

The Sermon on the Mount

Session VI

A Christian's Balance

Matthew 7:1-11

We are now entering the "home stretch" of our study of the Sermon on the Mount. As we enter chapter 7, let's take a moment to gain a little background knowledge of how Matthew has assembled this last portion of Jesus' great sermon. *First*, we should note that he divides this chapter into several somewhat self-contained components. *Secondly*, we will see that this chapter does not seem to have an apparent "link" to chapters five or six. *Third*, similar to the second point, chapter seven does not appear to flow from chapter six with any clear sequence of thought. Across time, this apparent disjointing of chapter seven has led some teachers to indicate that it was actually *not* a part of the original sermon message of Christ. However, such a claim is reading too much into the text. There is nothing new about a sermon having multiple points of instruction within the message; even points that do not appear on the surface to be related.

John Stott identifies a "**connecting thread**" running through the message of chapter seven as one of a Christian's **relationships**. His contention is that even though these seven sections are seemingly "stand-alone" points, each convey a message of how believers are to relate to others in this world.¹ He contends that the seven sections represent a message to us in how we are to view our relationships with:

1. **To our brother:** v.1-5
2. **To a group designated as "dogs" and "pigs":** v.6
3. **To our heavenly Father:** v.7-11
4. **To everyone in general:** v.12
5. **To our fellow pilgrims:** v.13-14
6. **To false prophets:** v.15-20
7. **To Jesus our Lord:** v.21-27

This is actually an interesting way to look at these messages and with the exception of #5; I think this has merit as a general structure.

Donald Carson takes a slightly different approach to examining chapter seven. He separates the chapter into two large sections: v.1-11 then v.13-27.² The first section presents three specific dangers every believer will face. The second section represents specific alternatives which we much choose from. Connecting these two sections is v.12, the Golden Rule. At the end of these is v.28-29 which conclude the sermon and Matthew records the reaction of the people to the entire Sermon on the Mount.

As we dive into chapter seven, I will generally follow the flow of Carson, just as a matter of personal preference only. Both are examples of excellent biblical study and worthy of mention here.

Let's begin:

(Remember: Be on the look-out for key structure / form points that will help us break out the meaning of this text.)

Danger 1: Being Judgmental:

Matthew 7:1-5

Do you see any form / structure points in this passage??

Dangers 1 and 3 will exhibit a very similar pattern. Each of these contains the following elements:³

1. Principle
2. Theological Grounding for the principle
3. An Example

Look back to v.1-5 and tell me which are 1) the principle; 2) the theological grounds; and 3) the example.

1. The Principle – v.1:

A. What is the principle?

This one is pretty simple, the principle is to not judge others. We've heard this many times before. I want to review the grammar here. Note that this is a command to **NOT** do something. ***What is it??***

The command is to **NOT** judge others. I use the English Standard Version (ESV) translation. I generally find its New Testament translation preferable in rendering the Greek text. This is one example where I think it is a bit weak:

The command is like many we have seen thus far in the sermon. In the Greek it is μὴ κρίνετε (*meh krinete*) – “you do not judge”. In Greek this is a prohibition. More specifically it is an ***emphatic prohibition command*** which means Jesus is really emphasizing his message here. To literally translate the words μὴ κρίνετε would be something like: “***You, you do NOT judge!!!,,,***”.

- B. We need to talk about what Jesus means by instructing us not to judge. The root word here κρίνω can mean “***judge, decide, consider, discern***”. ***Which of these meanings do you think he is telling us that Christians are not to be discerning or use their judgment in situations?? If not,,, what then??***

“***You, you do NOT judge!!!,,,***” does **NOT** mean that we are to be an ***undiscerning*** people. First of all, in just a few verses Christ is going to challenge us to recognize “***the dogs and pigs***” (v.6). Additionally, in the latter half of this chapter we will be

confronted with the challenge of recognizing “*ferocious wolves*” (false prophets) in v.15.

- C. The context here is clear that we are not to develop a critical spirit that is judgmental / condemning of others. *Let’s talk about examples of the difference between being a properly discerning Christian vs. having a critical spirit and being judgmental of others.*

2. **The Theological Grounds – v.2:**

Christ moves next in v.2 to presenting the theological foundation of why we should not be judgmental people. Look again at the end of v.1 and combine it with v.2. *Tell me what you think Jesus is saying? What is the meaning here?*

It is very possible to interpret this passage in one of two ways:⁴

- A. The way in which we judge others will be the way in which others judge us.
- B. The measure or manner in which we judge others will be the manner in which God judges us.

These make for some interesting discussion. I would probably lean toward the second interpretation simply because I believe Jesus’ chief concern here in the sermon is more geared toward our relationship with God than how the world sees Christians.

Nonetheless, back to judgment, what is the message here regarding how we should act? Are we to “water down” our critical thinking / assessments of situations because of this command?

No! The point here is not that we should be moderate in our judgment in order that others will be moderate toward us. Instead, the message is that we should abolish those human judgmental attitudes we so often develop, lest we ourselves stand in such light before God.

3. **The Example – v.3-5:**

Don’t you love the way Jesus taught!! Dangers 1 and 3 are just classic in the way that he makes a point, backs it up or grounds it theologically, then gives us an example so that we can properly understand.

There is really nothing significant going on in v.3-5 in the Greek language; it is all pretty straight-forward and comes across into English rather well. *I would ask you to look at this example and tell me which relationships / which community is in view?*

The reference is clear: τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου (*of brother your*) makes it very clear that this example is between two brothers. Thus establishing that what is in view is most likely

within the Christian community. *How does this reading help us in regards to disputes / disagreements both within and outside of the Christian family??*

I personally do not see that it should make a great deal of difference. How we should treat a brother shouldn't be a great deal different than how we would treat a non-believer in many situations. Recall how Jesus defined “*,,,your neighbor,,,*” in Matthew 22.

Yet specifically within the context of this teaching, I would tend to look at this passage as Christ's teaching regarding how believers should relate to one another. We are going to see things differently at times. Perhaps these are theological differences, perhaps they are social context issues.

Regardless, Jesus is admonishing us not approach these differences with an overly critical / judgmental attitude. Recall 2 Samuel 12:1-7 and how David became so critical of the rich man over a single sheep when he had just committed adultery and stolen another man's wife then plotted to have the man killed to cover up his sin!

Danger 2: The Danger of Being Non-Discriminating: *Matthew 7:6*

The second danger is presented in a different format. Jesus does not break it out into the three sections as he does the first and third dangers. This is also a verse that I personally have struggled to understand over the years. There is a very strong message in this single verse. As such, it is important that we get to exactly what Jesus is saying here.

I used the word “discriminating” in my label of this danger. This is a highly charged word in American society. Let's take a moment and discuss this term and its application to this verse.

The term “discriminating” implies that one is doing the action of “discrimination”. So, when we look at my heading for this verse, it implies that there is a danger in “not discriminating”. Let's talk about this a moment. I would begin by defining the term “discriminate”. Here are two definitions which I think demonstrate what we need to see:

- a. **Discriminate:** “*To recognize a distinction*” or “*To differentiate*”.
- b. **Discriminate:** “*To make an unjust or prejudicial distinction in the treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, sex, religious beliefs, age, political view, etc. etc.*”

So, if we think that Jesus is actually instructing us to against the dangers of non-discrimination, then in what definition of discrimination do you believe is intended?

The first definition is most appropriate in this context. First of all, we have just covered Jesus' teaching regarding the concept of being overly critical of others as well as referencing his

affirmation of the Old Testament instruction regarding loving our neighbors in Matthew 22. As such the second definition is not appropriate.

Keeping all of this in mind, we must remember that God gave us a great mind to think with and help guide us. Additionally, believers have the guidance of the Holy Spirit moving upon our hearts to help us in the areas of difficult discernment. So, while the second definition of discrimination is most obviously outside the bounds of our Christian belief framework, we are required and expected to be people of discernment. We are never to be judgmental, just as the previous passage has informed us. However, there is also great danger in becoming wishy-washy!!⁵

So, let's look at the verse a bit deeper:

Once again Jesus is giving us a *negative instruction* for us not to give something to a certain group of individuals. *When you look at this verse, what do you see are the key interpretive points for us if we are going to properly understand what Jesus is instructing us on??*

If we want to truly understand the message here, it is imperative that we properly understand what Jesus means by the terms “*„what is holy,,*” and “*„your pearls,,*” and the collective group of “*dogs*” and “*pigs*”.

The first point we should make is an obvious one; the terms are being used metaphorically. Christ is not speaking literally; the reference to “*what is holy*” is perhaps the most literal of the four. Regardless, Jesus is using word pictures make his point. Therefore we have to view these terms through the lens of Scripture and the context of the times.

Let's begin with the first pair; “*what is holy*” and “*your pearls*”. *Give me your thoughts on what Jesus is referring to here.*

Let's take a look at Matthew 13:45-46 to deliver Jesus' meaning of "holy" and "pearls" in this context:

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

We do not “give” the kingdom of heaven to others that is for God to do when a person comes to faith in Jesus. However, we do share the good news of salvation offered to all by God through the actions of Jesus. When we share the gospel, we are sharing our “*pearl of great value*” or that which we have which “*is holy*”. Therefore, in this portion of the metaphor, Jesus is referring to the our sharing of the gospel message.

Let's move to the latter pair, "*dogs and pigs*". *Tell me some of the ways you have heard these terms interpreted.*

First we should understand the context of "*dogs and pigs*". These were among the most detestable things in 1st century Jewish society. We absolutely cannot view this reference through 21st century Gentile eyes. I love a good pulled pork sandwich!! Additionally, there are few things in this world that I love more than my family dog Mojo!! He is truly my companion. But this was not the case in their society. Dogs were not family pets. They were wild mongrel scavengers that lived off the scraps of society, much like coyotes of our time. Pigs, of course, represented an unclean animal. An animal that Gentiles loved and raised for food, but Jews would have absolutely nothing to do with!!

With this context in mind, we need to ascertain who Jesus was referring to with the reference to "*dogs and pigs*". Scholars vary, however the three most common interpretations are:

- a. Gentiles
- b. All unbelievers
- c. A certain sub-group of unbelievers

What are your thoughts and WHY??

As we noted, we MUST look through different eyes in order to understand this metaphorical reference. So, let's take these individually:

- a. Gentiles: *Who is Jesus speaking to in the Sermon on the Mount?? How would this impact the interpretation??*

He is speaking to Jews. Matthew even records Jesus referring to Gentiles as "dogs" in 15:26.⁶ As such some scholars have taught that in this particular setting the prohibition is directed toward Gentiles. *Your thoughts?? WHY??*

Recall how we identified "*what is holy*" and "*your pearls*". These are a reference to the gospel message of Christ. A simple reading of just the Great Commission reveals that Matthew's Gospel is noting that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be spread to all mankind. Therefore I do not think this interpretation of "*dogs and pigs*" is a metaphor for Gentiles.

- b. All Unbelievers: This one is a bit more cryptic and finds its roots in the second century. By this point the Early Church applied this passage as being supportive of exclusive access of believers to the Eucharist (Lord's Supper). Unbelievers were not allowed to participate or even observe this sacrament.⁷ *What are your thoughts here??*

In my analysis, there is just no tangible support for this position. First of all, such an interpretation *implies* that “*what is holy*” is the Lord’s Supper, not the saving message of the gospel. Such a view of the Lord’s Supper was never in view in Scripture. Secondly, such a view impedes evangelism and runs counter to the commission Christ has given us all. Every believer was at one time an unbeliever!!

- c. **A sub-set of Unbelievers:** Today the most common and most likely interpretation of “*dogs and pigs*” is that it refers to those unbelievers who are not simply unbelievers, but are people who are openly hostile to believers and the gospel message. This position interprets the “*dogs & pigs*” as representing people who have had ample and repeated opportunities to respond to the gospel. Yet they refuse and are even hostile to it. As such, Jesus is calling for a level of discriminate thought with regard to these people. **They have made up their mind**, and they want nothing more than to reject and ridicule our Lord.⁸ **With this comes a strong word of caution:** When the Holy Spirit moves you to share the gospel with someone, even the most harsh and hostile Christian critic, you **DO IT!!** God can soften the hardest of hearts. It is His work; we are only the messengers.....

Let’s close out this second danger with some general observations / cautions:⁹

- a. Never forget that what we have been given is the greatest gift ever!! It is both a pearl of great value and truly holy.
- b. Despite this great gift being given to us freely by God because of His great love for us, some people will choose to refuse the gift.
- c. Some, who choose to refuse, do not simply “refuse”, but they also choose to adopt a vicious, cynical, often intellectually arrogant attitude toward those who do believe.
- d. As Christians, we must always balance our command here in 7:6 with the expectation that we love everyone, even our enemies. Simply because we are not to cast our pearls before these people, does not mean that we are allowed to adopt their hostile positions.

Danger 3: The Persistence in Pursuing God:

Matthew 7:7-11

Recall that when we opened we said that the first and third dangers held to a specific pattern. What was that pattern??

Each of these contains a “principle”, a “theological grounds”, and an “example”.

- a. **Principle – v.7:** *What is the principle Jesus gives us here?*

Christ frames up three imperative commands in v.7 that go directly to the underlying principle. He is commanding us to “*ask*”, “*seek*” and “*knock*”. The **principle** of the message lies within the results of each command. When we *ask, seek, and knock* we will

receive a response. We shall be “*given to*”, we shall “*find*”, and doors shall “*be opened*”!! *To whom or to what are we to “ask”, “seek” and “knock”??*

The answer is obvious; it is our Lord to whom all of this attention is to be directed. *Does this imply in some way that God is just “sitting” around ready to wait on us like a servant waiting on a customer?*

Of course not!! That would be to totally reverse the relationship. It is we who serve Him. However, He is our Father, Creator, Sustainer, Healer, etc etc.... He loves us as we love our children, except His love is pure and without any taint of sin. Think for just a moment how this command ties in to the opening of the sermon with the first Beatitude of being “poor in spirit”. The commands of v.6 fit neatly within the concept of being totally dependent upon God for every aspect of our lives. The heart which is truly and totally dependent upon God for everything, (*poor in spirit*), is the heart that will earnestly *ask, seek, and knock.*

b. **The Theological Grounds – v.8:**

I labeled this section “Persistence in Pursuing God”. *Why do you think it is labeled this way??*

1. First of all, we should note that Jesus is using a three-fold statement to make his point. He is reiterating the behavior he expects of his followers in three common terms of “*ask*”, “*seek*”, and “*knock*”. As such there is an implied element of **persistence** within the commands.
2. Grammatically Matthew uses two devices in v.7-8 for us to understand a message of continual persistence.
 - **First**, in v.7 he uses three emphatic imperative commands back to back. This not only personalizes each command but the repetition conveys an idea of persistence. Jesus is driving his point deep by repetition.
 - **Secondly**, in v.8 Matthew takes each of these imperative commands and employs them as present participles. In the Greek language present participles carry the force of a “*continuous*” action. Therefore what we see are three continuous terms used back to back which clearly carries the notion of persistence.

Give me some examples of what this looks like in our lives?? What are some of the biggest challenges to this command for persistence in seeking God??

Perhaps the most obvious example is in the area of prayer. The most common method for us to “ask”, “seek” and “knock” is in our prayer life. I do believe that the application is broader than just prayer, but I think prayer is the most obvious example of this.

For me personally, my challenges in this area are in simply devoting enough time to prayer. Some might answer that their issue is in the area of hearing (or not hearing) God’s response to prayer. *(Let’s discuss some of these common hindrances and how to move beyond them.....)*

c. **The Example – 9-11:** *We’ve discussed form and structure many times thus far in our course. Reread v.9-11 and tell me what you see in this area.*

1. One more time we see the **familial relationship** in play. Just as before the term υἱός (*huios*) son or child is employed. We are all children of our earthly parents. In addition, most of us have children of our own. As such, we can all connect to this passage in a very personal way. Jesus is laying out that this same type of family love that we have for our children is exactly the same type of love that God has for us!! The only difference is that His love is one that is pure and holy, much beyond our love. Nonetheless, the main point is clear: We **ARE** His children.
2. **Contrasting statements:** Notice that in v.9-10 Jesus uses two very obvious contrasting statements as the heart of his example. No parent would ever consider giving their child a stone or a snake in the place of food.
3. Next, we see the faithfulness of God toward His children through the **lesser to greater** device of v.11. Basically, if imperfect humans, whose love is imperfect, would find the continual requests of their children of great importance to meet; “***how much more***” can we trust our perfect Father in heaven to respond to us!
4. There is one more grammatical element that I want to bring out to you. This one is a bit technical and focuses on the original Greek language of v.11. In English we are not able to recognize this. Verse 11 not only employs the lesser to greater style, but it does so through the use of a **1st Class Conditional Sentence**.

We refer to conditional sentences as “***if; then***” statements in English. This is exactly what they were in Greek. In Greek there were four classes of conditional sentences, (only three are seen in the New Testament). We can identify which class of sentence is in play by examining the conjunction and the verb tense of the protasis (dependent clause). When the conjunction εἰ is used with an indicative verb, then the “if;then” statement is in the 1st class form. First class conditional sentences are **statements of fact**. In this case we see εἰ (*if*) + οἴδατε (indicative verb for “*you know*”). Therefore this lesser to greater, conditional statement is a true and factual statement!!

So, I want to bring this back full circle and discuss **application / implications** of all of this. We said earlier that one of the key areas of implication here is in our **prayer life**. Let's return to that component and discuss it for just a moment. The subject of prayer gets some considerable discussion. Since this subject is very much in view with this passage I wanted to bring in some points that John Stott focuses on regarding prayer. He cites three common objections to prayer:¹⁰

- a. **Prayer is "unseemly":** *What does this mean? How could someone come to this conclusion?*

There are several components here. **First**, there is the implication that God either *needs to be told what we need*, or *that He needs to be coerced somehow into responding*. **Secondly**, there is the notion that *our problems are just too small to bother God with*. *Do you ever have one of these??*

I must be honest. I have often thought in this second example. Seriously, I was born in most affluent nation on earth. I was further blessed to be in a wonderful home with Christian parents, in a nation where I was free to worship as I chose, in a part of this nation that is filled with predominantly evangelical Christian values. The list goes on and on and on..... *How in the world could my problems ever compare with the Christians hiding and dying for their faith in China or Iran or similar places??*

This type of thinking simply misses the mark of *why* prayer is important. It is *for us!!* It is for the building of *our relationship* with God!!

- b. **Prayer is "unnecessary":** *Same questions as before: What is behind this type of thinking? Why is it wrong?*

Often we observe people getting along just fine without prayer. Crops grow without prayer. Doctors treat the sick successfully without prayer. Families survive financially without prayer. Our days have been defined and God's sovereign plan is in place, therefore my petitions are not needed..... *What are your thoughts here??*

Once again, this person is not considering the relational aspect of prayer. The true focus of our prayer life is not so that God can now be "informed" about things He did not previously know, and thus can now deal with them. The focus is so that we can build our

communication relationship with the Creator of the universe who desires to have a close, and personal relationship with each of us!!!

- c. **Prayer is "unproductive":** *One more time,, why would anyone come to this conclusion??*

This is sort of the "**opposite**" of the previous problem. In this case, many would argue that prayer is unproductive because so often it *goes unanswered*. We all know the answer to this: Our prayers are answered. However, sometimes we have difficulty with the answers. *Give me some reasons WHY we often struggle.*

1. Very often we the answer is not what we want to hear. Sometimes our loved ones die, or complete healing does not come. It is not that God did not answer our prayer, it is just that we didn't like the answer we got!!
2. Sometimes we simply do not "hear" Him answer. I often think about that old saying which applies here: "*Listen carefully; for God speaks softly and the world is loud.*"
3. Patience: God's timing is not our timing. Sometimes we pray, pray, pray for something and the answer never seems to come. Maybe we become indifferent or just think that God's answer was "no"..... Then after an extended period His answer comes. *Have you ever experienced this??*

I experienced just this example for the years I was in the seminaries. I was pretty sure I was not called to preach, but was definitely called to be in the seminary and more specifically called to study both of the subjects I pursued. But why? To what end? It took over seven years for that answer to come to me..... Many times I thought of quitting,,,

Have patience, be persistent. The late Henry Blackaby taught that when we sense a period of silence from God, this is not a time to "stop" and "wait" for a fresh word. We must stay focused on those things He has given us previously to do.

Literature Cited

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³ Carson. 104-9.

⁴ Carson. 107.

⁵ Carson. 112.

⁶ Hagner, Donald A. *Word biblical commentary: Matthew 1-13*. Vol. 33A. Texas: Word Inc., 1995, 171.

⁷ Hagner. 171.

⁸ Carson. 113.

⁹ Carson. 113-14.

¹⁰ Stott. 186-89.