least a half-dozen issues, in this other person's life, came immediately to you mind after they judged you.

And I believe that is what Jesus is referring to when he teaches:

*<sup>1</sup>"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

For you see, while we have often interpreted the judgment we receive for judging others as coming from God, in fact God is not mentioned here as the Judge. Jesus is not saying that judging others will cause God's grace to diminish.

Is he not saying that when we judge others, they will judge us as well. It's human nature; it's a natural defensive response. Again, the message might be truthful, but the method is not from God.

If, however, a brother or sister in the faith comes to you and tells you that the Holy Spirit has been convicting them of the sin in their life, and they ask your opinion, you could lovingly share your observations and offer your support. For as we will soon see, while we are not to be the judge of others, we are to actively help one another.

In addition to Jesus' teaching not to judge one another, he also tells his followers;

**b. Don't be hypocrites.**

Is hypocrisy a real issue in the church today? Maybe yes; maybe no. But under the heading of "perception is everything" author David Kinnaman notes in his book, *UnChristian*, the troubling statistic concerning those born between 1965 and 2002; That nearly nine out of ten people outside the Church —87 percent—said that the term "judgmental" accurately describes present-day Christianity.

*David Kinnaman, UnChristian (Baker, 2007), pp. 48, 182*

So whether or not hypocrisy defines your life, it defines the church for the generation we are trying to reach.

This morning, through a very striking picture, **Jesus reminds us that we are all hypocrites whenever we try to correct another person's faults without actively dealing with our own.**

Again, while most of us over the years have interpreted that “log” in our own eye as our own sin, James Bryan Smith argues that the log specifically describes our blindness to the destruction of passing judgment against another Christian. If this is the case, then Jesus is telling us that we have to get rid of our judgmental nature if we truly want to help brothers and sisters in the Lord to deal with their sin. It is an interpretation worth considering.

In truth there is no contradiction between these two interpretations. For indeed a judgmental nature is also sin, and **the message Jesus is giving us here is that each one of us is to deal with our own sin, even as we seek to support other Christians in dealing with theirs.**

I love the thought of a 10<sup>th</sup> century “desert father” by the name of Abbott Moses.

*They who are conscious of their own sins  
have no eyes for the sins of their neighbors.*

Again, such an insight does not mean we are to ignore the state of others. **Rather, the method by which we engage another’s needs is not by passing judgment, but through a compassion and understanding that is born out of dealing with our own sins.**

In order to really help brothers and sisters in the faith deal with their sin, our spirits must be humble. Our attitude must be born out of our own experiences of trying to change our ways.

How easy it is to go up to someone and simply say that they are going to follow Jesus they must change “this” or “that” in their lives. But, if you have attempted to change that very same thing; or if you are trying to change another sinful action or attitude in your life, you would know how difficult change is, and you would have compassion and understanding of just how much you are asking that other person to do. Such compassion and understanding, as opposed to judgmental word, can be used by God to help others change.

I can't tell you how often I have told friends & relatives that they should stop smoking. And though I may do it for all the right reasons, unless I demonstrate a compassion and understanding about what I'm asking them to do, I will probably remain very ineffective in helping them to change despite all my truthful words describing the destructiveness of their habit.

The issue is not the truth of the message; it is the compassion & understanding of the method.

Again, notice that while Jesus tells us not to judge, and not to be a hypocrite, he is telling us that we are to help one another. But before we do, we have to deal with our own logs.

Relationships are important within the Christian community, so Jesus speaks to them. But He also speaks today about the relationship between Christians and those outside the Christian community, Jesus offers us

## 2. A Relationship Lesson about Those who Reject Christianity

<sup>6</sup>*"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.*

*If you do, they may trample them under their feet,  
and then turn and tear you to pieces.*

I can almost hear the critics of today saying to Jesus, "Hey Jesus, you're not being very politically correct with your language!" To which I would want to respond, "Since when has Jesus tried to be politically correct?"

Rather than focusing upon Jesus' reference to people as "dogs" and "pigs", know that what Jesus is doing is that he is making a precise cultural reference to a specific group of people; unbelievers. Jesus is talking about people who have been exposed to the reality of God, but have chosen not to believe in Him or to worship Him.

The Scriptures offer us other occasions when such descriptions are used. The Apostle Peter quotes Proverbs when he talks about such rejecters of God's salvation. Like;

### **2 Peter 2:22**

*"A dog returns to its vomit," and,  
"A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."*

Jesus wants us to recognize that **our relationship with people of faith is going to be different than our relationships with people who have rejected God.** Within the church, godly change occurs as we share

those things which are sacred; pearls, like the “pearl of great price” of Jesus parable representing the things of God's kingdom.

Here, Jesus cautions us about wasting time and resources on people who are rejected God. Perhaps you see a parallel message in:

### **Proverbs 9:7-10**

*"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult;  
whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.*

<sup>8</sup> *Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you;  
rebuke a wise man and he will love you.*

<sup>9</sup> *Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still;  
teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.*

<sup>10</sup> *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

There is a different kind of dynamic going on here. Wise and righteous people will hear and respond to God's Word and Spirit, whether they are believers or those who are open to God. Mockers, who deny God's presence and power will rebuff God's grace; they were called the “dogs” and “pigs” of Jesus' day.

While we must continue to pray for the Gospel door to open in the hearts of all people, Jesus is teaching us to make the most of our witness as we note those more open to receiving it. He gave the same lesson to his apostles when he first sent them out two-by-two. People who received them and their message are blessed. But, regarding those who rejected their message, the Apostles were to shake the dust off of their feet/sandals.

The same action is also described in the Book of Acts regarding Paul and Barnabas moving on from unbelieving Jews to Gentiles open the faith. (See Matthew 10:5-14 & Acts 13:44-51)

Author Kevin Harney makes this lesson very practical by telling this story Seismic Shifts:

*It was a battle. A wrestling match. A test of wills. Every day, at exactly the same time, Margaret would go to the bathroom cabinet, open it, and take out a huge bottle of castor oil. Then she would head to the kitchen to get a tablespoon. At the sound of the drawer opening and the silverware rattling, Patches, her Yorkshire terrier, would run and hide—sometimes under the bed, at other times in the bathtub or behind Margaret's recliner. Patches knew what was coming.*

*Someone had convinced Margaret that her beloved dog would have strong teeth, a beautiful coat, and a long life if she gave him a spoonful of castor oil every day. So, as an act of love every 24 hours, she cornered Patches, pinned him down, pried open his mouth, and—as he whimpered, squirmed, and fought her with all his strength—poured a tablespoon of castor oil down his little doggie throat. Neither Patches nor Margaret enjoyed their daily wrestling match.*

*Then one day, in the middle of their battle royal, with one sideways kick, Patches sent the dreaded bottle of castor oil flying across the kitchen floor. It was a momentary victory for the canine, as Margaret let him go so she could run to the pantry and grab a towel to clean up the mess.*

*When Margaret got back, she was utterly shocked. There was Patches licking up the spilled castor oil with a look of satisfaction only a dog can make. Margaret began to laugh uncontrollably. In one moment, it all*

*made sense. Patches liked castor oil. He just hated being pinned down and having it poured down his throat.*

*Welcome to the world of evangelism!*

*Kevin G. Harney, Seismic Shifts (Zondervan, 2005), p. 23-24*

God calls us to share the good news of salvation with our world, he also teaches us to wisely assess our method and our audience. Has God brought them to a point of receiving the gospel, or is their heart so hard that they will simply fight any efforts to evangelize, using God's word as fuel for their anger and rage?

Today Jesus is talking about relationships; he tells believers to be involved in one of his life without being judgmental or hypocritical. He also warns believers that those outside of the faith may be hostile to their witness at certain points in their life.

Then, Jesus goes on to give us

### **3. A Relationship Lesson about God**

And simply put, Jesus invites us into a relationship with God that is better than the relationship between a child and a good and loving father. Jesus invites us to pray to “Abba”. Joachim Jeremias, a respected 20<sup>th</sup> century German theologian, through his research of the prayer literature of ancient Judah notes that:

"in no place in this immense literature is this invocation of God as *Abba* to be found,,, *Abba* was an everyday word, a homely family word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner. Jesus did it always...

and authorizes his disciples to repeat the word *Abba* after him.

Source: Joachim Jeremias, *The prayers of Jesus (SCM, 1967)*, pp. 96, 97.

In brief, only Jesus invites us into a father-child relationship with a Heavenly Father who is perfectly good and exceedingly gracious. And using imperative verbs Jesus commands us to boldly and persistently pray; to ask, seek, and knock.

Does this describe your relationship with God? It is what Jesus wants us to experience; the reality of a God who is always just a prayer away; a God who will respond in good and gracious ways.

Finally, Jesus offers us

#### **4. A Relationship Lesson for all People.**

It is what we often referred to as "the golden rule".

*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,  
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

What I want to note here is similar to what I have just noted about the uniqueness of Jesus' teaching that we are to relate to God as our Heavenly Father.

For while others, before Jesus; like Confucius (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), the Stoics (the Greek philosophers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC), and in the Old Testament Apocrypha and the Jewish Talmud that came together before Jesus' birth;

all record similar sayings, they all do so in the negative-form. In one way or another they all convey a similar message;

"Do not do to anyone what you yourself would hate."

But again, **Jesus' teaching is unique, and it does what he has been doing all along in his Sermon on the Mount; it calls us to live a higher standard than the law.**

Rather than relating to others with a bunch of well-defined laws determining what we are not to do, **Jesus invites us into the freedom to imagine all the things that we would like to do for others.** This limitless and free imagination, able to adjust to any time or place or circumstance, becomes the basis of a relationship of love Jesus wants all people to experience.

Jesus says, *this sums up the Law and the Prophets.* But this shouldn't surprise us, it is a lesson we have heard before. For according to this same Jesus, all of the Commandments of God come down to two:

#### **Matthew 22:38-40**

*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* And.... *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*  
*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

## Conclusion

It is significant to note that after all of Jesus' religious teachings, He brings us back to lessons about relationships, because relationships are what life comes down to.

**A “Good and Beautiful Life” is a life lived in whole and healthy relationships with God, and with others.**

**How can you use Jesus' teachings today, to move in that direction?**

**AMEN**