

## Review

How many can you remember?

- The 8 Blessings
- The 6 Examples of Greater Righteousness
- The 3 Examples of True Religion
- The 1 Spiritual Priority

# 7:1-12 Dealing with Failure in the Pursuit of Righteousness

## Activity (Individual)

1. Think of a failure to live up to Christ's standard that you see among Christians today. You might think of a specific person.
2. What would you like to happen to this person? What would you like to say to them (or be said to them)? Would you like their sin to be exposed? Would you like them to be publicly shamed?
3. Now think about failures in your own life? If someone was to correct you, how would you like them to do it? Does your answer match Q. 2? Do you expect people to deal with you differently than you would deal with others?

## Overview

At first glance, chapter 7 looks much less organized than chapters 5 and 6. We might consider it a miscellaneous collection of further teachings of Jesus that tie in with the themes of the previous chapters. That would not be a bad way to read it, as there is much benefit in doing so.

But, on closer inspection, we might see that there are connections and rationale to why the different teachings in this chapter are brought together. Verses 1-12 group together nicely as a section which further illustrates the higher righteousness that Jesus has been calling his disciples to. Just as Jesus began by speaking of this righteousness as a fulfilment of Old Testament law, so he concludes this section by reminding us that his teachings are a summary of the spirit of the law.

Additionally, the section can be seen as a united whole in its theme of dealing with failure to uphold the righteous standard described in chapters 5 and 6. 7:1-5 introduce us to our own failure, and the failure of others; 7:6 deals with the failure of those who

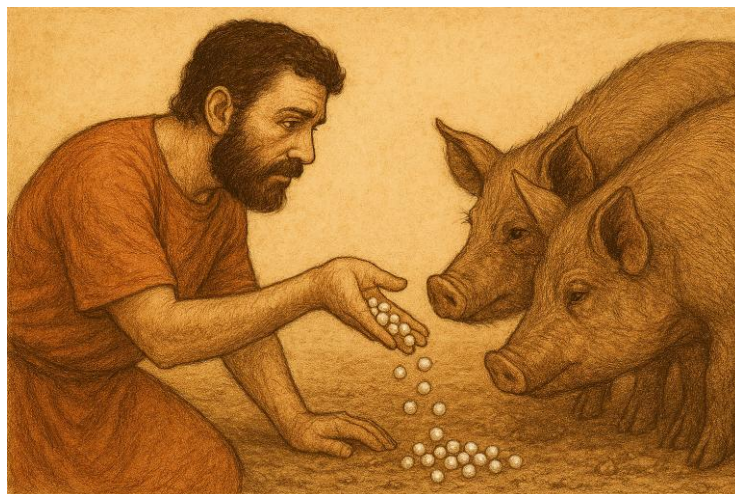
will not receive a word of correction; 7:7-11 deal with the willingness of God to help us in dealing with failure; and 7:12 ties back to 7:1-5 by urging us to deal with the failures of others, as we like others to deal with our own failures.

### 7:1-5 "Judge not, that you be not judged"



This follows naturally from the previous sections which called us to practice a higher form of righteousness and a more inward form of religion. The human temptation is to immediately find the failures to practice these things in others, while neglecting our own failure. True godliness prioritizes strictness with ourselves and tenderness towards others. This does not mean that we forget God's grace to us, or neglect our responsibilities to chastise and instruct others. But the proper balance must be achieved, to counteract our sinful tendency to neglect our own failure, and exaggerate others'.

### 7:6 "Do not throw your pearls before pigs"



This proverb seems to connect and contrast with the preceding section. If we deal with our own failures first, then we can truly be in a place to correct others also, through encouragement, rebuke, and instruction. But we must also know that not everyone will respond to our words positively (a recurring theme in Matthew).

We have to be wise in knowing when we and our message (for Christ's sake) are not welcome, or when someone is a "lost cause" (humanly speaking of course!)

This is very hard thing to do for some, especially those with the most tender hearts. But Christ's words should help such to relieve their hearts of burdens towards people that God does not expect them to carry.

### 7:7-11 "Ask and it will be given to you"



This section stands on its own to remind us of God's good intent towards his people. He is pleased to give us good things. It also reminds us that in life, it is often those who actively push for a thing will get it. Jesus tells us to bring this logic into our prayer life. If we desire some good thing from God, then ask for it!

In light of the larger passage, we might interpret this teaching to especially encourage us to pray in light of our failures (or even the failures of others) for God to help us. If we are burdened by our own failure (the log in our eye), the failure of others (The speck), or even the rejection of the gospel (pigs), then let us take it to God and know that he wants to give us what is good!

We might also interpret this negatively, in contrast to the pigs (those who do not value the message being preached). God will not force himself upon people, but he will respond when they seek him (cf. 6:33).



## 7:12 "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (The Golden rule)



The Lord takes us back to the law and the prophets which he spoke of in 5:17. He has explained in many examples what the fuller righteousness and religion that he calls us to, which fulfil the law of the OT.

He now presents us with a simple rule, which embodies the whole spirit of righteousness. But though it is simple, it is profound. Sin is fundamentally powered by selfishness. It is about me, at the expense of God and others. But righteousness rectifies this. It considers others over self.

It has been pointed out, that great wisdom and discernment are required in how we apply this practically. Just because I love chocolate cake, does not mean that everyone else wants chocolate cake. We are not thinking about superficial or cultural preferences which we have, and using those as a model for giving to others. But we need to look more fundamentally at what we want from others in terms of virtue. What kind of character do I see in people that is truly good for me?

It might help us to see this in the context of the passage. If this is not just an isolated teaching, then we can interpret in light of the start of the chapter - "Judge not, that you be not judged". We are thinking specifically of how we deal with the failures of others. How would we like people to deal with us when we fail? Remember also the Lord's prayer "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (6:12), and the beatitude "blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy".