

Focus Text

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? 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? 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. “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.” **(Matthew 7:1–6, ESV)**

1. Measure of Mercy

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”

(Matthew 7:1–2, ESV)

Jesus moves from the daily bread toward the measure of forgiveness found in the Lord’s prayer. The word for judgment can also mean “to avenge or condemn”. Jesus wants his followers to understand that they are not able to pass condemnation onto others because the starting place of following God is humility. In the Lord’s prayer, God’s forgiveness is measured by our ability to forgive others, and here, the flip side would be that our condemnation of others will be paid back toward us by God. Jesus establishes the hierarchy of authority in the life of His people. God is the one who sits in the seat of authority, and his followers are servants who lean on the help and care of God. Judges then and now sit in places of authority over others with the ability to sentence someone to prison or death. It is a lofty position to be in. This is reserved for God alone, and if someone desires to occupy God’s space, they will be dealt with by the Lord. If we recall last week, Jesus’ command to His people is to “seek God’s kingdom and righteousness,” meaning that our task in this world is to pursue the right way of living that pleases the Lord. The main focal point in one’s life isn’t what others do; first, we focus on our own growth in holy living. This, as we will see, is hard work; what would be easier is to centralize our focus on outsiders and their lack of holy living, making ourselves happier with our progress. Jesus demands that we are personally liable for our pursuit of God and that should be the center stage in the life of a Christian.

“In the cultural context of Jesus' time, judging others was closely tied to the concept of honor and the interpretation of religious law. The teachings in Matthew 7 address a society where there was bitter conflict between Jesus and Jewish authorities over the interpretation of the Law, which was fundamentally a competition for honor[1]. Jesus presents a countercultural teaching on how the meaning of the Law affects personal relationships in this context of honor competition[1]. He admonishes his disciples and the crowds not to judge others, which was a reformist tone challenging the corrupt world structures regulating people's lives[1]. This teaching was directed at individuals, emphasizing personal responsibility in how one treats others[1]. Jesus brings this up in Matthew 7 to reinforce his earlier command to "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," suggesting that his followers should address their own unrighteousness before criticizing others[2][3]. This approach contrasts with the prevailing attitudes of the time, where judging others was common in religious and social contexts[2][3]. By teaching "Do not

judge," Jesus prohibits a negative, critical attitude toward others, which was prevalent in the honor-based society of his day[2][3].”¹

“ So Jesus is here commanding his followers not to be characterized by judgmental attitudes (cf. Williams, “Stop criticizing others”). The immediate practical rationale for his command is that others, including God, may treat us in the same manner we treat them.”²

2. Seeing Clearly

“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? 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?”

(Matthew 7:3–4, ESV)

Now we move to a parable-type story emphasizing Jesus' point on the condemnation of others before working on seeking righteousness for oneself. It would be crazy for you to call out someone’s blindness if you were also just as blind. The mental image here is both hilarious and humbling because if we saw this happen with two folks outside of ourselves, we would instinctively understand the man with the log has the larger problem and needs more help. Yet, the truth is we are often far more willing to hold someone else to a standard we cannot hope to achieve. Contextually, Jesus is pointing toward the Jewish religious leaders who condemn the ordinary people for their shortcomings while engaging in sinful behaviors that would make most common Christians blush. Jesus has spent most of the sermon challenging His followers not to seek public spectacle and reward, but to instead seek humbly after God, not drawing an audience to see. The work of holiness is humbling and continual. Every day, as believers, we must approach God with repentance for our sinfulness, and God offers us His forgiveness. I, for one, am thankful for God’s overwhelming grace toward us. Refusing to take the log out of one's own eye and pointing at the speck in another’s ignores one's personal need for grace while robbing God’s grace from others. Jesus instructs that we forgive because God has been more forgiving toward us

¹ [1] Amevenku, Frederick Mawusi, and John Ekem. 2023. *The Sermon on the Mount and the Ewes of Ghana*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications.

[2] Doriani, Daniel M. 2006. *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

[3] Doriani, Daniel M. 2008. *Matthew & 2*. Edited by Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani. Vol. 1. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

² Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

than we can imagine. It is humbling, but we must deal with our logs first, and then we can help our friends in a spirit of humility remove their specks.

“Jesus now illustrates the foolishness of most judgmentalism with the hyperbole of the speck and the plank. He is clearly not concerned about literal pieces of foreign matter in people’s eyes but about his followers’ moral failures. How often we criticize others when we have far more serious shortcomings in our own lives. Such behavior offers another example of hypocrisy (recall 6:2, 5, 16), especially when we treat fellow believers this way, whose sins God has already forgiven. But v. 5 makes clear that vv. 3–4 do not absolve us of responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather, once we have dealt with our own sins, we are then in a position gently and lovingly to confront and try to restore others who have erred (cf. Gal 6:1).”³

3. Hypocrite, Heal Thyself

“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.” **(Matthew 7:5, ESV)**

Jesus stirs the crowd up with the language of hypocrisy again. Your first move as a follower of Christ is to remove the sin/log in your own life, and then you may come to assist your friends. If the log is the symbol of spiritual blindness, removing the log is the sanctifying work of grace that God does in one's life, allowing them to see God's kingdom clearly. Then, and only then, are we able to help others in our community. If you see your neighbor's house on fire, you may be tempted to get out your garden hose, but would that really help? Wouldn't it be better to call the fire department, which will arrive with a truck, tools, and the necessary expertise to extinguish the fire? What if you found a bomb in your work building? Would it be wise for you to start cutting wires in an attempt to disarm it? Shouldn't you call the bomb squad to come and disarm the weapon? It is easy to look out at what everyone else is doing that is wrong and to declare to others that they should shape up or pay the price. Still, it takes someone who is meek and humble to first look inward and ask that God would first heal the sinful, broken parts of our lives before we look to others in their wicked and broken state. It was once stated that we want grace for ourselves and justice for everyone else. Jesus wants grace and transformation for everyone. Before we help others to be free, first, we need to beg God to free us from our shackles. Every time I fly, the flight safety video reminds me that if the oxygen mask comes down, that means there is a problem. Before I try to help others put on their mask, the first order of business is to put my own oxygen mask on, ensuring that I can help them. We

³ Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

should encourage one another in gentleness and give grace and instruction to others at the pace at which we are receiving grace and instruction from Christ.

“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.” **(Galatians 6:1, ESV)**

4. Sacred Sensitivity

“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.” **(Matthew 7:6, ESV)**

Wait, where does this parable come from? Jesus is using a more personal approach to judgment. Pigs and dogs are meant to convey ungodly people who reject Jesus’ holy message of good news. Whether it be the Gentiles or the Jews, Jesus has gotten used to people rejecting his teachings and not wanting something holy and beautiful like a pearl. Jesus encourages His followers to understand that if someone rejects His teachings, they cannot force the gospel of salvation and redemption on that person. Think of it, could you ever convince a dog or a pig that a Rolex watch or a Mercedes-Benz is a valuable possession? Never, the dog will chase any car, and the pig will eat the watch. Jesus freely invites people to come into His Kingdom and be His blessed ones. Many wanted nothing to do with this holy life that stands out from the crowd around them. After all, Jesus has condemned public acts, divorce, judgment, and demanded that those in His Kingdom will be peacemakers, meek, humble, and poor in spirit. His followers will trust God with their lives and ask Him alone for daily bread and to forgive others as He forgives them. A humble submission to the will of the Father in Heaven characterizes Jesus’ way of life. If someone doesn’t want to follow Christ, no one can force them to do so, in the same way a dog can’t appreciate a beautiful pearl.

“Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reprove a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.” **(Proverbs 9:7–8, ESV)**

“The dogs described here are wild scavengers. The pigs best represent unclean animals for Jews. Both are natural opposites to what is holy or, like pearls, of great value. Both “dogs” and “pigs” were regularly used as pejorative epithets for Gentiles within ancient Judaism. Jesus is using the terms equally pejoratively but in the more general sense of those who are ungodly (cf. 2 Pet 2:22 for the same combination). Certainly for him these would include those who heaped scorn upon his message, which ironically occurred most

commonly among his fellow Jews and among the more conservative religious teachers and leaders (cf. Ps 22:16).⁸⁹ The number of parallels in modern Christianity to this phenomenon remain frightening. Jesus is obviously not telling his followers not to preach to certain kinds of people, but he does recognize that after sustained rejection and reproach, it is appropriate to move on to others”⁴

Application

In early Methodism, small groups were used to help one another be accountable for the process of growing more mature as Christ Followers. The most challenging group was called Band Meetings, and their purpose was to ask 5 challenging spiritual questions weekly.

1. What sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. Is there anything you think may be a sin in thought, word, or deed?
5. Are you keeping any secrets from the group?

These questions were answered weekly in a private, invite-only group, men met with men, and women with women. Everything in the group was confidential with no exception. Their purpose was for believers in Jesus to have an honest time working out their shortcomings and giving praise to God for their deliverances.

With your cornerman, or in a journal, reflect on these questions this week. Allow the Holy Spirit to identify the log in your eye, and give you His grace to remove it. This honest time with the Lord and your closest spiritual friends will remind you that God loves you, forgives you, and in humility, you and I will be able to help others with a heart of grace and humility. Amen.

⁴ 89 Cf. Gundry, Matthew, 122–23, who takes the animals as referring to those from among God’s people who turn on the righteous in persecution.