

# Judgment and the Golden Rule

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last week we started the section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches about our relationship to other people.

! We talked about how chapter 7 focuses on the theme of judgment. Before we read the verses that we'll cover tonight, let's back up and read the verses we covered last week. So here are the first six verses of Matthew chapter 7.

We saw last week that the Bible clearly calls us to use proper judgment, particularly about the biblical teachings from others and about the sins of others.

Those judgments are to be based upon the clear teachings of the Bible itself. What is forbidden is the self-righteous type of judgment that was practiced by the scribes and the Pharisees.

Jesus also warned us that we'll be judged with the same type of judgment that we apply to others. That's why we were commanded to take the log out of our own eye before we can take the speck out of another person's eye.

[ 1 : 45 ] So here's a question for you. How many of you feel qualified to judge properly like Jesus commands in verses 1 through 6? There are not a whole lot of people raising their hands out there, so here's another question.

For those of us who feel unable to judge like Jesus commands in the first six verses, how are we to obey Jesus' command? Here is some good news.

Jesus gives us the answer in the next six verses. So here are Matthew 7, verses 7 through 12. And those are the verses that we'll cover tonight. Jesus said these words in Matthew 7, 7 through 12.

He said, 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?

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. In verses 7 through 12, God promises to give us the wisdom and guidance we need to properly judge others.

[ 3 : 18 ] We just need to be sure to ask him for that wisdom.

We'll see that tonight as we talk about judgment and the golden rule. Many people who teach or preach verses 7 through 12 handle those verses as if Jesus has made an abrupt change of subjects.

In that view, Jesus has talked about judgment and now he's backtracking and talking about prayer again before making some later calls for additional judgment. After studying for this lesson, though, I now believe that we'll miss the main point of Jesus' argument here if we treat verses 7 through 12 as a standalone passage.

Treating verses 7 through 12 as a continuation of the judgment theme makes more sense. And here's why. We already have talked about how difficult it is to obey the command to judge properly or to judge biblically.

But if we treat verses 7 through 12 as being connected to the verses that come before and also come after them, we will see how to judge properly and biblically.

[ 4 : 30 ] Rather than having a switch halfway through, verses 1 through 12 are connected by the theme of proper judgment or proper discernment. That theme also continues in verses 13 through 19, which we'll study in the next few weeks.

In verses 13 and 14, Jesus commands us to pick the correct gate. That obviously requires judgment. And in verses 15 through 20, Jesus tells us to use our judgment to properly identify false prophets.

And of course, that also requires judgment. At the risk of making you want to leave early, here's the summary of what tonight's passage is going to teach us.

It's going to teach us that through prayer, we are to ask for God's wisdom. We are to seek for God's wisdom and not for God's wisdom. When we do that, God promises to give his wisdom to us.

And ultimately, that wisdom shows us that we are to judge people the way that we would like them to judge us. Martin Lloyd-Jones had this to say about why the promise about prayer is here.

[ 5 : 36 ] He said, Why then does our Lord utter this promise of verses 7 through 11 at this point? Surely the answer is this. In verses 1 through 6, he has shown us the danger of condemning other people as if we were the judges and of harboring bitterness and hatred in our hearts.

He has also told us to see to it that we remove the beam out of our own eye before trying to extract the mote out of our brother's eye. The effect of all that upon us is to reveal to us ourselves and to show us our terrible need of grace.

Jesus has held us face to face with the tremendously high standard by which we shall be judged, and that is our position at the end of verse 6. Ultimately, we realize that we are humbled and begin to ask, Who is sufficient for these things?

How can I possibly live up to such a standard? Not only that, we realize our own need of cleansing. We realize how unworthy and sinful we are.

We feel utterly hopeless and helpless, so we say, How can we live the Sermon on the Mount? How can anybody live up to such a standard? We need help and grace, and where can we get it?

[ 6 : 54 ] Well, here's the answer. Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. He goes on to say, That is the connection, and we should thank God for it, because standing face to face with this glorious gospel, we must all feel undone and unworthy.

The standard by which we are confronted is that found in the Sermon on the Mount, and by it we were all crushed to the ground and made to realize our utter helplessness and our desperate need of grace.

He closes by saying, Here is the answer. The supply is available, and our Lord repeats it for the sake of emphasis. John MacArthur said something similar.

He said, Verses 7 through 11 make a perfect bridge between the negative teaching about a critical spirit and the positive teaching of the golden rule in verse 12.

Even when we have been cleansed of our own sin and had the log removed from our eye, we need divine wisdom to know how to help a brother remove the speck from his eye. Without God's help, we cannot be sure of who are dogs or swine, who are the false prophets and apostates to whom we should not offer the holy and precious things of God's word.

[ 8 : 14 ] These considerations drive us to call on the Lord. So here Jesus is saying, in effect, if you want wisdom to know how to help a sinning brother and how to discern falsehood and apostasy, go to your heavenly Father and ask him.

Seek and knock at the doors of heaven, and you'll receive, find, and have the door opened. That's a long introduction. We're more than a quarter of the way through the lesson, and we've yet to dig into the verses themselves.

But you deserve to know why I now believe that verses 7 through 12 are connected to verses 1 through 6. Perhaps your experience has been similar to mine.

You've always heard verses 7 through 11 taught as a standalone passage with sometimes verse 12 added on to that. This may be the first time you've heard verses 1 through 12 presented as a connected group.

So if you're skeptical about the different approach, that's fine. Do what we all should do with every lesson we hear. Be like the Bereans in Acts 17.11.

[ 9 : 24 ] Of course, Acts 17.11 says, Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

As we start to dig into the verses in detail, we'll break the verses into three sections. And in verses 7 and 8, we see the promise.

So the promise is your first heading. Look at what Jesus said in verses 7 and 8 again. He said, If we're to judge the way that Jesus calls us to judge, we need God's wisdom for how to do that.

These verses contain a reassuring promise. We will receive God's wisdom for judgment if we ask for it. The three verbs in verse 7 call for continuous action.

Jesus is telling us to keep asking for wisdom. He's telling us to keep seeking for wisdom and to keep knocking for that wisdom. So when you put it together, those verbs challenge us to be persistent.

[ 10 : 54 ] So let's think about why God wants us to be persistent. Listen to what A.W. Pink said. He said, There are times when it seems as though God turns away from us, hides himself, and we have no access to him.

This is to test our sincerity, to try our earnestness, to put us to the proof as to whether we long for his grace as much as we imagine that we do. If we do, discouragements will only serve to redouble our efforts.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said something similar. He said, The most fatal thing in the Christian life is to be content with passing desires.

If we really want to be men of God, if we really want to know God and walk with him and experience those boundless blessings which he has to offer us, we must persist in asking him for them day by day.

Look now at verse 8. Again, Jesus said there, For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

[ 12 : 09 ] Before we get too far into verse 8, we need to remind ourselves of something that we saw in the first verse of chapter 5. Otherwise, we could get hung up on what Jesus meant by the word translated as everyone.

Matthew chapter 5, verse 1 says, Seeing the crowds, he, talking about Jesus, went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Remember that Jesus spoke the sermon to believers. He spoke the sermon to his followers. He's saying in verse 8 that everyone who is a believer will be the one who receives his request for wisdom.

Verses 7 and 8 should remind us of James chapter 1, verse 5. There James wrote, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Do you sometimes wonder why God wants believers to ask? After all, God knows everything we need, so why does he want us to ask? And here's something to think about as a possible answer for that.

[ 13 : 24 ] John MacArthur wrote these statements. He said, God gives us many principles in his word, but to give specific rules for every circumstance would require a giant library.

Even more important than that is God's desire that we rely on him directly. You know, the Bible is a limitless store of divine truth, and we can study it for a lifetime and still never exhaust all the truths in it.

But apart from God himself, we can't even start to mine its depths in his word. God gives us enough truth for us to be responsible, but he leaves enough mystery for us to be dependent on him.

He gives us his word to direct our lives and also to draw our lives to him. We talked last week, and we recapped earlier how we must judge with proper motivation and attitude.

We also need the proper motivation and attitude to receive the wisdom of God when we pray.

Listen to what John wrote in 1 John 3.22.

[ 14 : 36 ] 1 John 3.22 says, And whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. So obedience is a key aspect of getting what we ask for from God.

Let's move to the second section of the verses tonight. Jesus further emphasizes that God will give us the wisdom we need when we seek, ask, and knock for it with the right motives.

In verses 9 through 11, we see the parable. So the parable is what comes next. It's a short parable. Jesus said in verses 9 through 11, Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

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?

[ 15 : 41 ] Before we look at verses 9 and 10, take a minute to dwell on verse 11. Remember that for believers, God in heaven is our Father.

That glorious truth underlies the whole passage tonight. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus gave us the model prayer, Jesus referred to God as our Father.

And we know that for believers, that is true. Jesus likely repeated the point here for the benefit of his original listeners. That's because no Old Testament Jew ever addressed God directly as my Father. That would have been something new and startlingly original to Christ's original audience. So just in case they missed it the first time, Jesus refers to God as our Father again here.

Last time when we looked at the model prayer when Jesus said these words, we talked about how unbelievers have another spiritual father. In John 8.44, Jesus spoke to the Jewish leaders who had rejected him as the Messiah.

[16:53] And Jesus said to them in John 8.44, You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. The flip side came in John 1.12.

In John 1.12, John wrote this speaking of Jesus. He said, So here again in Matthew 7, Jesus reminds us of the amazing privilege we have to call God our Father.

Here's another quote from Martin Lloyd-Jones. He said, If you should ask me to state in one phrase what I regard as the greatest defect in most Christian lives, I would say that it is our failure to know God as our Father as we should know Him.

That is our trouble, not difficulties about particular blessings. The central trouble still is that we do not know, as we ought to, that God is our Father.

Do we know it in our daily life and living? Is it something of which we are always conscious? If we only get a hold of this, we could smile in the face of every possibility and eventuality that lies ahead of us.

[18:19] Keep in mind the fact that God is our Father as we look at the questions Jesus asks in verses 9 and 10. And here is that first question. It comes in verse 9.

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? When a son asks for bread, how many human fathers give a stone that looks like the bread?

How cruel would that be if somebody did that? Real cruel. Exactly. But if something like that were to happen, let's hope the son discovers that the supposed bread actually is a rock before he chumps down on it.

Otherwise, he might be visiting the dentist. Yeah. But the second question then, in verse 10, is similar, Jesus said, or if he asked for a fish, will give him a serpent.

This one requires a little more explanation. At least it did for me. I always had the thought that the serpent was alive when the Father handed it over, but that could be wrong.

[19:23] The suggestion is that of a snake that's cooked to look like ordinary meat and would, unlike the stone, meet the son's physical needs, but it wouldn't be what the son asked for.

You might be thinking, well, that's at least somewhat good. At least the son got something to eat. He fared better than he did when he got the stone instead of bread. But that's when we need to remember the Jewish dietary laws.

Those laws were still in effect when Jesus preached this sermon. So, listen to what Leviticus 11.12 says about snakes. Leviticus 11.12 says, Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you.

A loving Jewish father would never deceive and defile a son into dishonoring the word of God by tricking him into eating ceremonially unclean food. So, the original audience, being from a Jewish background, may have seen the second question as being even worse than the first because the father intentionally defiled the son.

In the parallel passage found in Luke 11, when Jesus preached a similar sermon, Jesus changed his question somewhat. Listen to Luke 11.11 and 12.

[20:47] Jesus said there, What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish, give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

In that land, some scorpions were quite large and resembled a bird's egg when they curled up to sleep. So, in this instance, the deceit could cause great physical danger to the son or even an agonizing death if the scorpion bit the son.

So, go back to tonight's text now and look at what Jesus says after he asked the questions in Matthew 7, 9, and 10. That brings us back to verse 11.

Jesus said there, 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?

We've made the point all along that Jesus is speaking to believers when he says these words. Here, though, Jesus says, You who are evil.

[ 22 : 00 ] He's still speaking to believers, but he's comparing those believers to a holy God. The Bible is clear that humans are naturally evil. Here are just a few reminders of that.

Genesis 6, 5 says this, The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

In Psalm 51, 5, David wrote, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Then moving to the New Testament, Romans 3, 23 tells us, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

When Jesus said, If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, he's talking about a typical human father who does not want to give good gifts to his children.

Most of us are fortunate to have had fathers who demonstrated this principle to us. A few, though, may have had fathers that rarely, if ever, demonstrated this principle.

[ 23 : 13 ] Regardless, Jesus' point is the same. A human father typically wants to do what is best for his children. The most naturally selfless relationship among humans is that of parents with their children.

Parents are more likely to sacrifice for their children even to the point of giving up their own lives than for any other people in the world. But think about this.

Even the greatest human parental love cannot compare with God's love. That's the point that Jesus is leading up to in verse 11. Look at verse 11 again in its entirety.

He said, 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?

The meaning of this verse is clear, but let's avoid moving on from it too quickly because Jesus used one of His favorite phrases when He said these words. And that phrase is much more.

[ 24 : 19 ] We saw the phrase recently in the previous chapter. In Matthew 6.30, Jesus said, But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

So did you catch the much more in there? There's no limit to what our Heavenly Father will give to us when we ask in obedience to His will and we ask in accordance to His will.

We looked at the parallel passage in Luke 11 earlier and we're going to go back to that again because Jesus defines what one of those good things is in Luke 11.13.

He defines one of the best gifts that God gives His children and Jesus said in Luke 11.13, If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

So the truth that Jesus proclaims here is that if imperfect and sinful human fathers willingly and freely give their children the basics of life, God will infinitely outdo them.

[ 25 : 38 ] Of course, that aligns with other places in Scripture. Listen to Ephesians 1.3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Now are you starting to see why it's important to remember that God is our Father? That's the reason why Martin Lloyd-Jones could say if we only got a hold of this, we could smile in the face of every possibility and eventuality that lies ahead of us.

That assurance, then, is one of the reasons we can be confident that if we ask God for wisdom about judgment, God will give us that wisdom. Because, of course, as Jesus said, 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?

Think about this. God being God never makes a mistake. He knows the difference between good and evil in a way that no one else does.

Think about an earthly father. He sometimes makes a mistake. Even the best fathers do. The earthly father at his best sometimes thinks at the moment that he's acting for the good of his child, but he still makes a mistake and discovers that later what he did was bad.

[ 27 : 06 ] Your father who is in heaven never makes a mistake like that. He'll never give you anything which will turn out to be harmful to you, but which at first seem to be good.

This is one of the most wonderful things that we can ever realize. We're the children of a heavenly Father who loves us and looks upon us and keeps His eye upon us.

He will never give us anything evil. He will never lead us astray. He will never make a mistake in what He gives us. He knows everything and His knowledge is absolute.

If we but realized we were in the hands of such a Father, our outlook on the future would be entirely transformed. All 11 verses of chapter 7 so far have been leading up to what we see in verse 12. So let's take a minute to consider what we've seen. In verses 1-6, Jesus has commanded us to use proper judgment. In verses 7-11, Jesus has taught us that through prayer we are to ask for God's wisdom, seek for God's wisdom, and not for God's wisdom when we need to exercise judgment. [ 28 : 22 ] He's reminded us that God will give us the wisdom we need because God is our loving and perfect Heavenly Father. Now in verse 12, Jesus summarizes what that wisdom will show us and Martin Lloyd-Jones said, the statement of verse 12, which is the summing up of this whole matter of judgment, comes with much greater force and persuasion when we look at it in the light of that brief statement about prayer.

It is only after he has reminded us of what God has done for us in spite of our sins and of God's attitude towards us and God's dealings with us that the tremendous argument of this exhortation really comes home to us.

So Jesus' words in verse 12 give us the third section of our lesson. The words give us the pattern. So the pattern is your last blink.

Look at what Jesus said in verse 12. In verse 12, Jesus said, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

The perfect love of the Heavenly Father is most reflected in His children when they treat others as they themselves wish to be treated. And that's the pattern that God wants us to follow.

[ 29 : 51 ] But look closer at the words of verse 12. Does Jesus say to treat others like they treat you? No, He says, to treat others the way that you wish they would treat you.

Treating others the way they treat us would be easy. Even unbelievers do that. Treating others the way we wish to be treated calls us to a much higher standard.

We already know that Jesus is speaking to believers when He says these words. We looked back earlier at Matthew 5.1 to remind ourselves of that. And if we didn't already know that, this verse would prove it.

So let's consider why that is. Here's a quote from John MacArthur. He said, There is no capacity within an unbeliever to love in the way that Jesus commands here.

Unbelievers can do many ethical things and every once in a while they might even approach the level of this highest of ethical standards. But they cannot sustain such selflessness because they do not have the divine resource necessary for regular habitual living on that plane.

[ 31 : 07 ] The only reason believers can come close to treating others the way they want to be treated is because believers have God as our Heavenly Father. We have to keep the verses in context.

Regardless of whether they know that the Golden Rule comes from the Bible, most people know the Golden Rule. However, the only way that people can hope to follow the Golden Rule is to have God as their Heavenly Father.

The promises we're studying tonight, like all the promises in the Sermon on the Mount, apply to believers and those promises apply to believers only. Treating others the way we want them to treat us is so important because that one statement summarizes the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus said so at the end of verse 12. So we'd like the time to consider the Law and the Prophets in detail, but let's look instead at how Jesus summarized the Law and the Prophets in Matthew 22, verses 37 through 40.

So here are those verses. Matthew 22, 37 through 40 say, And He said to him, and of course this is Jesus speaking here, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

[ 32 : 30 ] This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

That second commandment sounds very much like the golden rule. Loving our neighbor as we love ourselves is very similar to treating others the way we want them to treat us.

So that leads to another question. How can we possibly hope to treat others the way that we want to be treated? Well, we've talked about the answer some already, but the answer goes a little deeper than that because the answer is that such love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5, 22-24 say that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law, and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Remember how we looked at the parallel passage in Luke 11 and saw that one of the things that God gives us is the Holy Spirit.

[ 33 : 51 ] So now we just need to exercise the fruit of that Spirit. We often stop reading the fruit of the Spirit passage at verse 23, but verse 24 is just as important.

Listen to verse 24 again. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Because we belong to Christ Jesus, because Jesus' sacrifice has made us sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we now have the Holy Spirit.

That's the same Holy Spirit that when we yield to Him will enable us to treat others the way that we want to be treated. Remember the parallel verse to Matthew 7-11 that we read earlier.

I just mentioned it a while ago, but it's worth looking at again. Here is Luke 11-13. There Jesus said, If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

We'll let Martin Lloyd-Jones help us consider how all this ties together. He said this, If God saw us only as we are, every one of us would be utterly condemned forever.

[ 35 : 15 ] But He is interested in us in spite of these externals. He sees us as a loving Father sees us. He looks upon us in His grace and mercy.

So He does not deal with us merely as we are. He deals with us in grace. Then He goes on to say, That is why our Lord kept back this argument called the Golden Rule and put it after that wonderful passage on prayer.

That is how God deals with us. Now He says, in effect, you deal like that with your fellow men. Let us then observe human beings in their relationship to God destined for eternity.

Let us learn to look at them in this new way, in this divine way. He continues, Look at them, Christ says in effect, as I have looked upon you.

And in light of the thing that brought me from heaven for you to give my life for you. Look at them like that. The moment you do so, you will find it is easier to implement the Golden Rule because at that point you are delivered from self and its terrible tyranny and you are seeing men and women with a new eye and in a different way.

[ 36 : 32 ] He closes by saying, Only when we come to this, after having started with God and sin and self and others, we shall indeed be able to implement this amazing summary of the law and the prophets.

The theme of judgment is going to continue throughout the rest of chapter 7, but verses 7-12 actually end the main body of the Sermon on the Mount.

Starting next week, we'll hear Jesus give us an invitation and then the remaining verses will flesh out that invitation. He will call us to make a decision based upon everything we've heard in the Sermon.

All the commands we've seen in the Sermon on the Mount so far are impossible to do without God's help. Jesus is calling us to realize that we are unable to meet His and the Father's standards on our own.

We must reach out to God for grace and mercy so that the Holy Spirit will make us be born again. Only then can we hope to meet God's standards. and that is where the good news comes in.

[ 37 : 42 ] Think about the promises of Romans 10 verses 9-13. Romans 10 9-13 say, Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek for the same Lord is Lord of all bestowing His riches on all who call on Him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't say might be saved. It says, For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

When we are saved, then we'll be able to exercise proper judgment when necessary. Said another way, when we are saved, then with God's help we will be able to live up to the golden rule.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said of the golden rule, This is the thing to which we are called in Christ Jesus. We are to implement it. We are to practice it. And as we do so, we shall be showing the world the only way in which its problems can be solved.

[ 39 : 09 ] We shall at the same time be missionaries and ambassadors for Christ. Have you ever thought about how living out the golden rule actually makes you a missionary and an ambassador for Christ?

Because if you do it well, people will eventually ask, what is different about you? And if you do it well, when you witness to other people, they will realize that something is different and will be more likely to listen.

So that is why it's important to remember the last verse we looked at tonight. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder tonight of the standard that you call believers to uphold.

Help us continually rely upon you to give us the grace we need to more perfectly live out that standard as we go through our lives. Let us never forget that when we need wisdom to properly judge others, that that wisdom is available from you if we ask.

[ 40 : 23 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.