

## Grace to Live – Five Rules For Resolving Conflict

Matthew 7:1-6 | Sunday, November 4, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

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# GRACE TO LIVE

## FIVE RULES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

### Matthew 7:1-6

*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 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.*

*"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*

We come to this really famous verse of scripture. You may have heard it before. In fact, there has been speculation that this has now replaced John 3:16 as the most quoted verse: "Judge not, lest you be judged." We quote this verse, why? Because we do not like to be judged. We usually tell other people this wonderful verse, but I don't know how much we think about how it applies to our own lives. Really, in this very famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous sermon ever, the greatest sermon ever, Jesus is nearing the end and he gives this very practical instruction on relationships, specifically on resolving conflict within relationships. I think that this will help you in your family interactions, in your marriage, with your children, with your coworkers, with your neighbors. Whoever you fight with, this will help you. Resolving Conflict.

Let's just begin by talking for a moment about what Jesus is *not* saying. I don't think Jesus is telling us here that you're never going to exercise discernment; that you're never going to have any word of correction to speak to someone else, that you're never going to have an opinion or a judgment. He is actually talking about a certain kind of judgment. In fact, in the passage we just read, he tells you: "Don't give what is holy to the dogs and don't cast your pearls before the swine, before the pigs." He is calling people dogs and pigs, right? That's a judgment, isn't it?

He is not contradicting himself. He is actually identifying for us a very specific kind of judgment. In fact, he says it in a specific way. He tells us: When you pronounce judgment, when you enter into this "Here is my verdict," almost always what follows is a sentence, a punishment that you are going to apply to that person. When you do it in an ultimate

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fashion, you are putting yourself in the place that God alone belongs. You are giving up on a person. You are writing a person off. You are pronouncing judgment.

If we're not careful, if we've had some negative experiences, and perhaps even within a family context, we begin to judge the other person. We say, "I know what your motive is. I know why you did this. You always do this. You are horrible." Then we make this huge leap: "In fact, all women are horrible." "All men are horrible." We cultivate these judgments.

Jesus is warning against this attitude. In fact, he gives us some very helpful, I've called them "rules" for relationships. I don't normally like that kind of language. I don't want to reduce the sermon down to tips and techniques, but in this particular case it helps us, because if we understand the rules, we are going to see that there is a perspective underneath that informs them. It's this perspective that Jesus makes possible in our lives. That's what I really want to talk about this morning.

Many of you know my testimony. Early in our marriage, my wife and I were in a lot of trouble. It looked like our marriage was not going to make it, but that it was going to end in divorce. It was an extremely difficult time a few years into our marriage. It didn't help that I was a pastor. For me, it seemed like my whole life was about to be derailed. Our marriage was going to end and I was going to be out of ministry. God actually used this passage as one of the primary scriptural truths that helped save my marriage. So, this is a passage that's dear to me and I hope that it's helpful to you.

It should be said as we get ready to jump into it, that Jesus is using humor here to readjust our perspective and to show us how life in him creates a new perspective. And he connects that perspective to practice. I think you're going to see that. Let's get started and go to the first point. Rule #1: Set the tone.

### I. Set the tone.

You see this when Jesus basically tells you that if you judge others, you are going to get judgment back. We experience this in relationship with other people. **We find that if we judge others and we pronounce that judgment, what happens? They begin to judge us back.** In fact, I always find it interesting that when I get around someone who tends to be a critical person, a judgmental person, that person will say, "I don't understand why everyone else is so hard on me. They are always judging me." They are not making the connection that they are sowing and reaping, that it's a natural consequence of being overly critical towards others; that others then begin to look and find fault in our own lives.

But I think Jesus actually means more here than how it affects us on a relational level. **I think he tells us that if we live in a judgmental way, we are going to experience that in our relationship with him, which is actually much more serious.**

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Let's look at Romans 2:1: "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things." Look at what the Apostle Paul is telling us here. He is saying that when you say this person over here who does this thing is wrong, and you do the same thing, you are actually admitting that what you do is wrong. You are actually pronouncing judgment on yourself. So Paul is calling us out to some degree in this.

Then he continues by saying to us, "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things." It's right for God to bring judgment. "Or do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?" Verse 4: "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" This is what Paul wants us to see -- the big picture of these first four verses in Romans 2.

**He is saying that when you and I blow it and we sin, God will often not bring judgment on us right away, but he provides space for us. In that space he shows us his compassion and mercy, inviting us to repent, inviting us to admit our need before the Lord and to receive forgiveness by trusting in Christ.** But our tendency is to use that space to not repent, but instead to justify our own wrongdoing, then to judge other people. It's easy for us to do.

We understand why we do things that are not right. We make justifications for ourselves. Yet, we then pronounce this judgment on other people. Here's what this first rule is trying to get at, saying, "You know what? You set the tone. You set the tone of your relationship with other people, and you set the tone of your relationship with God. And if you are living in a judgmental, fault-finding way, that's the tone that you are setting." That's particularly unhealthy in relationships in a horizontal way, but it's really dangerous in our relationship with the Lord, because we need his grace. He offers it to us. In fact, he sets the tone, doesn't he? He sets it by sending his Son to pay the penalty for our sin, to provide forgiveness for us, so that that would really be what characterizes our relationship.

Let's go to #2.

### II. Softly and Tenderly.

This is an important rule. This is really what the whole parable illustrates. Let's imagine you come to me and say, "Brian, I've got something in my eye – could you get it out?" If I say, "Yeah, sure. Let me look. I've got a pair of pliers here. I know they are a little rusty. Let me wipe them off," what are you going to do? "No! Why don't you use a tissue, maybe?"

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**Jesus uses this very vivid image to teach us in our interaction with other people to be gentle, to be soft, to be tender in how we share our perspective, in how we share our observations.** In our family relationships, somehow (it's probably my fault) we've gotten in the habit of saying this phrase: "Sweetheart, can I share an observation with you?" Whenever you hear that, you brace for what follows, right? Here comes an observation, and observations are generally not: "Wow, you are doing amazing! Keep it up!" They tend to be corrective. Softly and tenderly. There is an invitation here for us to be gentle in the way that we interact with other people.

My Dad used to have this principle when we were boys and we would wrestle with him. He would never just tell us what the rules were. He wouldn't say, "Okay, you can't bite, you can't pinch, you can't pull hair." He would just say one thing: "You get what you give." So whatever you do to him, he does back to you. But he seemed to do it just a little bit harder, just a little bit, and you immediately got all the other rules, right? You immediately knew what was out of bounds. It was a very helpful way to say, "Here are the boundaries." It's a principle of sowing and reaping.

This is what we are seeing here in this picture that Jesus gives to us about how we interact with people. We have an invitation to set a tone of gentleness, respect for the other person, and that is accomplished through a gentleness that characterizes our interactions. You see this in Colossians 3:12-14.

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

There is an invitation here for us to be gentle. It's described for us here in this passage. And of course, Jesus famously in Matthew 11 invites us to come to him and he tells us that he is gentle. He says, "You are weighed down and burdened. You have all these cares. Come to me. You will find rest for your souls." He says, "I am gentle. Come and discover that as you follow me."

So, #1 – Set the tone. #2 – Softly and tenderly.

### III. Me first.

He tells us, "**Deal with yourself before dealing with other people.**" He does it so vividly with this hyperbole, this exaggeration, this log in your own eye. He invites you to address yourself first.

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When we are in our marriages and we are dealing with conflict, this is the great challenge. I find this as a pastor in the opportunities I have to do marital counseling that it's so natural for us to look at the other person and to see the other person as the problem. It's *really* difficult for us to stop and to look at ourselves and say, "Okay, let me deal with me."

In that season when my wife and I were struggling, I had a new friend. He was brand-new in his relationship with the Lord. He had just come to be a Christian. We went out to lunch one day. We were just sitting there talking, and I shared with him some of what we were going through. I said, "Listen, I know this sounds bad but I am telling you, I have done everything possible to make this marriage work." That was my statement.

And this brand new Christian looked at me and goes, "Brian, I haven't known you that long, and in the time I've known you, you've said some arrogant things, but that is the most arrogant of all the arrogant things you've ever said." It was one of those moments. I don't know why or how, but it was literally like a lightning bolt hit me right between the eyes. It was the mercy of God where in that moment I was able to say, "You know what? My pride is destroying my marriage." I told you there were a couple of verses God really used. The first one was, "God gives grace to the humble. He resists the proud." This is what God just dropped in my spirit in that moment: "I am resisting you. I am proud and I am resisting you."

I don't know if you've ever gotten in a fight with God. You never win. You cannot resist God and come out the winner. Here's the crazy thing. If I gave the microphone to my wife, which I will never do, she could tell you how imperfectly I lived this out. It would be completely misleading to say, "Okay, five years into our marriage, 25 years ago I had pride. Now, no pride. It's all gone." It would be misleading; it would be a lie. But that's the amazing thing about this promise.

**When you come and kneel before God and say, "God, I'm a mess. Help me. I've got pride and I can't get it out," he helps the humble.**

In that moment you experience God's grace. If you're new in your relationship with the Lord, you may be tempted to think that you need to say, "Well, I've got it all together." That's the worst thing you can say. It's the worse track you can take, because you probably don't have it all together. In the past maybe that was the protection we all sought; it was to give that appearance. **There is actually now liberty to come in Christ and say, "No, I don't really know where I am on the growth spectrum, but I don't have it all together and I need the help of Jesus Christ."**

I'm going to brag for a moment. I have an amazing marriage. A really good marriage. My wife is phenomenal. Our testimony would be it is God's grace in our love for one another. Right, dear? You're really happy? Okay. All is well. Start with yourself. Jesus is presenting this as a universal principle. Begin with you. If you are saying, "No, listen, I would begin with me, but there's nothing..." there's a big log right here, and you are blind to it. Open your heart to say, "Me first."

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Okay, here's a tough one:

### IV. Me most.

He doesn't just say, "You've got a splinter. They've got a splinter. Get your own first." He says, "No, you have a telephone pole in your eye." **He is using this humor to say, "You have lost perspective, and you are magnifying the faults of other people and giving yourself a pass."** He uses this universal language because it's the propensity of all of our hearts. It's just what we do because it's this principle of judging and judging in return. It's the way we defend ourselves by comparing and responding to criticism.

Now, Jesus offers you a way out of that destructive pattern of relating, that destructive pattern of conflict. Even if you are in relationship -- marriage, friendship, working with individuals that are very unreasonable, very judgmental, very difficult -- I would recommend so strongly to you not to go preach this message to them, but to practice it yourself.

Say, "Okay, I've got to start with me. I've got to say 'me first, me most.' I cannot enter into this with the perspective, "Well, okay, I'll start with me even though 95% of it is her, Lord. You know that. We know that. I know that. Even she probably knows that." No. No, we can't start there.

I think I told you last week or the week before that my wife and I ended a recent conflict by just saying, "Okay, we don't agree. We don't agree, but we love one another." We were further apart at the end of this conversation than we were at the beginning, so now we just need to go look at ourselves. I just need to go look at myself. Very imperfectly, we lived that out. Very imperfectly. But in it the Lord meets us and gives us grace.

So, me most is a tough one. Here's a very helpful one that we end with.

### V. No TMI.

Too much information. We know what it is in friendship, in conversation when people tell us things we really don't want to hear. We are like, "I could have done without that information." There's a way in all of our relationships where there is a proper exercise of discernment. Jesus starts by warning against the wrong kind of judgment. He kind of lays out for us how our perspective needs to change, then he concludes with this little saying about dogs and pigs.

In that, he is saying, "Okay, here is how it works. Here's how you exercise discernment in the right way. Don't give what is holy to dogs. Don't cast your pearls before swine." Both of those images -- dogs and pigs -- are used in scripture to

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portray those who don't believe in God or who oppose God. The pig in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant was unclean. You hear the word "dog" and you think nice pet, domesticated animal. But in the first century, a dog would typically live on the street, be filthy, be a scavenger, and was representative of those that were mean and opposed God.

**Jesus is saying, "Actually, when you are in relationship with someone and you are not in agreement, there is a place where you are careful about how much information you share. It doesn't serve them and it doesn't help you. There is a place where instead of just trying to win the argument or force the issue, you back up. You make space. You discern this is not working and you back out a little bit.**

Just think about that, if I could speak for a moment to those who would say, "I'm a Christian. I'm a believer in Jesus Christ." There are times where as you talk about that faith you will do so with people who either receive or don't receive. We want to share the love of Christ. That's something we do. But when other people are saying, "No, I don't want any part of that," or they share something that's really a contradiction to what you believe, sometimes the best thing you can do is just say, "Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Thank you for trusting that." **Make some space for the Spirit of God to work in your life and in their life and just hear them. Take an interest in them.** Sometimes we go all in, like: "I'm going to convert you whether you want to be converted or not." It's not good.

I use that language because sometimes people who don't embrace the faith will think all that we care about as Christians is just converting them. Jesus taught us to love others, to start there. Obviously, we hope that we get to share the love of Jesus and the message of Christ with everyone.

I think this is true also and it applies in the area of intimacy. It's healthy for us to be transparent. I'm sharing with you a little bit about how this principle is applied. My wife and I have learned to practice it in our own marriage, but there would clearly be things that would be inappropriate for us to share. That is very true relationally when we come to a place where people are not respecting what we are saying. That is kind of the flip of the perspective. **Jesus is saying we respect the other person. We don't shove things down their throat. When we do that, we are not just disrespecting them, but we are actually disrespecting what we have to share. We are devaluing it in a way that is not helpful at all.**

I want to conclude the message with a couple ways to help us respond.

- One is: Jesus offers you a new perspective on how you relate to God that in turn changes the way you relate to other people. Here is what Jesus does in his relationship with you. He comes to you and he says, "You know what? I am not going to require anything of you except that you come and receive my gift of salvation. I am offering you forgiveness of anything and everything that you've done wrong in your entire life. I have paid the

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penalty for that on the cross. The punishment is paid for you. Come and receive it as a gift and trust in me. I will then work in your life to bring about a complete transformation.”

- For some, the perspective shift for you is to say, “Jesus, take the log out of my eye. I am coming to receive forgiveness, to receive cleansing, and to trust in you.”
- For others, you are here today and you are thinking of some specific relationships that are really frustrating you. The Lord is offering you an invitation into a kingdom perspective, where you stop saying, “Okay, it’s my way.” You wouldn’t say this, but functionally, “my kingdom.” I am going to humble myself because I need the Lord to come in here and work. So I’m going to make space. I’m not going to force the issue. I’m going to look at myself because that’s the one thing I have the opportunity to control and I’m going to seriously ask the Lord to give me grace and to work on me.” See what God will do as you do that.

Let’s pray. Father, we come in response to these truths. There is so much wisdom here and so many opportunities for application for us. We pray, Lord, that you would just meet us and help us to apply these truths. Lord, I am aware that even in hearing this message there are some individuals that are really struggling in their marriage. There is a lot of blaming and accusation going on right now. Lord, you want to come in and bring your grace. You want to bring a oneness and a unity and a sweetness, a gentleness that’s been absent. Lord, I pray that you would meet those couples today, that there would be a safe place in you to come and respond. I pray especially, Lord, for those who have never known the joy of knowing you. I pray that today would be the day they turn and receive a whole new perspective on life from you. I thank you, O God, and pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

God bless you. Have a wonderful Lord’s Day.