

LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 7:1-29

To understand the importance of Christ's commands, and to avoid hypocritical judgment of one another.

The Perils of Faulty Foundations

Last year a news report came out in Stafford Spring, Connecticut that some 35,000 homes built between 1983 and 2010 were in need of inspection by a structural engineer to determine whether or not the foundations were failing, and the homeowners would pay nothing for it. The Senate proposed a provision in the fiscal budget for 2019 to reimburse the homeowners in that range. The issue was that the concrete came from a particular quarry in Stafford Springs that contained the mineral pyrrhotite. The mineral is known to



expand after it is exposed to water and air over time, leading to Y and V shapes in the concrete and destabilizing it. Foundations make or break a home. In the years I spent selling real estate, I can't tell you how many times homes would be sold for a fraction of their value because they required several thousands of dollars to repair damage done by foundation issues. The work is complicated, expensive, and requires engineers to do it.

“When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as One having authority.” (Matt. 7:28-29)

Knowing the importance of a sound foundation, it's no wonder that Jesus uses this to illustrate a deeper spiritual truth regarding obedience to what He says. Jesus, after all, is the Son of God and the one by whom

and through whom all things are made (Col. 1:16). Because of this, His words are capable of withstanding the storms of life; they are a firm foundation. We should do everything in our power to listen and respond.

The Relationship Matters

The first twelve verses of chapter seven deal with specific behaviors within a defined relationship, and the point here is that the relationship, to a large degree, dictates the behavior. Jesus differentiates between how we are to act inside the community of faith and outside of it in the world amongst non-believers. This sets up an important truth: Our behavior and actions *should look different* between Christians and the world. This is not a one-size-fits-all practice.

INSIDE THE COMMUNITY (VS. 1-5, 7-11)

Jesus first addresses the way we relate to one another. The log and speck illustration is likely one of the most well-known illustrations in the New Testament, and it presents the reader with an easy to understand truth: don't hypocritically call someone to the carpet when you yourself are more guilty than they are. This is, on the other hand, not saying that believers should not hold one another accountable. In fact, on the contrary, every believer is charged with that task (Gal. 6:1-2; Ja. 5:19-20). The word for, "speck" in the Greek can mean a small piece of wood, straw, or chaff. The point is that it is something small, almost unnoticeable that causes irritation. The word for, "log" on the other hand is a heavy piece of timber, perhaps a beam, typically used in roof construction during ancient times.

Verses one and two serve to reinforce what Jesus already taught in chapter six. In chapter six, when we pray, we are told that the way we forgive others is directly correlated to how God will forgive us (6:12), and now we are told the way we judge others will also be correlated to how God judges us. This is an example of something called *lex talionis* (the law of retribution). This was a very well-known law practice in the ancient world, and in fact a biblical one. The Old Testament practice of, "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth," is a perfect example of *lex talionis*, something that Jesus just addressed in chapter five. However, here, the one who is giving retribution is not a neighbor, but God Himself, the Divine judge.

Our relationship with God also shapes our actions towards Him. In verses seven through eleven, Jesus sheds light on this reality. There are three imperatives (commands) here: "Ask, seek, and knock!" They are in the present tense and the active voice, which means they could be translated, "Ask, and continue to ask, seek, and continue to seek, knock, and continue to knock." In other words, our relationship with the Father is an ongoing one that is not positioned by some action in the past, but one that is carried on in the present like any other relationship. Jesus sums up why we can expect these things from our heavenly father by appealing to the reality of actual parenthood: "If you then, being evil, 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" (7:11).

OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY (V. 6)

The way we relate to God and other fellow believers is marked by a specific set of behaviors that are distinctly different than the behavior towards non-believers. This is not because non-believers are lesser parts of creation. Everyone bears the Image of God (Gen.1:26). However, it would be inappropriate to call out a non-believer for their sin in an accountable manner, because they are dead in their sins still. It would be inappropriate to share with a non-believer what is sacred because they are not spiritually discerning. In other words, the thrust of this passage is severe censoring towards believers and lax sharing towards non-believers. The imagery would have struck at the heart of a Jewish person because pigs are considered unclean

according to the Law (Lev. 11:7-8). Jesus is saying, “Don’t put holy things before unclean animals.” It’s a figure of speech, but one that carries the appropriate weight intended.

IN SUMMARY (V. 12)

Jesus summarizes all of this in normal fashion and makes a profoundly weighty and yet simple statement: “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” It’s simple and seemingly common sense at first. Even ancient pagan religions had similar laws like, “If you don’t want someone treating you a certain way, you should never treat someone else that way.” That makes sense. Anyone with common sense should have no trouble agreeing with such a statement. However, Jesus takes this a step further by changing it from a negative to a positive statement. It is not enough in the Kingdom of God to merely abstain from bad practices towards one another. Rather, we are to be defined by the good practices towards one another. This is how the world knows we are the disciples of Jesus (John 13:35). It becomes even more profound when Jesus says that in doing so, the entire law and prophets are summarized. As complicated and detailed as the Old Testament is, it can be summed up in one simple way: “Treat people how you want to be treated.”

The Departed

Perhaps one of the most bone-chilling verses occurs in the seventh chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. There will come a day, the Judgment Day, when some will rise up and declare, “Did I not serve you, Jesus?” The construction in Greek anticipates an affirmative answer. There is no question in these people’s minds that they have been serving in the Name of Jesus. But this presents an incredibly important truth: *Activity in religious affairs is not a substitute for obedience to Christ*. Never mistake it for such. The Greek presents the option of translating this, “with your Name,” rather than, “IN your Name.” It’s almost as if these individuals were weaponizing the Name of Jesus to do whatever they felt like was good, rather than the will of God. Jesus says to them, “Leave. I do now know who you are.”

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Matthew 7:1-6. How are believers to relate to believers according to this verse? What’s the significance of the speck versus the log? What is the point? How are believers to relate to non-believers?
2. Read Matthew 7:7-12. How are believers to relate to God? What are the examples used to illustrate Jesus’ point? In your own words, write down what Jesus is saying. How does one fulfill the law and prophets?

Day Two

1. Read Matthew 7:13-14. How many ways are there to live according to this verse? Read Deuteronomy 30:19, Psalm 1:6 and Jeremiah 21:8. What are the two ways according to these verses? Is this what Jesus meant?
2. Read Matthew 7:15-20. How can you discern whether or not you are dealing with a wolf in sheep’s clothing? What marks the difference between good trees and bad trees? On the surface, they look the same, but what makes them stand apart? How does this apply to our faith?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 7:21-23. What are the things these people are doing in the Name of Jesus? Do they seem like good things? Why does Jesus cast them away? Read Psalm 6:8. Are there any differences between it and what Jesus quotes? If so, write them down.
2. How easy is it to mistake doing the religious or Christian thing for doing the things Jesus commands you to do? How important is obedience to Jesus' commands in this context?

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 7:24-27. In your own words, describe this passage. What does it mean to build on sand versus the rock? Once again, how important is obedience to Jesus' commands in this context?
2. Read Matthew 7:28-29. Why does Matthew include this detail in his account? What is the significance of this in the overarching narrative of the Gospel so far?

Week 11 Discussion: Let's Talk About the Log

There is so much confusion regarding judgmental behavior in the church today. It is not uncommon to hear someone use the log and speck example as a way of campaigning against any Christian calling any other Christian out for their sin. The heart of what Jesus is saying, however, isn't regarding accountability as much as it is addressing *hypocritical* judgmentalism. It is not a good practice to point out the sin of another brother or sister when you are in it even deeper. Before one can teach and guide others into righteousness, they themselves need to have made some strides in their own lives.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever been the recipient of judgmental hypocrisy? How did it make you feel?
2. How hard is it for you to call another brother or sister out for their sin? If it is difficult, why do you suppose that is? What is the difference between holding someone accountable and calling someone out for their sin? Are both ok? Use Scripture to support your answers.
3. How important are Freedom Groups in the context of this discussion? Why?
4. Read Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20. What are these verses prescribing? How does this fit into the context of Matthew 7?
5. Read Colossians 3:16. What are the things we are to be doing toward one another according to this verse? How does this fit into the context of Matthew 7?

Takeaways:

1. Our obedience to Christ's commands is supremely important and has lasting eternal consequences.
2. Believers are to hold one another accountable and call out one another's sin, but avoid having a hyper-critical spirit towards one another and/or *hypocritically* judging one another.

PRAYER REQUESTS: