

The Heart of a Critic (Matthew 7:1-2) - Sermon by Kelly Larsen

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Matthew 7 cannot be rightly understood if disconnected from the broader message of the Sermon on the Mount: our need to recognize our spiritual poverty. The essential starting place is brokenness before God. We must come to realize that we are spiritually poor (Matthew 5:2-3) before our lives can begin to reflect the gospel in our interactions with others.

Read Matthew 7:1-2.

Matthew 7:1-2 (NASB)

¹Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ²For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

1. To understand this passage, we must first answer what it means to judge another:

a. This passage does not teach that we are not to make any judgments.

Read Matthew 7:5. What type of judgment has occurred? How does this passage show that certain types of judgment are permissible?

Read Matthew 18:15. What type of judgement occurred in this text? How does this passage show that certain types of judgement are commanded by God?

As parents we often make judgements about who we will allow our children to play with or who we will allow to babysit our children. Is this type of discerning judgment, meant to protect our families from harm, what Jesus is speaking against? Why or why not?

b. The type of judgement condemned in these verses is when we apply **our own** standards of judgement to others.

Re-read Matthew 7:1-2. Who is doing the judging and measuring in this passage, God or us? Who is setting the standard of measurement, God or us? What does Jesus command regarding judging in this way?

We wrongly apply our own standard of judgment to others in two main ways.

- We apply our own personal opinions about the way we think things ought to be done, and judge on the basis of those opinions.
- We apply our own interpretation or understanding of the Word and make judgments in keeping with our interpretation and our understanding.

In both ways, we are wrongly taking our standards and applying them to others.

Are there any opinions you hold that could become standards for judging others?

What are some safeguards you could use to keep you from applying your own interpretations of Scripture in ways that become judgmental?

Read James 4:11-12. What type of judging is occurring in this passage? When you judge others by your own standard, whose law are you actually sitting in judgment over?

- c. Another type of judgement condemned by Christ is when we seat ourselves in the place of the Judge.

Read James 4:11-12. What is the connection between “speaking against” a brother and judging a brother? What does it look to “speak against” someone?

Speaking against another reveals that **you** have weighed them and found them wanting. When are you most tempted to speak against or judge others? Does this happen in conversation with others or do you sometimes find yourself making silent mental judgments of others based on your standards?

We are not to compare ourselves to others, but to God. We are to see our own brokenness. “Do not be the judge!” Which interaction with a fellow believer could be described as “gospel-shaped”: sitting above a believing brother or sister in judgement when confronting sin in their lives, or confronting the sin while identifying with them in brokenness? Discuss your answer.

Re-read James 4:11-12. Who is described as the only Lawgiver and Judge? If God is the only judge, what right do you have to take His place in the life of another, to “stand over the law”?

2. To understand this passage, we must also know what drives the critical heart:
- Pride drives the critical heart. Looking back at Matthew 7:1-2, we see repetitive use of the word “you”. When we stand over others in judgment, it becomes all about you!
- When a brother or sister sins, does standing in judgment over them further the objective of that person being restored? Why or why not?
- Explain the following statement: “When you judge with your law, you are judging God’s law as incomplete, inadequate, and inferior” (cf. James 4:11-12).
- Self-righteousness drives the critical heart. When you judge others, you betray your sense of superiority. The critic must believe that he lives up to the standards (or at least those that mean most to him). “I’m meeting God’s standard, and you’re not!”

When you refuse to acknowledge your own sin, how does this diminish your ability to see the beauty of the gospel and cross?

Read Matthew 7:3. Why is the man in this passage unable to see the log in his own eye? How can self-righteous judgmentalism blind you to “logs” of your own?

- c. Covetousness drives the critical heart. Covetousness is a desire to take for yourself that which belongs to others. When you covet, you want what someone else has.

Read Romans 14:4. When a servant was owned by someone in this time period, who set the standard for that servant? Who evaluated whether the servant was faithful or not?

Would it have been right for someone to come along and act as the master, trying to enforce their own standard for the servant? Why not?

How does evaluating someone by your own standard, seeking to master them, show covetousness?

3. To understand this passage, we must see what the consequences of a critical spirit are.

- a. A consequence of a critical spirit is broken relationships. This is true between you and others and between you and God.

Read Romans 14:10. A “brother” is referred to in this passage, implying spiritual “siblings” or spiritual co-equals. Are co-equals meant to stand in judgment over one another?

The passage goes on to say “Or again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?” Contempt is to dismiss someone or treat someone as “less than”. What does it mean to say, “You cannot dismiss your family member, and expect to have harmony in the home”?

Read James 4:6. The unifying theme of James is “humility.” When you function in a prideful way toward others, you set yourself in opposition to God. In what way does God’s grace *require* humility and brokenness?

Explain the following statement: “When you seat yourself in the place of ‘judge’, you go to war with God.”

- b. A consequence of a critical spirit is God’s judgment. God doesn’t allow rivals in His place as judge. If we persist in judging others, we will incur God’s judgement in this life and at the believer’s judgement when we die.

Re-read Matthew 7:1. What reason is given that we should not judge?

Re-read James 4:6. How can pride lead us to focus horizontally (on those around us), blinding us to the grace of God?

Closing Point:

The reason Jesus had to come, the reason for the cross, was because you and I are broken. Is it the gospel that is shaping how you think and talk about others? We must correct wrong, but we must do it in a spirit of gentleness, remembering that we too have filed spiritual bankruptcy.