

**Matt. 7:1** “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.

**Matt. 7:6** “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

**Matt. 7:7** “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>9</sup> Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? <sup>11</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

**Matt. 7:12** “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

I really have to smile this morning, because this Sermon on the Mount has been going on since August 2, and it does not appear to be running out of gas! It will have enough more to give us for one more Sunday after today. Just when you think it might start to let up a bit, we see more special teachings for today. So let’s get to them.

I do have to smile and shake my head a little as I hear Jesus’ opening words here. This is another one of these experiences where I wish I had a quarter for every time I have heard people try to quote this verse, and use it in some way. You always know it is going to be great when a person says “*You know, Jesus says that we are not to judge, but...*” and then they go ahead and tell you some dastardly thing about someone or something! I don’t know about anyone else, but I have heard this verse twisted around in so many different ways. There is much here for us to consider.

Just to give fair warning, this actually means something a bit different in Greek, with the original words and all. We will get to that in a moment. But this passage raises a lot of questions. Is Jesus saying that 1) we should never judge anyone for what they do, because that will result in ourselves not being judged? Some look at it this way. So what could this lead us to do ( or not to do )? *Never make a judgment about anything that anyone else does.* Well, most of the rest of the Bible's teachings will go against that. My goodness, if someone else is doing something awful to someone else, you have to call them on that! We cannot just look the other way and say "Well, we are not supposed to judge." Well, we have to make judgments every single day. This Option 1 cannot be a rule of silence, with the result and hope that we ourselves will not be judged. That is crazy. Could Jesus really tell people to look the other way on something terrible, and then comfort us by saying "Okay, now you will not be judged!" No.

I know it and I'd bet that we all know it, but the word "judgmental" is not something that we want associated with ourselves. We do not see being *judgmental* as a good thing. I drive on 422 and 480 a bit, and when I see people driving way too fast and dangerously, I say to myself BOY I WISH THAT GUY WOULD SLOW DOWN, BECAUSE HE COULD HURT SOMEBODY! Am I being judgmental? We are called to make what we would call judgments about things every single day. People should cause no harm. Even better, people should add some goodness. That idea is not judgmental.

It seems here that Jesus is concerned about people who are just on a daily mission to criticize and complain about someone else, or

maybe anyone they meet! And we know how the saying goes: if we look for the bad in someone, we will probably find something. Especially if we are predisposed to be looking for something wrong, we are probably going to hunt down something to be unhappy about.

I have come to believe that a lot of negative things that people do can be explained somewhat by hearing about the story of their lives. I grew up with a few neighbor boys who were just as mean as rattlesnakes, and they would do anything to humiliate you. And then I watched their father in action many times, as he berated his own children, in front of other people. I guess the fruit does not fall far from the tree. Yes, people do things every day that we wish they would not do. But rather than just be mad about that all the time, if we took the time to see what their lives were like, we might understand a little better. That is not to justify some bad behavior against other people. People are responsible for what they do. Period. But there seem to be dots to be connected regarding some people and the way that they are. On the one hand here, I think that Jesus wants us to think about why people do some of the things that they do. We need to walk a few miles in their shoes. We cannot just police others, as if we never have bad days ourselves.

Just a quick word about the Greek words in Matthew 7 here. This verb that we call JUDGE is actually bigger than it might seem to us. It is a deeper word with many meanings, and one of the key meanings for this verb KRINO is “to condemn.” If you are the judge in a capital case, where someone had murdered, and the evidence says someone murdered someone, and the jury agrees, the Judge does in fact find them guilty, and sometimes they are literally

condemned. The **Gospel of John** likes to use this same verb to refer to people being condemned. If they are judged, they are also condemned. So, when Jesus says not to judge here, he might have been suggesting that we do not just easily and quickly *condemn* others, to write them off as if their lives have been forfeit, and, that if we are quick to condemn others, we need to be careful because the same might be coming back our way. This should be clear. We cannot rightfully run around looking for a tiny spec in someone else's eye when we have a 2 x 4 stuck in our own eye.

Let's move to the other part of this teaching that get's abused and misused in our culture. *“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”* I think we know that every Sunday, sometimes other days of the week, we can watch certain preachers who have this hard-wired in to the center of their faith and message. ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU. One younger dashing TV preacher ( who lives in a \$10 million home ) always emphasizes this! I believe that he often asks his viewers the question: *Why have you not received your miracle? Well, probably because you have not asked hard enough!* Ask, and search, and knock, and you will find.

Folks, in this same Sermon on the Mount, did Jesus not tell us that we cannot worship money and God? Did he tell us that we cannot take it with us? Has he not repeatedly talked with us about how denying ourselves is a very crucial thing? And yet somehow, there are preachers out there who believe that the goal of life is to get rich, to be prospered by God, and they actually use the Bible to

back up the idea that one day God will take wealth from those who have it and instead give it those who have asked for it properly.

This Sermon on the Mount is a special section in Matthew, and it will come to an end next Sunday. Jesus is wrapping things here. Can Jesus reassure us and encourage us to ask, to search, to knock, in prayer and in our hearts, to do the things he has been talking about since August 2? Sure! Think about all that Jesus has pushed us to do: love our enemies, go the extra mile, pray for those who would hurt us, even though we can divorce, please don't. Even though we can seek revenge, please don't. Even though people can lust, please don't. He has asked us to deny ourselves in a lot of ways. And after all these teachings, he says that God loves us and knows what we need, and that God will provide good things. It is so unfortunate that people have latched on to this prosperity nonsense, which they have built out of a few verses, which directly deny the verses that just came before. Let's not sit quietly while people make nonsense out of the teachings of Jesus. We need all of his teachings, not just the ones that suggest we should be rich.

Finally, let's finish with what we have come to call the Golden Rule. Of course even that phrase has been corrupted. Sometimes people joke with me that the Golden Rule actually means, if you have the gold, you get to rule! Once again, no. What Jesus offers us here in this final verse is a common teaching of the Rabbis of his day, especially a famous one named Hillel. This is so simple, and you can use it in either Jesus' way, or Hillel's way. Jesus basically says "Do to others what you would have them do to you." Hillel actually would teach "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." And it is interesting that the two teachers actually say the same thing

after their one line. Jesus says “for this is the Torah and the Prophets.” He again refers to the Bible of their day, the first 2 portions of the Hebrew Bible, that Christians will re-order and call the Old Testament. Hillel will say his line and then add “that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary; go and learn it.” I wish I had a time machine to go back and see if these two actually knew each other, because they were doing their teachings at a similar time.

So, we should not be judgmental. We should ask, and search, and knock, knowing that God loves us. But it cannot be about just making the world go the way we want. We have far too much selfish religion in our society today. It would be great to reduce that. People would be far more attracted to who we are a the Church. So we can do our part in this. Also, just a word of caution: we should not see these words of Jesus as telling us that all our prayers will be answered in the way that we want. For whatever it is worth, if you claim to be a Protestant, rooted in Luther and Calvin, you need to reaffirm your world view that human nature is self-centered and flawed, to put it nicely. Protestants always need to be skeptical about how we might twist things to benefit ourselves more than others. Our broken human nature will naturally take teachings from Jesus and try to twist them to our advantage. Once again, we remember from a few Sundays ago, the Lord’s Prayer, which does not contain the words “me,” “I,” “my,” or “mine.” Let these things be strongly held within us. In the name of Jesus. AMEN.