

Series: From Israel to Everyone: Disciples who Demonstrate God’s Presence (a study of Matthew).

Sermon Text: 7:1-6 Judging Others
(to ask questions)

(See App for lesson, slides, and

We’re in the 3rd and final chapter of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount which covers topics from identity in the Beatitudes to secret spiritual disciplines. Modern perspectives, like those “*lenses*” we covered in 6:21-22, make us misread and misuse this text. For example, if we’re obsessed with “self-optimization” we’ll spin Scripture into a personal guide for inner peace and growth. A sign of doing this is if we treat others like distractions to be managed or inferiors who “*haven't done the work.*” My point is the gospel is not a self-actualization project! Another example is our modern “therapeutic lenses” which filter truth that sets us free as emotional self-protection or toxic shame. To avoid feeling bad, we’ll retreat into self-introspection (“*I’m too broken to engage with others*”) or project our insecurity outward (“*I must hyper-criticize others to feel secure*”). It’s easy to weaponize Scripture for selfish ambition or self-protection like those religious leaders Jesus scolded back in 5:20. But as intimidating as it can feel, we need not “get ourselves together” before His Spirit brings relational healing TO and THROUGH us. The Sermon on the Mount invites us to participate in God’s relational restoration project. Its truths gently guide us towards righteousness, the “*right relationships which enable creation to flourish as God designed.*” All Jesus said from 5:17-7:12, especially His “Golden Rule”, illustrates how a “*fulfilled law*” and “*greater righteousness*” look in everyday life. We’ll visualize how here in **Matthew 7:1-6** as we unpack this...

BIG IDEA: Grace repairs relationships by turning hypocritical judges into restorative siblings.

Too often, we treat faith like a private courtroom to put others on trial as we pardon ourselves. Christ proposed a cure for hyper-personalized faith in **verse 1: Judge not, that you be not judged.** This highly quoted verse is routinely misapplied. When read alone, it can seem as if Jesus hates court rooms, critical thinking, moral discernment or calling out wrongs. But later in **Matthew 18**, He’ll outline careful steps for offering correction. The Apostle Paul echoed the spirit of this in Galatians

6: when believers stumble in sin, we're to gently help them course correct without succumbing to their temptation or self-righteous pride that says, "*I'm too important or too broken to help.*" **Verse 2** explains what Jesus meant about not **judging**: ***For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*** That should give us pause! Christ's **chapter 6** prayer taught that unforgiveness fractures relations with God and others. This also occurs if we scale the bench, plop down in the judge's chair, and usurp God's role as supreme evaluator of everyone and everything! We can easily overlook this danger in a culture where we're encouraged and rewarded for rating, ranking and writing others off in our minds and on our screens (e.g. 2 stars, likes, comment-section call outs, swipe right/left). God's gospel flips all this on its head! Culture evaluates to condemn, but Christ's kingdom measures to restore. This was evident at the cross where our cosmic Judge stepped down from the bench to bear our sentence, disarm our accusers, and heal creation's brokenness.

Once we envision Jesus doing that, passively or actively sitting in **judgment** over others should seem ridiculous! So, to illustrate the absurdity of our self-righteousness, Jesus used outrageous visual humor in **verses 3-4**: ***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?*** The question is: "How do I tell if I've slithered back into the judgement seat to be a hypocritical judge instead of a restorative sibling?" Honest looks in the mirror can preserve present relationships and protect future ones. Linger too long, though, and we'll filter conviction through moralistic and therapeutic lenses. Obsession with managing our guilt and insecurity will catapult us into self-protect mode and withdrawal. It makes us too exhausted to love neighbors, too guarded to worship with others, and too ashamed to receive the grace awaiting us at the Lord's Table. Corinthians does say to examine ourselves before Communion--not to trap us in analysis paralysis but to set us free to love. So, yes...take sin seriously, confess, repent and cultivate new habits...just realize that the table unites us with others and transformation is the Spirit's job! The idea of becoming "*fixed or educated enough*" to help others is as absurd as this **log and**

speck example. Rather than waiting for a “*spiritual graduation day*” to participate in redemption, let’s embrace being lifelong learners--always in progress, and always open to having our lenses corrected and our gifts refined along the way (cf. Romans 12:1-2).

That brings us to **verse 5** where Jesus didn’t say to ignore someone’s sin *specks* but gave a reordered sequence that turns hypocritical judges into restorative siblings: ***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.*** *Hypocrite* sounds rude or harsh unless we recall its theatrical origin: actors who wear masks are pretending to be someone they are not. So, Jesus wasn’t insulting people; He was clarifying what self-righteous criticism is: prideful treason that dethrones the True Judge so we can sit on His bench! But don’t misunderstand: God does have high standards that bring righteous order. His issue is our natural temptation to tear down instead of building one another up! **Verse 5** presents a clear path where being honest about our own *eye-logs* brings self-examination that qualifies us to help. How? Taking our own sin to the cross first totally changes our posture: we no longer approach others with an air of condemning superiority but a clear-sighted, restorative humility. Noticing needs but refusing to help is inconsistent with God’s love which doesn’t just inspect damage in our lives but steps in to help us rebuild!

Now, after explaining how grace clears our spiritual vision to make us helpful, Jesus warned of some folks who may despise our help in **verse 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 balanced the scales by using a literary [chiasm](#) (parallelism) that suggests His Spirit helps us discern light from darkness. He reminds us that as we lay down the Judge’s gavel, we must never abandon spiritual discernment. Moreover, Jesus has no issue with *doggies* and *piggies*. Israel called nonbelievers (Gentiles) *dogs*, and *pigs* were typically raised by them since God’s Laws forbade Israel from consuming or touching them (cf. Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8). Many scholars think this relates to the advice **Matthew** mentions later in **10:14**, “*If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.*” So, Jesus is warning

us not to confuse grace with being naïve. We must discern the readiness of those to whom we offer **holy** truth. When someone is locked into hostility, throwing more words at them won't change their heart--it just invites them to **trample** what is precious and **turn on you**. While we're obliged to speak truth, we can't make others accept it. That's what the Spirit does through the gospel, and we must let Him lead every spiritual conversation! But before you use what I'm saying as an excuse to stop helping another image bearer, I should warn you about another thing Matthew says later in **chapter 18**...we need the church's help to determine when to back off. Why? Because at times we have impure motives, lop-sided views of what's fair, or inadequate understanding of a situation that brings hasty conclusions. Since we all need help in our walk with Jesus, we must develop the habit of seeking it! Once our **eye** is cleared of hypocritical **logs** to see our own need for grace, we face another question that we'll explore next time: "How can prayer help us gain the humility, wisdom and love to live this way without falling back into prideful traps?" Just because we make bad **judges** doesn't mean we can't be good thinkers and helpful healers. This chapter helps us realize that learning ways to repair relationships is a major benefit of the Sermon on the Mount.

Sunday to Monday Connection: God's patient presence continuously transforms us, moving us from isolation and judgment into humble community. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we stop judging and start walking together, supporting each other's spiritual growth and restoration.

- **Question:** How can we, as a congregation, actively create a safe and welcoming space where people feel free to drop their defenses and share their burdens?
- **Next Step:** Choose one person you've viewed critically and take a gentle step toward them this week. Listen deeply, offer encouragement, or humbly seek a path toward mutual understanding and grace.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. Where are you most tempted to notice the "**speck**" in someone else's eye while ignoring a "**log**" in your own?

2. What is the practical difference between hypocritical judgment and healthy, loving accountability within a church community?
3. How do verse 1 (“*judge not*”) and verse 6 (“*do not throw your pearls before pigs*”) balance each other in daily relationships?
4. Before offering spiritual advice, criticism, or corrections to anyone this week, spend 10 minutes in silent prayer asking God to expose your own blind spots in that same area.
5. If you must engage in a hard accountability conversation this week, begin the conversation by humbly confessing your own flaws or contributions to the relational strain.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Bible Project - Gospel of the Kingdom [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Heaven and Earth [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Temple [Videos](#).
- Bible Project – Day of the Lord [Podcast episodes](#).

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Chapter context:** “Matthew 7 consists of a number of apparently self-contained paragraphs. Their link with each other is not obvious. Nor does the chapter as a whole follow on from the previous chapter with any clear sequence of thought. Many commentators conclude, therefore, that originally these blocks of material belonged to different contexts, that Matthew himself assembled them, and that he perhaps did his ‘scissors and paste’ work a trifle clumsily. But it is not necessary to reach this conclusion. The connecting thread which runs through the chapter, however loosely, is that of relationships. It would seem quite logical that, having described a Christian’s character, influence, righteousness, piety and ambition, Jesus should concentrate finally on his relationships. 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. So some account is given in Matthew 7 of the network of relationships into which, as the followers of Jesus, we are drawn.” (Stott, 174)
- **Clarification:** “Jesus warns sternly against condemning others. Of course, this does not mean (as some have thought) that no follower of Jesus should

ever be a magistrate. God intends that his world should be ordered, and that injustice should be held in check. Jesus is referring, not to official lawcourts, but to the judgments and condemnations that occur within ordinary lives, as people set themselves up as moral guardians and critics of one another. We rightly guess that he had a particular target in mind. In 5:20 he has named them: the scribes and Pharisees. Though we know from history, and from the New Testament itself, that there were many scribes and Pharisees who were genuinely and humbly pious people, the tendency of hard-line pressure-groups—which is what the Pharisees basically were—is always to create a moral climate in which everybody looks at everybody else to see if they are keeping their standards up. In many countries, this kind of moral climate used to be maintained in relation to sexual morality. Often, today, the moralism is just as fierce, but the target has changed. Today it might be, for instance, conservation and the environment. In some countries, neighbours spy on each other to make sure they place the right kind of garbage in the right kind of bag, so concerned are they about proper disposal and the danger of pollution. That word, in fact, is an indication of what's going on: 'pollution' was precisely what the Pharisees were afraid of. Jesus warns against all such 'judgment'. He doesn't mean that we shouldn't have high standards of behaviour for ourselves and our world, but that the temptation to look down on each other for moral failures is itself a temptation to play God. And, since we aren't God, that means it's a temptation to play a part, to act, to be a 'hypocrite' (which literally means a playactor, one who wears a mask as a disguise)." (Wright, 69-70)

- **Judge not:** "Our Lord's injunction to 'judge not' cannot be understood as a command to suspend our critical faculties in relation to other people, to turn a blind eye to their faults (pretending not to notice them), to eschew all criticism and to refuse to discern between truth and error, goodness and evil. How can we be sure that Jesus was not referring to these things? Partly because it would not be honest to behave like this, but hypocritical, and we know from this and other passages his love of integrity and hatred of hypocrisy. Partly because it would contradict the nature of man whose creation in God's image includes the ability to make value-judgments. Partly also because much of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is based on the assumption that we will (indeed should) use our critical powers. For example, we have repeatedly heard his call to be different from the world around us, in that we are to develop a righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees, to do 'more than others' in the standard of love we adopt, not to be like the hypocrites in our piety or like the heathen in our ambition." (Stott, 175-176)
- **A continual habit of judging:** "That the Messiah is not forbidding any kind of judgment is clear from other passages. We are to discern and judge between right and wrong or light and darkness. Even in this particular passage, we are exhorted to make a certain judgment when we are called to remove the splinter from your brother's eye. However, this passage deals with the human propensity to render unfair judgment upon others. The present, imperfect

tense of the verb suggests that this is a continual habit or attitude of judging others. The first-century Rabbi Hillel noted that we should not judge a man until we have been in his situation. We are forbidden to judge in this manner for several logical reasons. We may have impure motives or an imbalanced understanding of what's fair. We often are too hasty in our conclusions, not to mention that we may not have adequate knowledge of a given situation. Of course, it is assumed that only God can be the ultimate judge of a person's eternal destiny. The plain truth is that we too often make terrible judges in our own fallen condition...We should proceed carefully before attempting to remove the splinter in our brother's eye when we have a log in our own eye. It is interesting to note that both the splinter and the log consist of the same material. How true it is that many times we are quick to pick on our brother's fault when the same kind of sin actually exists in our own lives...If we are not to give dogs what is holy, then the implication is that we should, in fact, judge between the holy and profane.” (Kasdan, 72-73)

- **Comparing Scripture with Scripture:** Cf. Mk 4:24–25; Lk 6:37–42; 8:18. The rhetoric of this section, like many of Jesus' other sayings, employs familiar techniques like hyperbole that may have moved an ancient audience to laughter. In this case, Jesus would have been employing such Middle Eastern humor (cf. Pilch 1995) to disarm his audience and communicate his message with intensity...Paul seems to allude to this judgment saying in Romans 2:1 (cf. 14:1, 10, 13; also Hagner 1993: 169); James 5:9 may also allude to it. Warnings about judging or accusing God's servants are, of course, much more ancient (Ps 109:6, 20, 29)...By this point in the sermon, a disciple who has been taking the Matthean Jesus' words seriously might well be too introspective to focus on judging others anyway. The graphic language of Jesus' teaching so far (5:3–6:34) challenges its hearers to a radical personal commitment to God's kingdom and righteousness that should scare them into attending to themselves. But just in case the hearers had been too obtuse to grasp that point in 5:3–6:34, Matthew renders it explicit in 7:1–5. One dare not assume God's prerogatives by withholding forgiveness (6:12–15) or judging (7:1–5). Disciples are instead objects of God's evaluation, and God evaluates most graciously the meek, who recognize God alone as God and judge. One should note, however, that Jesus warns against assuming God's prerogative to condemn the guilty, not against disciples' discerning truth from error (7:15–23). Further, Jesus does not oppose offering correction but only offering correction in the wrong spirit (7:5; cf. 18:15–17; Gal 6:1–5). (Keener, 239-240)
- **Our judgmentalism:** “Earlier Jesus exposed our hypocrisy in relation to God, namely practising our piety before men to be seen by them; now he exposes our hypocrisy in relation to others, namely meddling with their peccadilloes, while failing to deal with our own more serious faults. Here is another reason why we are unfit to be judges: not only because we are fallible humans (and not God), but also because we are fallen humans. The fall has made all of us sinners. So, we are in no position to stand in judgment on our fellow sinners; we are disqualified from the bench. The picture of somebody struggling with

the delicate operation of removing a speck of dirt from a friend's eye, while a vast plank in his own eye entirely obscures his vision, is ludicrous in the extreme. Yet when the caricature is transferred to ourselves and our ridiculous fault-finding, we do not always appreciate the joke. 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. 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. So, 'you hypocrite' is a key expression here. Moreover, this kind of hypocrisy is the more unpleasant because an apparent act of kindness (taking a speck of dirt from somebody's eye) is made the means of inflating our own ego. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican was our Lord's own commentary on this perversity. He told it 'to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others'. The Pharisee made an odious and inaccurate comparison, magnifying both his own virtue and the publican's vice. What, instead, we should do is to apply to ourselves at least as strict and critical a standard as we apply to others. 'If we judged ourselves truly', wrote Paul, 'we should not be judged.' We would not only escape the judgment of God; we would also be in a position humbly and gently to help an erring brother. Having first removed the log from our own eye, we would see clearly to take the speck from his." (Stott, 177-178)

- **Verse 6:** "What then about the dogs, the pigs and the pearls? Doesn't this imply that Jesus' followers are to make quite a serious judgment—namely that some people come into these categories, so should not be given holy or precious things? Yes. It seems as though Jesus is here assuming a distinction between one's own community—in his case that of village and town life in Galilee, within the Jewish world of his day—and people from outside. 'Dogs' was after all a regular abusive term for Gentiles; pigs were kept only by Gentiles, since Jews didn't eat pork. He seems to be warning his followers not to try to explain the meaning and life of the kingdom to people who won't even understand the Jewish world within which it makes sense. If this is right, it fits with what Jesus says later, in 10:5–6. The early mission of the gospel is to Jews only (see too Romans 15:8). After the crucifixion and resurrection, of course, everything is different; the gospel must then go out to embrace the world. For the moment, the disciples are to treasure the gospel like priests in the Temple guarding their holy things. Even though we live today in the new world, commanded to share the gospel riches with all and sundry, it would be good to think we still regarded the message of the kingdom as something sacred and beautiful, to be treasured and valued." (Wright, 70-71)
- **Tough words:** "At first sight and hearing this is startling language from the lips of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed immediately after his appeal for constructive brotherly behaviour. But Jesus always called a spade a spade. His outspokenness led him to call Herod Antipas 'that fox' and hypocritical scribes and Pharisees 'whitewashed tombs' and a 'brood of

vipers'. Here he affirms that there are certain human beings who act like animals and may therefore be accurately designated 'dogs' and 'pigs'. The context provides a healthy balance. If we are not to 'judge' others, finding fault with them in a censorious, condemning or hypocritical way, we are not to ignore their faults either and pretend that everybody is the same. Both extremes are to be avoided... If we first remove the log from our eye and thus see clearly to take a speck from our brother's eye, he (if he is a true brother in the Lord) will appreciate our solicitude. But not everyone is grateful for criticism and correction. According to the book of Proverbs, this is one of the obvious distinctions between a wise man and a fool: 'Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.' Who then are these 'dogs' and 'pigs'? By giving them these names Jesus is indicating not only that they are more animals than humans, but that they are animals with dirty habits as well. The dogs he had in mind were not the well-behaved lapdogs of an elegant home but the wild pariah dogs, vagabonds and mongrels, which scavenged in the city's rubbish dumps. And pigs were unclean animals to the Jew, not to mention their love for mud. The apostle Peter was later to refer to them by bringing together two proverbs: 'The dog turns back to his own vomit,' and 'The sow is washed only to wallow in the mire.' The reference is at least to the fact that unbelievers, whose nature has never been renewed, possess physical or animal life, but not spiritual or eternal life. We remember also that Jews called Gentile outsiders 'dogs'.³ But Christians certainly do not regard non-Christians in this contemptuous way. So, we have to penetrate more deeply into Jesus' meaning." (Stott, 180-181)

- **Share truth wisely:** "The lesson is clear. Those who have no discernment about the distinction between the holy and the profane will have no appreciation for the spiritual riches of Yeshua. In fact, some will become downright antagonistic! If a person is so turned off by the treasures of the New Covenant, then it is better not to confront them further. There are many people even in our day who are seeking and hungry for what Yeshua offers. Our time is better spent with those who want to dialogue in a respectful manner." (Kasdan, 73)

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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