

# WEEK 10: A NEW VISION FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Matthew 7:1–12



## The Place of the Passage

Jesus brings the central section of the Sermon the Mount to a conclusion. After the introductory Beatitudes and the call to live out the light of the gospel of the kingdom in the world (Matt. 5:1–16), Jesus announced that he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets and that he was bringing about a greater righteousness for his people (5:17–20). After unfolding this vision with several ethical examples (5:21–48), devotional practices (6:1–18), and instruction addressing our relationship with anxiety and money (6:19–34), Jesus applies this to our personal relationships as well (7:1–12). He first corrects a hypocritical tone of judgmentalism (7:1–6) and then confronts our need for expectancy in prayer (vv. 7–11). He concludes not only this section but the whole central section of the Sermon on the Mount with a vision for how we are to treat others. This section thus unfolds his vision for our relationships with one another and with our heavenly Father.

## The Big Picture

Jesus offers a new vision for relationships by correcting hypocritical judgmentalism, encouraging expectant prayer, and calling us to treat others as we wish they would treat us.

## Reflection and Discussion

Carefully and thoughtfully read this section of Jesus' teaching, Matthew 7:1–12. Then use the provided questions to help you think more deeply about the text. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1833–1834; online at [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).)

### Relationships in the Church and the World (Matt. 7:1–6)

Jesus' command to "judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1) is well known but often misunderstood. Many people understand this to mean, "Do not say that someone's doctrine or behavior is wrong." But what do you see in the context of Matthew 7:1–5 that indicates that this is not what Jesus means? (Consider also vv. 6, 15–20.)

In your own words, summarize the meaning of Jesus' illustration of the speck and the log in Matthew 7:3–4. Why is this teaching important?

Jesus calls those who are pridefully judgmental toward others "hypocritical." In what way are they being hypocritical? How is this similar to the issues Jesus addressed in Matthew 6:1–18?

In a sentence, summarize the main point of Matthew 7:1–5.

Jesus is speaking to an important issue in relationships within the Christian community. What are some features of a community marked by hypocritical and prideful attitudes of judgmentalism? In contrast to this, what are features of the type of community Jesus is creating with his teaching in Matthew 7:1–5?

In the first century, people often despised dogs and pigs and valued holy things and pearls. Although some dispute what Jesus means, if that which is valuable refers to the Christian message, and if the animals refer to those who spurn the message, then what is Jesus' point? How would Matthew 10:14 support this understanding?



**THE GIVER OF GOOD.** When Jesus encourages us to pray, he does not merely say, “Pray because you should pray.” No, he unfolds before us the generous heart of the Father. He encourages us to think about the best fathers we know, the ones who only and always give good gifts to their children, and then he teaches us that our Father in heaven is even more generous than that (Matt. 7:9–11). God is more generous than the most generous person you have ever met. He is the giver of all good. He gives good gifts—even the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)—to those who ask him. There could be no better encouragement to pray.

**Whole-Bible Connections**

**THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE GOLDEN RULE.** Jesus provides a beautiful summary of his teaching with what we now call the Golden Rule: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12). He goes on to point out that this rule is the summary not simply of his own teaching but of the Old Testament also, as he adds, “this is the Law and the Prophets.” Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said he came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (5:17). The Golden Rule is one way in which Jesus demonstrates that his message does not contradict the Old Testament but fulfills it. Jesus has come to create a kingdom filled with forgiven and transformed sinners who not merely agree with the Golden Rule but begin to embody it.

**Theological Soundings**

**HUMAN SINFULNESS.** When Jesus teaches us to pray, he commends the generosity of fathers, affirming that they would not give a stone to a child who asked for bread, nor a serpent when asked for a fish (Matt. 7:9–10). Yet then he says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts . . .” (v. 11). In Jesus’ view, human fathers are a model of generosity and care, but they are also, in his words, “evil.” This is true of even the best people—loving and generous fathers—according to Jesus. We are not as bad as we could be, but something is so deeply wrong that Jesus can summarize us with this singularly damning word. The Bible teaches that we are not merely sinners because we sin; fundamentally, we sin because we are sinners. Ever since the fall,<sup>1</sup> when Adam sinned, every person has been born with a sinful nature, and so we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) and thus in need not only of forgiveness but of regeneration.<sup>2</sup>

**THE ETHIC OF LOVE.** Ethics is the study of morality, justice, and virtue. Jesus addresses various ethical topics throughout his ministry. In the Sermon on the

Mount Jesus summarizes the whole of our ethical responsibility toward others with the Golden Rule: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12). Elsewhere he summarizes this responsibility toward others by stating, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (22:39). In each case he notes how his teaching summarizes the ethical teaching of our responsibility toward others in the Old Testament (7:12; 22:40). These two statements complement one another, showing that at the heart of Christian ethics is to love others and treat them as we wish they would treat us.

**Personal Implications**

Reflect on how to apply what you have learned in this text to your everyday life. Make notes below on personal implications of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole. Also write down what you have learned that can lead you to praise God, repent of sin, trust his gracious promises, and live in obedience to him.

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

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**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

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**3. Theological Soundings**

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#### 4. Matthew 7:1–12

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#### As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment to pray and ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Matthew 7:1–12. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

#### Definitions

- <sup>1</sup> **The fall** – Adam and Eve's disobedience of God by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, resulting in their loss of innocence and favor with God and the introduction of sin and its effects into the world.
- <sup>2</sup> **Regeneration** – The Holy Spirit's work of bringing spiritual life to a person, thus enabling him or her to trust, love, and follow God. Essentially equivalent to what is often referred to as being "born again" (John 3:7) or "saved" (5:34).