

Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5-7



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Introduction

Goals for the Series

- Learn more about Jesus' fundamental teaching, the Sermon on the Mount
- For ourselves, to practically apply the basics
- For others, in evangelism and working with new Christians
- Deeply consider what it means to follow Christ

Basic Background on the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the foundation for the AA handbook, called the Big Book. The basic principles contained in the Big Book, and derived from the Sermon on the Mount, have positively affected countless lives.

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five major teaching blocks arranged by Matthew by revelation. As such, it has been considered to be Jesus' foundational teaching on what it means to be one of his followers. This should get our attention!

Finally, there are many views on how to read the Sermon on the Mount. Here are two major ones:

- The **Lutheran** view was to consider the Sermon on the Mount as an impossible standard, which should lead us to Christ and grace. This view would have much of what Jesus said categorized as "Law," as opposed to grace.
- This is contrasted with the view that the **Anabaptists** have held, which is that the Sermon on the Mount is directly applicable to Christians. Will we follow this standard perfectly? No! But, with God's help and the power of Christ within us, we become more Christ-like daily.

This series will follow the Anabaptist perspective that, with God's help, we can live the way He wants us to. All verses in the text are provided in the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Time Periods

When considering time periods, most of us have believed in administrations, what most scholars call dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism is the belief that we can divide the time periods of the Bible into distinct periods with different rules.

Major tenets of dispensationalism include:

- The idea that Israel and the Church always remain separate
- The promises to Israel remain to Israel
- The kingdom of heaven is different from the kingdom of God

I now believe that:

- Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promises to Israel
- The Church receives the blessings of those promises through him
- The kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are the same, and both refer to:
 - In fullness, the future paradise on Earth.
 - In part, God's will being done in the here and now.

From a practical perspective, the most important question that we must ask ourselves is: **are the Gospel accounts for us to apply directly as Christians?** I believe that the majority of what Jesus taught and lived is still directly applicable to Christians today.

Romans 15:4 “Learning” is the word *didaskalia*. In almost every other occurrence of this word, it is translated “doctrine.” Interestingly, from a historical perspective, it is almost entirely possible that none of the Gospels had been written at this point in history. So, the things that Paul was talking about as being written before—that is referring to the Old Testament.

II Timothy 3:16, 14-17 All Scripture is profitable for doctrine (*didaskalia*), reproof, and correction, for instruction in righteousness. In the context, the word “scripture” is referring to the Old Testament.

Acts 17:11 What were the Bereans fact-checking Paul with? They were fact-checking him with the Old Testament Scriptures!

There is only one occurrence of the word “scripture” in the entire Bible that refers to anything besides the Old Testament [II Peter 3:15-16].

Luke 24:25-27 Jesus explained his life, ministry, etc. from the Old Testament scriptures.

John 5:39 The scriptures contain life and testify of Jesus.

The Old Testament (or old covenant) is done away with. We should consider some of what Jesus did as pertaining to the old covenant. Here are some examples:

- Telling people to present themselves to the priests
- Making sacrifices in the Temple
- Water baptism
- Tithing

There are some things that change with Pentecost in a dramatic way. **But at the same time, are we to believe that Jesus' teachings were just applicable to the disciples during his earthly ministry, especially when God had those accounts written years after Pentecost?**

Here are some questions that I think will help us interpret and apply what is recorded in the Gospels:

- Is what Jesus is doing or teaching directly tied to legal observance or the Law?
- Are there any aspects of this record that are more applicable in the culture of Israel from Christ's time that the culture now (i.e.-leaving the gift at the altar is not something relevant to our culture directly)?
- If the answer to the previous two questions is, "No," is there any aspect of this record where practices have fundamentally changed since Pentecost (i.e.-water baptism)?
- How did the original audience apply Jesus' teaching? How can I apply this teaching in the post-Pentecost church?

The Importance of Jesus' Words

Luke 6:46-49

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?

Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

I Corinthians 3:11

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 6:68-69

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

I Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

John 12:44-50

And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment--what to say and what to speak.

John 12:44-50 Continued

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

John 15:4-11

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

John 8:31-32

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

1 Timothy 6:3-5

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Matthew 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Importance of the Heart

Proverbs 4:23 We are to guard our hearts. The phrase "keep our hearts with diligence" comes from a Hebrew phrase meaning to "keep captive the heart, as if in prison." We confine our hearts to the standard that God has given to us.

Deuteronomy 30:6 This is one of the great promises given to the people of Israel that is fulfilled by Christ and given to the Church [Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27].

Romans 2:29 Here is the fulfillment of the promise in Deuteronomy 30:6 [Colossians 2:11; Hebrews 10:16]

The Importance of the Heart Continued

Acts 2:37 Here is an example of the spirit influencing hearts through the spoken Word before the new birth [Romans 10:9-11]. We must be convinced in our hearts of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and we get there through believing (having faith) in the words of the gospel.

Acts 5:3 Here is an example where evil spirits influenced the hearts of those who were saved—this shows us the importance of guarding our hearts.

Psalms 51:10 This is David pouring out his heart before God; we too can ask God to continue renewing our hearts and to help us be better for Him.

What we are going to learn in this series is that Jesus taught to help people understand the need for heart change, and we will see that he taught that because heart change is the only way to really see true change in our lives.

If you still believe that the Gospels are “for our learning,” if you still consider yourself to be a dispensationalist, if you are still skeptical about all this concern over time periods, I believe that you will still find a lot of value in the series. Take time with God during this series; ask Him to reveal more to you about how to understand and apply this vital teaching of Jesus in our lives.

The Beatitudes – Matthew 5:1-20

The Beatitudes

The name “Beatitudes” comes from the Latin Vulgate, where each statement starts with beati (blessed, happy). The Latin noun beātītūdō was coined by Marcus Tullius Cicero to describe a state of blessedness, and was later incorporated within the chapter headings written for Matthew 5 in various printed versions of the Vulgate.

Four of the Beatitudes, along with 4 accompanying “woes” are covered in The Sermon on the Plain [Luke 6:20-26].

Matthew 5:3 – Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Poor in spirit is a humility toward God. It is a recognition of our need for and dependence on God. It is not about talking about being without money, though there are many other warnings in the Bible about being rich [Proverbs 28:20; Matthew 19:23-24; Luke 12:16-21; I Timothy 6:9,17; James 1:11].

Ephesians 2:12

remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Throughout the bible it was the humble, not the overconfident and prideful, that God chose to do great things: Moses [Exodus 3-4], Gideon [Judges 6-8], David [I Samuel 16].

Matthew 18:1-4 Jesus says that we need to be like children (infants). Small children know they need their parents. That is how we are to be with God.

I Peter 5:5-6

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

James 4:6-7

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

We are to clothe ourselves with humility because God opposes the proud [Proverbs 3:34].

Proverbs 15:25

The LORD tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries.

Proverbs 16:5-6

Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.

Proverbs 22:4

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.

There is always a temptation to get egotistical as we start to have success in any category. But we must remain humble and recognize that us using the abilities and gifts God gave us is not a show of our own greatness, but a reflection of what God has done for us. Those who walk in genuine humility are a glory to God.

For further study: word study on “proud” and “haughty.”

Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are Those Who Mourn

This is mourning sin. Not mourning the consequences of sin, but having a heart that breaks for sinning against God. A heart that yearns to put God first and follow him.

II Corinthians 7:10

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

James 4:8-10

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Further Study: David’s sin and response to God [II Samuel 11-12; Psalm 51]

Matthew 5:5 – Blessed are the Meek

A quote of Psalm 37:11. It is the meek that will inherit the earth. This is a reference to the coming kingdom, to salvation. A meek person seeks to understand. They don’t quickly react or jump to conclusions. They consider what is being said. This applies to hearing doctrine as well as interpersonal relationships.

“A meek person wants to understand more than they want to be understood.” - Vince Finnegan

Colossians 3:12

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

Matthew 5:6 – Blessed are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

We are to crave the things of God. Our desire and focus is God and His righteousness. Those who seek God will be filled and satisfied.

Psalm 42:1-2

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Jeremiah 15:16

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.

Jeremiah 20:9

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

We are to pursue living righteously. We are to crave the things of God like a starving person.

Matthew 5:7 – Blessed are the Merciful

We are to forgive like God forgives. He forgave us even though we are completely undeserving. What we have been forgiven for is far greater than anything we could have to forgive.

Matthew 18:21-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 5:8 – Blessed are the Pure in Heart

Lacking deceit, falsehood.

Probably from:

Psalm 24:3-5

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

The context there is having a pure heart in the sense of not having a divided heart, divided loyalty, but seeking God alone without falsehood.

Matthew 6:24 We can't serve two masters.

We have to clean up our inside.

Matthew 23:25-26

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

1 John 2:15

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

James 1:7-8

For that person [who doubts God] must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James 4:8

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Matthew 5:9 – Blessed are the Peacemakers

We are to work at living peaceably with everyone. We can pursue peace in every interaction. We can have the soft answer that turns away wrath [Proverbs 15:1].

Romans 12:14

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Romans 12:18

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Romans 14:19

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

I Peter 3:15-16

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Matt. 5:10 – Blessed are Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

When we are living rightly, there will be persecution. We don't face the same type of persecution that early Christians did, and that has led to a great deal of spiritual lethargy and self-deception.

Before Constantine, Christians in the Roman Empire faced great persecution. It was hard to be a Christian. After Constantine, it was hard not to be a Christian. Things shifted and God was an excuse to conquer and kill. The lack of persecution didn't result in a golden age of Christianity. It resulted in a twisting and subversion of the teachings of Christ, the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, and the collapse of the Roman Empire. I'm thankful that we don't face life-threatening persecution in our day, but we have to be on the lookout. If we are not facing any persecution, then we probably aren't speaking the gospel enough or taking a stand on what Christ has directed us to do.

Luke 6:22-23, 26

Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

I Peter 2:18-24

When we suffer for doing the right thing we are to rejoice, because we are glorifying God and following in Christ's steps.

Paul certainly faced a huge amount of persecution, yet he rejoiced in it. When Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in prison, they sang praises to God and ultimately saved the jailer and his family [Acts 16:16-34]. They were joyful because they knew they were doing what God wanted them to do, and

being joyful led to them taking God's purposes even further. Their lives were a glory to God and a reflection of the life of Christ.

Despite the enormous amount of trials and persecution that Paul endured he considered this life a "light momentary affliction" [II Corinthians 4:17]. His perspective and heart was in the right place. He kept his eyes on the hope, the coming kingdom, and pursued it relentlessly.

II Timothy 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

II Corinthians 12:10

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Romans 8:35 Persecution can't separate us from God's love and our place in his plan.

Other examples: Jeremiah, Elijah

Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13 We are the salt of the earth. Salt in bible times was not the refined table salt we have now. It would have been closer to the Himalayan sea salt, which has other minerals in it. It was possible, especially if it got wet, for the salt to lose its saltiness and be left with mostly the other minerals.

Most scholars agree that this metaphor emphasizes the preservative and cleansing quality of salt. According to Levitical law, every sacrifice offered was to be salted [Leviticus 2:13]. Christians, those living according the previous beatitudes are a preservative for the world. We prevent rot, we offer a gospel that can cleanse a person's life. If we stop living according to Christ's teaching, we start to lose our preservative qualities and can become useless as far as accomplishing God's purposes.

Matthew 5:14 We are the light of the world. We are to remain high and shining. Our example of conduct is a glory to God. That is how we should see our lives. We live for God so that we can be a glory to Him, not just for the benefits derived from it.

Matthew 5:15 Our motivation is to glorify God, not to get praise for ourselves. God is concerned with why we do things, not just that we do them.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

More on good works: Titus 2:7,14; Titus 3:8,14; Hebrews 10:24

Christ Came to Fulfill

Matthew 5:17 Law (torah) and Prophets refers to the whole Old Testament.

Matthew 5:18 iota is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet. Could also refer to the yodh, the 10th and smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (not much bigger than an apostrophe/tilde).

Jesus emphasizes that he will fulfill the law, not abolish it. He is demanding a heart change and actually increasing what we are to do as we'll see next time. Paul makes a similar point in Galatians 5:14-26. If we are living love the way Jesus taught it we are fulfilling the law.

Matthew 5:19-20 What this clearly shows is the importance of doing what is taught here. If Christ is our Lord, we have to take his words seriously. We've certainly seen that the apostles did. It also shows that following the physical acts of the law without changing our heart is not sufficient. That is how the scribes and Pharisees lived. We don't want to copy their mistakes.

John 8:31-32

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

You Have Heard, I Say to You – Matthew 5:21-48

The previous section ended with Jesus saying that he came to fulfill, not abolish the law. In this section our Lord goes on to show how to correctly interpret some sections of the law. This section is sometimes referred to as “the six antitheses.”

Throughout this section we see Jesus taking commandments that Israel was familiar with from the Old Testament and strengthening them by enforcing not just the boundary of the law, but the heart behind it. He is seeking to change people’s hearts, to have them circumcise their hearts. Jesus wants us to not just seek to follow the rules, but to pursue the intent with which they were given. To follow in Jesus’ steps as his disciple is not an easy thing. But doing so has enormous benefits to us now and in the coming kingdom.

Matthew 5:21-26 – You Shall Not Murder → Don’t Be Angry With Your Brother

Original commandments found in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17.

Jesus consistently raises the bar. If we are not even angry with our brother, there’s no way we’ll get to the point of murder. If you stay far away from the cliff you’re never in danger of falling off. There are many warnings in the bible about anger.

Proverbs 29:22

A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

II Corinthians 12:20 Anger and quarreling are in the list of concerns that Paul has for the Corinthian church.

Galatians 5:20 Anger is in the list of "the works of the flesh," qualities of people that will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 4:31

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Colossians 3:8-9

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

James 1:19-21

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

In Matthew 5:23 there are two sides to this statement. Part of being reconciled with God and offering Him our praise and worship is to be reconciled with our brothers and sisters. Strife and anger between

members of the body can interfere with our relationship with God. Remember from the last section that we are to be peacemakers. We have to actively seek to stay on good terms with our brothers and sisters. That may mean proactively apologizing for something that could potentially be a problem. The second thing we can glean is that we are to drop what we are doing, no matter how important, to reconcile with a brother or sister in Christ.

The CSB Study Bible puts it this way:

“Speaking to the context of his day, Jesus said disciples should seek reconciliation even if it meant halting in the middle of offering sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple. This interruption was significant because since Jesus’ original audience (located away from Jerusalem) would have to abandon their gift at the altar, travel for days to reach Galilee and seek reconciliation, then return to Jerusalem to complete the sacrifice. Such is the priority of reconciliation.”

In Matthew 5:25 Jesus discusses lawsuits among his disciples. Paul also talks about not taking lawsuits against a brother in Christ to a secular court [I Corinthians Ch. 6]. We are to reconcile with our brother. That is part of reconciling with God.

I Corinthians 6:1

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

Matthew 5:27 – You Shall Not Commit Adultery → Don’t Look at a Woman Lustfully

Original commandments found in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18.

Again, Jesus is addressing the heart. And we know God is the searcher of hearts [Jeremiah 17:10]. If our hearts aren’t looking lustfully at another person, we never come close to adultery. Sin starts in the mind.

Even the Old Testament addresses the heart on this topic. Every lustful thought is not adultery, but illicit sexual desire is. The law prohibits both the act of adultery and adulterous desires.

Exodus 20:17

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Psalms 19:14

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Matthew 5:29 – Pluck Out Your Eye

Jesus is using very strong language (hyperbole) to get our attention here. We obviously shouldn’t mutilate ourselves thinking it will solve sin issues. The point is we have to take sin seriously. It’s better to remove something important now than to find we’ve lost it all when Christ returns.

Mark 8:36

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

The eye is what allows us to see and therefore lust for something. The hand represents physical actions. The right was considered better and more important than the left.

James 1:14-15

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Sin often looks beneficial or seems harmless, but the end of it is death. If we let little sins fester it slowly hardens our hearts so that bigger sins start to seem acceptable. We must vigilantly remove it from our lives. God helps us do this as we pursue Him. We need Him and we need each other.

Romans 6:20-23

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The two roads are to serve sin or to serve God. As we'll see later in this series, the road to serving sin has a lot more traffic lanes. It's also important to point out that we are responsible for the sin in our own lives. There are times when we need to help others overcome theirs, but we are to police ourselves.

I Corinthians 10:12

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Paul references the Old Testament. Israel was shown miracle after miracle. God proved his power and faithfulness over and over, yet most of Israel still rejected Him. We can't coast spiritually.

Hebrews 3:12

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

I John 1:8

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We must remain on the lookout and examine ourselves against the word of God to keep on track. When we stare at the world too long we'll start to think that is normal and acceptable.

Matthew 5:31 – Whoever Divorces, Issue a Certificate → Only Divorce Due to Sexual Immorality

Original commandment found in Deuteronomy 24:1.

God's original intent was for a man and woman to marry and be faithful to each other for life. It was only because of man's hard-heartedness that the provision for divorce was given to Moses.

By Jesus' time, some Rabbis had given such trivial reasons as a wife's burning of food or fading beauty as legitimate grounds for divorce. Jesus firmly rejects this. He is saying that those who divorce for frivolous reasons (not sexual immorality) and remarry are committing adultery.

Paul reiterates Jesus' command in I Corinthians 7:10-16, where he follows it with additional revelation for more specific situations.

I Corinthians 7:10-11

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband

(but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

Jesus expounds on this when being tested by the Pharisees in Mark 10:2-10, saying that God, by way of Moses, added the amendment for divorce because of the Israelites' hardness of heart.

We live in a very individualistic society and it is destroying marriage. Now when things aren't the best for me, society says to get out. A "no fault" divorce is the most common type in America. Marriage is a covenant, and that covenant is to be held above the individuals. When the husband and wife pursue God's love toward each other that covenant is a blessing to them and their children.

Throughout the Old Testament marriage is shown as a reflection of the covenant between God and His people. Idolatry is frequently denounced as adultery against God.

Matthew 5:33 – Perform What You Have Vowed to God → Don't Make Vows

Original commandments found in Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21.

Simply mean what you say and say what you mean. Have such integrity that vows aren't necessary. The words of a person have become so meaningless that we have to make elaborate vows to show we are telling the truth ("I swear to God," "I swear on my mother's grave"). Even simple agreements now require legal contracts.

Some scholars think that the practice of using seemingly important things (heaven, Jerusalem, the temple, your own head) as the object of a vow was used to make false vows that they would not uphold later. This was used to cheat people. Jesus accuses the Pharisees of this practice in Matthew 23:16-22.

Matthew 5:37 CSB

But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one.

The adversary is the father of lies and deceit [John 8:44]. We don't want any part in that. God doesn't make a distinction between lies and "little white lies." We pursue righteousness.

Matthew 5:38 – An Eye for an Eye, a Tooth for a Tooth → Don't Resist Evil (Don't Repay Evil)

Original commandments found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21.

The original commandment was intended to enforce a policy where the punishment fit the crime. It applied to civil authorities (courts), and not individuals.

Many over the centuries have taken this verse to mean complete non-resistance. However, if we look at the scope of the bible, we see this can't be the case. Jesus himself resisted evil at every turn. He was not shy about confronting wrong where he saw it. Therefore, we must take this another way. We are not to repay evil with evil. We do not seek vengeance [Romans 12:19, Proverbs 20:22], but pursue forgiveness [Ephesians 4:32].

Resist - anthistēmi - to stand against, withstand, set oneself against. Commonly used of warfare when opposing armies would array themselves in ranks opposite the other army.

Jesus is not saying be a pushover when faced with evil. He is saying don't repay evil or be vengeful and vindictive.

1 Peter 3:9

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Romans 12:17-21

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

"Don't fight fire with fire, fight fire with water." - Sean Finnegan

Matthew 5:39b. – If Slapped on the Right Cheek, Turn and Give Left

The Bible scholar Walter Wink has done some great work on this section which he calls Jesus' Third Way (not cowardly submission or violent retaliation). To hit someone on their right cheek the standard way requires your left hand. In Hebrew culture, the left hand could only be used for unclean tasks. This means the only way to hit the right cheek would be a backhand, which was used to insult, humiliate, degrade, or show dominance. Jesus' instruction to turn the cheek then forces the aggressor to hit with the right fist. This does mean you could get hit again, but if you are it forces the aggressor to treat you as an equal.

Keep in mind that many if not most of the people Jesus is speaking to are slaves or at least low in economic status. This behavior could easily result in getting whipped, but it doesn't allow the master to cow you.

Matthew 5:40 – If Sued for Your Tunic, Give Him the Cloak as Well

Giving your tunic and cloak would leave you naked. The interesting thing is that in Hebrew culture, the shame for nakedness was less on the one that was naked and more on the one that witnessed or caused it. Being naked in court would bring great shame on the one suing you.

In the time of Jesus, indebtedness was a huge epidemic. The heavy imperial Roman taxes on the wealthy plus the taxes from Herod Antipas to pay Roman tribute meant the wealthy tried to find ways to hide their wealth. Land was a great way to do that. To do that they continued to tax land owners until they were so far in debt they became indentured laborers or tenant farmers. In this climate, suing for a cloak was often all that was possible, though they had to give it back at night [Deuteronomy 24:10-13].

Stripping naked in court could quite surprisingly bring more dignity to the poor by unmasking the oppressive charade of justice.

Matthew 5:41 – If Forced to Go a Mile, Go Two Miles

This refers to the Roman practice that allowed a Roman soldier to impress any subject person into service for up to 1 mile. Most notably we see this happen to Simon of Cyrene when he is forced to carry Jesus' cross [Mark 15:21]. A soldier's pack was often 60-85 pounds, not including weapons and armor. Officers could often afford slaves or pack animals to transport their belongings. However the common soldier often depended on compelling a passerby to carry it for them.

The interesting thing here is that going the second mile was a military infraction. Typically minor infractions were left up the centurion to decide punishment. It could be anything based on their whim. When the person decides to go the second mile, the tables completely turn. Now the soldier is surprised, then anxious. He could be punished and he doesn't know how severe it will be.

Matthew 5:42 – Give to Those Who Want to Borrow

In the immediate context this probably was in reference to an enemy or someone opposed to you. We aren't to withhold what is needful out of spite or retaliation. If that is true for enemies, then how much more for others. If at all possible, give instead of lend. Much division and strife can come from debts between friends and acquaintances. We are to do our best to help those in need and expect nothing in return.

Luke 6:30

Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.

Matthew 5:43 – Love Your Neighbor, Hate Your Enemy → Love Your Enemies, Pray For Those Who Persecute You

The original commandment in Leviticus 19:18 is a command to love your own countrymen. Jesus adds to this and says not just to love your neighbor, but also your enemies. "Hate your enemy" is the first statement not from the Old Testament that Jesus disputes. It must have been a common saying of the time.

Matthew 5:45 Loving your enemies does not make us children of God, only faith in Christ accomplishes that. However, displaying the kind of love Jesus commands here shows our “family resemblance” with God and our brother Jesus Christ. It is a sign of what is going on in the inside.

Matthew 5:46-47 If we only love those who love us, big deal. Even the worst of people do that. To love like Christ loved is to be kind to, support, and help those we don’t know or even those that we dislike. Behavior like that opens up the door for God to work in those people’s hearts and turn them from darkness to light.

Luke 10:25-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Matthew 5:48 – Be Perfect as Your Heavenly Father is Perfect

That is our standard and aim. Ultimately, we are trying to emulate our Father in heaven. And based on Jesus’ teachings, radical love is the primary way in which we emulate our Father, who is gracious even to the ungrateful and evil [Luke 6:35]. Jesus Christ is our prime example, as he is the only one who did it perfectly. Jesus is the pinnacle of what God can do with someone who comes to him with a heart of complete meekness.

What can God do with you?

Living Righteously – Matthew 6:1-18

In the next section of the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 6:1-18], Jesus teaches 3 major points

- Avoiding hypocrisy
- How to pray (Lord's Prayer)
- Forgiveness

Matthew 6:1-4, 16-18 – Avoiding Hypocrisy

To be able to avoid something you must first understand what you need to avoid. Merriam-Webster defines hypocrisy:

“A feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not: behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel; especially: the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion.”

The Greek word translated hypocrite in Matthew chapter 6 can be better understood as someone who is an actor or pretender.

For example, think about movie actors. The actor will put on a face that shows they are sad, but they are not really sad. They are pretending to be sad to play the part. Movie bloopers show us that the actor can go from trying to be serious to breaking out laughing the next second from the face they made or tone of voice they used. It is all FAKE; nothing they do is real! The whole purpose is to make someone who sees them think that it is genuine.

Matthew 6:1

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

“Beware” indicates that God is warning us about something to avoid. What are we to watch out for? “Practicing our righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.” The problem is not practicing our righteousness where others can see us. God is not telling us to make sure you are always inside with curtains drawn when we act in accordance with God's Word. The point God is making is not to do it with the purpose to *be seen by them*.

Bottom line: God does not want us to follow His commandments because it will make others think we are so great. He wants us to do it out of love and respect for Him regardless if others are around or not. “They have received their reward” which is of men and is fleeting compared to eternal rewards from God.

Many of the Pharisees thought they were genuinely righteous and doing God's will. The problem is that they got so caught up in the legalistic observance of the law and additional oral tradition that they started to look down on those that fell short of those things. They were so busy feeling superior that they lost the heart that God has for His people and neglected the commandments to love. We have to watch out for the same thing. If we get to a point where we think we know it all and have everything figured out, we're in trouble. That's a good sign that we've lost our humility and meekness.

In our day, Pharisee is basically synonymous with hypocrite, but in Jesus' time, they were highly regarded and looked up to. It's easy to point to them and say, "look how you screwed up." But we have to watch out that we don't do the same thing.

Matthew 6:2

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

In this verse giving to the needy is an example of righteousness in which the hypocrites would sound trumpets solely for the purpose of everyone looking and seeing how "righteous" they seemed to be. God wants us to give because it is a good work, not because it will give us a good name.

Matthew 6:3

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

- The right hand is the hand of blessing and this phrase may allude to the placing of the Corban (poor man's box/chest) on the right hand side. Thus, when giving at the temple the people would be on the left-hand side of the person giving. We are to not let those standing on the left hand side (very near us) know what we give.
- We must not observe it too much ourselves. The left hand is a part of ourselves; we must not within ourselves take notice too much of the good we do, must not applaud and admire ourselves. This can lead to us thinking we are better than those around and having a prideful spirit [James 4:6, 10].

Matthew 6:4

so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This verse further clarifies and corroborates verse 3. Giving is to be intimate between us and God. Others do not need to know how much we give and we ourselves do not need to measure how much we give in comparison to others. We are to give what we are happy to give.

Christ warned the disciples [Luke 12:1], "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Leaven spreads subtly and pervasively, until the whole lump of dough is affected. So does hypocrisy.

If you've ever been deceived by a con artist, you know that the reason he got your money is that you didn't know at the time that you were being deceived. If you had known, you wouldn't have let him get your money.

Hypocrites often don't get into hypocrisy deliberately by thinking, "I'd like to bring God's judgment down on myself by being a hypocrite. That sounds like the way to go!" Rather, due to pride, they think, "I want people to respect me. If they knew what I was really like, they wouldn't respect me." So we think we need to keep up a "better" front. So we try to impress others, forgetting that God examines the heart and knows everything. You cannot hide anything from God!

Matthew 6:16-18

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

Matthew 6:16-18 Continued

that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This passage is similar to verse 2 with giving with the needy except here fasting is the example. The hypocrite would purposefully disfigure their face so everyone who sees them knows they are fasting. Again their reward is of men and nothing will come from God.

Mark 7: 6-8

And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

Matthew 23:27-28

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Epistle references to avoiding hypocrisy, in the context of love:

Romans 12:9

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

I Timothy 1:5

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

I Peter 1:22-23

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

I Peter 2:1

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Further Study of Strong’s G505 & G5272

II Corinthians 6:6 II Timothy 1:5 James 3:17 Galatians 2:13 I Timothy 4:2 I Corinthians 13

Matthew 6:5-8 – How to Pray

Matthew 6:5-6

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

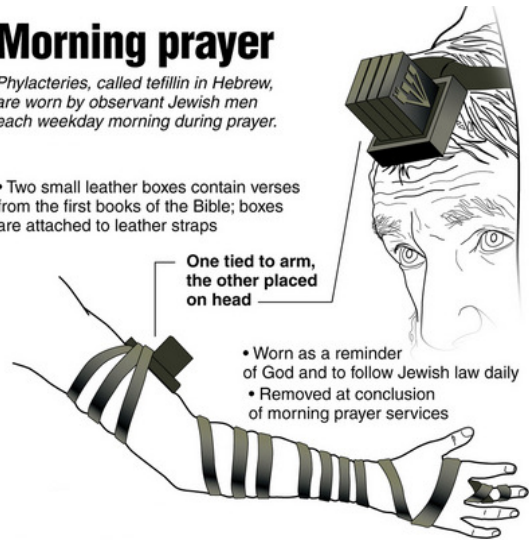
But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In these verses Jesus warned against praying with vain glory. Following Jewish tradition, phylacteries were worn during the Morning Prayer [Deuteronomy 11:18]. The hypocrites would follow the tradition saying they are doing the will of God, yet would make sure they were seen wearing the phylacteries [Matthew 23:5]. By choosing the street corner it was a strategic choice as they were not only within view of both streets, but every passenger turning close upon them would observe them, and hear what they said. “They have received their reward” which is again of men and is fleeting compared to eternal rewards from God.

Morning prayer

Phylacteries, called tefillin in Hebrew, are worn by observant Jewish men each weekday morning during prayer.

- Two small leather boxes contain verses from the first books of the Bible; boxes are attached to leather straps



One tied to arm, the other placed on head

- Worn as a reminder of God and to follow Jewish law daily
- Removed at conclusion of morning prayer services

Their pride was expressed in two things:

- They love to pray there. They did not love prayer for its own sake, but they loved it when it gave them an opportunity of making themselves noticed.
- It is that they may be seen of men; not that God might accept them, but that men might admire and applaud them.

What is the will of Jesus Christ in opposition to this? Humility and sincerity are the two great lessons that Christ teaches us. Privacy is required for personal prayer. Isaac went into the field [Genesis 24:63], Christ to a mountain [Matthew 14:23], Peter to a housetop [Acts 10:9]. Personal prayer is to be unobserved so as to avoid ostentation, to avoid distraction, and to enjoy greater freedom. Even if men do not see us, the Father still sees us in secret and will reward us.

Matthew 6:7-8

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

In these verses Jesus warned against praying with vain repetition. It is not all repetition in prayer that is condemned, but vain repetitions. Christ himself prayed, saying the same words [Matthew 26:44]; as did Paul for different churches for wanting to visit [Romans 1:10-11; I Thessalonians 3:10]. Vain repetition is idle babbling the same words again and again to no purpose. It is without regard to the sense of them; just our lips moving. There is no magic number for prayers. For example, if you think that if you pray 100 times for something that it will come to pass, you might as well say it as fast as possible to get to 100, and then it will be done. The Gentiles used many words (long prayers) either out of pride or superstition, or an opinion that God needs either to be informed or argued with by us, and because men love to hear themselves talk. This is not to say that all long prayers are forbidden; Christ prayed all night [Luke 6:12].

Solomon, with all his wisdom, tells us to use few words [Ecclesiastes 5:2]. To be thoughtful in what we pray for and not just uttering whatever comes to mind. “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him;” therefore, there is no occasion for such abundance of words. It does not follow that we need not pray; for God requires us by our freewill to pray for our need of him and dependence on him.

Children do not make long speeches to their parents when they want something; it is enough to say, “my head, my head.” Let us come to Him with the disposition of children; with love, reverence, and dependence. He is a Father that knows our situation and knows our wants better than we do ourselves. We are not to prescribe, but subscribe to God!

Matthew 6:9-13 – The Lord’s Prayer

Some manuscripts add “For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen” to the end of verse 13. This last sentence is referred to as the Doxology, and is often added to the end of biblical text and psalms.

A Doxology is an expression of praise to God, especially a short hymn sung as part of a Christian worship service. The word doxology comes from the Greek *doxa* (“glory, splendor, grandeur”), and *logos* (“word” or “speaking”). Most doxologies are short hymns of praise to God in various Christian worship services, often added to the end of chants, psalms, and hymns.

This doxology in Matthew 6 is not contained in Luke's paralleled version [Luke 11:2-4], nor is it present in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew (Sinaiticus & Vaticanus, both from the 4th century), which is to say that it is very likely that Jesus never said this phrase. There are at least ten different versions of the doxology in early manuscripts of Matthew before it became standardized to the one version some still retain today.

Scholars believe the Matthew 6 Doxology to be based on a verse from I Chronicles:

I Chronicles 29:11

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.

The Lord’s Prayer should be understood as an example, a model, of how to pray. It gives us the “ingredients” that should go into a prayer. It is not magic words. The Lord’s Prayer takes approximately 20 seconds to say; emphasizing the brevity of most prayers, while still having thought put into it.

Some scholars break it into three parts:

- The Preface (v. 9 & 10)
- The Petitions (v. 11-13)
- The Conclusion (v. 13 Doxology)

Prayer (Outline)

- Our Father in heaven
 - Into – Prayer to God, our Father – Concerned for us [Ephesians 1:3-6]
- Hallowed be your name
 - Start with Praise to God – All glory is given to God
 - Hallowed – Not just meaning to praise as holy, but “to make holy”
- Your Kingdom come
 - Coming no matter what – no worries – hope

Prayer (Outline) Continued

- Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven
 - Help us follow Your statutes and after our brother, Jesus Christ
- Give us this day our daily bread
 - Daily needs – not just food, material/spiritual
 - The original Greek Bible has the Imperative of Entreaty expressed in all of these petitions; in other words, the word please is implied. "Give us" expresses in communion with our brethren our loyal trust in our heavenly Father and the covenant between the Father and all men. The Greek word “epiousios” translated "daily" appears only in the Lord's Prayer and can be better understood as “super essential” or “necessity”.
- And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors
 - Forgiveness – We know we are not perfect and will need forgiveness – help us forgive others also
- And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
 - Keep us from temptation and evil
 - These related petitions are nearly identical. The first part asks God not to allow us to take the path that leads to sin. God does not tempt anybody (James 1:13). This petition asks God for discernment and strength in the battle between flesh and spirit; for we do not have the strength to do it alone.
- End with Praise to God
 - Added in some manuscripts – always good to give God the praise in glory

Matthew 6:14-15 – Forgiveness

Luke's gospel has a series of five forgiveness parables:

- The barren fig tree [Luke 13:6-9]
- The bent over woman [Luke 13:10-13]
- The lost sheep [Luke 15:4-7]
- The lost coin [Luke 15:8-10]
- The prodigal son [Luke 15:11-32]

Even more compelling is the way that Jesus forgave those who sinned against him directly. For Jesus, forgiveness was not an automatic thing—it was intentional, a conscious choice. After the Roman soldiers had scourged and nailed him, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them” [Luke 23:34].

Forgiving has been a cornerstone of the Christian faith. Jesus taught his apostles and disciples and in turn they taught forgiveness to anyone who would listen. Paul especially followed in Jesus' footsteps and taught about forgiveness.

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.

Colossians 3:12-14 Continued

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Forgiveness is something all of us want to receive but most of us hesitate to give. Jesus makes it clear, however, that we can't have it without giving it. If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins [Matthew 6:14-15]. These words allow no room for doubt or discussion. Forgiveness flows two ways. We cannot separate receiving forgiveness from extending forgiveness.

Forgiveness cannot begin until we admit our own failures. If we cannot do that much, we can neither give nor receive forgiveness. We cannot receive forgiveness without acknowledging our need for it, and we cannot extend forgiveness without admitting that because of our own imperfect condition we have no right to withhold forgiveness from anyone else. For Christians, forgiveness is nonnegotiable; it is the very essence of our faith.

Acts 7:59-60

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

What Forgiveness is NOT

It is NOT Condoning the Behavior. Once we understand that the act of forgiving does not compromise our moral standard by condoning the offense, we are in a position to forgive even the worst of sins. To forgive is not saying, "What you did is okay." It is saying, "The consequences of your behavior belong to God, not to me." When we forgive, we transfer the person from our system of justice to God's. To forgive is to recognize that the wrong done against us is a debt of sin, and all sin is against God. Therefore, in forgiving, we transfer the debt from our ledger of accounts to God's, leaving all recompense in his hands.

It is NOT Restoring Trust in the Person. Trust is earned. It is something we give to those who deserve it. To blindly trust someone who has hurt us is naïve and irresponsible. If a person is a thief, it is foolish to give her a key to your house. We can forgive people from the wrong they've done without extending to them an open invitation to do it again. It is foolish to trust an untrustworthy person.

It is NOT Agreeing to Reconcile. Forgiveness is a necessary step toward reconciliation, but reconciliation is not necessarily the goal of forgiveness. In fact, there are some situations when reconciliation is not a good idea. It is silly, if not dangerous, to press for reconciliation when the other person is unrepentant, unchanging, or unwilling.

It is NOT Doing the Person a Favor. In Judaism, forgiveness is not required unless repentance is demonstrated and pardon is sought. But Jesus raised the standard of forgiveness to a higher level. Jesus and his followers taught that we are to forgive even those who remain unrepentant. Forgiveness benefits the giver at least as much as the receiver, so we extend it whether or not the person asks for it.

It is NOT Easy. Forgiving is difficult enough when it involves a one-time transgression. It verges on the impossible when the offense is ongoing. Such circumstances require an attitude of forgiveness, not simply an act of forgiveness. When Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive, Jesus gave this response:

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Jesus is asking us to do something that to our five senses seems impossible. In and of ourselves we don't have enough forgiveness to go around. But God does. So when we are at our limit and think we cannot forgive someone any longer, we can ask Him to forgive others through us. We ask God to give us the strength to keep going. In so doing, we take one more step of obedience and allow ourselves to become a conduit of God's grace.

Treasure in Heaven – Matthew 6:19-34

Last time we examined our heart with regards to giving, praying, forgiving, and fasting. In this section Jesus dives into where we store our treasure, where the focus of our life and actions reside.

Two main choices are given:

- We must choose a master, either God or wealth (the world).
- We must choose our perspective and thought life, either faith and trust in God or anxious worry about the future.

Matthew 6:19-21

Two possibilities are given for where we keep our treasure: on earth or in heaven. Our treasure is not to be in earthly things. Those things can be stolen, decay, or be destroyed. We are to play the long game and store up our treasure in heaven with God, awaiting the immeasurable blessings in His coming kingdom.

Heaven is a flexible word in the Bible and appears nearly 700 times. It has at least 4 different main usages. Heaven can refer to:

- The sky, or the atmosphere of the earth [Genesis 1:20, 2:19; Deuteronomy 11:11; Job 35:5; Isaiah 55:10; Acts 1:10; James 5:18].
- Outer space, everything beyond our planet [Genesis 1:15-17, 15:5; Deuteronomy 1:10; Psalm 8:3-4; Acts 4:24]. That seems to be the emphasis of the title “God of Heaven,” though there is likely a layered meaning [Daniel 2:18-19, 44; Jonah 1:9]. We might say “God of the Universe.” The phrase “heaven and earth” refers to the universe, or all of creation [Psalm 115:15, 124:8; Acts 17:24].
- To God himself [Daniel 4:26; Luke 11:16, 20:4, 15:18, 21; Matthew 16:1, 23:22], or refer to things that come from God [Matthew 19:23-24; John 1:32; I Thessalonians 1:10; I Peter 1:12].
- God’s dwelling place [Ecclesiastes 5:2; Daniel 2:28; Psalm 11:4; Matthew 3:17, 5:16, 6:9, 10:32, 16:17; Colossians 1:5, 4:1]. Other spirit beings reside there as well [Matthew 22:30; Mark 13:32; Revelation 12:7-8, 13:6].

These last two usages are what we’re discussing. Our treasure is God Himself, and we can think of the rewards of seeking Him as being stored with God, available to us when we are in His kingdom. Where our treasure is stored is when our inner being is focused. What is the focus of our life? Is it on secular, worldly goods or pursuits, or is it on being a disciple of Christ and pursuing God’s purposes?

Some have used verse 19 to justify a “gospel of poverty.” It is possible to interpret “don’t lay up treasure” as never save up more than you need. If this were true, it would be a sin to have more in your bank account that you plan to spend this week or month. The apostles didn’t seem to live this way. They were by no means rich people, but they didn’t seem to live a life of poverty. This is not to say that God doesn’t call some to live very meager lives so they can focus more on God. Over the centuries it is the work of monks living by this principle that helped to preserve much of the Bible we have today. However, I believe it is an error to say that Jesus is calling every disciple to that way of life. A better way to understand this is by the Hebrew figure of speech known as a Limited Negative. A Limited Negative is stated in the format “not A, but B,” but means “not only A, but also B” or sometimes “not merely A, but primarily B.” There are many examples of this in the Bible [John 1:13, 6:27, 12:44; Matthew 10:20, 34]. Understanding this figure of speech, we read verse 19 to say, “Don’t only lay up treasure on earth, but also lay up treasure in heaven.” Doing only the former without the latter is disastrous.

Luke 12:13-21 Parable of the Rich Fool. The problem was not storing up goods. The problem was not being rich towards God. God cares about our heart's intentions and desires.

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

I Timothy 6:17-19

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Rich Christians are given a greater responsibility. They have to resist the temptation to trust in the riches they have instead of God. They are to be extra generous.

Philippians 3:17-20

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

When our God is our belly, our end is destruction. We can't fill ourselves with earthly things and expect to have citizenship in heaven.

Matthew 6:22-23

In the Hebrew way of speaking, an evil or bad eye represents greedy, stingy, or corrupt behavior [Deuteronomy 15:9; Proverbs 23:6, 28:22; Matthew 20:15]. A good or healthy eye represents generous or righteous behavior [Proverbs 22:9].

Whichever choice we make will determine the course of our lives.

Matthew 6:24

We can't serve (douleuō – to work as a slave/bondservant) two masters. We cannot expect to focus on and pursue the things of this world and still live the way God wants us to live. This is really a rebuke of idolatry. We are either pursuing God or we are not. All throughout the Bible this choice has been given [Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Joshua 24:15; Ezra 9-10]. Mankind has the choice to reject the world and its enticing temptations or to reject God and his plan for salvation.

I John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Matthew 6:25-30

The "therefore" connects these statements to the previous commandments and warnings. If we are not laying up treasure on earth and keeping our heart there, then we don't need to be anxious.

Verse 25 ends with the question "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" This is a Rabbinic style of argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has already done the hard part of providing life and a body, then why worry about easy things like food and clothing?

Next, Jesus gives two "how much more" examples, one for food and one for clothing. These are the opposite, an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God would do such things for the lesser, how much more for us (the greater)?

- How much better are we than birds? They get their basic needs met without farming or storing up food in barns. Humans were "created in the image of God" and given dominion over the other creatures [Genesis 1:26-27].
- How much better are we than wildflowers? Lilies are beautiful yet will soon die and be used for fuel to warm ourselves. If God would "clothe" the lilies so beautifully for our enjoyment for a small time, how much more will he provide for us?

Between these examples Jesus shows the vanity of being anxious (verse 27). We can't add time to our lives by worrying (in fact, several studies indicate the opposite). The literal translation is "add a cubit," but most modern translations consider this a metaphor for adding some standard unit of time to one's lifespan.

Verse 29 reveals an important fact: worry is the result of a lack of faith in God. I'm able to greatly enjoy roller coasters because I trust the design and the equipment to keep me safe. I can live without worry by trusting in God as my sufficiency. Either our master is God, or it's worldly riches, success, and status. The nice thing about being a bondservant is that your master provides for you. You serve him and he meets your needs. God is a good master. The worldly goals are not, they just leave you wanting more and more. In the United States this snare has been given a great sounding name - The American Dream. The original idea sounded good. Immigrants from around the world come to find success and riches where before they only had poverty. However, it has certainly become an idol, something to pursue other than God.

Matthew 6:31-32

We aren't to be anxious about basic needs like those without God. God knows what we need.

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Philippians 4:6-8

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Trust in God's provision frees us to pursue God's kingdom. We are assured that as we pursue God's purposes and disciple ourselves to our risen Lord and savior, our needs will be met. What pressure that takes off us!

Let's be clear that this doesn't mean not working or being lazy [Colossians 3:23-24; II Thessalonians 3:10]. It also doesn't guarantee an opulent and luxurious life.

Mark 4:19

but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

We don't want to be those who let the thorns of the world choke out the word of God in our lives.

Matthew 6:33

This is the crux of the matter. It is when we are seeking the kingdom that this assurance applies.

There are many teachings of Jesus about rewards [Matthew 5:12, 6:4, 6, 18, 7:7, 19:27-30; Luke 6:38, 19:11-27], but they are not necessarily about material blessings. The rewards promised are mostly in heaven, stored up until Christ returns and we enter the kingdom. On the contrary, the things promised in this life are persecution and hardships [Matthew 5:10-11, 10:22; John 15:19-21; II Timothy 3:12; I Peter 4:14-16]. But we are promised that our needs will be met as we pursue God as disciples of His son.

Philippians 4:10-19 Paul had periods of lack and periods of abundance. He was content in both because he was seeking God.

I Timothy 6:3-12 Again, we see the strong agreement of the apostle Paul with the Lord Jesus Christ. Godliness isn't about gain in this life. We understand nothing if that is our focus. Material wealth is a temptation and snare. For a Christian, riches are a responsibility. A wealthy Christian is told to give more [I Timothy 6:17-19].

It was a common belief that prosperity was a sign of God's blessing and therefore one's godliness. This is not true. The main point of the book of Job seems to be to refute this. It is the miserable comforters that tell Job his loss is due to sin [Job 8:3-4, 20, 11:5-6, 22:6-9]. But God says Job never sinned with his lips throughout the whole trial [Job 1:1, 22] and rebukes the miserable comforters' words [Job 42:7].

The most successful mega churches today have something in common. It has become known most commonly as "The Prosperity Gospel," but also "The Health and Wealth Gospel," "Word of Faith," or "Name It and Claim It." It espouses that God has called us to material abundance in this life and we just need to ask or even demand the treasure that is already ours in heaven. This is a very appealing, yet flawed interpretation of the Bible. However, it brings in many who want an "easy button" approach to fix their life. The Bible is not a self-help book or a way to give good people a better life. It is God's plan for salvation through the ages. It tells us what God did to rescue those who are dead in trespasses and sins and tells us what we have to do to become connected to The True Vine [John 15:1-11], our Messiah Jesus Christ, so that we can inherit eternal life.

Faith, belief, and prayer are not a currency to buy what we want from God. God is not a vending machine that caters to our material wants. Faith, believing, prayer, and positive confession are not tools that force and manipulate God into catering to our whims. God is the sovereign ruler of the universe, our creator, and our heavenly Father. Yes, He does bless us and give us many great things, but our heart is to love and follow Him because He loved us first. The focus of life isn't on getting material things in this life, but to strive to lay up treasure that waits for us in our eternal life by spreading the gospel and

reaching out with the radical love that Jesus lived. The Prosperity Gospel takes the focus off God's ability to provide and puts it on man's ability to believe.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

It's so easy to focus on the getting while ignoring the heart and behavior expected. Blessings have always been in the context of pursuing God.

Matthew 6:34

We aren't anxious about tomorrow. Each day has its own trouble and worry will not change that. Instead we pray for our daily bread and have faith in our great God. We should be so busy accomplishing God's will that we don't have time to worry. God meets our needs and frees us to move forward with Him.

Jesus isn't prohibiting planning for the future, but he is prohibiting being anxious about it. And we also aren't to put our faith in our plan, but in God. Plans can change, because our perspective and understanding is limited. That is why we pursue God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and trust Him to meet our needs along the way.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

Let us look to God to direct our paths so that we can will and do His good pleasure. We don't have to worry about our needs along the way.

Our Interpersonal Spiritual Walk – Matthew 7:1-14

At the start of this chapter Jesus transitions from focusing on our internal spiritual life (prayer, fasting, etc.) to a focus on our interpersonal spiritual walk.

Matthew 7:1-6 Covers judgmental behavior between Christians. There is a strong emphasis on avoiding hypocritical behavior, as well as the difference between being judgmental and discerning.

Matthew 7:7-11 Goes over God's willingness to respond to our call. We can expect great things from God as we seek him with the right heart. We need His help to do His word, and he will help us as we ask.

Matthew 7:12-14 Discusses what has become known in our society as "The Golden Rule."

Judgmental Behavior Among Christians

Matthew 7:1-2

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.

These days in our "socially conscious" society it seems like verse 1 here has become the rallying cry of those who want to condemn Christians for holding to a standard. They point to this verse and try to say that Jesus commanded us to accept any lifestyle. That is not what is being said here. That is taking this verse completely out of context, as we will see in more detail next week, because in Matthew 7:15-20 Jesus discusses recognizing people by the fruit they bear. Synonyms of recognize are: observe, perceive, diagnose, distinguish, pinpoint, verify, and determine.

We ARE to be aware of ourselves and others, but this examination is not meant to be done with a judgmental or harsh criticism in mind. We as Christians have been called to love others unconditionally, but this does not mean we have to accept everyone and everything unconditionally.

A good example of this is found in Matthew 26 where the disciples accuse the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil of being wasteful. Jesus corrects them and tells them that not only was she doing a good work, but she would always be remembered for it. Jesus recognized this woman for her actions, the disciples judged her for them [Matthew 26:6-13].

It is important to note that these two verses don't actually prohibit judgment of others. Which makes sense in the context of Matthew 7:15-20 which discuss knowing ourselves and others by the fruit of our lives. Jesus follows up the statement in verse 1 with additional information in verse 2. What is being required is for our judgment to be fair.

We judge ourselves and others against a standard often. What makes our judgment wrong is when we are being hypocritical with our standard. We can find ourselves tempted to have a more merciful standard for ourselves than those around us if we're not careful, and that is definitely something we need to be very careful about. As we can see here God will measure unto us according to the same measure we use for others, not the measure we use for ourselves. This should motivate us to be even more generous with our love and forgiveness to others. In the end it's not our judgment that matters but God's because He is the true judge.

Interesting item of note: According to the teaching of some rabbis in Jesus' time, God had two measures that He used to judge people. One was a measure of justice and the other was a measure of mercy. Whichever measure you want God to use with you, you should use that same measure with others.

Matthew 7:3-5

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.

An extreme example of this is found in the records of King David's life. When Nathan came to and told him the story of the rich man killing the poor man's sheep, he was very quick to condemn him [II Samuel 12]. But he was blind to his own sin in killing Uriah and stealing his wife. Clearly this is something we all need to pay attention to in our own lives if David, who is called "a man after God's own heart," was able to fail at this so spectacularly.

Keep in mind that Jesus isn't saying that it's wrong for us to help our brother with a speck in his eye. Just like Nathan helped David get back on track, we need to make sure we aren't being hypocrites when we are pointing out another's fault. Nathan is also a good role model in this category in that he didn't come at David bashing him over the head. He was very merciful in how he approached David with his sin.

Matthew 7:6

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.

In the East, dogs were wilder and traveled in packs. They feed on carrion and garbage and the creatures meant to be called to mind in this passage are nothing at all like the house pets we cherish here in America. Dogs and swine, besides being ceremonially unclean, were peculiarly repulsive to the Judeans. In the context here the "dogs" and "swine" can refer to people who are actively hostile to the gospel, or completely blinded and hardened by this world. We need to have a keen eye when we are in the world and really SEE who we are talking to. Some people are motivated by love to come to Jesus Christ. It is the goodness of God that brings them to repentance. Others are motivated by fear. The fear of the judgment, the fear of hell. We never prey on this fear, but it can be a very open door to give someone the peace of the Truth.

God does not require us to argue a person into the faith.

I Peter 3:15

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

We should be ready to give to every man an answer, but our duty is to share the truth, and if their response is bitter resistance to our sharing, then it says here in Matthew that we shouldn't continue to cast our pearls before swine.

Interesting item of note: this section shows us that sin can harden the heart to the point that a person becomes like a wild dog or boar. Romans 8:7 "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." The word here "hostile" is translated from a word that means enemy or hatred. Sin causes a person to develop a hatred for God and His Word.

God's Willingness to Respond

Matthew 7:7-8

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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

ASK

In James 4:2,3 it says in part, "...You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly..." and in I John 5:14,15 it says: "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

From these two sections we can see there must be certain qualifications to the "ask" in verse 7. There is a right way and a wrong way to ask. God looks on the heart. There are also right things and wrong things to ask for in our prayers. Our wants and needs must line up with God's will.

When we ask according to God's will it promises us here twice that not only will it be given to us, but we will receive (*lambano*) into manifestation those godly desires on our hearts

James 1:5-7

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

The Greek words used in this section of James for "ask" and "gives/given" and "receive" are the same words used in these verses in Matthew. This section gives us a little more insight into how we are to ask God for anything. We cannot ask casually, we must have faith. If we doubt, it says right here that we shouldn't even begin to expect to receive anything from our Lord.

Interesting item of note: the promises in Jesus' teachings about asking were NOT made to the multitudes, but to the disciples.

SEEK

Hebrews 11:6 KJV

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

This seeking of God and His promises isn't meant to be a passing thought. We are to seek and pray with our whole hearts. Just like we can't ask with a double-minded lack of focus, we are not meant to seek with a lazy, halfhearted effort.

KNOCK

In these two verses we see an increase in intensity from Ask, to Seek, to Knock. The fact that Jesus came back to the subject of prayer which as we've seen was already covered earlier in Chapter 6

shows us how important it is to our Christian walk. Persistent prayer does not overcome God's stubborn reluctance; it gives glory to Him, expresses dependence upon Him, and aligns our heart more with His.

Interesting item of note:

Matthew 7:7-8

[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 the one who seeks [finds](#), and to the one who knocks [it will be opened](#).

The words "Ask", "Seek", and "Knock" in verse 7 are all in the Present Tense, the Active voice, and the Imperative Mood. This means they are commands meant to be carried out by us in the present.

The word for "given" in verse 7 is in the Future Tense and Passive Voice which means that God will be doing the action and that this action will occur to us in the future.

The word for "receive" in verse 8 however is in the Present Tense and Active Voice which means that we are doing the receiving NOW.

The word for "you will find" and "finds" in these two verses are the same Greek word and both are in the Active voice meaning we are the ones doing the finding. The only difference being verse 7 is in the Future Tense and verse 8 is in the Present Tense.

The word for "it will be opened" is not only the same Greek word in both verses, it is in the Future Tense and Passive Voice both times. Meaning that God is the one doing the action and it is happening in the future.

Essentially, in verse 7 we are commanded to [Ask](#), [Seek](#), and [Knock](#). In return God promises to [Give](#) and [Open](#), and that we will [Find](#). All three promised as future events. Then in verse 8 we are told that when we [Ask](#) we [Receive](#) in the present, and when we [Seek](#) we [Find](#) in the present, and when we [Knock](#) God will [Open](#) it in the future.

Matthew 7:9-11

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

As children we go to our parents when we are in need. In the same fashion we go to our Heavenly Father and count on Him. Our earthly parents realize we have needs. You guys don't tell your kids "tough luck" when they come to you needing dinner. These examples that Jesus gives are meant to speak to the people in that culture. It's like saying "you wouldn't give your kids Tide Pods instead of candy," or (as long as you're paying attention) "you wouldn't put a Kraft single onto your kid's sandwich still wrapped in the plastic."

We are all imperfect beings. It says in Isaiah 49:15 that even a mother can momentarily forget about their child, as impossible as that sounds, but that God's memory and love for use will NEVER allow Him to forget us. Even as much as we strive to live the word and do God's will, we will never be perfect. And if we can give gifts and live a life filled with love and Christian service, all that pales in comparison to what God can and does give us.

The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:12

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

What Jesus is saying here in this verse is generally known as “The Golden Rule,” and while Jesus did not actually invent this, he is unique in stating it this way. This command was stated by Socrates, "What stirs you to anger when done to you by others, do not do to others." And by Confucius, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

As we can see Jesus took this command which was negative and passive and turned it inside out by stating it in the positive: DO instead of DO NOT. Phrasing the command this way vastly increases the scope of its application. Instead of NOT saying mean things, we would also be encouraged to SAY more uplifting things. You don't just NOT rob someone, you GIVE to them.

Matthew 7:13-14

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Here Jesus lays out two paths for us. We all have only two options, the same two options that were laid out for the Children of Israel thousands of years ago in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 30:19 KJV

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

The way of death is the wide gate. This is what leads to the illusion of more than two choices. The gate is wide, and the path is easy that leads to death and destruction. There are so many countless ways that we can live a life that is contrary to God's Word. But the way is narrow and straight that leads to life simply because there is only ONE way to life, and that's by obeying God's Word.

Discernment – Matthew 7:15-29

Last time we learned about not being judgmental. In this final section of the Sermon on the Mount, we'll learn about discernment.

Jesus gives strong warnings that are for our benefit. I want to be clear that I believe all of us are those who mostly produce good fruit. But there are important things for us to hear and be aware of in this section. And we always want to push ourselves to do better.

Matthew 7:15

Beware - *prosechō* - to be attentive, to guard oneself against

This is a warning. We have to be on the lookout. There are many competing doctrines, and they can't all be right. False prophets don't look dangerous. They appear harmless, but are very harmful spiritually. We want to be like the Bereans who checked everything they were taught [Acts 17:11].

Luke 6:26

Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

II Corinthians 11:13-15

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

Just because someone is popular and successful and brings in great crowds does not mean they are working for God. Jesus suggests the opposite is true. The world elevates itself, not God. The people in Corinth were being enticed by confident, boastful false prophets. The context indicates this was lowering their opinion of Paul. Paul goes on to show how he was taking care of them and said he'd rather boast in his weakness.

Teaching one wrong thing doesn't turn someone into a false prophet, but we do have to be diligent about what we believe and teach.

Matthew 7:16

Thankfully, Jesus tells us how to spot them. We can see what they are by what is produced by their lives.

I Timothy 6:3-5

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness,

he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Matthew 12:33-37

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Deuteronomy 13:1-5

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’

you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.

But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

II Peter 2:1-3

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Acts 20:29-30

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Jeremiah 14:13-14

Then I said: “Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’”

And the LORD said to me: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.

False prophets are not a new thing. They abounded in both the Old and New Testaments. The Adversary tries to distort and dilute the truth.

Matthew 7:17-18

Jesus uses hyperbole here to emphasize that the product of a false prophet is rotten. Diseased trees can produce some good fruit, but mostly produce bad fruit. Healthy trees produce mostly good fruit, but occasionally some bad.

Matthew 7:19

This suggests that a false prophet's end is destruction. Teachers will be judged more strictly [James 3:1].

Matthew 7:20

This imagery suggests that at the judgment seat the false prophets will be joining the devil in the lake of fire [Revelation 20:10, 14-15, 21:8].

Matthew 7:21

Just calling Jesus Lord is not sufficient to gain eternal life. Salvation requires a heart change. Those who have had a change of heart will be doing God's will.

Luke 6:46

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?

Lord is the title of the master of a slave. To call Jesus Lord and not obey him is just lip service.

Romans 10:9-10

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

It is the heart that believes. It's our heart that changes. We can't fool God. Ezekiel prophesied of this.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

God's people are to be zealous for good works. We are to pursue living the way God commands. We have been created in Christ for good works [Ephesians 2:10]. Faith in God without works is dead [James 2:14-26]; it's not genuine.

Say I am speeding down the highway and get pulled over. I apologize to the officer and say I'll do better, and he gives me a warning. The next day I'm speeding down the highway again. The officer recognizes me as I'm apologizing again. He doesn't believe me anymore and gives me a ticket. My works show that the apology was not genuine. We can say "Lord, Lord" all we want, but that doesn't save us. It's the genuine heart change that does. We have to say and mean that Jesus is Lord and act accordingly.

James 1:22

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Matthew 7:22-23

These are alarming verses, and I think that is the point. Jesus wants us to self-examine. The phrase "never knew you" seems to indicate that these people were never saved. The concerning thing is that they did mighty works. Some interpret this to mean that one who calls himself a Christian can perform signs and miracles without being saved. There are different ways to look at this.

This may not be directly related, but the first thing that comes to mind is the words of Paul regarding love.

I Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

This seems to echo what we've been discussing. I can do great works with the wrong heart, and that does not profit me at all. Love here is representative of the heart of a disciple. Jesus summed up the whole law with two statements on love [Matthew 22:37-40]. When we are loving the way and to the extent that Christ did, we are also doing the other commandments.

This still leaves the question of these works that Jesus mentions. The basic question seems to be: are these works from God or are they not. Or maybe, are they sometimes from God and sometimes not. There is a scriptural basis for both.

- These signs and miracles are not from God. There is certainly scripture to support this.
 - The sorcerers of Egypt duplicate Aaron's staff turning into a snake [Exodus 7:8-12]
 - Simon the Sorcerer [Acts 8:9-11]
 - Bar-Jesus/Elymas [Acts 13:6-12]
 - Deceivers that Paul warns of:

II Timothy 3:12-13

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

- The future coming of the lawless one is with many false signs [2 Thessalonians 2:9-10].

- God performed these signs through an unsaved person. God can allow any person or even animal to do something miraculous to accomplish His will.
 - Paul speaks of those preaching the gospel for spiteful and selfish ambition, yet still rejoices that they are preaching Christ [Philippians 1:15-18].
 - Judas Iscariot had the ministry of an apostle and did signs and wonders with the other 11 [Matthew 10:5-8], yet he betrayed Jesus [Matthew 10:4, 26:14-15].
 - Balaam was a false prophet who caused great sin among the children of Israel [Numbers 31:16; Joshua 13:22; II Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelations 2:14], yet he gives legitimate prophecy for a time [Numbers 22-24].
 - Balaam's Donkey speaks [Numbers 22:21-38; II Peter 2:16]

In either case, the point is that we need to have zeal for God, a heart that yearns to do His works. We will sin and fail in many categories along the way, but we have to keep that drive to want to do better and to pursue God's purposes.

Matthew 7:24-27

The one who follows Jesus' teaching is wise and his life is founded on rock. He will endure to the end.

Jesus specifically says the fool is one who hears and does not act. Hearing and agreeing with Jesus' words is not enough. We have to act, behave, and live how he directed.

I John 1:6-7

If we say we have fellowship with him [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

In the Old Testament, a storm is sometimes used a symbol of God's wrath and judgment. Jesus may have had these passages in mind:

Isaiah 28:16-17

therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter."

Ezekiel 13:10-14

Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash, say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out.

And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the coating with which you smeared it?' Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath, and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to make a full end.

And I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the LORD.

The fool builds his house on the things of the world. That house cannot stand. If we consider this in the context of false prophets, the fool could be someone who builds their life on false doctrine. When the storms of life roll in and that doctrine fails, they reject God. Jesus' says, "Great is the fall of it."

I know that there have been times I've thought I was absolutely right and have found out I was mistaken. That can be a hard realization to swallow. That is why humility toward God is imperative. We must always be ready to realign ourselves with God.

It's interesting that we don't have details on the houses other than their foundation. They could have looked exactly the same. Or maybe the foolish man's house looked a lot nicer than the wise man's house. But the floods revealed the truth. We need to build our lives on Christ so that we can weather the storms of life to the end.

Romans 5:3-4

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

Mark 13:13

And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Hebrews 3:14

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Hebrews 10:36

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Matthew 7:28-29

It was typical for the teachers of Jesus' day to depend on the writings and teachings of Rabbis before them. Jesus didn't do this. This is strongly evidenced when he interprets the law in the second half of Matthew 5 with "you have heard, but I say unto you." He was teaching from his own God-given authority as the Messiah.

This was surprising and astonishing to the people. That probably doesn't mean everyone was astonished in a good way. There was likely a mixed reception. We know the scribes and Pharisees certainly didn't like the way Jesus taught. We are likely to receive a similar response.

Let us keep the things we've learned in this series locked tight in our hearts. Let us have a renewed zeal for the things of God and seek him with our whole hearts.