

Intro

Christianity is fundamentally a relational religion. Today, in just 12 verses, we're instructed on how to relate to fellow believers, how to relate to unbelievers, how to relate to God, and how to relate to everyone in general.

If we're not intentional, we can forget how important relationships are in the Christian life. We might see our faith as just me and Jesus. It's all about my personal relationship with Jesus. The local church becomes an afterthought. We forget that God saved us to bring us into community with his people in the local church.

Or we might think that following Jesus requires that we seclude ourselves from the world. Being crucified to the world, or love not the world, is understood differently by different people. But it can't mean hide out, shelter ourselves, or run away. After all, Jesus sends us into the world. Jesus wants us to be lights in the world.

While some might be inclined to neglect the church in favor of their personal relationship with Jesus, we could neglect God because we're so wrapped up in church busyness. With one activity after another, time with God is an afterthought. Christianity is all about human relationships, but not really about God himself.

The Christian faith is relational. And it's not one dimensional. In terms of relationships, we're more like a general handyman than an expert in a particular field. More like a general handyman than say the underwater welder or the ice carver who specializes in the chainsaw. This morning we learn that...

BIG IDEA: Kingdom righteousness is relational

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

This morning Jesus concludes his discussion on kingdom righteousness.

Point 1: Judge appropriately (7:1-5)

Explanation (relating to fellow believers)

Jesus begins with how we relate to one another in the local church.

Judge not, that you be not judged

It's been said that this verse has surpassed John 3:16 as the most popular Bible verse among non-Christians. What's the appeal? Here's proof that the Bible says it's sinful to judge others. Christians are actually sinning when they make moral judgments. Well, not so fast.

I think the first lesson I ever received on interpreting the Bible came about a month after being saved. My 18 year old brother taught me about the importance of context. Matthew 7:1-5 was the example he used.

Well, let's follow Jesus' argument. Jesus says don't judge or you'll be judged. The "you" here is plural = this is addressed to the local church community, not isolated believers. The NT assumption is that Christianity is a communal religion practiced in the context of the local church. Jesus hasn't stated the nature of this judgment yet. Then he says:

For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

In other words, if we judge others inappropriately, God will hold us to the same standard that we hold others.

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

Note the fact that the speck "is in your brother's eye." In other words, the person being judged is a fellow brother in Christ. Jesus' concern is when one brother notices a speck in their brother's eye, yet fails to notice the log in their own eye.

A speck is a very small piece of wood, like a splinter. Something extremely small in comparison to a log. The comedic picture is one believer harassing another believer for something minor while failing to deal with flagrant sin in their own life. Say the man committing adultery rebuking the man who showed up 5 minutes late for church.

Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?

It's utterly illogical, but it happens. Now we get to Jesus' point.

You hypocrite, 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.

Don't worry about sin in a brother's life until you've dealt with your own sin. So the issue isn't judging in general. The issue is a certain type of judgment. It should be obvious that Jesus isn't forbidding all reproof, evaluation, and encouragement to turn from sin. After all, Jesus is making a judgment himself. He's calling the brother who makes a big deal about the speck a hypocrite. Nearby Jesus calls people dogs, pigs, false prophets, ravenous wolves, etc. Jesus is making moral judgments as he says this. Jesus is not forbidding all forms of judging. For example:

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching and admonishing** one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

You may have noticed that the brother with log will be judged. People who fail to examine themselves, yet reprove others, will face God's judgment, which is hell.

Much like those who are unmerciful won't receive mercy and those who are unforgiving won't receive forgiveness, those who judge harshly won't receive mercy. If we've believed, we've experienced Christ's mercy, so we're merciful to brothers with specks. And understanding God's holiness and his attitude towards sin, we turn from sin (logs) instead of looking for minor faults in other believers. Overlooking our brother's faults and dealing with our own sin is a consequence of salvation, not a cause of salvation.

Application

We all know that type of person. The one who's always finding fault and stirring up controversy. They grievously harm others without apology, but they're the first to point out your faults. That person who boasts about themselves (pride), fails to fulfill their responsibilities, or makes excuses for their own failure, yet harasses fellow believers over their own unique convictions.

What does this say to the local church? It says, “go hard after yourselves.” Here’s a good question to judge where we’re at:

Do I examine myself as rigorously as I examine others? Am I ruthless on others, but lenient with myself? The principle is: evaluate yourself harsher than you evaluate fellow believers. In your regular times of Scripture reading ask ourselves: am I living this? When praying, ask God to reveal your faults.

The gospel helps too. In the gospel we see our unworthiness. There’s nothing we can do to merit salvation. Only Jesus can take the guilt of our sins away. Only through faith can Christ’s righteousness be credited to our account. We deserve judgment. But through faith we’re granted entrance into the kingdom of God. When we grasp the mercy shown to us in Christ, we’re inclined to extend mercy to our fellow believers. And to those who don’t know Jesus.

To the unbeliever:

Matthew 7:1 doesn’t mean it’s wrong to evaluate and make moral judgments. It doesn’t mean we can live however we choose and Jesus doesn’t care. It means God wants us to evaluate ourselves carefully against God’s standard. And if we’re honest, we’ll admit we’ve failed God’s standard. This brings judgment. The good news is that we can be rescued from our sin through faith (believing God’s promise of salvation through his Son Jesus) and repentance (turning from sin to follow Jesus).

Point 2: Evangelize wisely (7:6)

Explanation (relating to unbelievers)

If Jesus’ disciples give holy things to dogs, or give pearls to pigs, they’re susceptible to attack. Dogs were wild scavengers and pigs were unclean. They’re portrayed as savage and vicious. These animals represent a spiritual reality: people who are hostile to Christianity.

The mention of holy things and pearls give us a clue as to what Jesus is getting at. Well, what is holy and precious, and when given to ruthless people leads to Jesus’ disciples being attacked? It must be the gospel. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised his disciples reward in heaven when they are persecuted because of their allegiance to Jesus.

Application

For us this means that we should be wise when we proclaim the gospel. We need to be alert to how it is being received. Is the person receptive, or are they becoming increasingly hostile? Continuing to share the gospel with a hostile person could provoke attacks. Or someone at work could be trying to get us to talk about sensitive issues so they can turn us in to management.

It’s like the missionary in a country where it’s illegal to preach the gospel. Sharing the gospel runs the risk of being turned in. They can’t indiscriminately proclaim the gospel to all. They need to read their audience and follow the Lord’s leading. It’s not a matter of, if we’re bold we’ll keep on talking no matter what. It’s a matter of boldness with discernment. How is the gospel being received?

This means that when we're talking with someone and they're becoming hostile we don't have to get through all our material. Whether it's God-Man-Christ-Response or Ravi Zacharias' origin-meaning-morality-destiny, when someone's getting angry, we don't force the gospel on them.

Caution: I'm not trying to convince you that you shouldn't be proclaiming the gospel. In fact, Jesus assumes that his disciples will proclaim the gospel. That's why he's giving us guidance on when it's advisable not to share. He assumes his disciples will be persecuted because he assumes they will proclaim. He's just advising against proclaiming in certain cases. When we're not received, there comes a time to shake the dust off our feet (Matt 10:14) and move on to others who may be receptive.

Point 3: Pray expectantly (7:7-11)

Explanation (relating to God as a needy children)

Jesus gives us three commands with promises. Ask and you'll receive. Seek and you'll find. Knock and the door will be opened. The sense is continually keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Jesus appeals to our logic to encourage prayer. If an earthly father, who is evil (Jesus assumes all earthly fathers are evil), will give food (bread and fish) to their child when they ask, surely the heavenly Father who is not evil will give good things to his children.

A promise is being made here. When we ask, when we seek, when we knock, the Father will answer and give us good gifts. Jesus is enticing us to pray.

In doing so, he presupposes that every human has a sinful nature. We're all evil (Jesus is speaking to his disciples!) in the sense that all of our being is contaminated by sin. Even after being born again, our words, thoughts, and deeds are still hindered by sin since our sinful nature remains. So if an earthly father with a sinful nature will generally provide for their children when they ask, surely we (God's children) will receive good from our heavenly Father who cannot be tempted by evil and planned from all eternity to send his Son to take the punishment for our sins. Jesus is basically saying, "pray because when you do you will receive good things from the Father."

Application

How should this promise affect us? First, it should make us pray. When we pray, we can be sure that the Father will send good things our way. The other side of the coin is, "You do not have, because you do not ask (Jas 4:2)." If good things come our way when we pray, we lose out on good things when we don't pray. We don't have because we don't ask. But if we ask, we'll be blessed by our heavenly Father. Prayer is effective. Prayer yields tangible results. Prayer is a conduit of God's blessing.

This is why I reached out to my small group, my pastors, and my prayer room and begged them to pray for our family when we received news we had a certain amount of time to find pastoral employment. I believed prayer would help my situation. "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (Jas 5:16)" because the Father delights to give us good things when we pray.

Second, this should inform what we pray for. The Father only gives us good things. So if we're not praying for good things, we won't receive. This is why God isn't a genie. We can't just pray for anything in general.

This is why the answer to some of our prayers is no. In God's view, what we're praying for isn't good. So we don't receive. And this is why some of our prayers are answered in ways that are unexpected. We think we know what we need. But God knows otherwise. So, in his wisdom and love, he answers our prayers in a way we wouldn't expect. Having perfect knowledge of all things, and knowing what is best for us, God chooses to give us good things we wouldn't have anticipated. We wanted something else, but he gives us something he knows is good for us. This also helps explain the timing of answered prayers. Sometimes we think we need something right now. But in God's goodness, he makes us wait, giving us good things at the right time.

The same goes with Palermo Christian Church. We don't have because we're not asking. We're missing out on good things by not praying. When we continually seek God in prayer, good things come to our church body. It would be hard to find better biblical proof for the effectiveness of prayer elsewhere. Given our theme this morning, **kingdom righteousness is relational**, might I suggest that our prayers should involve relationship matters.

Point 4: Love generously (7:12)

Explanation (relating to everyone)

“So” indicates a conclusion. 7:12 concludes what Jesus has been saying about kingdom righteousness (5:17-7:11). Law and the Prophets = the whole OT. So loving others in the way that we wish they would love us sums up the whole OT and kingdom righteousness. In other words, kingdom righteousness as proclaimed by Jesus represents the spirit of the OT.

Application

Kingdom righteousness isn't about mere external behavior: refraining from murder or refraining from adultery. Kingdom righteousness isn't about creating loopholes to make our disobedience acceptable: slippery oaths. Kingdom righteousness is communal: reconciling with offended brothers, praying together (the Lord's Prayer was congregational), and being careful not to wrongly judge our brothers and sisters. Kingdom righteousness is outward: being generous, loving enemies, and praying for enemies. In other words, loving others in the ways we desire to be loved.

Let's consider two ways we can love each other based on today's passage.

First, we can love one another by helping one another instead of judging one another. Yes, some sins are so unrepentant, flagrant, and detrimental to the church's well-being that they need to be dealt with. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about sins we're trying to repent of.

What would you do if a fellow believer told you they were having marriage troubles? Would you rebuke them with harsh words? Would you give them a lecture? Maybe quote a few passages and make it seem like fixing their marriage was as easy as hitting a light switch. Or would you listen? Let's get a cup of coffee this week and talk about it. Would you encourage them? Point them to gospel promises and hope in Christ. Would you pray with them on the spot (and keep praying all week)? Would you weep with them?

What would you do if a fellow believer told you they were having trouble trusting God because of their health condition? Would you rebuke them for their lack of faith and unbelief? Would you quote a few Bible passages

and insinuate how easy it should be for them to get over it? Or would you listen to them at length, pray with them, weep with them, and encourage them in the gospel?

If you were hurting and seeking help from your brothers and sisters, how would you want to be treated? Would you treat hurting brothers and sisters the way you want to be treated? Be honest! Let's be compassionate and caring and help. Let's not be uncaring and judgmental, making harsh comments and making light of a fellow believer's hurt.

Another way we can treat others the way we want to be treated is by praying for them. Calling on the Father for a fellow believer yields good things in their life. Remember, we lack blessings when we fail to pray. How might your prayers impact a fellow believer here? Going through a struggle? Call on many to help you through prayer.

A great way we can live this out is in the context of small groups. In a small and intimate group we can share our lives and support one another through life's challenges. God's design is Christianity lived out in the local church community.

Conclusion

Kingdom righteousness is relational, and these relationships take many forms. When it comes to relationships we need to be more like the general handyman than the underwater welder or the ice carver who specializes in the chainsaw. We have relationships in the local church, relationships that require us to navigate sin in our own hearts and help others with their sin. We have a responsibility to proclaim the gospel and relate to unbelievers wisely. And we have a relationship with God. We neglect prayer to our own detriment. Let's steward our various relationships well in the strength God supplies, loving others in the way that we wish they would love us.