

Matthew 7:1–2—Measure for Judgment

William Shakespeare's 1604 play *Measure for Measure* takes its name from Matthew 7:1–2, which reads (in the KJV):

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Critics often think the play owes more to the New Testament than just its clever title. John Margeson writes that Shakespeare makes the “measure for measure” concept central throughout the play. “Integrated with a traditional Catholic exegesis of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” Margeson says the play “provides a lucid commentary on extravagant legal mindedness of the ‘old Law’ sort, such as was evidently associated with certain Puritans in Shakespeare’s day.”¹

Many take the central theme of the play to be consideration of whether Christ’s dictum describes the way the world is or the way it should be. According to Margeson, Shakespeare sets forth a “larger and more merciful concept of justice, dependent not upon equally weighted retribution but upon recognition, self-awareness, and forgiveness, which prevails in the conclusion to the play.”²

1. John Margeson, “Judge Not,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 423.

2. Margeson, “Judge Not,” 423.