

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 7:1-6: Judging others, continued

JUDGING OTHERS

1. The verb “judge” (Greek *krino*) in 7:1-2 has a range of meanings in Scripture, including (a) to discern; (b) to judge judicially; (c) to be judgmental (or censorious); (d) to condemn. While interpreting this passage we might recall the following verses which encourage discernment or judgment:

- We are to identify “swine” and “dogs” (Mt 7:6) and false prophets (Mt 7:15)
- We are to exercise discipline within the body of Christ where appropriate (Mt 18:15; 1 Cor 5:5, 11)
- We are responsible for judging wisely, not by appearances: Jn 7:24: “Do not judge (*krinete*) by appearances, but **judge with right judgment**”

Now consider two other passages on judging in which Paul and James seem to have this saying of Jesus in mind:

- Rom 14:5, 10: “Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds... **Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister?** For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”
- James 5:9: “Beloved, **do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged.** See, the Judge is standing at the doors!”

Which of Carson's four possible meanings of “judge” is intended in Mt 7:1-5?

2. Carson writes of “judge not” (7:1-5),

Some rabbis said that God had two measures by which he assessed men, the measure of justice and the measure of mercy. It may be that Jesus in 7:2 is using this belief to drive home his point—the measure we use, of these two, will be applied to us. For example, suppose we come across a wretched liar. How do we look upon him? If we measure him by justice alone, we will be very critical and condemning. But that measure will then be turned on us: How truthful are we? How often do we slant reports and stories to make a point or earn favor? Or perhaps we apply the standard of justice to the adulterer or prostitute. How will we fare when the same standard is applied to us, especially in light of Mt 5:27-30? Or again, perhaps we apply God's standard of justice to wealthy men who exploit the poor by unfair practices and greed. But how often have we been greedy? How often have we robbed others of value for money (even, for example, in our work)? Do we really want the standard of God's justice to be applied to ourselves in the way we are prone to apply it to others?

Which people evoke judgmentalism in you? How does this differ from simple recognition of sins? What can you do to avoid judgmentalism without falling into indifference or “moral apathy” (Carson)?

3. According to the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (184), “..the judgmental person by not being forgiving and loving testifies to his own arrogance and impenitence, by which he shuts himself out from God's forgiveness.”

If you are insufficiently forgiving toward others do you forfeit God's forgiveness (cf. 7:1-2; 6:14-15)? (Does Rom 1:32-2:11 clarify or further confuse the issue?)

4. Despite its intuitive feel, Jesus' proverb about giving pearls/holy things to swine/dogs has long defied certain interpretation, in part because it must have been so obvious to Matthew's readers that he provides it without elaboration. Two points shed some light: First, dogs and swine were both regarded as unclean animals (cf. e.g. 2 Pet 2:22¹; these were mangy roaming mongrels hunting for scraps, not well-groomed lap dogs). Second, "what is holy" may be an allusion to sacred food (i.e., food for sacrifice) as in Lev 22:10.²

Some interpretations include:

- **Don't indiscriminately share Christ's truths with those who would ridicule and despise them** (Tasker, Stott, Green, Augustine, Carson³); shun those who have heard and rejected them (Calvin), prefer their lives of sin to the Gospel (Chrystom) and are self-condemned (as in Tit 3:11)
- **Don't allow the unbaptized to join in the Eucharist** (Didache 9:5)
- Connecting 7:6 to 7:1-5 (judge not, lest...): **It is worthless to try to correct someone unwilling to listen** (mentioned in Keener 243)
- Given that too-broad application of 7:1-5 might lead to a church filled with false disciples, 7:6 **"warns against easy conditions of entrance into the church."** Such false disciples might not only contaminate the fellowship but also turn against other disciples in times of persecution (Mt 24:10, 49). (Gundry 122)
- Again connecting v. 6 with vv. 1-5: **"Do not condemn one another in the midst of a hostile world**, lest the world turn on you and take advantage of your weakness. (Cf. The analogous appeal in 1 Cor 6:1-8, where Paul admonishes Christians not to bring judgments against each other in Gentile courts)" (Gardner 130)
- Noticing that the Lord's Prayer is followed in Matt by a series of applications of its petitions, one might expect 7:6 to be an application of "deliver us from the evil one." If so, **"It warns against the temptation of apostasy, of falling prey to the Evil One** by forfeiting what is holy and precious, namely, one's privileged rights as a son of the Father and one's life as a disciple in the Kingdom" (Guelich 356)
- In light of 15:26, it might **"warn against giving miracles (cf. 7:7-11) to those unwilling to be part of the family**, just as Jesus demands faith and submission rather than bestowing his power

¹ 2 Peter 2:20-22: 'For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "The dog turns back to its own vomit," and, "The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud.'"

² If the pearls are the Gospel, as in the parable of the pearl of great price, and the dogs and swine are Gentiles, one might see this as forbidding outreach to Gentiles. This is unlikely: "Certainly Matthew would not have understood the saying as prohibiting the Gentile mission, because he views Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount as applicable in his own day (7:21-27; 28:19), whereas the prohibition of preaching the kingdom to the Gentiles (10:5) was restricted to the time of Jesus' earthly ministry (28:19)." (Keener 242)

³ Carson points out NT examples, including Mt 15:14, where Jesus, speaking of some Pharisees, tells his disciples to "Leave them; they are blind guides"; Acts 18:5+ where Paul abandons his ministry to the Jews in Corinth because they oppose him and had become abusive; Jesus' instruction for his disciples to shake the dust off their feet (Mt 10:14).

like magic (15:22-28). In this case the saying forces people to press in to become disciple (13:10-12); it would qualify both the following context about prayer and the preceding prohibition against 'judging', inviting disciples to discern 'dogs' from God's children" (mentioned in Keener 242)

What do you think Jesus meant by this saying, given the context? Is there a meaningful difference between the possible readings?

5. Most interpretations of the pearls-before-swine proverb (7:6) encourage disciples to employ discernment when deciding where to share Christ's teaching. As Michael Green puts it (p. 106),

It is an irresponsible use of time and effort to continue to hammer on a door that is firmly closed... [Disciples] should be equipped with the most sensitive radar to see where the Spirit of God is already preparing the way, and only then move in.

Similarly, Carson (p. 114) writes of,

the somber recognition that not all men will receive [God's] revelation. Some, like dogs and pigs confronting pearls, remain utterly insensitive to this revelation. It does not gratify their immediate appetites, and they have no other criteria by which to assess it. Thus, by these verses, we are being prepared for the division of the human race into two groups, portrayed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7:13f.

Share with the group the people in your life who are most ripe for the gospel and, on the other hand, experiences you've had where you found yourself sharing the Gospel where it was not only unwelcome, or even turned toxic.

6. The ask/seek/knock saying of 7:7-11 constitutes three breathtaking, parallel promises. Based on context, what restrictions on the thing requested/sought and the character of the petitioner might we infer?
7. Some key passages on prayer which shed light on 7:7-11 tell us if we are obedient to God he will hear our prayer (1 Jn 3:21-22; also Ps 34:15); we should pray persistently (Lk 18:1-8), boldly, confidently, and according to his will (1 Jn 5:14-15, also Jas 1:5-7, Mk 11:23-24; Mk 11:23-24; Ps 84:11); taking delight in God (Ps 37:4); asking for what we need (Jas 4:2-3), including the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13); knowing he cares for us (1 Pete 5:7); and our prayers can be undermined by sin (e.g. 1 Pete 3:7). Add to these the lessons from the Sermon, that our prayers should focus on the kingdom first (6:9-10); that we should approach God as our *Abba* (6:9), that prayers aren't to inform God of anything (6:6; He knows everything) and that our prayers should be first and foremost between us and God (6:6; from which we may infer they build our relationship with God and train our thoughts).

Carson writes of this passage,

Sadly, many of God's children labor under the delusion that their heavenly Father extracts some malicious glee out of watching his children squirm now and then. Of course, they are not quite blaspheming to put it in such terms; but their prayer life reveals they are not thoroughly convinced of God's goodness and the love he has for them. Jesus' argument is *a fortiori*: If human fathers, who by God's standards of perfect righteousness can only be described as evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, *how much more* will God give good gifts to them who ask him? We are dealing with the God who once said to his people, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no

compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”...

Carson then quotes this poem:

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare;
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He himself had bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.
Thou art coming to a king;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

John Newton (1725-1807)

What be inferred about *your* view of God by what you pray for and how you pray?

8. Keener writes,

This pericope [passage] emphasizes some important lessons: First, Jesus promises his disciples extraordinary power with God, like that of Elijah of old. In this case, the Gospel narratives and other ‘charismatic’ sayings (e.g. Mk 9:23; 11:22-25; Jn 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-27; cf. Jas 1:5) demonstrate that Jesus was not speaking figuratively, but training disciples to express bold faith (cf. 6:8; 18:19; 20:20; 21:21). [245]

Discuss.



Fun fact: In the Gospel of Thomas (92-93) the pearls-before-swine means, **Don’t share your wisdom with incurious disciples** (cf. Guelich 354), and is stated by Jesus after he complains that the disciples aren't asking the questions he wants them to.