

## Week 9: Matthew 7

### Hook



**Main Point: Believers will be known for their fruit; not everyone who claims to know the Lord is a Christian.**

A young man named Leland Jr. died of typhoid fever at the age of 15 in 1884. His parents wanted to honor his memory by doing something that would benefit others. They decided to meet with Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard University. In the meeting, the couple presented their idea of a building to memorialize their son. Eliot was underwhelmed by this unassuming and plain looking couple. He thought their proposal seemed too lofty and expensive, so he suggested a scholarship. But that was not what the couple was looking for, so they left.

One year later, Eliot heard that the couple had established a \$26 million memorial in their son's name and called it Leland Stanford Junior University. Today we know it as Stanford!<sup>i</sup>

Because Charles Eliot judged this couple by their appearance and did not withhold his prejudices, he missed out on a great opportunity.

**Q: Is there a time when you have judged something only to find out it is completely the opposite of what you thought or disliked? It could have been a movie, book, a certain food, etc.**

## Week 9: Matthew 7

### Book

**Main Point:** Believers will be known for their fruit; not everyone who claims to know the Lord is a Christian.

**Mathew 7:1–6 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Don't judge others; judge yourself.

**Q: Does this really mean we *never* judge anyone for *anything*? If so, how can we reconcile 7:1 with 7:15–16?**

**Q: Why is judging and correcting our own behavior more important than judging others?**

It is difficult to use Jesus' "do not judge" as a blanket statement telling us never to judge anyone for anything, considering that just a few paragraphs later, He tells them they could recognize false prophets by their fruits (vv. 15–16). Believers should always exercise discernment, especially when it comes to listening to what people say about God or the Bible or truth in general. It is only natural that we "consider the source," especially in today's world when *anyone* can start a blog or gain an Instagram following. But that's not the kind of judging Jesus is talking about here.<sup>ii</sup>

When we look at the section as a whole rather than just those first three words, we see that the emphasis is on the hypocrisy of judging the speck in another's eye when you have a plank in your own. This is an intentional hyperbole, a literary device Jesus often uses for effect. In this way, this section is a continuation of the hypocrisy warnings of chapter 6. Just as Jesus commands us not to perform righteousness to be seen by other people, He warns us not to judge others' external actions (vv. 1–6) and not to trust others' religious claims (vv. 15–23).<sup>iii</sup> What really matters is the heart, and only God can see the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Someone may look super religious on the outside and not have a heart that is right with God (vv. 21–23). Others may seem "not righteous enough" according to our religious standards, but they actually are pursuing God and growing in righteousness. These are the kinds of people Jesus tells us not to judge.

In this way, church is kind of like the gym. Imagine if you were a super-fit, regular gym-goer, and a new person who was overweight joined your gym. Just because that person doesn't look as fit as you doesn't mean he or she isn't working as hard as you to get fit; it just means that person just got started. He or she may even be working harder than you. You can't see it from the outside. In the same way, we can't judge other people's walk with Jesus. Every one of us is

on a journey of sanctification, the spiritual version of “getting fit.” We can’t judge where someone else is on the journey.

The Sermon on the Mount gives us some hard-hitting truths about the standard of righteousness in God’s kingdom. Jesus really raises the bar. He starts this chapter by telling us that the purpose of hearing His teaching isn’t so that we can judge other people. It’s so that we can look at our own hearts and judge ourselves. Hebrews says the Word of God is “sharper than any two-edged sword.” But it’s not to be used as a weapon against other people. Instead it is to be used to pierce deeply into our own hearts, judging our own thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12). That doesn’t mean we can’t hold our friends accountable. There is a place for that (Matthew 18:15–20; 2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus says you can remove the speck from your brother’s eye (v. 5), but only after you have corrected yourself.

This last verse (v. 6) is a wisdom saying, like a proverb, that serves as a transition from this section on judging to the next section on good gifts. It is a closing warning that those who don’t value God’s Word won’t allow you to take the speck out of their eye anyway. Godly friends who value discipline and correction can help one another see and remove the sins in their lives, as iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). They would see correction as a “good gift” from the Father (vv. 7–12). But without a relationship of mutual love and accountability, trying to offer someone correction would be like “throw[ing] your pearls to pigs” (v. 6).<sup>iv</sup>

**Q: Why do we always seem to want to judge everyone but ourselves?**

**Q: How can focusing on the planks in our own eye help our own faith and relationships?**

**Q: Why is it hard to see the planks in our own eye? Do you have friends you can ask to help you see and remove them?**

**Matthew 7:7–11 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** God wants to bless His children with good things.

**Q: How does using the word *seek* connect this section to “seek first his kingdom” in the last chapter (6:33)?**

**Q: What kind of “good gifts” does God want to give us?**

This is all connected to seeking the kingdom of God. If you are seeking the kingdom, you will be seeking His will. As David said in the Psalms, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (37:4). Too often, we quote that last part without looking at the first part, as if God is like a magic genie, giving us whatever we desire. But the key to that verse is that by delighting in the Lord, His desires *become* your desires. You desire the things of God. Even if you don’t understand it or know what it is at the time, you desire His will.

This isn't to say we just accept that "God's gonna do what He's gonna do" and don't ask Him for things. He wants us to share every emotion and every desire with Him. But the objective is found in the process of prayer, the relationship-building that happens in it. It's not about getting God to give us what we want. It's about God changing our hearts. The more we seek His kingdom, the more our requests will align with what He wants for us. When they don't, we will happily defer to His will, as Jesus did when He prayed in the garden, "... not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

**Q: Describe a time when God answered your request with a "no" and you saw later that it was for the best.**

**Q: How can we grow in our understanding of God's will?**

**Matthew 7:12–23[Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** God judges the heart.

**Q: How does this section relate to the opening section about not judging?**

**Q: How can we recognize a false prophet?**

**Q: How does the Golden Rule (v. 12) connect with all of this?**

Just as verse 6 is a proverb connecting the first two sections, so verse 12 is a proverb connecting to the section previous to it. Jesus is talking about God's giving us good things and He tells us to treat others the same way. Only do good to others. Treat them the way you would want to be treated. This "golden rule" didn't originate with Jesus; it was a widespread principle of ancient ethics. This doesn't make it any less meaningful. It actually gives us a great point of connection with anyone when we talk about Jesus. It is something everyone can agree on, which provides a segue to introducing people to Jesus.<sup>v</sup>

This section is the flip side of the opening section about not judging the externals. Not everyone who looks religious on the outside actually knows Jesus. Jesus makes several points there:

- The way of salvation is narrow in a different way than they think (vv. 13–14).
- True prophets bear the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 15–20).
- It doesn't matter how much religious stuff you do if you don't know Jesus (vv. 21–23).

Both Greeks and Romans often used the image of two paths or two ways after death. Most first-century Jews would have believed they were saved because they were descendants of Abraham, which was a "narrow path" – a small number of people compared to the whole world full of nations. However, Jesus doesn't define the narrow path by connection to Abraham, but

by connection to Him. What matters is who really *knows* Jesus in their heart. The Greek word used here means not just knowing *about* something, but knowing *through personal experience*, implying an intimacy. “I never knew you” was a serious phrase of formal repudiation in Jewish culture at the time.<sup>vi</sup>

The trick is, we can’t always know who those people are. People may talk a good game and even do miracles in Jesus’s name but not really know Him (v. 22). This is one of the most fascinating verses in the Bible. How could someone do miracles without really knowing Jesus? We don’t really know, but Jesus is making it clear that it happens. Charismatic gifts (tongues, prophecy, and miracles) are not necessarily evidence of a true disciple of Jesus. Paul says the same – that speaking in tongues, prophecy, and miracles are worthless without love (1 Corinthians 13:1–4). God *is* love and Jesus *is* God, so the real indicator of a relationship with Jesus is love. Just as Jesus tells His disciples at the Last Supper, “They will know you are my disciples by your love for one another” (John 13:35). If you really *know* Jesus, you will love other people.

Here Jesus says something similar – you will know them by their fruit (v. 20). The indicator of true disciples is not their preaching or speaking in tongues or miracles, but their love, joy, peace, patience, and so on. Do they have the Fruit of the Spirit in their lives? Secondly, Jesus says those who know Him do not just call Him Lord, they do the will of the Father (v. 21). This connects to His overall point at the end of the Sermon – don’t just hear My words, do them (vv. 24–27). Don’t just *say* you follow Me, *actually follow* Me. Don’t just call me Lord, do what I say. Those who truly know Jesus won’t just talk a good game or put on a good “show” of supernatural power; they will live like Jesus, love like Jesus, serve like Jesus, be like Jesus.

False prophets may look like sheep, like just one of the flock, but they are really ravenous wolves. This phrase indicates intensity – not just wolves, but ravenous wolves. They want to attack and devour as many of the sheep as they can. Though Jesus tells us not to judge the speck in our brother’s eye, He *does* expect us to judge false prophets, because if we don’t remove them from our midst, they will destroy the flock. We recognize them by their fruits. Not their preaching and teaching or even whether they can do miracles or speak in tongues. Their fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All of us are on a *journey* of growing in the Fruit of the Spirit, so they don’t have to be perfectly patient all the time. They may have lapses in self-control, like any human being. But if you don’t see these fruits growing in their life at all, you’re dealing with a false prophet. If they are a fantastic preacher but treat their staff with harshness instead of gentleness or if you see nothing but discord instead of peace in their church, you may have a false prophet.

Even if we don’t see false prophets for who they are, God will expose the true state of their hearts at the day of judgment – “on that day” (v. 22). He will cut down any tree that doesn’t

bear good fruit and throw it into the fire (v. 19). Jesus claims here, just as He does in the parable of the sheep and the goats at the end of Matthew, that He is the One who will judge, thereby equating Himself with God. Only Jesus can truly judge someone's heart, but we are called to be discerning about who we follow as leaders.

**Q: Why is it important to be discerning about who we follow as leaders? How can bad leadership destroy a church?**

**Q: Why is it easy to judge church leaders by the wrong qualities?**

**Q: How can we be discerning without judging "the speck in our brother's eye"?**

**Matthew 7:24–29 [Read]**

**Talking Point 4:** The purpose of God's Word is to DO IT.

**Q: Why does Jesus use the example of a house being blown over to describe someone who doesn't live out His words?**

**Q: How does this passage connect to being able to discern false prophets?**

Here, at the very end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells them His teachings only matter if you live them out. They could sit in the crowd and listen to Him preach and teach all day long, but it meant nothing if they didn't *do it*. James says the same. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

This type of illustration, relating following God's law to building a house, was common in Jewish wisdom literature. The Old Testament often used the rock image for the security Israel had in God if they obeyed His law (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:2; et. al.). God's law is a firm foundation on which to build your life. The covenant promised that following God's law brought blessing, and not following it brought curses. Moses ends the giving of the law in Deuteronomy with "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

But Jesus' aim is higher even than blessing in this life. The context is the final day of judgment. It is true that storms could represent any test in life and following Jesus' words will help your house stand. But in this context, it most likely refers to the final test, the Day of Judgment.<sup>vii</sup> It's about our eternal destiny, not earth's blessing. The whole sermon is about living in the upside-down kingdom of God, not the world. Following Jesus' law does not promise us health, wealth, and prosperity in this life. Look back at verse 14. Jesus says the gate is narrow and the way is *hard* that leads to life. In the beginning of the Sermon, the Beatitudes, Jesus promised persecution and suffering for His disciples. He says being a disciple means to take up your cross

and follow Him (Matthew 16:24–26). This promise is about our eternal security. Storms may blow and beat against us throughout our life, but if our house is built on the rock, we will stand in the end.

Jesus here equates His words with God's law, again claiming that He *is* God. We must either accept His divinity and submit to His lordship or reject Him altogether.<sup>viii</sup> The issue is obedience. Those who have that firm foundation are the ones who obey Jesus' words. They don't just listen to His words; they actually do what He says. This is what matters. You can listen to sermons and go to Bible studies all day long, but if you don't live it out, your house isn't built on the rock. As the saying goes, "Sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car." Jesus doesn't want pew-warmers. He wants followers.

**Q: Why is it so easy to be just a pew-warmer instead of a follower?**

**Q: In what ways have you been guilty of listening to Jesus's words but not living them out?**

**Q: Which parts of the Sermon on the Mount were most convicting to you personally and why?**

**Q: Of course, none of us is perfectly obedient. How can we know our house is really built on the rock? How is this related to the earlier passages about knowing Jesus and bearing fruit?**

## Week 9: Matthew 7

### Took

**Main Point: Believers will be known for their fruit; not everyone who claims to know the Lord is a Christian.**

Elton Simmons is a sheriff's deputy who has served his community for more than 20 years. He has made more than 25,000 traffic stops, and handed out plenty of tickets and citations, but his file contains zero complaints. This fact was so stunning to Simmons's captain that CBS News caught wind of this story and came to shadow Simmons to discover what was so special about him.

The news crew saw that Simmons treated people with respect, without any condescension or pride. He disarmed people with his charm and contagious smile. He does not give people a guilt trip or make them feel that he is looking down on them. After receiving a ticket from Deputy Simmons, people are still in a good mood. It's quite incredible! His cheerful demeanor and kindness impacted the people he came into contact with and flowed like ripples throughout his city. There is a lesson in his example for all of us.<sup>ix</sup>

**Q: What type of example is Simmons setting?**

**Q: What are some practical ways you can love others while at work?**

**Q: Can others tell that you are a Christian by how you interact with them?**

### CHALLENGES

**THINK: How can you be sure you really know Jesus and have built your house on the rock?**

How does all this talk about obedience relate to salvation by grace through faith alone? If it's all about obedience and living out Jesus' teaching, is that "works righteousness"? How can we reconcile this sermon on the ethics of the kingdom with our theological understanding of taking on the righteousness of Christ? How do they each relate to justification and sanctification?

**PRAY for God to show you ways you haven't been living by the laws of His kingdom.** Not because you think you can earn your way into heaven, but because as a citizen of His kingdom you want to live as He commands. Pray for God to change the desires of your heart so that any of these commands that feel like *have-tos* become *want-tos*.

**ACT: Share something you have learned from the last few weeks of studying the Sermon on the Mount with someone else.** You could share with Christian friends to encourage them in their faith, your children to teach them something new, or even a non-Christian, as a witnessing



experience. Don't just share information. Discuss it, wrestle with it, ask questions, and listen to their thoughts or questions, too.

*Hook, Took & Editing by Jorge Fraige*

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i

▣ [Today in the Word, June 11, 1992](#)

ii

▣ Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

iii

▣ Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 95.

iv

▣ Alexander Belmain Bruce, *The Gospel According to Matthew, The Expositor's Greek New Testament, Vol 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 129130.

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▣ Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

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vii

▣ John Paul Heil, "Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders in Matthew 7:24–27" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1998), 23-25

viii

▣ Gary A. Tuttle, "The Sermon on the Mount: Its Wisdom Affinities and Their Relation to Its Structure" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977),

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▣ David Anderson, "Lesson 15: The Golden Rule of Relationships (Matthew 7:1-12)" *Matthew*, June 25, 2020 - <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-15-golden-rule-relationships-matthew-71-12>