

In Light of Judgment and Grace

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Well, we arrive this morning as we continue studying through the Sermon on the Mount to one of the better-known verses in Scripture, Matthew 7, beginning in verse 12, beginning and ending in verse 12 both today and next week, and I invite you to turn there, to this verse that is known as the Golden Rule. Matthew 7:12 reads in the New American Standard in this way. Our Lord Jesus said,

12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Now you've heard that verse in times gone by. We're going to approach it this morning in a general way and then leave our detailed exposition of it for next week. It's called the Golden Rule because of its surpassing excellence as a guide to Christian ethics and to human relationships, and that's all well and good, but I want to tell you this is hardly a verse that is about horizontal relationships, as I intend to show you here. We need to see that this verse is tied to other things that are very vertical and God-ward and eternal in their perspective. It's easy to reduce this verse to a mere statement of human ethics and a statement of just, "Be good to others and they will be good to you, and can't we all just kind of get along and live as one," kind of thing. That's not what this verse is talking about at all. This verse will repay our efforts to understand it at a very deep level, and our intention today is to really just focus on the significance of one single word in this verse and it's the word in your English text, in the NASB anyway, that is third in the sequence, the word "therefore." The word "therefore." Jesus here is connecting what he's saying to something else in the Sermon on the Mount and that's what I want you to see here today, to see the context, because Jesus is drawing upon prior context in order to make this great statement about human relationships. He says, "Treat people the same way you want them to treat you. Whatsoever, therefore, you would have people do to you, do also to them for this is the law and the prophets." What does this mean and why does he say it here? That's the critical question that we want to answer here today.

The word "therefore" is something that is drawing an inference. It's drawing a conclusion from something that has previously been said and I realize that sometimes when you are reading the Bible and sometimes it's easy to get just a little bit impatient with such things as connections and all of that, but here it is so crucial for us to understand the context that is informing what Jesus said. Jesus draws this familiar Golden Rule from something that

he had already said in the context of the Sermon on the Mount and, frankly, when it comes to this verse, verse 12, I think the most difficult interpretive issue for this verse is what is the prior connection that Jesus is drawing upon.

Now, stay with me as we go through this because you're going to find that it is immensely profound in what we have to say. It is immensely profound for your life. It is immensely profound for all of eternity. This is not a casual statement that he just dropped in here, he is drawing a conclusion from other things that he said and said, "This is what," what he's saying here in verse 12, he's saying, "This is where your mind should go. This is where your thinking should go in light of what I have previously said." But the question is: what is he connecting it to? What is it about what he previously said that he's drawing it to? And I think this is one of the great connections in all of the Sermon on the Mount to see and to understand but commentators differ on exactly what he's referring to.

Some very good men who are far better expositors of the word of God than I am, believe that Jesus is linking what he says here in verse 12 all the way back to chapter 5, verse 17. Look at it with me. Chapter 5, verse 17 where Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." And what these very fine commentators will say, you see, right here is the connection that Jesus is making and they will say that you can see this connection, you know that that's the connection he's making because it functions like bookends. In verse 17 and in chapter 7, verse 12, you see the reference to the law or the prophets. So in chapter 5, verse 17, "Don't think I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets," you skip ahead if you would in your text, go back to chapter 7, verse 12, and they say, "See here in chapter 7, verse 12, it says, Jesus says treat the people the same way you want them to treat you for this is the Law and the Prophets." So they say, "See, it's right there. It's right there in the text. These are the bookends of what Jesus is teaching." So in their view of the Sermon on the Mount, these two verses function as bookends and here is the whole summary of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and they say, "Now Jesus says in light of everything I've said from 5:17 to 7:11, this is what you're supposed to conclude from it," and they see it as being a summary of everything that the law and the prophets teach.

Now, for people that are familiar with my teaching, you would know that I find that to be an attractive interpretation. I find that to be an attractive interpretation because I like the fact that it is based on language that you can see right in the surface of the text. You can see that for yourself and I'm always inclined and I always like what is technically called an inclusio, meaning that the same statement begins and ends a passage and so you can see the connection and it ties everything together, puts it in together like an envelope, and when I was first studying this passage, I was drawn to that interpretation and I said, "That sounds good." So the idea is this according to these teachers, Jesus is saying, "Therefore in light of all that I have taught in this sermon, obey the Golden Rule, for this is the essence of what the law and the prophets teach." They say, these teachers, Matthew 7:12 summarizes the main body of the sermon before Jesus moves into his closing exhortation about beware of false prophets and all of that.

So I was originally inclined toward this view. It ties the sermon together based on objective evidence in the text and good men are saying this is what it means, and then I realized there is only one problem with that view. There is only one problem that makes it so that you can't accept that as a proper understanding of the connection that Jesus is making, and the problem is this: it does not make any sense. It doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

First of all, notice that to say that this is the main body of the sermon, 5:17 to chapter 7, verse 12, means that you are excluding the prior 14 verses where Jesus taught on the Beatitudes, taught on persecution and talked about life in the world. It just cuts off the front part of the sermon. That doesn't make any sense. But beloved, think with me further and stay with me here because this is really really far more important than you might superficially think. Matthew 7:12, go back and look at it with me in this general sense, Matthew 7:12 is a principle about human relationships. Verse 12, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." It's about human relationships. It's a summary statement of some kind based on something that Jesus said earlier about human relationships, and according to the view that I just presented to you, the idea is it goes back to chapter 5 and chapter 6 and it summarizes all of that together and puts it all into one place but, beloved, when you read the Sermon on the Mount, you realize that that does not fit; that that's not correct; that that's not the right way to view this passage.

So what we're going to do here today is we're going to look at three aspects of the context leading up to the Golden Rule so that we can see exactly what it is that Jesus is saying. Three aspects of the context and the first aspect of the context leading up to the Golden Rule is your response to God's law. That's point 1 here this morning: your response to God's law. In chapter 5, verses 21 to 48, Jesus is searching our hearts and he is expounding on the true nature of the law of God, showing that it is not simply something that touches on our external conduct but it goes to our heart response to God's law. It's not enough, Jesus says, for you simply to avoid physical murder, God's law addresses your heart and says you shall not even hate another man. It's not enough for you simply to avoid the physical act of adultery or fornication, God's law forbids you to look on another person with lust in your heart, and on and on it goes. So in chapter 5, verse 21, through chapter 5, verse 48, Jesus searches out your heart by the law of God and deals with different sins like anger and lust and truthfulness and retaliation and loving your enemies, just to name a few. Now, he concludes with this stunning declaration in that section in verse 48, he says, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Now stay with me here. I'm showing you why that cannot be part of the connection to chapter 7, verse 12. The impact on human relationships, the main thrust of that section is vertical. It's a response and going to the way the law of God searches your heart and exposes sin. It is about a vertical aspect of responding to God and his law and the impact on human relationships is only incidental. That does not fit with what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:12. Heart desires in response to the word of God do not naturally fit into what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:12. It just doesn't fit with what Jesus says there. It's bigger than that. There is something more going on in the totality of the sermon that

you can't reduce it and press it all into an aspect of human relationships. That doesn't work. We're going somewhere with this, I promise.

So one aspect of the context that leads up is this aspect of your response to God's law. Now, secondly, as you move into chapter 6, Jesus is addressing your relationship to God the Father. He is addressing your relationship to God the Father and this is all very critical. The Lord's prayer, for example, in Matthew 6:9 and 10, is devoting petitions addressed to the glory of God. Look at it there with me as we kind of review where we have traveled over the past year and a half or so. Matthew 6:9 says, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.'" The central aspect to what prayer is to be on an ongoing basis in the life of a disciple is devoted to the glory of God. It is in response to the fact that your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Look at verse 8 just prior to that, he says, "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way." It's vertical. It's in preoccupation with the glory of God. It is teaching us that the central defining first priority of prayer is the glory of God, the expansion of his kingdom, a submission to his will. You see, that doesn't fit what is supposedly an umbrella statement, you can summarize the whole sermon by saying, "Treat others as you want them to treat you." It doesn't fit. The glory of God and that prayer seeking the glory of God doesn't fit within that supposed definition to summarize it all into that way.

As you go on, you see that that's reinforced. In chapter 6, verse 19, as he establishes priorities in the mind of a disciple, priorities in the mind of a citizen of the kingdom, he says in verse 19, he says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." Verse 24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Beloved, that far transcends anything related to human relationships, doesn't it? This is more than human relationships that Jesus has been addressing. There is this great vertical dimension to it saying God requires an exclusive devotion from you or you cannot serve him at all, and he says your first priority is to, chapter 6, verse 33, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Priorities, seeking first this, vertically oriented. Vertically oriented in your response to God's law. Vertically oriented in your relationship to God the Father. Vertically oriented in prayer toward God. Here's where you come out with it when you start to see the context, and just remember pretty basic things, is that not only can you not fit chapter 5 into the Golden Rule, you can't fit chapter 6 into the Golden Rule either. The bucket isn't that big to hold that much water, by which I mean that the statement that Jesus makes in chapter 7, verse 12, is not comprehensive enough in order to spread over the entire expanse of everything that he has taught us in the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon is very broad, it's very deep, it's very searching, and to suggest that chapter 7, verse 12, focuses and is intended to be a summary of everything that goes before that is to cut off the vertical significance of the sermon altogether.

So we come back to Matthew 7:12. We look at it and we read it again for the sake of refreshing our mind and keeping it in front of us. Jesus says, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." So we come back to the question, we come back to the question: what is "therefore" connecting with? And we'll ask a second question, a subsidiary question to that in light of everything that we are saying here this morning: who cares anyway? Who cares? Why are you making such a point about one single word in one single verse? Man, what is the matter with you? I think you don't get out enough that you are dwelling on this at such great length. I think you need help.

Who cares? Well, I'll try to answer that and defend myself against the accusation that was just made against me, which I made, so, you know. Here's the answer. Who cares? All men with an eternal soul should care, which is all men, including all of you. You should care about what the connection is here to this verse because, beloved, this is central to your existence both now and to your future appearance before the judgment seat of God.

Let me remind you of something that sometimes as you're going through a text it's easy to forget, that we are reading and we are studying and we are trying to understand the words of Jesus, and who is Jesus but the one who is the eternal Son of God who came down from heaven in order to declare these things before men. Who is Jesus but the one who gave his life on the cross to save our souls. Who is Jesus but the one who is carrying out the eternal plan of redemption that God had established before the beginning of time. Beloved, when you remember those really basic things, you start to realize that we should expect as we come to the words of Christ, we should expect something that transcends mere human existence. We should expect something that transcends what a life coach could tell you about the way to deal with other people. There must be something more to it. There must be a greater significance to it than simply saying what you would say to a three or four-year-old, "Be nice to Johnny so Johnny will be nice to you." There has to be more to it than that. So we come expecting Christ to speak something of great eternal significance as the words of an eternal mind drip from his lips in what we're seeing here.

What is the connection? What is the thought that Jesus is making here? Well, that leads us to point 3 where we will spend the rest of our time and we're going through this more quickly than I anticipated, but that's okay. Point 3 in what is Jesus talking about here? Oh, it's so profound. He's speaking to your reaction to judgment and to grace. He's speaking to your reaction to judgment and grace and I'll just give this to you in a summary and then I'll show it to you carefully from the text itself. What Jesus is saying is this: he says, "I have spoken to you about the nature of coming judgment. I have spoken to you about the nature of the grace of God in your life. And now, therefore, how should you respond to that? What should be the conclusion that comes from it?" And beloved, he is talking about themes, he is speaking about truths that transcend time and transcend human existence. He is talking about great themes of God's judgment and God's grace and he says in light of these great transcendent themes that far transcend your human relationships, that far transcend your brief window of time on earth, he says you need to develop a comprehensive sense of your approach to life that is informed by what I have just been saying about judgment and about grace.

Now I'm going to show you this. The main thing that I'm trying to do right now is to develop in you an expectation that this is something significant, this is something profound, this is not something that can just be lightly traded back and forth among unregenerate people as an instructive way to deal with people. It's so much more than that. The Golden Rule, my friends, the Golden Rule is not, not, not, not, it is not a moralistic maxim urging you simply to be kind to men with the idea being, "Be kind because it's good to be kind." That's so obviously superficial that when we realize that we are sitting at the feet of Christ, the eternal Son of God, we have to understand there must be something more to it than just that, especially in light of this critical word "therefore."

So what is he saying here? Why does he say this and why does he say it here? Well, beloved, he's shaping us in all of life and what he is doing is this: Jesus is tying the Golden Rule to his earlier statements on judgment. On judgment. The context is more narrow than what our friends say when they point us back to chapter 5. It's more narrow than that and that's what I want to show you. Jesus is talking about your third point here, what is your reaction to judgment and grace, and it is sobering, it is holy, that it is high and lofty and exalted that he is teaching us.

So he says in chapter 7, verse 1, which we expounded a number of weeks ago, he says in chapter 7, verse 1, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." Jesus has pivoted from chapter 6 to chapter 7 into a new theme and he is talking about his disciples and their response to the judgment of God. And he says in chapter 7, verses 1 and 2 he says, "Be mindful of the way that you interact with men and the way that you think about men and the critical assessments that you make of others. Be mindful of that because, my friend, you are one day going to be judged yourself. You are going to stand before God and he will render a judgment of your life." Whoa, whoa, all of a sudden you are reminded that you are moving toward something of eternal significance before a holy God and there is judgment on your life that is just ahead of you.

And when you go to the end of chapter 7, you see this clenched by the fact that Jesus is speaking about judgment at the end of chapter 7 as well. Look at verse 21 with me. He says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Judgment of a great and final import. And he says there in verse 24, he says, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."

You see, beloved, he is talking about judgment both before the Golden Rule and after the Golden Rule. The immediate context of us says we should understand this in the realm of judgment that is coming. Jesus says in verse 2, "You will be judged." He ends with a warning saying there are going to be people who have heard my words who think they know me as Lord and I am going to send them away, "I never knew you." He calls us to a sober assessment of what he says, a heart reception of it, and says, "The ones who hear what I say and act upon it are going to be like those who built their house on a rock and their house stood against a storm." Saying in essence, using a picture, our souls standing firm as we enter into the judgment of God.

So the consequences of this are eternal. Jesus is talking about great eternal themes here when he speaks in this way and says by contrast, by way of warning, he says, those who just hear and go on and don't act on it, they are just like a foolish man who built his house on sand and we all know how that turns out, as soon as the inevitable rains come, splat, it's gone, and he says, "Don't you understand." His teaching is this, "Don't you understand that you have an eternal soul that is moving toward an appointment of judgment with God and I am giving you words that would prepare you for that judgment?" How are you going to respond? Do you respond? Are you taking this seriously? Are you in earnest on it? Because the warning that Christ gives to you is that if you don't, the consequences are predictable, they are inevitable, and they are great.

So he's speaking about judgment here. Now, the whole point, everything that I'm trying to do today is this in dependence on the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of those who hear his word when it is proclaimed, is to try to overcome a built-in sense of neglect, a built-in sense of indifference or carelessness that you might carry in response to the word. "You know, I've heard this Golden Rule throughout all of my life. There is probably not much in store for me here because I already know it all." No, I don't think that that's really the Spirit-inspired response to what Jesus is saying. How should this be impacting us as we contemplate it today and next week? What should our thoughts be in response to it? Well, blessed be God, he shows us in the text itself what the kind of response is this is to have on our hearts in the way that we respond to it.

Look at verse 28 with me. We'll get to these verses again in a few weeks. Just establishing context so we know what the "therefore" is there for. Verse 28, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." What effect did the Sermon on the Mount have on those who heard when Jesus gave it some 2,000 years ago? They were amazed. They were astonished. They were struck with the authority with which he had spoken to them. They recognized that the Lord of their souls was addressing them. They understood that there was great import to this. They had never heard a man speak this way. Their scribes and teachers of that day never spoke like Jesus spoke. So they were astonished, they were awestruck, they were thunderstruck at the reality of what Jesus had just said and realized that the consequences of it were vast. They were astonished that one was standing before them in human flesh and such wise, godly, insightful words were falling from the lips of one who by appearance looked just like they did. They were amazed, and you see, part of the reason that that is recorded in the text is for us to say do

we have a sense of awe and astonishment in response to what Christ has said here; to realize that something from a heavenly realm has addressed our souls in a way that changes the way that we look at everything. That's the idea here.

So what Jesus is saying at this point in the Golden Rule, this is where in Matthew 7:1 and 2, beloved, follow me, it is at this point in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus begins addressing human relationships in the sermon. It's in chapter 7. Go back with me to chapter 7, verses 1 and 2, it's at this point that Jesus starts addressing our attitudes toward those around us when he says in chapter 7, verse 1, "Don't judge so that you won't be judged. The way you judge, you will be judged; by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 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?" And on it goes. You see, it's at that point where he is addressing human relationships and he is addressing human relationships because your perspective on others, your critical spirit toward others, he has already taught us, he has already said, we've already studied, he says a hypercritical attitude toward others, it means that you are going to face a stricter more severe standard of judgment before God when you stand before him at the judgment seat of Christ, and he says you don't want that. If you carry out in human relationships a harsh, unbending, critical, judgmental standard, understand that God is going to somehow adopt the flavor of your attitudes toward others in life and apply it to you when you are standing alone before him at the judgment seat. "Oh, now I start to see. Now I start to see why this is so significant. Now I start to see that the ramifications of Matthew 7 are eternal. Now I start to see that this addresses every relationship in my life and that this searches out my heart and this makes me think beyond this life to think about myself solitary and alone before the judgment seat of God." And now, together seeing that, we start to enter into a spirit that says, "This is amazing. This is amazing. You know, I've been going through all of my life," someone might say, "I've been going through all of my life and just reacting to relationships and people make me mad, I think badly of them and I say what in the world is wrong with them. Blah blah blah blah." That's theological language, I know. "I've never grasped," I would expect some to be saying, "I've never grasped the fact, I've never understood the fact that there are eternal consequences to my circle of relationships that I have right now. This is sobering. This is amazing. I never thought about that before." When that starts to sink into your mind, now you are starting to enter into the spirit of what Jesus is saying here.

So, friends, when you understand that what Jesus is saying here, he says in light of these principles of judgment, in light of the fact that the way that you judge others is going to somehow impact the way that God judges you when you stand before him, therefore, however you want men to treat you, you treat them that way because this is the law and the prophets. Now you see the connection. Now you realize Jesus is addressing you as an eternal soul saying there are eternal consequences, that there is judgment coming, and therefore factor that vertical principle of judgment, that future principle of judgment, calculate that into the way that you approach human relationships because there are eternal consequences to it all. Whoa. That is why the Golden Rule is here. It summarizes how to think about your circle of relationships in light of coming judgment.

Now, it would probably do well for me to just give you a brief hint of review of things that we've said in the past. There is a judgment for unbelievers that is coming as they stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. God condemns them for their sins and sends them away to hell. We read about that in Revelation 20:11-15. Jesus here is addressing his disciples. We're not going to face, those who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, are not going to face that ultimate final judgment, but what we've seen in the past and what we've addressed in the past is the fact that we are still going to give an account of our lives as believers to God. He's going to evaluate our lives and determine the weight of eternal reward that is given to us based on the way that we have lived as Christians. The fact that we have been saved from the ultimate judgment in hell does not mean that there is not going to be a final accountability that we give to God. All Christians will enter into heaven, it's not that we're being judged to see whether we go into heaven or not. That's not the point of this accountability that believers will have, but we will stand before God and give an account to him of the way that we have dealt with the resources and relationships that he gave us in this life. We will give an account to him and he will reward us accordingly, and what Jesus is teaching here is that somehow the measure of judgment that we face from God at that time, the strictness with which he evaluates our lives, is in part going to be determined by the way that we have dealt with others in our lifetime.

So those of you that are strict and unbending and very harshly critical of others, maybe even as a Christian, hard to reconcile those two things but apparently it can be done, understand that your harsh critical attitudes are going to diminish your reward because God says, "I will hold you to the same kind of judgment that you held to others." That you were harsh toward others, well, God is not going to be harsh in that same way but he will extract the sin and apply a principle of strictness that's going to diminish your eternal reward. It's going to diminish somehow the eternal joy that you have will be less than what it would have been simply because of the strict harsh way that you dealt with others in this life. That's an incentive to grace, isn't it? That that would say, "I don't want that."

Now, as you read this context of Matthew 7:12, you see something else and these two things go together like two pieces of bread on a sandwich. The Golden Rule is also a response to grace, the grace of God in your life. Look at Matthew 7:7 where he says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there," I'm at verse 9 now, "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, 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!" How much more will God bless you as you seek spiritual growth and growth in righteousness? How much more will he answer that good request from you if an earthly father who is sinful knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more will a holy God who is good and gracious toward his children give blessings to his children when they ask for them?

You say, "Well, you know, God is really good and God is really gracious. It must be really really good." To which Jesus says, "Precisely." You realize that God deals with you in this way when you don't deserve it. Isn't it true that God even as a Christian, God has been gracious to you despite your undeserving times when you have drifted into patterns of sin? Times when you have forsaken the fellowship of the saints? Times where you have closed God's word and had no desire for it and your heart has just been lukewarm and cold toward the Christ who saved you? Isn't that true that we've gone through seasons like that? And what has God done in response? He has kept you. He has continued to cleanse you from your sins. He has kept you in his hand. He has never let you go. He has never cast you out. He stimulated you to restore your desires. He has shown you grace and kindness and blessing on both an earthly and a heavenly way in response to that. And you look back, for all of my sin and my imperfection even as a believer, all that God has done is responded to me with grace and kindness and blessing upon blessing. You say, "He's really good. He's really gracious." Jesus says, "Precisely." We read this text and we say to ourselves, "Ah, precisely," because and we start to see the connection that is being made here.

Beloved, in light of coming judgment, be mindful of how it flavors your interactions with human relationships. In light of grace and the way that God has dealt with you and his promises of grace in dealing with you, in light of grace and in light of judgment, therefore, go out and function this way in your human relationships. There are eternal consequences to our human relationships. Therefore, treat men in this way. You have been on the receiving end of justifying grace, you have been on the receiving end of sanctifying grace, you have been on the receiving end of God's restoring grace either in your sorrows or in your sins, it has just been grace upon grace upon grace. The shore of your life has continually had the waves of the ocean of grace lapping upon you, therefore, factor that into your human relationships. Therefore, let that drive what you think.

Beloved, there are just times where I look out and I just realize, you know, we're all, my fleeting words and my fleeting presence before your life is just a shadow pointing you to an ultimate reality that is going to be true for every one of you, and I won't be there beside you at judgment. You will be there alone before God, in a sense Christ there as your advocate but you're going to give an account, and this season of grace and this season of preparation will be over and then the moment will arrive, and as I've told you many many many times, I want that day to go well for you. I want that day to be a day of praise and honor from God to you, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." Well, Jesus has taught us what the key is that unlocks that as we live through life, as we live our Christian lives, to be mindful of that coming judgment and to be mindful of grace and to live in response to it.

Beloved, speaking to those of you who are Christians, you have received kindness from God that you did not deserve no matter what your life looks like right now. If you are a Christian, you have received grace in response to your sin and rebellion. If you are a Christian, God has extended love to you before you ever loved him. We love because he first loved us. A gracious holy God reached down in love and brought the Gospel to you through some kind of human instrument, and a gracious holy God by the power of his

Holy Spirit opened your dead and sinful heart to see realities that you had previously missed or had previously rejected, and a great great Christ loved you and gave himself up for you on the cross, bore all of your sin as an act of gracious initiative, as an act of love toward you in obedience to his own Father, he said, "Father, I will take that person's sin on my shoulders. Punish me for it, O God, so that they can go free." You didn't deserve that. You deserved the punishment. You deserved the stroke but Christ stepped into your stead, Christ went ahead of you before the judgment of God and absorbed his wrath, absorbed the punishment that your sins deserved, and then through the power of the Holy Spirit, brought you to understand that the promise of the Gospel was that everyone who believes can have eternal life, and the Spirit worked belief in your heart and you believed in Christ and you were saved and your life was changed and you went from being a son of the devil to being a son of God.

Don't you see the eternal stretch from east to west, from north to south? The broad ocean of grace that has been given to you? Have you received Christ to know that grace? Do you see the great grace that, of course, there is going to be an accounting to how you respond to it? Jesus says, "Therefore, then, here's what you do with it." If you have some sense, if you have some understanding, "Oh, there is some kind of an accountability coming to me." Jesus says, "Yeah, good, follow that train of thought." You say, "Oh, the oceans of grace in which I swim! The showers of kindness that God has given to me to cause me to be born again! He took me out of the rebel army and made me one of his own. Oh, oh, oh, the great grace that has been given to me! There are twin eternal realities that inform everything that I think about life horizontally and life vertically and life to come." Jesus says, "Precisely! Precisely, in light of judgment and in light of grace, therefore."

Look at Matthew 7:12, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." We're going to talk about what that means next week but the "therefore" is what we are here for this morning. The "therefore" that you would understand that that is a pivot point of great consequence and it works something like this: therefore in light of relationships and God's coming judgment, therefore in light of God's grace in dealing with you as a father deals with a son, therefore when you deal with men, Jesus says, deal with them like this, and then he says what he says in Matthew 7:12.

Why is this context so important? Why is this discussion of context so important? Beloved, every one of us, at the risk of saying something that is just so obvious that it shouldn't even be said, every one of us, don't we, live within a circle of relationships: spouse, family, coworkers, neighbors, you name it. We all live in a context of human relationships and what Jesus teaches us here is that the way that we act in response to that is a reflection of the way that we think about coming judgment. It is a reflection of the way that we think about grace that has been given to us and what he's saying is as you interact in your circle of relationships under the watchful eye of your heavenly Father, you let Matthew 7:12 be your fundamental guide. Not the selfish desires, "I want it to be this way. I demand my rights. It must be what I want. You do what I tell you to do. You must be what I want you to be or you will bear the brunt of my wrath." No. No, in light of

coming judgment, that couldn't possibly be smart, a smart way for you to live, a smart way for you to orient your character. That couldn't possibly be good. In light of grace as we've discussed it here this morning, that couldn't possibly be good. Christian, when you receive this ocean of grace from God and then turn off the little spigot of your life so that grace barely dribbles out in your relationships with others, that couldn't possibly be right, could it? Jesus is saying that you need to think about, you need to calculate your whole premise of life, your whole premise of relationships in light of judgment and in light of this grace.

This sermon is coming to a climax of cosmic importance. We are entering into the explosion of the fireworks of the implications of everything that Jesus has said from the beginning of Matthew 5:3, and what we see here in chapter 7, verse 12, is that our human interactions are of great consequence. Now, I know that many of you are sweet and tenderhearted and I praise God for that. I was telling people yesterday and today what a blessing it is to be at Truth Community where there are so many gentle, sweet hearted people. That's what it's supposed to look like. You are a reflection of what Christ is talking about here. But at the same time, I realize that some of us are not all that we could be. All of us fall short in one way or another and the corrective to that in part is to recognizing the significance of judgment and of grace and letting – here's the thing, beloved – letting the force of that, letting the power of that, letting the understanding of that, have such an impact on your understanding and upon your heart that you say, "Yes, I must live in response to this. I cannot separate the two. I don't have a realm of my human relationships that is uninfluenced by and uninformed by judgment and grace. Judgment and grace spill over into the way that I think about all of these things with my spouse, with my children, with my family, with my boss, with my subordinates, all of it." So, beloved, what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 7:12 is this: the grace that you have received and the accountability that you will face sets the manner in which you respond to the circle of the relationships around you, therefore, and then he gives us Matthew 7:12.

Beloved, never knowing how many more times I have to speak to you, I hope that it's a thousand, 20 years times 50, but never taking that for granted, never assuming that I've got a lot of other times to say this to you, beloved, Jesus speaks to you as Lord of your soul. He has spoken to you with clarity in the Sermon on the Mount throughout it, 5, 6 and 7, and now he is coming to this conclusion where he says, "Understand that the way that you respond to my words is going to have great eternal consequence. Some call me Lord but don't respond at all and I'm going to send them away forever. They are not even in my kingdom." I don't want that for you. I really don't. I want your day of judgment to go well for you and the reason that God has put these things in our lives is to show you this is the way that God thinks, this is the way that God acts. He has declared it all to us in advance and now he calls you to respond according to these things. Your blessedness, your eternal reward, is inextricably linked to what Jesus says here on the Sermon on the Mount and in this Golden Rule.

We'll see what it means next time. For now, ask God to prepare your heart that it might have the full blessedness upon your life and destiny that he intends.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for these wonderful words of life, these wonderful words from the lips of our Savior. How could it be that we as sinful men could hear holy words from the lips of our Lord? How could it be that you have given us such a great treasure in your word and such a great treasure in Christ? Father, we don't deserve that. Truly you have been gracious to us. Work in each heart and prepare us. Work in each heart to think through life rightly in light of judgment and in light of grace, and let it begin to spill over in the way that we interact with each other and in the circle of relationships that are outside the walls of this church, Father, informed by the words of Christ whose words were amazing, the words of Christ that will determine whether our house stands or falls when the great flood comes. Bless each one and help us as we have prayed in Jesus' name. Amen.

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