

7:1 *Judge not*- For Paul, one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (Mt. 7:1-5). The commentary of James on this part of the Sermon is interesting: "Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". I suggest under 7:24 that James considers the Sermon to be "the perfect law". The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

7:2 *Judgment you judge*- The "judgment" is of condemnation- every one of the 28 occurrences of the Greek word refer to "damnation" or "condemnation". The 'judging' which is prohibited in :1 is therefore of condemning others.

*With what measure you measure*- This verse begins with "For". Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

7:3 In Luke, the Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfect... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit" . This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was

without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

*Why do you behold-* This continues the context about judging from verses 1 and 2. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 4- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him!'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

*The splinter-* Literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity... these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really register.

*Consider not-* James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

*7:4 To your brother-* Remember that the Sermon was spoken to the disciples. The Lord is foreseeing how things would tend to go in the life of His collective people. There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. Christ's parables often have an element of unreality

in them to highlight how His attitudes are unusual (e.g. the employer who pays all his men the same wages for different hours of work). And these unusual attitudes of His reflect the sensitivity of Jesus. But in this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story. Perhaps He intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can... See on 13:28.

*Pull out-* S.w. 'cast out' in :5. The word is elsewhere used about the casting out of the rejected in condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). It is also used about casting out from church (3 Jn. 10) and synagogue and society (Acts 13:50; Jn. 9:34; Lk. 6:22). In Luke's account of the Lord's presentation of the material, he uses the same word for "cast out" from religious association (Lk. 6:22) as he does just a few verses later for this 'casting out' of splinters (Lk. 6:42). The casting out is therefore a judgmental condemning of others- and that is the connection with the preceding context of Mt. 7:1-3. In practice, this involved religious disfellowship. Christ's people are to associate with each other in fellowship because they are convinced that by grace, they in the body of Christ shall share eternity together. To 'cast out' from fellowship someone is therefore to effectively 'cast them out' in condemnation. The same word is used in both senses. The Lord's parable is most insightful- because He observes that actually to do this is a natural tendency for His followers, and they will justify it in terms of thinking they are doing it out of concern. And yet their attempt to do this is in fact the plank in their own eye. That judgmentalism is in fact a far worse failing than any fault they have observed in their brother. And this all flows directly and seamlessly on from the Lord's point blank statement that He will condemn those who condemn others (Mt. 7:1). The practice and upholding of the wicked practice of disfellowship therefore appears to be an issue upon which our eternity may be staked. We must pay any price, including social death and being cut off from communities and families we have known and loved, in order to avoid doing this.

*Behold-* An invitation to try to actually see the plank in your own eye. The plank is there exactly because you have tried to 'cast out' your brother, having heard the Lord's teaching about the need

for a "single eye" (Mt. 6:22) and deciding that your brother's eye is defective. The plank is your judgmentalism. And that is what is so hard to perceive.

*7:5 Hypocrite-* Usually on the Lord's lips with reference to the Pharisees whom the Lord clearly detested and whom the rank and file disciples whom He was addressing likewise despised. But the Lord is saying that their critical, condemnatory attitude to each other would make them no different to the Pharisees.

*First-* The Greek *proton* suggests that the following clause is of ultimate, supreme importance; it's not simply a chronological statement that 'first do this, then do that'. If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation.

*Cast out-* We are to condemn ourselves firstly, recognizing our major blindness, and then with the humility of spirit elicited by this, we will have crystal clear vision with which to assist others.

*See clearly-* The Greek *dia-blepo* is related to the verb *blepo* in :3 ("why do you *behold / see* the splinter..."). The judgmental believer sees the splinter in his brother's eye and wants to condemn him for it, but the one who has repented of his judgmentalism and removed that plank from his spiritual vision will see through ('through' is really the sense of *dia*). The translation "see clearly" doesn't seem to me to have much to commend it. The one who has repented of the plank of his judgmentalism will see through casting out / condemning the splinter in his brother's eye. "Then" you will see through casting out the splinter from his eye- *tote* more comfortably carries the sense of 'right then'. The moment you repent of your condemnatory judgmentalism, you immediately see through condemning your brother's weakness. And so the Lord has powerfully enforced His principle which He began with at the start of this section- do not condemn. And through this profound parable of casting out splinters and planks, He has brought us to see through our brother's splinter. But the only way you can do that is to cast out / condemn your own condemnatory attitudes. It is often claimed that those who have committed what some would see as 'major' sins feel unable to judge others for their sins, and this is seen as a weakness. But actually, we are all major sinners. Those who have repented or matured into softer, non-condemnatory attitudes are mature, and not 'weak' as they are portrayed by their hard line brethren.

The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community of believers in Him; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. This story is a classic- of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously

exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

In Luke, having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye...? For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Lk. 6:41-43). There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

7:5,6 If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to "cast out" the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to "cast [out]" our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for "cast out" in 7:5 (*ek-ballo*) and "cast" in 7:6 (*ballo*) are related. Clearly verse 6 belongs in the section about judging which begins in :1. The idea of being "cast out" is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be "cast out" and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be "cast out" into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be "cast out" into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be "cast out" at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor. 11:31). But we

are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would've confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren't food but stones. They just wouldn't have appreciated them. This isn't any justification for hypocrisy; it's simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to "pearls"; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

*7:6 Give not-* We are to judge, but not to condemn (7:1). Clearly this verse 6 requires us to show discernment.

*The holy unto the dogs- Hagios*, "the holy", could be translated 'the holy ones', the saints. They were not to be thrown out to the dogs- i.e. to be condemned. This command not to condemn would then fit in seamlessly with the teaching of the preceding verses. The dogs which were on the edge of the city are associated with condemnation in both Jewish thought and Biblically (Ps. 59:6,14; Rev. 22:15). We are not to condemn, to throw the saints out to the dogs.

*Neither cast- Ballo*, related to *ekballo* ("cast out") in :5. I have noted several times that 'casting out' is used in the Lord's thought for condemnation.

*Your pearls-* Pearls represent the believers. The 12 pearls of Rev. 21:21 represent the 12 disciples. The Lord Jesus in His work with us is "seeking goodly pearls" (Mt. 13:45). The pearls are 'ours' in the sense that all that are Christ's are ours, as He makes explicit in John 17. His pearls are our brethren.

*Before pigs, lest they trample them-* Trampling by pigs was another Jewish figure of condemnation, of rejection into the Gentile world. Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord used the figure of trampling [s.w.] to describe condemnation and rejection (Mt. 5:13). To trample under foot meant to despise and specifically, to reject (s.w. Heb. 10:29 "trodden underfoot the Son of God"). Again the point is being made- don't condemn your brethren and treat them as mere worldlings, or even worse, those who shall be rejected from God's Kingdom. To refuse to fellowship them is treating them just like that.

*Turn again and rend you-* If we condemn our brethren, as it were casting them out to the pigs- those same pigs will turn on us and rend us- i.e., *we* will share the same condemnation which we gave our brethren. And thus the point of 7:1 is repeated- if you condemn, you shall be condemned. The same word translated "rend" is used by the Lord in Mt. 9:17 about how the wine of the new covenant will "burst" or destroy the old wineskins and the wine will run out

from them. The bursting or rending of the wineskins is a picture of destruction and condemnation. The pigs of condemnation to whom we consigned our brethren will turn again and trample *us* underfoot. Therefore- do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. This interpretation of verse 6 fits snugly into the context of the preceding verses. Any attempt to make it apply to not offering the Gospel to "pigs" in case we get hurt by them would seem out of context- and contrary to the spirit of taking the Gospel to all men without discrimination, and never holding back in sharing the Gospel from fear that we might get beat up for it.

*7:7 Ask and it shall be given*- The connections within the Sermon surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit". The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfill his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

*Seek... find*- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the

Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12; ). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?

The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. Not long previously in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

*Find-* See on 7:14.

*Knock... opened-* This again is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren, in the context of :6), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the

second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.