

# Getting Along with Others

## (Matthew 7:3–12)

With the lesson, “Do Not Judge,” we began a study of Matthew 7:1–12, a passage that teaches (along with other principles) how to get along with others.<sup>1</sup> I promised to pull from our text six suggestions regarding relationships. The first suggestion was this: We must stop being judgmental. In connection with that principle, I proposed that Jesus was discouraging at least five common practices:

- Letting our background, prejudices, and preferences affect our judgment.
- Making hasty judgments without trying to have all the facts or know all the circumstances.
- Making judgments regarding the motives of another.
- Putting the worst, rather than the best, possible construction (interpretation) on what people do.
- Being harsh, bitter, and hypercritical in our judgments—instead of tempering our judgments with mercy and love.

These are universal faults. You probably know someone who is guilty of every one of these, don't you?

Having asked that question, let me apologize. It was a trick question. If someone came to your mind, you may have judged that individual. At

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<sup>1</sup>This is a revision of a lesson titled “How to Get Along with Others,” which appeared in *Truth for Today* (February 2002): 18–24. The lesson “Do Not Judge” was in the previous issue, “The Sermon on the Mount, 2.”

the very least, I probably led you to be guilty of applying 7:1, 2 to someone else rather than to yourself. I did this deliberately to introduce the second principle on getting along with others.

### MAKE NEEDED CHANGES (7:3–5)

If we desire to get along with others, our first concern must be about making needed changes in our own lives. When it comes to the need for change, we generally prefer to look at others instead of ourselves. Jesus understood this. He said,

Why do you look at the speck<sup>2</sup> that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log<sup>3</sup> 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? 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 (vv. 3–5).

This passage has a touch of humor. Try to imagine a man with a log protruding from his eye as he struggles to position himself where he is able to see a speck that is in another man's eye. (Can you picture that log swinging this way and that, as those nearby have to duck to keep from being hit in the head?) Jesus would have us know that it is ridiculous for us to act as judges

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<sup>2</sup>The KJV has “mote,” which is a Middle English word meaning “a very small particle” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. [2006], s.v. “mote”).

<sup>3</sup>Some think this was part of the timber that supported a house or a beam that helped hold up a roof. In any case, it was a *big* piece of wood.

when we may be in worse condition than those we are judging.<sup>4</sup>

Christ may have had the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees in mind, but the truths of this passage convict us all. How easy it is to see the faults of others while ignoring our own! Think of the story of King David in 2 Samuel. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had Bathsheba's husband killed (11:1–17). When Nathan went to David and told him the tale of the rich man who killed the poor man's lamb, David wanted to "hang" the offender<sup>5</sup> (12:1–6). However, when Nathan said, "You are the man!" (12:7a), instead of a hanging, David was ready for a prayer meeting (12:13; Psalms 51; 32). In regard to getting along with others, Jesus wants us first to examine *ourselves* to see what changes *we* need to make.

Incidentally, the first part of Matthew 7:3 can add another item to the list of judgmental practices condemned by Christ. The Greek word translated "look" (βλέπω, *blepo*) has "greater vividness" than the usual word for "see" and expresses "a more intent, earnest contemplation."<sup>6</sup> It means to scrutinize, to examine closely. A speck is not easy to see. When someone tells you, "I have a speck in my eye," you probably cannot see it unless the light is exactly right and you get very close. We could therefore add this far-too-prevalent characteristic to the list of bad judgmental habits: *Looking for the worst in people instead of the best, painstakingly scrutinizing every word and action in an attempt to find some fault to criticize.* That was how the scribes and the Pharisees were treating Jesus.

Many commentators and some translators believe that Christ used the figures of "speck" and "log" because they had the same composition. One was very small and the other very large, but both could have been composed of wood. The NIV has "speck of sawdust" and "plank."

The possibility that the speck and the log were made of the same material provokes some interesting thoughts. It is a fact of human nature that we often are overly sensitive regarding faults in

others that we have in our own lives. Psychologists call this "projection": projecting into the lives of others what we see in our own lives. We assume that everyone else is like us, that others think and feel the same way we do. It is also a fact that our own sins generally do not look as bad to us as the same sins do in others. Bertrand Russell's well-known "emotive conjugations" illustrate the way we perceive situations: "I am firm, you are obstinate, and he is pig-headed. I have reconsidered; you have changed your mind; he has gone back on his word."<sup>7</sup> For a biblical example of this, read the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38). When Judah was told that Tamar had "played the harlot" and was "with child," he was ready to have her killed (v. 24); but when Tamar proved that Judah was the father of her child (v. 25), the subject of capital punishment was quickly dropped (see v. 26).

If Christ deliberately illustrated His point with two items both made of wood, we have the absurd situation of a man with a log-sized sin acting superior to another who has a speck-sized amount of the same sin. Paul wrote about this kind of inconsistency in Romans 2:1–3:

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

How did Jesus characterize those who acted in such a way? Jesus minced no words; in the first part of verse 5, He said, "You *hypocrite*!" Being *hypercritical* makes us *hypocritical*. If we constantly criticize others, we are implying that our record is clear, that our lives are right. Otherwise, we would not be qualified to judge. At the same time, we have these huge telephone poles<sup>8</sup> sticking out of our eye sockets.

Again, I say regarding judgment, that we must start with self. Jesus said, "First take the log out

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<sup>4</sup>A log-eyed man's offering to help a speck-eyed man is roughly equivalent to my offering to help someone else grow hair. (I am "forehead bald" [Leviticus 13:41; KJV].)

<sup>5</sup>He was ready to have him killed.

<sup>6</sup>W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 59.

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<sup>7</sup>Bertrand Russell, "Brains Trust," BBC radio broadcast, 26 April 1948 ([www.stoneforest.org/critical.html](http://www.stoneforest.org/critical.html)); Internet; accessed 6 May 2008).

<sup>8</sup>A telephone pole is a familiar "beam" or "log" to my listeners. Use a term familiar to your listeners.

of your own eye." It is easy to confess the sins of others; it is difficult to confess our own sins. Paul advocated self-examination in a variety of contexts: "Test yourselves . . . ; examine yourselves!" (2 Corinthians 13:5); "But a man must examine himself"; "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:28, 31). Romans 14:13 is especially applicable. Phillips' translation renders this verse, "Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. If we must be critical, *let us be critical of our own conduct* and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble or fall" (emphasis added).

Even in the matter of self-examination, common sense is in order. We are not talking about a morbid obsession with personal failures and shortcomings—what Warren W. Wiersbe called "a perpetual autopsy."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, if we want to get along with others, our first concern must be to make needed changes in our *own* lives. If we start with self, we will be less disposed to be judgmental. We must strive to remove *all* log-sins from our lives, but in context it is the log-sin of being judgmental that needs to be removed.

We could now leave verses 3 through 5, for we have covered the primary emphasis of the verses. However, there is a truth at the end of the section I do not want to overlook.

### **HELP OTHERS IN HUMILITY AND SENSITIVITY (7:5b)**

If we really love someone and see sin in his life, we will try to help him remove that sin.<sup>10</sup> This is implicit in the latter part of verse 5: After Jesus charged each one first to take the log from his own eye, He said, "And *then* you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (emphasis added). Jesus said our first priority is to work on our own sins, but He did not discourage helping a brother with his sins once our own lives are in order.<sup>11</sup> A number of passages

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<sup>9</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1989), 29.

<sup>10</sup>This is implied in one of the classic definitions of love: "Love seeks the best for the one loved." True love cannot ignore sin in the life of a loved one, sin that can damn his soul. See also Matthew 18:15.

<sup>11</sup>A parallel could be drawn with Matthew 5:23, 24, where Jesus said, "*First* be reconciled to your brother, and *then* come and present your offering." It was not Christ's intention to discourage offerings; rather, He was emphasizing what needed be done *before* offerings were made.

teach on the need to help one another remove sin from our hearts and lives:

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1, 2).

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19, 20).

Jesus' illustration of the speck in the eye in Matthew 7:3–5 underlines *the need* for help. The eyeballs and eyelids are extremely sensitive. Even a speck in the eye is no laughing matter. If you have children, you have probably heard the anguish in the voice when one of them has cried, "I have something in my eye!"

The illustration also indicates *the approach* that should be taken by the one helping. If I have something in my eye and you volunteer to help get it out, I want you to be very careful and sympathetic. In the same way, we need to be sensitive in dealing with others. Paul said, ". . . restore such a one *in a spirit of gentleness*" (Galatians 6:1; emphasis added).

We are all sinners in the presence of a holy God, before whom we shall someday stand in judgment. We all need help spiritually, so let us be willing to help others; but, as we do so, let us render that help with care and compassion.

### **REALIZE THAT EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT, AND LEARN TO DEAL WITH THE DIFFICULT (7:6)**

We come next to the verse on "dogs" and "swine" (v. 6). Here is a puzzle; this verse seems to go against the spirit of what Jesus had been saying. Should we go around calling others "dogs" and "pigs"? I think Christ put this sentence in for balance. We are not to be hypercritical, fault-finding, self-appointed "inspectors of warts"; but neither are we to be gullible. God gave us common sense, and He expects us to use it in dealing with people. We are not to be callous and censorious, but neither are we to be careless and credulous.

If Jesus had only given us verses 1 through 5,



He might have left us vulnerable, afraid of making any judgment because we might make a wrong one that would haunt us. In verse 6, however, He implied that we *must* make *some* judgments regarding others—and He illustrated this fact with a reference to dogs and pigs: “Do not give what is holy<sup>12</sup> to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

Before we consider the meaning of Christ’s words, we need to understand the nature of dogs and swine, especially in His day. Both were ceremonially unclean animals under the law of Moses.<sup>13</sup> When you think of dogs, do not think of the pampered pets owned by some, but rather think of vicious, savage, half-starved, filthy scavengers running in packs. The term “dog” was sometimes used in the Bible as a metaphor for a sinner (Matthew 15:26; Philippians 3:2; Revelation 22:15). The pig was the epitome of uncleanness in the Jewish mind. This being the case, most (if not all) pigs in Palestine were those that ran wild.

That latter fact is missed by many commentators. As they struggle with verse 6, they say that “turn and tear you to pieces” must refer to dogs instead of pigs. This may be the case,<sup>14</sup> but to insist that pigs cannot “tear you to pieces” exposes their ignorance of pigs. They have never been around a mother pig who will try to tear your leg off if she thinks you are too close to her new babies. They are also unaware of the viciousness of wild pigs who, pound for pound, are among the most dangerous of all creatures.<sup>15</sup>

Keeping in mind the disposition of dogs and pigs, look again at verse 6. Jesus once more presents scenes that depict the ridiculous. He first spoke of giving “what is holy to dogs.” There is no way a mongrel can appreciate that which is

holy or sacred. Some think the passage refers to the unthinkable circumstance of a priest’s taking meat from the altar of sacrifice and tossing it to a pack of wild dogs. This would never be done.

Then Jesus made reference to throwing “pearls before swine.” Even as dogs cannot appreciate that which is holy, so pigs will never appreciate pearls. As soon as they discovered that the pearls were not food (and perhaps had broken a tooth attempting to eat the gems), they would indeed be inclined to “turn and tear you to pieces.” My mind goes back to long-ago days when I rose before daybreak to feed the hogs. As soon as the pigs heard me mixing their food in an old metal bucket, they would go into a frenzy. As I approached their pen, they would be squealing and climbing all over each other. I had a difficult time pouring the food into the feeding trough, which was invariably occupied by at least three or four hungry hogs. I can assure you that if I had poured pearls into the trough instead of a mixture of ground grain and milk, as soon as the pigs discovered that was the case, I would have prayed for a very strong fence!

Next, we must ask, “Who are the ‘dogs’ and ‘swine’ to whom Jesus referred?” That question is best answered by first asking, “What is the ‘holy’ and what are the ‘pearls’?” Jesus referred to the kingdom (church) as the “*pearl of great value*” (Matthew 13:45, 46; emphasis added). The message about the kingdom (church) is called the good news (gospel) (see Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). God’s Word is *holy* (Romans 1:2; 2 Peter 2:21), and this holy message is spoken of as a “treasure” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Since all this is true, most commentators believe that Christ was warning against giving God’s Word to individuals who lack spiritual appreciation:

- those who continually reject the truth,
- those to whom the gospel is “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23; 2:14),
- the kind of people spoken of in Titus 1:15 “who are defiled and unbelieving,” having “both their mind and their conscience . . . defiled.”

Again, Jesus may have had in mind the scribes and the Pharisees, who refused to accept His words.

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<sup>12</sup>Some have suggested that, instead of “what is holy,” the word in the text should be translated “earring”; but “the text is acceptable [and understandable] as it stands” (Robert H. Mounce, Matthew, New International Biblical Commentary [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991], 65).

<sup>13</sup>The pig was specifically designated “unclean” (Leviticus 11:7); the dog was “unclean” because it did not have split hoofs and did not chew the cud (vv. 3, 4).

<sup>14</sup>Many scholars are convinced that Matthew 7:6 is an example of inverted parallelism, in which the last part (“turn and tear”) refers to the first part (“dogs”).

<sup>15</sup>In my part of the world, we can talk about the famed “razorback” of years past. Preachers in other parts of the world might refer to the wild boar, the wart hog, or the pig-like peccary.

Some commentators object to this interpretation of verse 6,<sup>16</sup> but I believe it is the simplest explanation of the passage and that it accords with other passages of Scripture. When Jesus gave “the limited commission,” He told His disciples to shake the dust off their sandals<sup>17</sup> and move on when they were rejected (Matthew 10:13, 14).<sup>18</sup> Each time Paul’s message was rejected by the Jews, he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44–51; 18:5, 6; 19:9; 28:17–28).

This is a difficult judgment to make. We do not have the right in advance to decide that someone is a “dog” or a “pig.” Love always believes the best, and we should give everyone the opportunity to hear the gospel (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16). On the other hand, if we continually try to teach someone and are constantly rejected, at some point, common sense and the principle of being good stewards of our time (Ephesians 5:16) will say, “Stop casting your pearls before swine and find someone else to teach.”

The main point I want to make at this time, however, is that, in Jesus’ illustrations in 7:1–12, He made clear that we have to relate to many different kinds of people, and that we have to learn how to treat each kind. We will encounter hurting people with specks in their eyes, individuals who deserve our love and attention. We will also meet hogs and dogs whom we will never be able to help. They will resist every effort on our part to get close to them. Their only interest in us will be in determining how to tear us to pieces. The best thing we can do with these is to leave them alone.

Think of the tenderness of Jesus with the woman who washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:36–50) and with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:2–11). Contrast this with His scathing denunciation of the hardhearted scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. Again and again, He said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites*” (vv. 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; emphasis added).

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<sup>16</sup>One early uninspired Christian document, the *Didache*, used Matthew 7:6 to teach that the Lord’s Supper should never be given to the unbaptized.

<sup>17</sup>This was a symbolic way of indicating “I will have nothing more to do with you.”

<sup>18</sup>Jesus Himself refrained from casting His pearls before swine. On occasion, He did not answer the Pharisees (Matthew 15:2, 3; 21:23–27). He did not talk to Herod (Luke 23:9).

Christ did not say to shoot the dogs and pigs. He just said to leave them alone. Paul’s admonition is appropriate here: “If possible, *so far as it depends on you*, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18; emphasis added).

## DETERMINE TO RELY ON GOD (7:7–11)

This brings us to the great passage on the power of prayer: verses 7 through 11. When we first read these verses, we may think that Jesus had finished the subject of relationships. However, the verse after this passage (v. 12) transitions with “therefore” and then gives the ultimate instruction on how to get along with others: the Golden Rule. The word “therefore” indicates that Jesus was wrapping up His subject—summarizing it, drawing it to a close. In some way, then, verses 7 through 11 relate to the overall theme of getting along with others. I will deal with these verses in detail in the next lesson, “You Can Trust God.” At the moment, my purpose is to show how this passage fits into the context of the subject under discussion.

On one hand, we are not to be judgmental; we are to be merciful and kind. On the other hand, we are not to be gullible; we need to know when to shake the dust off our feet. These judgments are difficult to make. How can we keep from being tough when we should be tender, or tender when we should be tough? Verses 7 through 11 give us the answer: We must rely on God.

“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 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!”

What great statements these are! God answers prayer! Even as a loving father responds to the needs and requests of his children, so God responds to us.

This passage relates to our subject in several ways. For instance, God shows mercy to us, and this implies that we should show mercy to others. Especially, it emphasizes that we can go to God

with our needs—in particular, the need to know how to deal with others. In this regard, the message is similar to that of James 1:5a: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.”

Verse 11 says that God will “give what is *good* to those who ask Him!” I hear someone say, “A new house would be good . . . or more clothes . . . or a better-paying job”—but what is really “good”? Are not spiritual gifts the best? Among these is a discerning spirit: the ability to know how to deal with all kinds of people. If you really want to get along with people, if relationships are important to you, you will spend much time in prayer.

## LIVE BY THE GOLDEN RULE (7:12)

We come at last to verse 12. This verse has been called the high point of the Sermon on the Mount. Certainly, it climaxes the discussion on how to get along with others. The passage begins with the word “therefore.” In a sense, it summarizes all that has been said in the sermon regarding human relationships—whether with brother or enemy, whether with friend or foe. Specifically, it sums up all that we have learned in 7:1–11 about getting along with others: “Therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. . . .” We generally express it like this: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This is probably the universally best-known statement of Jesus. Almost everyone admires these words. Even those who do not live by the precept admire the principle.

Prior to Jesus, many had worded the principle of verse 12a in the negative: “Do *not* do unto others what you would *not* want them to do to you.” Among those who expressed this were Socrates, Aristotle, the noted Jewish teacher Hillel, Confucius, and Buddha. Jesus, however, was the first to express it positively: “Do unto others. . . .” There is a world of difference in the negative and positive approaches: The negative statement was largely a matter of self-protection, while the positive is a matter of self-forgetfulness. It is possible to fulfill the negative by doing nothing,<sup>19</sup> while one can

<sup>19</sup>The “goats” of Matthew 25 would have been saved on the basis of the negative expression of this rule (vv. 31, 32, 41, 42).

only fulfill the positive by doing good. A person does not even have to be religious to embrace the negative philosophy; that is a naturalistic way of looking at life. However, the second is the basis of pure religion. Jesus said, “. . . this is the Law and the Prophets” (v. 12b). The NIV has “. . . this sums up the law and the prophets.” That is, the Golden Rule summarizes the Old Testament teaching on human relationships.<sup>20</sup>

This passage comes at the end of the discussion to give a summary of what came before, but it is also here because it enunciates a principle that covers numerous other situations that may arise in relationships. Imagine that you had a book that dealt with every possible relationship problem. Try to visualize how large such a volume would be. Then imagine that you are interacting with someone and a crisis arises. You start frantically leafing through the book to find how to deal with it. After an hour or so, you find the answer you need and look up—and the other person is gone. Instead of giving you such a volume, Jesus said, in effect, “Here’s how to handle that crisis or any crisis. Ask yourself, ‘What if the situation were reversed? How would I want to be treated?’ Then treat the other person like that.”

How simple this is—and yet how profound! Can you imagine how it would be if all of life were conducted on this basis? What if every business operated this way? What if every home, every school, every nation, every congregation honored this principle?

Let me pause again to say that the Lord expects us to use common sense. Matthew 7:12 assumes that when we put ourselves in the other person’s place, we will be *good enough* not to want something bad, and that we will be *wise enough* not to want something foolish.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise the drunk might reason, “What I want is for people to give me alcohol, so I’ll do unto others as I would have them do to me—and give everyone bottles of liquor.” To use a personal illustration, I might reason, “I like to eat liver and

<sup>20</sup>Elsewhere Jesus, in effect, said that loving one’s neighbor was a summary of the Law and the Prophets regarding how to treat others (see Matthew 22:37–40). The Golden Rule gives us a practical guideline to use in loving our neighbors.

<sup>21</sup>Adapted from J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel or A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1914), 265.



onions,<sup>22</sup> so the next time I have to fix a meal, I'll cook liver and onions for my wife"—in spite of the fact that she *hates* liver and onions.

I think, however, that most of us understand what the Golden Rule is talking about. The passage refers to general truths, that which is true of all people. We all want to be treated with compassion, so we ought to treat others that way. We all like to be appreciated, so we should express appreciation for others. We would all like for others to believe the best of us—to put the best construction on what we do—so we should do the same for others. The list can be extended. We want others to try to understand us, to cover our lapses into stupidity with the mantle of kindness, to forgive us—so let us treat people the same way we want them to treat us.

Would it not be wonderful if we lived in a world in which everyone treated everyone else like that? Would it not be wonderful if *we* treated everyone like that?

## CONCLUSION

I have read that Mahatma Gandhi<sup>23</sup> was initially impressed with Christianity—especially the great teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount, including the Golden Rule. When asked why he was not a Christian, he replied sadly that he had not seen any Christian *living* by those principles. Do I live by the principles we have studied? Do you?

Matthew 7:1–12 is followed by these familiar words:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it (vv. 13, 14).

Would it be fair to suggest that the gate is so narrow that it will only allow entrance . . .

- To those who are not judgmental?
- To those whose first concern is to make

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<sup>22</sup>Liver (either calf liver or pig liver) cooked with onions is a fairly common dish in the US. This smelly combination is enjoyed by some but despised by others.

<sup>23</sup>Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), leader of India's non-violent nationalist movement, was one of the great national leaders of the twentieth century.

needed changes in their own lives?

- To those whose efforts to help others are characterized by humility and sensitivity?
- To those who recognize that everyone is different—and who have learned how to deal with the difficult?
- To those who have determined to rely on God?
- To those who live by the Golden Rule?

Yes, I know that Matthew 7:13, 14 must be applied to more than just human relationships, but surely the passage includes this. How important it is to learn to get along with other people!

Have you failed to treat others as you should? I have too. Is it not wonderful to realize that God, through His graciousness, will forgive us of those shortcomings if we repent and determine to do better in the future?<sup>24</sup> Our lesson opened with the idea that we must *first* be concerned about needed changes in our own lives. It is time for self-examination. If your life is crying out for important changes and we can help you, please let us know.

## *Preaching and Teaching Notes*

When you use this sermon, you will want to emphasize that no changes are more desperately needed than spiritual changes. Tell non-Christians how to be saved (John 3:16; Mark 16:16) and erring Christians how to be restored to a faithful life in the body of Christ (Acts 8:22; James 5:16).

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## *The Silver Rule*

Other cultures have rules similar to the Golden Rule. The Silver Rule, upheld by Confucianism, says, "Do *not* do to others what you do *not* want them to do to you." The Silver Rule is a passive command, while the Golden Rule requires an active response from believers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>A determination to do better in the future is part of true repentance.

<sup>25</sup>Larry Calvin, *The Power Zone* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Sweet Publishing, 1995), 166.