

MT. 7 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Final)

We begin where we left off the last time—finalizing our study on the Sermon on the Mount. To summarize, first Jesus showed how he was magnifying God's laws as they were originally intended, in contrast to how the Jewish leaders had distorted them. In the Beatitudes, He showed the proper attitude toward God's laws, which is a spiritual matter. Next, He focused on several OT laws and showed their true keeping in spirit and letter. Finally He focused on *the three main religious practices* that the Pharisees had misapplied. Finally, He now shows the proper way of discerning truth from error without becoming judgmental as the Pharisees had mostly done.

He begins, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' and look, a plank in your own eye? Hypocrites! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will clearly see to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Mt. 7:1-5). The Contemporary English version translates it: "Don't condemn others, and God won't condemn you. God will be as hard on you as you are on others! He will treat you exactly as you treat them."

This was a major problem of the Pharisees--of condemning others and feeling very self-righteous--as Jesus later used the illustration of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9.

Expositor's explains, "Jesus' demand here is for his disciples not to be judgmental and censorious [severely critical, faultfinding]. The verb *krino* has the same force in Romans 14:10-13 (cf. James 4:11-12). The rigor of the disciples' commitment to God's kingdom and the righteousness demanded of them do not authorize them to adopt a judgmental attitude. Those who 'judge' like this will in turn be 'judged,' not by men (which would be of little consequence), but by God (which fits the solemn tone of the discourse). The disciple who takes it on himself to be the judge of what another does usurps the place of God (Rom 14:10) and therefore becomes answerable to him."

The Pharisees not only looked down on others that did not perform all their man-made rules, but even among themselves, they looked down on those of a lesser rank.

Greek expert A.T. Robertson explains about the term to *judge*. "The habit of censoriousness, sharp, and unjust criticism. Our word critic is from this very word. It means to separate, distinguish, discriminate. That is necessary, but prejudice (prejudgment) is unfair and captious criticism."

Yet, Christ is not against evaluating and analyzing situations, since He also said, "Do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). We should condemn the sin, but be considerate toward the sinner (Gal. 6:1-2). Although God has not constituted us as judges of His law, we should evaluate the actions of others—but with mercy, as Jesus mentioned in Mt. 6:15, and as the parallel passage in Luke 6:36 about judging says, "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

Christ also explains that we should focus more on judging ourselves instead of others. He uses an illustration from carpentry He knew so well as part of His profession. He mentions we should center our attention on the "plank" in our eye (own faults and sins) before honing in on someone's speck (it means sawdust in the Greek). As Paul said, "work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

After pointing out this principle, Jesus warns of not going to the opposite extreme. He says, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces" (7:6).

Expositor notes, "Disciples exhorted to love their enemies and not to judge might fail to consider the subtleties of the argument and become undiscerning simpletons. This verse guards against such a possibility. The 'pigs' are not only unclean animals but wild and vicious, capable of savage action against a person. 'Dogs' must not be thought of as household pets: in the Scriptures they are normally wild, associated with what is unclean, despised. The two animals serve together

as a picture of what is vicious, unclean, and abominable.”

On the other hand, the “pearls” refer to the precious truths of God’s Word (see Mt. 13:45-46). We are not to try to convert other people by dumping all the biblical truths on them although they show no interest in knowing about them. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be ready to give a *defense* of our faith, but it doesn’t give us the right to go on the *offensive* about our faith.

So, how can we be sure we are discerning things properly? Jesus Christ now gives us the answer—by persistent prayer. He says: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt. 7:7-8).

God is willing to help us, if we ask Him, and we should not assume we already know the answer. Sometimes we might think He doesn’t really care, and so Jesus goes on to say, “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (7:9-11).

Christ mentions even a parent, having human nature that is naturally self-centered and not God-centered, still knows how to give good things to his children. So how much more is God willing to give us good things since He doesn’t have our evil inclinations? *Expositor’s* brings out: “What is fundamentally at stake is man’s picture of God. God must not be thought of as a reluctant stranger who can be cajoled or bullied into bestowing his gifts; as a malicious tyrant who takes vicious glee in the tricks he plays, or even as an indulgent grandfather who provides everything requested of him. He is the heavenly Father, the God of the kingdom, who graciously and willingly bestows the good gifts of the kingdom in answer to prayer.”

Then, Jesus gives one of the key concepts in all of Scripture, called the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 7:12). This is the great principle behind the last six of the Ten Commandments, which governs our relationship with our fellow man. That is why

Jesus said this concept summed up all of the Old Testament law—for God is love—and all of His laws reflect an outgoing concern for others—the basis for the Golden Rule.

Even some of the rabbis understood this fundamental concept of the Bible, but expressed it in a negative instead of a positive way.

Expositor’s comments: “About A.D. 20, Rabbi Hillel, challenged by a Gentile to summarize the law in the short time the Gentile could stand on one leg, reportedly responded, ‘What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it’ (*Shabbath* 31a). Apparently only Jesus phrased the rule positively. Thus stated it is certainly more telling than its negative counterpart, for it speaks against sins of omission as well as sins of commission. The goats in Mt. 25:31-46 would be acquitted under the negative form of the rule, but not under the form attributed to Jesus....And in the context of fulfilling the Scriptures, the rule provides a handy summary of the righteousness to be displayed in the kingdom. Above all this verse is not to be understood as a utilitarian maxim like ‘Honesty pays.’ We are to do to others what we would have them do to us, not just because we expect the same in return, but because such conduct is the goal of the Law and the Prophets.”

As Christ concludes the Sermon on the Mount, He gives four warnings about God’s true way of life—and contrasts it in pairs of two—two roads, two trees, two claims and two builders.

He warns there are two main ways of life: “Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (7:13-14).

He is saying the way of discipleship is “narrow,” or restricting, because it is based on proper, non-Pharisaic, law-keeping, as well as leading to persecution and opposition—which are major themes in Matthew.

Secondly, Christ warns, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears

bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (7:15-20).

Wolves have been known to kill sheep and then use their skin to hide among the flock and kill more sheep. This saying is a warning about judging people by their appearance or words, and not by their actions. Peter later saw the fulfillment of this when he said, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Peter 2:1-2). Paul also warned his ministers in Ephesus, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30).

Christ then compared people to two trees—one that produces good fruit and the other bad. Again, a person can be fooled by looking only at the foliage and not the fruit. The fruit takes time to develop, while leaves do not. So sometimes it takes time to see people's true fruits.

Then, Christ focuses on two claims—one true and the other false. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Mt. 7:23-24).

Here we see that these false prophets are actually false preachers who use the name of Christ to deceive and develop followers. The key to knowing who they are is that they practice "lawlessness." What is lawlessness? 1 John 3:4 says, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." Lawlessness here means the disregard and the breaking of God's law. Preachers who don't teach to keep all of

God's commandments are teaching "lawlessness." James puts it this way, "'For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak, and so do, as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:10-12).

Jesus' final warning is illustrated by the contrast between two buildings: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall" (Mt. 7:24-28).

We see "the will of the Father" (vs. 21) is what Jesus equates with "these words of mine"—since they all coincide. The two types of Christians can be classified as one who is only a "hearer" of God's word and the other as a "doer" (James 1:25).

Each "Christian house" can look secure in good weather. But in Israel, there were torrential rains that quickly became raging floods. Only then would the quality of the two builders be revealed. This idea reminds us of the parable of the sower in which the seed sown on rocky ground lasts only a short time, until "trouble or persecution comes because of the word" (Mt. 13:21). The point is that the converted man builds his house to withstand anything—he truly puts Jesus' words into practice—and lays a spiritual foundation that will withstand anything. Those who pretend to have faith, who don't really put Jesus' teaching into practice, are foolish builders. When the storms of life come, their spiritual structures buckle, not having been based on the sound foundation of obedience to God's laws and true faith.

The account ends, "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes". In other words, He was sure of what He was saying.