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# How to Treat People

## Matthew 7:1-12

*Russ Kennedy*

This past year has been terrible.

It has been a terrible year of the COVID with disease, death and terrible destruction of people's lives and livelihoods.

It has been a year of exposing discontent and division. We see this at the national and political level. But sadly, we also see it in the churches. Many churches have been destroyed during this season, not because of pandemic, but because of people. The devil has worked much mischief. But God has also done much sifting. This does not excuse the foolish and sinful responses of many, but it does explain it.

It has been a year where Christians have openly and attacked other Christians for differing views on personal and church responses to the pandemic. Social media and personal emails and conversations have been filled with ungodly talk to and about other believers who differ in their views.

What has all that got to do with the text we have in front of us? Surprisingly, a lot!!!

One of the challenges in handling the Word of God is to see what is actually there. So often we don't because of what we have been taught about the text. Sometimes we are blinded by our expectations and frameworks. Sometimes what the text says is clear – we just don't want to admit it and therefore be obligated to obey it.

Sometimes, we have a text that is so misused and misapplied it strains us to hear it in a fresh but true to the text way. We have two very familiar texts before us that we need to listen to afresh.

### **Our Varied Relationships (v.1-11)**

The interconnections between these paragraphs might be a little difficult to see at first. When we look at them from the perspective of varying relationships, their connections become much clearer.

#### **Our Relationship with Christians (v.1-5)**

True disciples understand the complexities of our relationships. Jesus' followers walk and worship together as a gathered people. Jesus' words are for the disciples under the Law. But Jesus' words through Matthew are for us. They are not for the world. Unbelievers often try to quote these texts to clap back against Christian's moral pronouncements. We will see how we are to respond to that a moment.

## Stop Sinful Judgment (v.1-2)

Here is a command for Jesus' followers, for those who are truly in the Kingdom. Unbelievers have no right to this. They cannot defend their present and future judgment by invoking this text. But believers often, sadly, misunderstand and then misuse what Jesus is talking about here.

**7** "Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup>For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

In the context, Jesus pronounces judgment on the Scribes and Pharisees. He exposes them and at times, excoriates them. At times, Jesus corrects His disciples. If Jesus discerns, rebukes and corrects His disciples, we have to stop and think about how that affects what this text means. Because of this and because of the rest of the New Testament, this then cannot be referring to any of the following:

It cannot be a command against discernment. Spiritual insight into a person's life is a part of the one-anothering. Discernment is itself a kind of evaluating a person's actions and attitudes that is designed to help us grow.

It cannot be a command against rebuke and correction. Many texts in the New Testament require us to publicly and privately correct and rebuke one another. It is a key feature of preaching. The loving, Biblical rebuke of another brother or sister should helpfully correct us.

It cannot be a command against Biblical confrontation leading to church discipline. In church discipline, an evaluation is being made about a person's lack of repentance leading to a judgment about whether or not they are to be treated as a believer. Consider, 1 Corinthians 5:10–13:

<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Well, then what is being commanded and why?

It is a brief, abrupt, imperative: "Judge not." Why? Why should we not do what this verb commands? Because we will be, judged – same word. In the context of the Old Testament in which these words were said, they simply mean, "Do not act as a judge to pass a legal condemnation when you have no right to." This is under the Mosaic Law. Anyone who usurped the authority of the judges was themselves subject to the condemnation of the Law and its authorized judges.

Jesus goes on to say you need to understand this: the standard you hold others to, you will be held to whether that standard is Biblical or not. Now, we begin to understand what Jesus is speaking of. The Pharisees were regularly passing judgment on people's actions *based on their legalism which misused and added to the Mosaic Law*. Their additions to the Law were treated as authoritative as the Law itself. Often the Pharisees condemned Jesus or His disciples for not doing things the way they had prescribed. Those in the kingdom of heaven were not to do what the Pharisees did. They were not to judge others lest they came under God's judgment based on the standard they were holding others to.

If this is what this text means to disciples under the Mosaic Law, what do these words mean when we come to the New Covenant? We see this text worked out in Paul's writings.

This kind of judgment is characteristic of unbelievers. Paul highlights this in Romans 2:1–5 in his condemnation of unbelieving pagans:

**2** Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. <sup>2</sup>We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

You confront, correct, and condemn other Christians acting the way unbelievers do.

There is a kind of judgment that is forbidden of Christians.

### **Do not pass judgment on another's freedom. (Romans 14:1–4, 10)**

**14** As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup>One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup>Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. <sup>4</sup>Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

<sup>10</sup>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;

You have no right to pass judgment on another Christian in the area of liberty. You are not another Christian's master nor are you their judge. You

may disagree with them. You may restrict your liberty more. You may have all kinds of persuasive arguments piled up from the logic and Bible. Good; you live by them and be absolutely sure you are consistent. But you may not, beyond the commands of the New Testament, have a negative, condemnatory, judgmental attitude toward them. The only discernment, rebuke, correction you are allowed is only in the commands of the New Testament. Is that clear?

Do not judge another Christian's liberty or you will be subject to being judged on the standard you hold others to. This is what is meant by "measure". This is another way of referring to the standard on which the judgment is based. The warning then is that we ourselves may well be subjected to the censure by others based on some wrong standard.

### **Do not allow other Christians to pass judgment on you based on the Mosaic Law. (Colossians 2:16–17)**

<sup>16</sup>Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

We also must not receive or give judgment based on the Mosaic Law. We do not live under it. We are not obligated to it. We must not judge others based on the Mosaic Law. Further, we have a responsibility to not allow it.

Jesus' command here governs all in the kingdom. The disciples were not to be like the Pharisees and judge each other by all kinds of rules and regulations added to the commands of God in the Mosaic Law. The disciples in the New Covenant were not to judge one another by the Mosaic Law or by their own personal standards.

### **Avoiding Hypercritical Correction (v.3-5)**

But there is a place then for counsel, correction and rebuke.

<sup>3</sup>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? <sup>4</sup>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? <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 brother's eye.

Self-examination must go before correcting others. This is clearly the meaning of what Jesus says. Jesus asks a *why* question and a *how* question. Both are humorous. Both are intended to be ironic. Both are meant to make us squirm a little. It is so easy to see the splinter in someone else's eye but not the log in ours.

### **A Question of Motivation (v.3)**

Why do we do this? Why do we tend to see specks in others while having a log in our own? This is a question about motivation. Since Jesus is still talking about judging, then what does drive us to judge others when we have

a huge problem or fault? We do so because we believe we are right. Our personal beliefs and desires are driving us. We believe in our standards, our convictions and our rights so we will find all kinds of faults in others.

You confront, correct, and condemn others because you believe you are right.

#### **A Question of Method (v.4)**

How can we do this? How is it possible to be so blinded to ourselves and yet so attuned to others? Because in English we sometimes say, "How could you..." as a means of shock, of incongruity, we think this is what Jesus is saying. Maybe even unintentionally, the translators have got this right. This is a process, a method question. How is it possible to accomplish this? Why do you think you are able to do such delicate surgery as splinter removal from another's eye when you can't even see the log in your own?

You confront, correct, and condemn other Christians even though you really are unable to do so.

#### **A Charge of Hypocrisy (v.5)**

You are a hypocrite if you do this! No, now wait. Don't soften it. Don't excuse it. Own it. This is you. If you challenge, correct, or condemn someone with your legalistic standards or misuse of the Law, then you are a hypocrite. As the Reese's cup says, "Not sorry." This is Jesus' accusation. This was leveled in Jesus' day at the religious leaders. Matthew is leveling it at many in the church. This was and is all too common among believers.

How is this being a hypocrite? You are hypocrite because your self-righteousness is being masked by holding others to your superior righteousness. You present as someone who is godly when in fact, your judging others is ungodly. The point here is not whether you are holding others to standard you don't keep. The point here is that you condemn based on the standard itself.

You confront, correct, and condemn other Christians when you are a hypocrite.

#### **A Challenge of Tradition**

But stop... why do we think this is about correcting another person's conduct? Why is it common to use this sentence to warn us that we need to get the sin out of our life before we can deal with the sin in someone else's life? Now, it is true that it is wrong for us to be quick to attack someone else's sin when we have not dealt with our own similar sins. But is that what Jesus is primarily talking about here? Would the Pharisees and critical Christians really be ok if they just stopped doing what they were condemning others for?

Could this be about something else that is similar but different? I suggest that this is first about how we see each other and how we see the kingdom. This seems first to be about seeing. I don't find much here about doing.

Jesus has used an *eye* illustration just few sentences ago. The eye then was used to warn us about our perspective, our opinions, our lenses tend to affect how we respond to people and situations. Could it be that this illustration is the same kind of illustration?

Let's think about this together... What does a log in my eye do to me? It changes my perspective, my ability to see clearly. The log is blinding me. I think I can see, but the reality is that I cannot. Yet, I really think I can see the little flaw in your own perspective, in your own way of seeing things, in your way of doing things. Do you see now that this is deeply connected to the "judging" in the prior paragraph? My wrong views, my exalted standards, my misuse of the Bible are disqualifying me and preventing me from helping you with your much smaller perspective issue.

So, you have the log of an unbiblical view of the Mosaic Law or your extra-biblical standards and you are prepared to pass confront, correct and condemn me of my use of Christian liberty. You are condemning someone because your opinions are blinding you. Your faulty perspective needs to be dealt with.

There is application beyond this. But we should really be careful here to be shaped by what the words actually say and what the image is conveying. It is possible that sin is blinding us. That would be a secondary application of this text. But it is not the primary focus. This is about how your response to other Christians is driven by your sense of being right.

Let's apply this to some of the divisive issues that have emerged during the pandemic. Wearing and mandating masks has become a huge issue. Why? First, there is no direct command in the New Testament about something related to or directly connected to masks. Now hear me out. Many of you on both sides of this issue are already marshalling your Scripture precepts and principles for your viewpoint. Stop! This is an "eating meat sacrificed by pagans" issue. We have in all our mandates recognized that this is a wisdom issue. Wearing or not wearing masks is not a moral issue - it is not a virtue symbol.

Those of you are against it, have your practical, medical, and Biblical reasons for being against mandating it. Those of you who are for it, have your practical, medical, and Biblical reasons for mandating it. Both perspectives have merit. Some say the data shows the importance of wearing masks to prevent the spread of the disease. Others say the data shows that the spread of the disease was nearly identical whether there were strong mandates or not. Whether you wear or don't wear a mask, the passion with which you argue for or against *is evidence the log in your eye*.

This log (and the sinful response to others who have a different perspective) is blinding you from seeing the other person's perspective and viewpoint. Because you have loaded up your perspective with Biblical justification you are simply unable to properly see the other person's perspective. You see yourself as *right* and the other person as *wrong*. Both sides are trying to trump Christian liberty and turn a wisdom issue into a moral issue.

Is there merit in both positions? Yes. Are there some Biblical principles that should guide our own views? Yes, there are. Does that mean one view is morally empowered and the other not? No, it does not. Does that mean people holding either position believe they are right and therefore morally empowered. Yes, that is the sad state many are in. You are prepared to confront, correct and even, in some cases, condemn others who have a different view.

The sin here? It is not whether you do or do not believe in or conform to masks mandates. The issue is that you will deny another Christian their liberty or destroy another Christian for their viewpoint. You will judge based on your... standard.

I wish that all this were that simple. It is not. It is the very complexity of wisdom and liberty issues that sometimes make them hard. There are submission issues involved. There are relational issues involved. There are risk issues involved. There are trust/distrust sources of data issues. But in 46 years of ministry, over and over again I have seen and been involved in attempts to turn wisdom issues into moral issues. King James Only. Women wearing pants. Men wearing earrings. Tattoos. Psalter only. Hymns only. Contemporary worship. Preaching style. Youth ministry philosophy. Building decorations. Wearing a mask or not. In every case, this text speaks directly into it.

### **A Command on Purpose (v.5)**

What is the surprise here? "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." Here are the commands in the text:

Stop judging others...

Get your own log out **so that** you can help others...

See it? You must so value helping the other person that you are willing to deal with your own fault. Again, this may be a sin. But I have argued this is much more about our legalism, our opinions, our perspectives. We are NOT allowed to simply say it does not matter. It matters a lot. We are not allowed to simply say, "I am right and they are wrong." No, you can sin in two ways in this text. You can challenge, correct and condemn others in their liberty. Or, you can refuse to address your own legalism and so be poised to really help the person you have judged.

Beloved, repent of judging others. Prepare yourself and remove your legalism so as to be able help others.

### **Our Relationship with non-Christians (v.6)**

Jesus now addresses our relationship with unbelievers. He is not changing the subject. He is changing the sphere in which we are operating. Who then is Jesus talking about here?

<sup>6</sup>“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.

The command is to the true followers of Jesus. It was relevant to Jesus’ immediate audience. It is relevant to the church in all ages. But we do have to be sure we understand this.

Who are the dogs and the pigs in this text? I mean, they have to be someone or a category of people for the command to make any sense. In Jesus’ day, dogs were not household companions as they are today. Dogs were just as much avoided and an abomination to Jews as pigs were. So much so, that a Gentile was referred to as a dog. Dogs were scavengers, ravaging, dangerous and aggressive. Pigs were (and still often are) aggressive and dangerous. For this to make sense to us, we should add the word, “feral” in front of both. Do not give what is holy to feral dogs nor pearls to feral pigs. Why? Because doing so is dangerous.

What is Jesus warning us about? He is warning us about how we interact with rebellious, aggressive unbelievers. Yes, there is a place for evangelism and the gospel for all. But there is also a place to stop giving what is holy and valuable to people on whom there appears to be no work of grace at all. Often, this is the case with people who have been disciplined. Instead of repenting, they become more and more angry and aggressive and spiritually dangerous. There is a point to say, “That is enough. You know the truth. All I can do now is...” Well that is what follows.

Be aware of the dangers of aggressive unbelievers.

### **Our Relationship to God (v.7-11)**

<sup>7</sup>“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

What is Jesus talking about here? First, notice that these are not commands. These are statements of reality. Ask, seek and knock and you will receive, find and have the door opened. The last sentence makes it clear that this is about our relationship to God. So, as many seem to think, if we keep on asking and keep in



seeking and keeping on knocking, then at some point, our persistence moves God to respond?

Verses 9-11 will not let that interpretation stand. The point is not that our persistence moves God. That is a denial of what God is like. He is not a harsh or hard parent withholding what is good for their children. Even we who are evil do good for our children when it is in our power to do so. Evil people can be persuaded by the persistence of children to do something good for them.

God is not like that. He is poised to give good to us. We simply ask, We simply seek. We simply knock. If it is the good that God does give, then He will give it. Be sure that your theology of prayer is not rooted in false ideas about God. Be assured that if you are asking God for the good things He will give, then you will have them.

Ok, so then, what is the good things God is poised to give? The Bible points to many, many things. But is it possible that the good things are in the context? Is it possible that the good things are not to serve money, not worry about tomorrow, not to judge others? Could the good things we should ask for, seek after and knock expecting are to put the kingdom first, to trust God explicitly even for the essentials of life. Could the good be that we set aside our legalism and our critical, judgmental attitudes and actions? Could the good be that we are so humbled by grace that we will take our logs out so as to be able to help others? Could the good be that we have discernment about whether to continue to speak about Christian things with an unbeliever?

Ask, seek, knock on heaven's door knowing God will give all those good things. Be regularly praying for the good things God intends to give.

### **Our Core Principle (v.12)**

Underlying all this a core principle. This principle affects all our relationships. It is not to the exclusion of other principles, but is still very important.

<sup>12</sup> "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

#### **Its Statement**

This is a radical statement. It is a positive command. Do to others what you want done to you. Other religions have the negative version. Other religions say, "Don't do to others what you don't want done to you." Sadly, many Christians think that is what this says. It doesn't. It goes beyond. No religion, no ethic, no philosophy has this as a positive statement. All of them have it as a negative statement.

This is a guiding principle among the people in the kingdom of heaven. What you expect others to do to you, you do to them. This is hard. This is part of all that was given in the beatitudes and in the Law of Christ. This is the down-side-up kingdom.

You want people to stop judging you? Stop judging them. You want people to listen and appreciate your perspective, listen and appreciate theirs. You want people stop confronting, challenging and condemning your liberty? Stop doing it to theirs. You want people to help you with issues in your life, do what is necessary to be qualified and able to help them. You want God to do good for you? Do good for God.

### **Its Significance**

This principle fulfills the Old Testament. It does not fulfill just the Law. It fulfills the Law and Prophets. This means that Jesus is the embodiment of this principle. You want to know what this looks like in real life, in real relationships? Look at how Jesus engaged others around Him. Don't give me simplistic platitudes. They won't work. Jesus' fulfillment and embodiment of this is complex and challenging. Jesus is always kind to many and Jesus is always hard and even harsh with others. We are called then to weave this principle, this pattern and even this Person, into the fabric of our Christian life.

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### **Reflect and Respond**

There is much to think about. Will you? Please?

There is much to repent of. Will you? For the sake of your soul and the good of the church?

There is much to move towards. Will you? For the good of others.

There is a good God to ask, seek and knock expectantly. Will you? Will you at least get these good things from God?

There is wonderful principle and Person to live by. Will you?