

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: POWER OVER PRIDE

In GOD'S NEW HUMANITY

A Seminar on Kingdom Principles

Matthew 5-7

Session Five

Matthew 7:1-12

The Text:

1. *Stop criticizing so that you may not be criticized; 2. for you (yourself) will be criticized with the same criticism you use on others and you will be evaluated with the same evaluation you use on others.*
3. *Why do you see the tiny speck (of sawdust) in your brother's eye but pay no attention to the building timber in your own eye? 4. Or how is it that you say to your brother, 'Let me extract the tiny speck out of your eye,' when, Look! there is that building timber in your (own) eye?! 5. You hypocrite (two-faced person)! First cast the timber out of your (own) eye and then you will see clearly to extract the speck from your brother's eye!*
6. *Don't ever give what is sacred to the dogs and don't ever throw your pearls in front of swine, lest they trample them with their feet and then turn and tear into you!*
7. *Keep on asking and you will (keep on) receiving (it will be given to you, repeatedly or continuously); keep on seeking and you will keep on finding; keep on knocking and it (the door) will be repeatedly or continually) opened to you. 8. For everyone who keeps on asking keeps on receiving and the one who keeps on seeking keeps on finding and to the one who keeps on knocking it (the door) will keep on being opened. 9. No one among you will give his son a stone when he asks for bread, will he? 10. Nor will he give him a snake when he asks for a fish, will he? 11. If therefore you who are evil know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who (continually or repeatedly, as a habit of life) ask Him. 12. Therefore, keep on doing to others all the things you would want them to do to you, for this is the (heart of) the Law and the prophets.*

V. Jesus requires the application of the principle of spiritual discernment in God's new humanity. - (7:1-12, cf. 15-20)

A. He prohibits discerning the faults in others and encourages discerning the faults in ourselves. (7:1-5)

The Text:

Stop criticizing is literally, "Do not judge." To pass judgment on others is to criticize them, find fault with them or disparage them. Jesus prohibits us from taking this attitude because "what goes

around comes around” and we can expect the same treatment from others. The negative imperative prohibits an action in progress: “you are doing it, quit it.” The attitude of criticizing others is a proud attitude. It says, “I am better than you, so therefore I am in position to criticize you.” Most people do not appreciate such an attitude and are likely to think and maybe to say, “Who says you are better than I am?” Such a critical attitude destroys relationships. We all have our weak points. Whenever we point our finger at someone else we find three fingers are pointing back at us! When we criticize others we invite similar criticism of ourselves. As Jesus says, *for you (yourself) will be criticized with the same criticism you use on others and you will be evaluated with the same evaluation you use on others.* Most church fellowships need a double dose of this lesson. If we could just stop criticizing and instead compliment each other on the good that we see in others, the whole atmosphere in the church would change. The same would be true for our workplaces or schools or anywhere people need to work together.

One reason we are in no position to criticize others is that we do not know all the facts about others nor do we know their motivations. Even if we did know, we are still not impartial judges. We all judge others through the lens of our own experiences and prejudices based on what we have learned from our family and from our teachers and from what we have read and learned from others.

John 8:1-11 gives us a good illustration of this. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. Nothing is said about the guilt of the man involved, but their attention was on the woman as though she was already condemned. Their purpose was obviously to trap Jesus in a dilemma from which He could not escape. However, in His godly wisdom, knowing that the Law commanded that she should be stoned, He challenged whoever was without sin – any sin, not just adultery – to cast the first stone. Since they all knew deep within them that they, too, were sinners, they dropped their stones and walked away leaving the woman standing in judgment before Jesus. Seeing that her accusers had left, Jesus pronounced His judgment: “Neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin.” Thus did He with grace allow her to start over a new kind of life, lived by Jesus’ principles, for “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). Caring generates compassion.

Jesus then illustrates the principle with another example from life:

3. Why do you see the tiny speck (of sawdust) in your brother's eye but pay no attention to the building timber in your own eye? 4. Or how is it that you say to your brother, 'Let me extract the tiny speck out of your eye,' when, Look! there is that building timber in your (own) eye?! 5. You hypocrite (two-faced person)! First cast the timber out of your (own) eye and then you will see clearly to extract the speck from your brother's eye!

The sawdust and the timber are both from the same natural material: wood. The only difference is the size of the material. A tiny speck represents a very small amount of wood and is like a very small amount of sin or personality flaw. But the problem is that the person wanting to remove the speck has a giant roofing beam, a huge timber, in his own eye! This is humorous hyperbole, of course, exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Such a timber is much too big to fit in anyone’s eye, but the point is that he



cannot see around the timber to take the speck out of his brother's eye! Such a person is, of course, a hypocrite. He acts as though he has no problem at all and therefore is qualified to remove the sin (or at least to criticize it) in the other person. What terrible pride!

What we need to do, of course, is to repent of our own sin so that the "timber" may be removed from our own eye (See I John 1:9). Then we might be able to help our brother confess his "little" sin (speck) so that he can see clearly, too. We are to stop discerning sins in others and to start discerning sins in ourselves and receiving cleansing and forgiveness so that our pride may be cut down and we may be enabled to help others.

- B. He commands us to discern between those who have spiritual perception and those who do not. - (7:6)

The Text:

Don't ever give what is sacred to the dogs and don't ever throw your pearls in front of swine, lest they trample them with their feet and then turn and tear into you!

Not everyone you meet will have a positive attitude toward you. Although we are to demonstrate Christ's love for all people, we must not allow ourselves to be duped or tricked by unscrupulous people who may wish us harm either because of jealousy or just because of their evil, selfish, proud nature. We are taught by Jesus not to criticize or judge others but at the same time to use spiritual discernment in dealing with others. There are those who, in their natural, sinful state have the nature of a dog or a hog. Dogs and hogs have no appreciation for pearls or anything of beauty. Like the people where we first lived in Beirut who tore off the blooms of the flowers my wife, Maxine, had planted along the edge of the sidewalk leading to the building where we lived and threw them down! Perhaps it was an anti-American attitude, but whatever the reason, we felt sad and sorry for those who could not appreciate the beauty of flowers. There are times when we cannot share with some people the blessings the Lord has bestowed on us, especially if we do it in a proud way, but even if we do it in a humble way. John gives us a similar warning in his first epistle 4:1 "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

- C. He calls upon us to discern the source and power of spiritual gifts and explains how to receive them. - (7:7-12)

The Text

7 - 8. Keep on asking and you will (keep on) receiving (it will be given to you, repeatedly or continuously); keep on seeking and you will keep on finding; keep on knocking and it (the door) will be repeatedly or continually opened to you. 8. For everyone who keeps on asking keeps on receiving and the one who keeps on seeking keeps on finding and to the one who

keeps on knocking it (the door) will keep on being opened.



God is the source. The gifts and the power are received through prayer. God's gifts of humility and power over pride (all those mentioned in the previous parts of the sermon) are received through prayer. Verses 7 and 8 give us the principle of persistent, continuous or repeated prayer. This is not to say that Jesus wants us to repeat any prayer, even the model prayer, just to say we have prayed! Real prayer involves seeking the face of God in such a way as to develop a deep personal relationship with Him.

We delight in carrying on a conversation with those we love, especially our spouses and our children. We often repeat ourselves in those conversations, not necessarily word for word, but idea after idea. Then we change the subject, but the conversations develop our relationships. So it is with God. When my wife and I were getting to know each other we walked for hours, sometimes in the rain in Hawaii so we could learn about each other and our families.

If we keep on (present active imperative) asking, seeking and knocking we are promised that when we do so we will keep on receiving what we are praying for. It is not a one-time thing. It is a continual process of praying and receiving. (Please see my seminar: *God's Lightning: A seminar on Prayer* in freebiblecommentary.org by Dr. Bob Utley, Director of *Bible Lessons International*. See bottom left corner of title page.)

Visualize powerful positive prayer.

9. No one among you will give his son a stone when he asks for bread, will he? 10. Nor will he give him a snake when he asks for a fish, will he? 11. If therefore you who are evil know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who (continually or repeatedly, as a habit of life) ask Him.

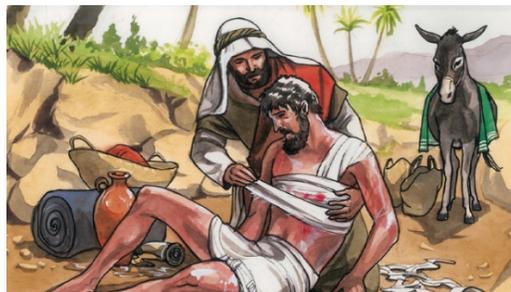
Jesus uses the experience of a father giving gifts to his children to illustrate God's attitude toward giving gifts to His children (His followers). When we pray to our Heavenly Father He responds in love and kindness and not in giving hurtful gifts. In the Middle East there are many flat, round rocks that resemble the flat round bread in common use for many centuries even down to today. But a loaf of bread made of stone has no taste and no nourishment. It would be unkind to give a child a stone in place of bread. A snake or especially an eel is no substitute for an edible fish. Each statement is phrased in such a way as to expect a negative answer: "he wouldn't do that, would he?" Of course not! A sadistic

human father might possibly do such a thing, but our Heavenly Father, who is by His very nature LOVE, never would!

The parallel to this statement in Luke 11:13 says: *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!* The words in Matt. 7:11 “give good gifts” are changed to “give the Holy Spirit.” The best gift of all is the Holy Spirit; that is, Christ living in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. (See Col. 1:27: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”) His life in us gives us the power to live like Him; as though each of us had a zipper down our back and we could unzip ourselves every day and let Him put His head, including His brain, eyes, nose and mouth, into our head; His arms and hands into our arms and hands; His heart, chest and abdomen into our heart, chest and abdomen; and His legs and feet into our legs and feet! Try to imagine that every day!

The gifts of God are given as we apply the Golden Rule, 7:12: *Therefore, keep on doing to others all the things you would want them to do to you, for this is the (heart of) the Law and the prophets.*

This is the way we know that we are applying the “Law of Love.” If we relate to others with those actions and attitudes that we would want others to apply to us, then that would be proof of our love for them because it would reflect our natural love for ourselves. It is the natural expression of unselfish, unconditional, ideal love. There is no other religion of which I am aware that teaches this same ideal. There are many which teach the negative form of the rule, sometimes called “The Silver Rule,” which says: “Do not do to others anything which you would not want done to you,” but this requires no positive action at all! Actually, non-action is a negative decision! One might simply refuse to interact with others and seem to fulfill this rule. Jesus does not allow that. He requires that we do something positive for anyone with whom we interact.



In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) the priest and the Levite did nothing to help the man who had been beaten up by robbers and left half-dead by the side of the road. They chose to ignore him and chose not to help him. They fulfilled the silver rule by doing no additional harm to him; but the Samaritan followed the Golden Rule and did for him what he would have wanted others to do for him in the same kind of situation. He dressed the wounds of the injured man, put him on his own beast of burden and took him to an inn and paid for his stay there. That is love in action!

What a wonderful world this would be if all of us continued to love one another in this way!

This verse could be the key verse for this whole paragraph or even the whole sermon. If we live by the Golden Rule, then we will not be critically judging others, nor would we give what is holy to those who have no appreciation for them, nor would we try to take specks of sawdust out of others' eyes until we clear the timber out of our own eyes. Not only that, but we would pray constantly, staying in touch with our Heavenly Father through His Spirit who lives in us and meditating on His loving Word to each of us. Indeed, this may be considered a summary verse for the entire sermon.