

Matthew 7:1 — Judge not lest you be judged

(Ryan van der Avoort — 5pm service, Sunday 29 December 2019)

How do you think *outsiders* to Christianity would describe Christianity *based on the Christians they know*?

Share with the person next to you for 1 minute – you ask them, they ask you.

Three words someone *not*-Christian would use to describe *Christians*.

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What did you have?

→

Negatively, I would have said: judgmental, hypocritical, and homophobic.

I reckon many people think of Christians as judgmental.

And let's be honest, many professing Christians are – it's terrible, we're terrible.

And in light of that, today's verse seems like a perfect response.

So the Christian comes a-judging and the non-Christian responds:

'How dare you!

Didn't Jesus say, 'Judge not lest ye be judged...?'

(P)

Right, if that's how the general populace might use this verse, then how do Christians use this verse?

Well, Christians seem just as likely to misuse it:

We either say nothing to others out of fear of breaking Matthew 7:1: We're going *'well, who am I to judge'*

Or we'll use Matthew 7:1 if someone calls us to account for something:

Who are you to judge me!

You can probably pick up, at the heart of how people use this verse, we're saying:

We can't or shouldn't make *moral judgments about other people*.

'Only God can judge me' – you seen the bumper sticker?

Only God can judge me – so *who are you* to make moral judgments about something I said or did?

And so, very often, again, *this verse* is used to either justify silence (we don't say anything to others) or sin (we don't let others call us to account).

(P)

Is that how Matthew 7:1 should be used?

Is that what it means?

Let's dig into the Scriptures.

Look at the passage in front of you.

Jesus begins in verse 1 with a statement bound to make us sit up and go 'huh!?'

Matthew 7:1 *'Do not judge, or you too will be judged.'*

Now the word for *judge* is an interesting one.

You and I do it all the time.

It means to separate or make a distinction.

So for me, when it comes to chocolate, white chocolate is *not* chocolate.

Come on, you with me? – white chocolate is not chocolate.

I ask someone to bring chocolate to something and they bring white chocolate – I think they've forgotten the request.

So, if I have two 'chocolate' options (white and dark) in front of me...

I make my choice by *judging* –

In other words I *separate* the choices, I make a *distinction*.

And this is life.

Should I go left or right – you're judging.

Should I go to work or take a day off – you're judging.

So I hope you already see:

We judge as part of our everyday life and it's not always bad.

I mean that same word elsewhere is used very positively by Jesus.

Jesus tells a story of two men who owed money to a moneylender – the one a huge amount, the other a small amount.

And the moneylender lifted the debt owed by both.

And Jesus asks:

Which one do you think will love the moneylender more?

And Simon answers:

I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled'

And Jesus replies: *You have... judged correctly!*¹

You see? - same word.

Judgement is not necessarily bad – we do it all the time, we must do it all the time.

So this command in 7:1 can't mean we don't make distinctions, or we can't approve or disapprove of one thing over another.

Even verse 6, look:

Do not give to dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs –

That's making a moral judgement right?

Or go down further in your bibles to chapter 7 verse 15 – '*Watch out for false prophets*'.

Come on – isn't that judging?

To watch out for a false prophet you have to go: *that's* a false prophet!

So, simple point at this stage:

Jesus hooks our attention but already this verse can't be used to say:

'you can't make a moral judgment!'

So, what *is* it about?

Look at verse 2 which narrows the meaning.

This *isn't* about *not* judging at all.

This is about *the way* we judge.

Verse 2:

*'For... in the same way you judge others, you will be judged...'*²

You see it?

This is against judging in *the wrong way*.

More specifically, this is about *hypocritical* judgment.

Look at verse 5 which we'll come to soon – you see it there?

'You... hypocrite...'

So, *hypocritical* judgment.

Now let's double click on that:

What's *hypocritical* judgment?

What does it mean to be a *hypocrite*?

¹ Luke 7:43

² Or as the next part says it in different words: '*... and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*'

It's a word from the ancient theatre actually.

A hypocrite was an actor with a mask.

So you understand this?

You're playing a part but it's all outside like a mask.

There's an *outside* reality but it's not actually *who* you are.

They're not the same thing.

And so now back up again to verse 2 and look at the issue here.

Verse 2 – the warning is:

In the same way you judge others, you will be judged.

And then it finishes:

With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Picture this:

You have a standard, a way of measuring others.

And you hold it up to others...

'Oh yes, just not up to scratch...'

You use it to evaluate others.

But what *don't* you do?

You don't hold it up to yourself!

- It's **double** standards isn't it?
- I'm against sex outside of marriage, but I watch other people having sex on my TV – and I don't mean porn, I mean the latest TV series.
- Or, I condemn the person who stole my laptop, but I'm OK to stream illegal media on that same device – middle-class thieving.

Double-standards.

➔ It'll be different for each person, what's the Spirit convicting you of right now?

A measure we hold up to others, but not ourselves.

So, double standards.

- But it's also, **dodgy** standards.

Because look, often the standard we use to judge others is based on my strengths.

I have something I'm good at, or something I think I'm managing well and that's what I judge others by.

- So I don't *open* my mouth all the time like that person over there!

Meanwhile I also don't *open* my life and my resources up to many people either.

- Or I look after my possessions or appearance with great care (unlike those other people).

Meanwhile I don't spend as much time caring for the broken people around me.

- Or, I got the right doctrine! (not like *those* people).

And yet those doctrines of grace don't seem to be producing much grace in me, or zeal for reaching out to those without Jesus.

Dodgy standards - play to our strengths and ignore our weaknesses.

➔ Again, what's the Spirit convicting you of?

Double standards.

Dodgy standards.

Jesus goes on to illustrate this in verses 3-5 with a short parable.

It's funny, but also cutting.

Imagine.

Dude 1 has a speck in his eye.

Dude 2 has a *telephone* pole in his eye.

And dude 2 with the telephone pole is trying to tell dude 1 with the speck that the speck needs removing.

So, verse 3: why do you LOOK... [eyes]

You can't SEE properly and yet you're making judgments by SIGHT.

Verse 4: How can you SAY [mouth]... when all the time there is a plank in your own eye.

In other words, there's a disconnect between your speech (the things you condemn in others) and *your* life.

In still other words, you're a... hypocrite, an actor with a mask.

You *see* but you don't *see*.

You *speak* to others but you should be *speaking* to yourself.

Ah man – do you feel it?

I'm using 'you' as I say these things but this is cutting me.

Jesus' true judgment in verse 5 stings me because...

I'm the hypocrite he's talking about.

...and so are you!

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Now automatically that makes me want to shut up and not say anything about anyone else.

But let's be honest, that won't last for long.

Plus, bigger picture we know Jesus isn't actually against making moral judgements – he is *for* us weighing things up morally.

So, what's the way forward here?

Verse 5, Jesus counsels.

'You hypocrite' – remember, you actor with a mask – Jesus sees through us –

Take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'

There's two points from Jesus here we need to wrestle with.

Firstly we're to take the plank out of our own eye.

We all gotta do this.

You look good OR bad...

But we all walk around with telephone poles sticking out of our eyes – hypocritically judging others...

Loving to tell others (or think) how much they don't meet our own standards.

And yet we all fail even our own standards.

So, we gotta take the plank out of our own eye.

How can we do that?

A good mirror would help.

A true mirror we can look in and go:

I got a telephone pole in my eye!

But listen, that mirror can't come from me cause my mirror has blind spots for my sin.³

And so does yours.

And this is obviously where Jesus comes in:

Jesus sets himself up as the true standard or measure we're to judge ourselves by.

Awfully cocky and dangerous thing to do.

We do it all the time and get cut down to size.

But what charge will you bring against Jesus?

He had multiple groups take him to trial and they couldn't find any dirt on him.

³ Actually this is where God uses one another to help. A friend points out my sin.

Even the stuff they made up couldn't stick!

Do you know any other human being, current or historical, like that?

Eventually they could only condemn him for being exactly *who* he claimed to be –

God *above* come to live among us *below*.

But this makes sense!

The true standard must come from *above*, not from us *below*.

Because again *from* us - the standards are double and dodgy – we make rules, we break them.

That's true for every one of us!

...Except for Jesus, he was never an actor with a mask, not once.

The good outside matched the good inside.

The standards he set for others (standards of *love* by the way, unique) – he always met them:

Love for his Father, love for others.

He perfectly portrayed these – read the biographies.

So he's the perfect standard, the true standard.

An utterly *consistent* life.

And so, utterly *condemning* of ours.

He reflects our sin back to us.

And his eyes see past our disguises to our hearts.⁴

And so look, this is uncomfortable – Jesus shows us our ugliness:

Pride, arrogance, judgmentalism...

No wonder so many people reject the real Jesus.

But listen, in this ugly revelation also comes the offer of beautiful redemption.⁵

The stuff going on in my heart *is* ugly...

The measures I use to judge others *are* false.

I fail my own standards - more importantly I fail God's standards of love.

I *am* judged by Jesus!

BUT in Jesus... the judge is judged in my place.

His life in place of mine.

So that as I turn to him, I can start again as someone remade in Jesus, the very inner me being renewed.

⁴ The biographies are full of moments of him doing this.

He looks at the most religious on the outside and sees them as rotting moral corpses inside.

⁵ Jesus didn't take on a mask, but he did take on our sin.

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Now look life living with Jesus after that isn't a cake walk.

Life with Jesus means the mirror is always there.

And it often shows me to still be a messy messy person who has to cling to Jesus more and more – that's my only hope.

But this means that the person trusting in Jesus can only ever be **humble**.

Kinda like the person who visits the change room of a clothing store – those neon lights and mirrors are hardly flattering are they? (maybe that's just for me with my skin type)

So, the Christian is by definition humble.

Again we don't like this.

But what's the alternative?

That ugly reality without Jesus is still there.

So what you gonna do?

Keep putting on the makeup of your mask?

Some of you know that that is too tiring a way to live – it's hard to maintain, and it means you can never let anyone really in.⁶

Instead what Jesus offers isn't a façade but **freedom**.

The mess in me has been judged, it deserved to be judged.

And I'm still messy.

Hello humility!

But also, yay, freedom!

Because I don't have to put up that mask, I can put it down.

Cause Jesus died for me, and by His Spirit is at work in me.

So firstly, take the plank out – Jesus is the mirror to see it all – and it will lead to humble freedom

But then secondly, did you see the end of verse 5?- what's the end goal?

- ***We're to then work at removing the speck from our brother's eye.***

Interesting, right?

Especially, remember verse 1 is used to say '*don't make a moral judgment*'.

But this doesn't climax in saying or doing *nothing*...

But *instead* turning to your brother and saying: '*hey, you got something in your eye!*'

But of course if we've had our turn before the mirror of Jesus then...

Not only will that plank be out so we can see the speck of another more clearly...

⁶ The facades weigh too much to carry – for something so flimsy as a mask, it weighs an awful lot to maintain.

But also when we say *'you got that speck...'* we'll say it with a gentleness that only genuine humility can bring.

And now we can work at removing the speck from our brother's eye.

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Now, think for a moment:

Why should we want to remove that speck?

And the answer is that the speck is still a *problem* for our brother – we should *judge* that to be true.

And so we should, if we want him to be well, we should want to help remove the speck.

You get that?

We're used to saying *'judgment is bad, only bad'*.

But this says:

'no, no, judgment is good – it's good for us, it's good for the other – it reveals the true nature of things.'

If you have cancer in early stages that can be defeated then have it diagnosed and treated.

We need to realise this:

When God judges, in love he's warning us that we've turned from what's good for us.

When we sin, it isn't an arbitrary measure God uses to judge that.

He created us, he designed us to enjoy a true and flourishing humanity in relation to him.

And our sin is to kick at the standard of true humanity.

We wave our fists at God but it's hitting us in our own faces.

And God's judgment, his good judgment is going – *'stop it, look what you're doing to yourself (and others)' as you've rejected me!*

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Now listen – draw this together...

My understanding is that Australia, even more than South Africa has a rising volume of speech saying:

'Don't you come here with your bigoted opinions if you're a Christian!

We don't believe what you believe... so keep quiet!'

Ironically it's all said in the name of freedom of speech and freedom of belief...

Which is taken to mean that everyone else has free speech to say Christian beliefs are wrong but not visa-versa.

So, what are Jesus-followers to do in this culture?

Well, let's consider how what Jesus says here, will shape our hearts and lives and speech in a way that is an attractive witness, bringing glory to God.

Remember those two points from verse 5, well...

- 1. *Firstly, if we take the plank out then when we will judge with gentle humility. [i.e. this is about Manner]***

Half the reason Christians are *shut down* is because of the ways we've *spoken up* spewing *hypocritical* judgment.

We must own that, and repent before God and others.

But if I take the plank out my own eye then anything I say will be said...

Well I will treat the person in front of me not as a foe or an adversary exacting a penalty but as a physician providing medicines.⁷

They're not my enemy but my brother, sharing either the same Jesus or the same broken humanity.

2. Secondly, we will judge because we love the person before us. [i.e. this is the Motive]

'To love is to not judge', says the world.

'To not judge is to not love', says God.

In the things that matter, non-judgment is not loving

In the things that matter, judgment is loving because it points to a better way.

When there's a fork in the road and one way leads to death and destruction, it is *unloving* to not point that out.

Now let's see what this might mean in practise.

- **Firstly think about Christians 'judging' other Christians.**

And I mean judging in the proper sense of the word...

Maybe it looks something like this:

'Dude, listen, I struggle with sin.

If Jesus didn't keep helping me, I'd be a goner.

But listen, we gotta talk about something going on for you...'

And so we talk.

We hold people accountable for the faith they profess as Jesus followers...

When either their actions or their doctrine don't match Jesus and the Scriptures.

But we do it, not to pull them down *but* to spur them on/to build them up – love is our motive.⁸

And this raises the necessity of fostering close Christian relationships where we:

- Know one another well enough to be able to see issues, and
- We create relationships where it's natural to speak into one another's lives with gentle humility and for the good of the other person.

Christian with other Christians.

⁷ Paraphrase of: "What then!" say you: "if one commit fornication, may I not say that fornication is a bad thing, nor at all correct him that is playing the wanton?" Nay, correct him, but not as a foe, nor as an adversary exacting a penalty, but as a physician providing medicines. For neither did Christ say, "stay not him that is sinning," but "judge not;" that is, be not bitter in pronouncing sentence [Homily XXIII on Matt. VII. 1. By Chrysostom (NPNF1-10)]

⁸ For more see: James 5:19-20 and Galatians 6:1-2.

- **Secondly think about Christians 'judging' non-Christians.**

Now, this is tricky!

We don't judge and speak to non-Christians in quite the same way as Christians.

See for Christians, we speak to them as those who like us are *in* the family.

And the motivation we give them for change or direction is based on the Jesus they know and trust in.

That's not the case for when we speak to or judge non-Christians:

They're not inside but outside – they're brothers or sisters in humanity not Christ.

So, what do we do?

Well when we speak, we remember the gentle humility (the manner) and the love for them (motivation).

See, the *manner* – we speak again not as those *over* them but those *alongside* them.

Because when it comes to rebellion against God we've been there, done that, and got the T shirt.

And even now, as Jesus-followers, we're those held together only by his mercy...

And so any words we say to them are said gently and softly.

But we still say them with *conviction*.

Why?

Because genuine *love* compels us – remember:

Fork in the road, one leads to death and destruction – it would be unloving not to say anything.

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Now look, there'll be times when we may need to stop speaking to a professing Christian or non-Christian about issues.

And this is what verse 6 is talking about:

'Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces'

There will be times when after all is said and done, we'll need to move away from someone:

- the professing Christian who despite all our love keeps responding with unrepentance and then open hostility
- Or the non-Christian who does similar, scorning our distinctions said humbly and out of love.

So it may be better to walk away - if only for a time.

Or to close that facebook chat or whatever the case may be.

There will be moments like that.

Let's wrap things up thinking big picture...

In this section of Mathew's Gospel, chapters 5 to the end of 7...

Jesus teaches that the people who know and trust in him will be so distinct/different that even unbelievers give glory to God.

And in the matter of judging we need this.

Imagine if Christians judged in the right way because of Jesus...

Separating and making good distinctions...

What would the people around us think?

Oh many will disagree with **what** we say (the content)!

But they won't be able to fault **how** we've done things – our manner and motives.

So they say:

'Yeah I totally disagree with what they said, but... hmmm I can't deny the gentle humility that goes with their convictions...

And the overwhelming sense that they're saying this out of love for me.'

...You see it? – powerful witness!

Friends, I wonder...

Can the major issue sometimes in seeing people become Christians be that ***the people already claiming Jesus is Lord are so lightly marked by that Lordship?***

Where...

- We're either so ***arrogant in our judgments*** (feeding those stereotypes)...

Or the other extreme:

- We're so ***silent in our convictions***.

Either way our light does not shine before men.

What Jesus says here points to a better way!

A people marked deeply by knowing Jesus.

They separate and make distinctions.

But they do so with a manner and motive shaped by Jesus.

May that be us to the praise of his glorious grace!

Amen.