

# Playing God

Gospels

Matthew 7:1-12

## Introduction

Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 7, where we will pick up our study today. This is a heavy study because of its topic.

Jesus begins by making a basic statement that has led a lot of people to the wrong conclusion. Look at Matthew 7:1.

***Do not judge so that you will not be judged.***

Everyone hears this and says, “Oh, you should never say anyone is wrong. You should never judge anyone for anything.”

In order to do justice to this text, before we even get to Jesus’ meaning, let me give the other side and ask and answer two basic questions. These questions are:

- When, if ever, is it right to judge?
- When, if ever, is it wrong to judge?

## When Is It Right To Judge?

We will begin with the first question, “When is it right to judge?” I am going to give several scenarios in which it is right to judge or make judgment. I am not talking about the Pharisaical, censorious, picky kind of judgment. I think you will understand as we go along.

### 1. First, it is right to judge someone when they openly rebel against scripture.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 5:1,

***It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles [pagans], that someone has his father’s wife.***

Someone, evidently, is in an incestuous relationship, having married his mother. Continue to I Corinthians 5:2-3 and note Paul’s words.

***You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who***

***had done this deed would be removed from your midst.***

***For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this . . .***

The word “judge” in this verse, or “krino” in the Greek, appears more than a hundred times in the New Testament.

Our age resists moral accountability. We see an example of this by the author of *Looking Out for Number One*, if you have ever read any of his book. He writes, “Do not be intimidated by another person’s council about what is right and what is wrong. Especially watch out for the moralists. Forget the moral standards others have tried to cram down your throat.”

This is the pervasive attitude today. I read of a church that disciplined out of its membership, a woman who was living openly in immorality and refused to repent. She took the church to court, saying, “You have no right to judge me,” and won in court.

Is it right to judge according to the text of scripture? It is right to judge when someone openly rebels against God’s Word? It is indeed, proper to say, “You are wrong.”

### 2. Secondly, it is right to judge someone when they openly deny the doctrines of scripture.

People in our age resist convictions, do not like dogma, and toss away theology – that stuffy stuff – with the thought, “We want something that’s a little more titillating.” As a result, people have now entered this world of ecumenism, in which we hold hands for love, and in the process, have sacrificed doctrine and abandoned pure theology.

Listen to what Paul says about this in Romans 16:17,

***Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions [divisions] and hindrances contrary to the teaching***

*[doctrine] which you learned, and turn away from [avoid] them.*

This does not sound very loving, does it?

John writes, in II John 1:10-11,

*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;*

*for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.*

I wonder how popular John would be today.

I just finished reading the results of one group's six year study of the Bible called, "The Jesus Seminar". Two hundred self-proclaimed authorities on God's Word got together and for six years, their object was to identify the things in the gospels that Jesus really said. I thought He said all of it, but they had some questions.

The group came up with the conclusion that 31 of the more than 700 sayings attributed to Jesus are authentic – only 31. This conclusion means that 80% of the New Testament is out to lunch.

Would you believe that of the New Testament, the entire Gospel of John was cut out by these authorities? The chairman said that Jesus did not speak in the long monologues in which John had Him speak.

The decisions of this group reveal their bias and their agenda. The parables of the Good Samaritan and the mustard seed, passages criticizing the rich, commands to love one's enemies and each other were considered authentic sayings of Jesus. However, passages calling for repentance, affirming the deity of Jesus Christ, affirming the demands of discipleship, or in which Jesus is speaking of the need for redemption, or the new birth, were not considered words that Jesus really said. These are unpopular doctrines.

Galatians 1:8 hits a group like this between the eyes, when Paul writes,

*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to [this one] . . . he is to be accursed!*

These are strong words. It sounds like Paul is doing a little judging, does it not? Yes, he is. It is correct to judge when someone denies the doctrines of scripture.

### **3. Thirdly, it is right to judge when we judge our own relationship before God.**

We are always safe with this one. We never have to wonder whether we are right or not on this.

I Corinthians 11:28-32 uses the word "krino," or a form of it, in three verses.

*But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

*For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. . . .*

*But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.*

*But when we are judged, we are disciplined . . .*

The theme of judging ourselves is a rather prevalent theme. We are to evaluate who and what we are before Jesus Christ.

There is too little of this being done because in our pursuit of holiness, it is too convicting. We do not like confession, which is not good for our self-image, but prefer to stay where it is safe.

It is right to judge ourselves.

### **4. Fourthly, it is right to judge when we evaluate everything – everything – in light of scripture.**

I Corinthians 2:15a says,

*But he who is spiritual appraises [judges] all things . . .*

Do you want to be spiritual? Paul tells us in this verse to judge all things – obviously in light of the scriptures.

The movements within our culture today are running rampant with trends and fads that are against scripture. We must evaluate.

*USA Today* recently carried a full page article that told of the spiritual search of Hollywood's hottest stars. It was a tragic recalling of all of the New Age gimmicks, including following channelers, gurus, spiritual incantations to rid the body of toxins, meditation, yoga, crystals, and on and on.

What is the problem? When we put the Bible aside, we have no compass; we have no rudder to steer ourselves into what is true spiritual reality.

*Life* magazine grabbed my attention this past week. Stores put all the magazines together at the

check out so we will spend a little more money! The headline of the *Life* magazine read, “Do you believe in miracles?” I will admit – I bought a copy. The subtitle read, “If you do, you’re not alone.”

I could not believe some of the current things that have been happening. From a vision of the Virgin Mary on a hillside in Yugoslavia to the face of Christ on a billboard in Georgia, signs of a divine presence are touching millions. In New York there are Jews who believe that crumbs which fall from the rabbi’s table, if eaten, can cure illnesses and keep marriages together. Muslim gurus are said to be able to perform mystical healing. A growing cult in Bayside Queens believes it can capture the form of the Virgin Mary by aiming Polaroid cameras up at the clouds.

According to the magazine, in the past ten years, fifteen million people have flooded to a small village in Yugoslavia where children said they saw Mary appear. A housing boom has been created in this village. Priests from the local cathedral come out and perform healing ceremonies. There were pictures of people lying flat on the floor after being touched by this man claiming divine power.

One woman in this village comes out on her porch and blesses hundreds of people every day, touching them on the head. One of the pictures shows a worshiper enraptured by her touch. She also tells people what Mary has told her, “The blessed mother wants you to pray four hours a day. The blessed mother wants you to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. The blessed mother wants you to do penance.”

This sounds more like the Pharisees than Mary, does it not?

The woman also said that Mary told her this, and this is the key, “The blessed mother wants you to find peace within.”

Should we discern this? Should we evaluate the error? You had better believe it.

This past week in the newspaper, Prince Charles of England was quoted as saying, “The hope of mankind is for all of us to somehow discover the divine element within each of us.”

We are living in a day when spiritual discernment is of paramount importance. The writer of Hebrews called the church to a level of discernment when he wrote these words,

*. . . for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14)*

Spiritual discernment is part of our living. We need it more desperately now than ever before.

Where would we be today without the discerning people who said the movements of their day were wrong when evaluated by scripture?

Where would we be today without Martin Luther, who went against the current of popular church teaching that salvation can be bought. People were shelling money out with hopes of getting into heaven. Luther said this practice was wrong, that justification comes by faith alone, and he began the Protestant Reformation.

Would you be holding a copy of the New Testament had it not been for William Tyndale, who, in 1525, went against the sayings and the teachings of the organized, accepted church that said the Bible was for clergy only and chained it to the pulpit? He said the Bible should be in the hands of everyone and gave us the first English translation of the New Testament. He died as a result – killed as a heretic.

Where would we be today without these men?

One of my professors who marked me, said, “In every generation the church has missed the mark somewhere. The question is, ‘Where is it missing today?’”

It is right to discern and judge in light of scripture.

## **When Is It Wrong To Judge?**

Now let us look at the question, “When is it wrong to judge?” Let me give several instances.

### **1. First, it is wrong to judge when judging occurs before all the facts are known.**

This is like the petty, censorious, Pharisaical type of judgment. Before we know all the facts, we say something like, “Oh, really? I should have known. I figured he’d do that.”

John 7:51 says,

*Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?*

Solomon also refers to making hasty judgments before all of the facts are in.

### **2. Secondly, it is wrong to judge when judging condemns another person’s personal convictions.**

This is a tough one. We could camp on this one all day. Let us read Paul’s words in Colossians 2:16,

*Therefore no one is to act as your judge . . .*

Paul then lists several things, saying,

*. . . in respect to a festival . . .*

Three times a year the Jews would set aside a time to worship and celebrate. Paul says, “Don’t judge someone on the festival times.” He continues,

*. . . or a new moon . . .*

What is Paul talking about? This was the beginning of the Jewish lunar calendar when they set aside time to worship and to rest.

Paul also said not to judge as it relates to,

*. . . a Sabbath day . . .*

He continues in Colossians 2:17a to say,

*Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come . . .*

What is the problem? Christianity was developing – it was leaving Judaism and marching toward a radical new lifestyle. In the first century, there was a wide spectrum of thought. There were Orthodox Jews who had come to Christ, but wanted to do it like they had always done it. There were others who were ready to jump off the end of the peer, shouting “grace” all the way down to the water. Everyone was lining up somewhere on this spectrum and there were many divisions and all kinds of problems.

As a result of this, people were judging. Some people were saying others were not doing enough. Others were saying, “Relax. Come on over. The water is fine.”

There were tremendous conflicts in the new church. So Paul writes, “Don’t judge.”

God can bless for convictions, although this is not just talking about convictions. We, in fact, live in a day when there are not enough personal convictions. Paul does not deny the need for convictions. He says, “Make sure you have them and know why you have them.”

However, when we have convictions and know they are personal, we are to understand that they are extra-biblical. These are convictions concerning the way we live, what we may wear, where we may go, what we may eat, or things of that nature. We should have convictions, but do not say, “I am now the standard. God gave this to me and I am now evaluating everyone else in light of this.”

Do you know one of the most difficult lessons for us to learn? It is that God can bless someone with whom we disagree. I know this comes as a real shock to most of us, as we say, “Now wait a second, Lord!” I have seen both judgments – I have been in very, very strict legalistic camps and have seen judgment on those who have a different lifestyle and I have seen the opposite lifestyle and have seen judgment that comes on people who are over there. They are both wrong.

### **3. Thirdly, it is wrong to judge when judging attacks another person’s motives.**

Look at I Corinthians 4:5.

*Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.*

Until this time, Paul implies, we do not know the reason people do everything they do; we do not know their motive and we cannot judge motives.

The rabbis taught something, in this day, that they did not practice, but is great advice today. They said, “The six greatest works that we can do are:

- study the scriptures;
- teach children the scriptures;
- visit the sick;
- show kindness to strangers;
- pray;
- think the best of other people.”

Note the last one of these.

I think these are the six greatest works because they are the most difficult. We tend to exaggerate other’s faults and minimize our own. We say, “He has such a terrible temper. Me – my mother is Irish.”

The rabbis would have us turn this around.

### **4. Fourthly, it is wrong to judge when judging attempts to destroy someone’s reputation.**

James 4:11 tells us, in the context of the church,

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law . . .*

The word for “speak against” is rather interesting. It means, “to defame; to speak evil of; to say bad things about other people.” The catch, however, is

that the context of the word is when the person is not present. This is when the person is not around and we give our judgment and it is judgment that is titillating, says bad things about the person's reputation, and will destroy. This kind of judging, the scripture says, is wrong.

Let us remember the story of Stonewall Jackson, who saw two men fighting in his camp. The men were brawling at the edge of the camp. Jackson walked over to them, stopped their brawl, and said, "Men, may I remind you, the enemy is over there."

**5. Fifthly, and finally, it is wrong to judge when judging displays self-righteousness.**

Look at Matthew 7:1 again.

***Do not judge so that you will not be judged.***

This is not discernment or other forms of judgment that we have already discussed, but the judgment typical of the Pharisees. This is the censorious, picky type of judgment because someone was not like they were.

It is easy to be like this if you live under the delusion that you are spiritually better than someone else. This is the reason the Pharisees could do it. They had arrived; they were the standard, so they felt free to judge.

However, notice the result of this judging. It is a boomerang. Look at Matthew 7:2.

***For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.***

In other words, self-righteous condemning builds its own gallows. If we live by the sword of the tongue, we will die by the sword and we will feel the pain as well. These are strong words.

The illustration of this is given in Matthew 7:3-4.

***Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?***

***Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye?***

Jesus pulls from His construction background, something that was very familiar to Him. The word "speck" is "karpfos," which could be translated "splinter".

Notice that the splinter and the log are the same thing in different sizes.

It is also interesting that both of the people in this verse are involved in the same sin; have the same problem. However, one of them is dabbling, while the other is drowning.

The one who is drowning in the sin is so quick to notice it in others. Why? He knows the way he is and understands the symptoms.

As a result, this person comes to the other with a log jutting out of his head. The word "log" is a reference to a support beam in a home. Every time he turns his head, he is knocking people over. He comes over and says, "May I take the speck out of your eye," and, of course, knocks the other person backward ten feet. How ridiculous this is!

A classic illustration of this is the time Nathan came to David and told him the fascinating story of a sheep stealer who was caught in the kingdom. David said, "What?! We've got a sheep stealer in the kingdom? Take his life!"

Nathan said, "We've got a wife stealer, too. What do you want to do about him?"

The problems were the same – the difference was the magnitude.

## **Judging "Dogs and Hogs"**

Before I give applications from our study today, we have to handle a very difficult verse. Preachers love it when they are in the middle of a passage and one of these verses pops up. I am committed to teaching through God's Word, so we will deal with it. I think I have some answers.

Look at Matthew 7:6.

***Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.***

In Christ's time, dogs and hogs were ceremonially unclean animals. This was the kind of dog that was a scavenger or a rabid dog, not little Fi Fi or Spot in the house.

Jesus is referring to the priest who would offer meat on the altar. They would not throw that which would now be considered sacred to some scavenging, frothing dog. That would be ridiculous.

In the same way, one would not take something that cost much and was priceless or precious and use it to adorn a swine's neck. That would be equally ridiculous.

The question is, “Who are the dogs and the hogs that are referred to in this verse and how do they fit?”

We need to look at other passages of scripture to discover who the dogs and hogs are, but it is very clear.

Turn to Philippians chapter 3 and let us look at a passage that will show us who they are. Begin by looking at Philippians 3:2.

***Beware of the dogs, beware of evil workers...***

The word “dogs” is the same word as that used in Matthew 7:6. Paul uses parallelism; that is, he is making a parallel between dogs and evil workers; he is using “dogs” as a synonym for evil workers.

Look at Philippians 3:18-19.

***For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,***

***whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.***

The words “in their shame” mean “in their sin,” and they are proud of it.

Let us look at Peter’s words in II Peter 2:13b-14.

***. . . They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse . . .***

***having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed . . .***

Skip to II Peter 2:22 and note these words.

***It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”***

This clears our question up. Who are the dogs? Who are the hogs? They are people who openly reject the cross of Jesus Christ, who revel in their sin, who love their immorality, who will do nothing with greater delight than rip a believer apart for their stand. God says that there comes a time when we are to stop talking to these people.

This explains for me, a passage I did not understand before knowing this explanation. You may recall the time Jesus stood before Pilate and then Herod (Luke 23:1-12). Jesus was asked, “Are You

who You say You are?” and Herod wanted to see some sign or miracle performed by Jesus.

Now I am on the sidelines saying, “Okay, Lord, here it is! You’re in the kingdom – the palace – tell them who You are. And, Lord, give Herod a good miracle. Turn his chair into a hot skillet or something to get his attention.”

However, we are told that Jesus said nothing and performed no miracle (Luke 23:9).

Why? Herod was a dog – in biblical terms. He had rejected the truth for years. He had taken the Old Testament prophet John and cut his head from his body because of his stand.

Jesus, in effect, says that to tell Herod what he already knows would be like taking the precious pearls of the Gospel and giving them to a swine. These are strong words.

You are probably thinking, “Who is going to be the one to determine who the hog and the dog is? Is that something we can do? In addition, how am I to deal with the believer that I can’t agree with? How can I live and relate to people like this in the church and people like this in the world? How do I handle it?”

Jesus gives us the answer in the next verse. He does not just drop His thoughts and start thinking about prayer – it is all within the same context. Look at Matthew 7:7a,

***Ask, and it will be given to you; . . .***

This is literally to ask and to keep on asking.

Then, when asking, what is “it” that will be given to you? Is it that we will ask for and get anything we want? No. We are given the discernment needed to handle life in the way Jesus has just explained in Matthew 7:1-6.

Continue to Matthew 7:7b-8.

***. . . seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.***

***For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, . . .***

When we keep on asking and keep on seeking, we find. Why? We are going to need this throughout our lives. God cannot give, a year ago, what we are going to need tomorrow on the job. We need a fresh deposit of wisdom. Keep on asking throughout life and God will help to know when to speak and when to remain silent.

Now, if you have any question about whether or not God will answer, Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:9-11.

*Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?*

*Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?*

*If you then, being evil [imperfect; sinful], know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!*

In other words, God will give what we need to relate to other people, but we have to come to Him and specifically ask in prayer.

This is tough for us to do because we say prayers, but we do not pray. The way to learn how to start praying is to listen to a new believer or to a child.

Recently, while on vacation, my kids got down by the side of the bed, so excited that they got to go swimming, and prayed, “Lord, I can swim!”

We get down on our knees after we have had a fantastic day, and say, “Lord, we thank You for this day and the many blessings therein.”

We are so vague. If we want discernment to deal with specific situations, Jesus is saying, in effect, “Ask specifically.”

One author wrote these words, “We all have one pat prayer, and if we can ever get rid of it, we can begin to pray.”

## **Application – Two Dangers For Those Who Play God**

Let me tie up our discussion today with two thoughts. The application is that the danger of playing God is twofold.

### **1. Number one, playing God creates an inability to recognize our own personal sin.**

I love the story of the fifty-three residents in a certain neighborhood of a Connecticut city who signed a petition. They were sick and tired of the reckless driving on their neighborhood street. The police set up a watch and a few nights later, five violators were caught. All five had signed the petition!

On a more serious note, I read recently of a man in Maine who was caught in an immoral relationship. It made national news. Why? This man had given his life to a crusade against pornography. He was vocal

in his opposition to it and was leading campaigns against it. I would say, “Yes, and more of it.” However, when he was caught in this way, it was interesting because this was a man who was crusading against sexual looseness in magazines and was completely blind to it in his own life.

Have you ever asked the question, “How can people do what they do? Are they blind?”

Yes, they are – they really are. You and I are too, when we set ourselves up as the standard; when we become God’s voice; when we are righteousness, and, in effect, say, “If you look like me, God will bless you.” The danger is that we become blind to the log that is protruding from our face.

Paul writes in Romans 2:1,

*Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge [habitually] practice the same things.*

Those in the first century, by the way, had a problem with the same stuff we have problems with today.

### **2. Number two, setting ourselves up as God is dangerous because it creates an inability to help other people recognize and overcome their sin.**

Look at Matthew 7:5. I skipped this verse, but want to look at it now.

*. . . first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.*

This is interesting, is it not? Jesus does not say, “Ignore your brother.” Your brother needs help – he has a splinter in his eye. How painful can it be?

Galatians 6:1 says,

*If anyone is caught in any trespass [the very act of sin], you who are spiritual, . . .*

What are the spiritual to do? Get a club? Take pictures and send them to the newspaper? Ignore it? All three of these are much easier to do than what Jesus said to do.

Jesus says,

*. . . you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself . . .*

In other words, “You who are Spirit-led, go restore, go help him get the splinter out. But, before you do, you’d better make sure that the log is out of your own eye.”

Finally, Jesus wraps it up in Matthew 7:12. He summarizes it all when He says,

**. . . therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.**

Now you may have had someone say to you, “Oh, they’ve been saying that for centuries. Jesus didn’t come up with that. Confucius said it. Aristotle said it. Plato said it.”

They did not say it. They put it in the negative. They said, “Don’t treat other people in the way you don’t want them to treat you.”

In other words, “Leave them alone.”

Jesus puts it in the positive, active state. He says, “Treat people the way you want them to treat you.”

In other words, you take the initiative; you take the first step and see what happens.

This is great advice for the church, obviously. How do you want people to treat you in the church? Treat them that way first.

How do you want your wife or your husband to treat you in the home? Treat them that way first.

How many kids want your parents to treat you with respect? Treat them that way first.

Once you start, it is a cycle that will never end. This is otherwise known as “The Golden Rule”.

Paul, in effect, says, “Don’t play the role of God.”

God, by the way, is not holding auditions for back ups. He is all we need – one God.

However, in this rule, God says, in effect, “I want you to play the role of a servant. Take the initiative; step first.”

As you well know, by the way, we then need a lot more steps.