

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MATTHEW 7:1-12

THIS chapter contains the last section of the Manifesto of the King, and may be described as a summary of principles of action. Its light flashes back on the teaching of our Lord, and forward on the obedience of His subjects.

The first twelve verses deal with the attitude of the subjects of the Kingdom to those who are without.

- In the first six verses the King describes that attitude.
- In the next five (7-11) He tells His subjects of the power in which they will be able to obey the injunctions given.
- In verse 12 He returns to the original teaching, linking it, in a crystallized form, with the truth He has declared concerning the power at their disposal.

First the attitude described.

It is a twofold attitude - without censoriousness, "**Judge not**;" but with careful discrimination - Do not cast holy things to dogs.

As there breaks upon us a consciousness of the difficulty of obedience to this description of attitude, it seems as though the Lord, looking at that little group of men listening to Him, the first subjects of the Kingdom, had said to them,

- Does this appear to be difficult?
- Do you feel this is an impossible ethic?
- Is this something far exceeding the righteousness of Scribes and Pharisees?
- Are you doubtful as to how you will be able to obey?

"**Ask**," "**seek**," "**knock**," and everything you need for obedience is at your disposal.

Then, having revealed the dynamic, He continues, and we specially need to notice one word in His next statement, for it is the key to the unity of the whole section. He says, "**Therefore all things**" and that "**therefore**" leans back upon the "**ask**," "**seek**," "**knock**." "**Therefore**" links the final declaration concerning our attitude to the outside man, with the initial description, through the medium of the promised power.

This paragraph is unified, and its one teaching has to do with our attitudes toward other people.

- First, a detailed description;
- Secondly, a declaration of the power in which we shall be able to obey so fine and searching an ideal;
- Finally, a command, which we describe as the golden rule, and often misquote by taking the words out of the context, and by omission of the “**therefore**,” rob of half its force.

We have no right to read this verse, “**All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.**” We have no right to quote it in that way, and to call it the golden rule. We must not omit the “**therefore.**” If we do we cannot obey.

If we retain the “**therefore**,” then, amazed and terrified by the tremendous claim, we are driven to ask, to seek, to knock, and to know that the Listener to the asking, to the seeking, to the knocking, is our Father. Then the rule is golden, golden with heaven’s own light, flashing with heaven’s own fire, possible with heaven’s own power but in no other way.

Now let us turn to a consideration of these three sections.

First, our Lord’s description of the attitude of His subjects to those who are without. As already indicated, this divides itself into two parts.

- The first five verses forbid censoriousness;
- The sixth verse insists upon a careful discrimination.

The one commandment is contained in the first words. Everything that follows explains and argues for obedience to that command - “**For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.**”

That is graphic illustration.

The King decrees that whatever measure we use, the other man will use the same. In what measure we mete in that same measure it shall be measured unto us.

A careful understanding of the use of the word “**judge**” here is very necessary, because in the second section when our Lord says, “**Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine,**” He commands us to judge; and upon another occasion He distinctly said to His disciples, “**Judge righteous judgment.**”

So that this command, “**Judge not, that ye be not judged,**” must not be taken superlatively as though we were not to use the reason and the powers of discrimination which are ours within the Kingdom of God.

We must therefore understand what our Lord really meant by the word, and how He used it in this particular connection.

The strict meaning of the word “**judge**” is *to distinguish, to decide*; and the variety of applications possible to such a word is evidenced by the fact of the variety of ways in which it is translated in our New Testament.

In the Authorized Version it is translated in all these ways:

- Avenge,
- Condemn,
- Decree,
- Esteem,
- Go to law,
- Ordain,
- Sentence to,
- Think,
- Conclude,
- Damn,
- Determine,
- Judge,
- Sue at the law,
- Call in question.

There is no value in that grouping save as it reveals the fact that the simplest thought in the word is that of distinguishing decision.

- Sometimes the decision may be adverse,
- Sometimes it may express itself as a decree determined upon,
- Sometimes it may express itself as a sentence to be carried out.

All these varieties are seen in the translations made use of. The simplest thought is that of *distinguishing, coming to a decision. Sometimes it runs out into action, sometimes it conditions a passive position. Therefore its particular sense must always be determined by the context.*

Here, evidently, the Lord did not use the word “**judge**” in the sense of forbidding us to discriminate, to distinguish, to decide. There can be no doubt whatever that He used it of coming to adverse conclusion in the sense of condemnatory censoriousness. “**Judge not,**” condemn not, come to no final decision, do not usurp the throne of judgment, or pass a sentence, or find a final verdict; “**Judge not, that ye be not judged.**”

So He forbids to His subjects, the usurpation of the throne of final judgment about any human being. He tells them that they are not to judge in the sense of condemnation; that there is no power deposited in the individual life that shall enable that individual to find a verdict, and to pass a final sentence; and He warns us off, every one of us, from that spirit of critical censoriousness which decides concerning our brother, as to the rightness or wrongness of his action, because we cannot possibly weigh in the balances all the motives that may lie behind that action.

Our Lord then proceeds to give reasons against such judgment:

First, retributive judgment will fall back upon the man who exercises such judgment. Of course there are different interpretations of the meaning of the words, **“With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.”**

Does He mean with what judgment we judge our fellow man we shall be judged by God? Some commentators tell us so. We may judge our fellow man falsely; God cannot. We come to wrong conclusions because of the limitations of our being; God cannot come to wrong conclusions. That can hardly therefore be the meaning.

Then He proceeds to say, **“With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you.”**

Luke chronicles the uttering of the same words at another time:

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with what that measure ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

There is no doubt that the King’s purpose is to teach us that we must expect to receive judgment on the same basis as that on which we give it.

If we set ourselves up as men finding verdicts and sentences, then we must expect to be so judged; and in the measure in which we mete to men our judgment, in that measure they will mete their judgment to us.

The King immediately rises into what would appear to be a higher realm:

“Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

“Beam,” “mote.” Nowhere else in the New Testament are these words used.

- A beam is just exactly what the word means to us, the branch of a tree, or a massive piece of timber.

- A mote is hardly what we understand by a mote. It is a dry twig off a branch, a chip from the beam itself.

Of course, the proportion is the same. The small thing is the mote; the beam is the great thing that blinds entirely.

What is the beam to which the Lord refers?

He is speaking to men who exercise a spirit of criticism against other men, who are supposed to be sinners above the measure in which the critic is a sinner. This cannot apply, therefore, to the case of a man who is living in vulgar sin if he criticize the man guilty of a sin less venal. The beam is not what the world calls a vulgar sin, because the man living in open and vulgar sin never does criticize the man guilty of small sin. If the beam be some prominent vulgarity, then there is no point in the illustration at all.

The man who says there is something in the other man's life which is not consistent, is the man that says that there is nothing inconsistent in his own life.

Yet the King says that there is a beam in his eye; he who professes to have the right to criticize his brother has something greater - a beam in his own eye, and it is that lack of love which expresses itself in censoriousness.

When men look for motes, the passion that makes them do so is a beam, more guilty in the sight of heaven than the mote for which they look.

We should be far more pitiful, far more gentle and kindly in our judgment, far less anxious to criticize the man with the habit that we have not, had we more love. Christ arrests the man who has no mote, and says, your search for a mote is evidence of a beam, and you have no power to see the mote in its true relation and proportion; there is a hindrance to the vision because the beam is in your own eye.

The slight change in the final word is interesting. “ **Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.**”

He did not say, “Then shalt thou see clearly the mote,” but, “**Then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote.**”

The man with the beam is the man who is looking for the mote, and beholding it.

Notice the question, “**Why beholdest thou the mote?**” You criticize it, you attack it, but you cannot move it. Get the beam out of your own eye, get the passion for criticism removed, get the ungodly and unchristlike endeavor to find the mote destroyed; and then you will see clearly, not the mote, but how to remove it.

The power for removing the mote to which you object lies, not in the acuteness of your vision, but in the passionate love which makes you desire to remove it. And so with the beam of unchristly censoriousness and criticism gone, you will be able to take the mote out of your brother's eye.

There is nothing more ungodly than a critical spirit; nothing more unchristly than that false righteousness which is always looking for a mote.

Once let the beam be removed, then will come the Christlike spirit that knows how, with gentle delicate touch, to remove the mote, that the brother's vision may be clear. So the Lord warns us from usurping the throne of judgment. Do not form a final judgment; do not come to adverse and critical conclusions concerning men.

Then there is a sudden change.

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

We are not to be critically censorious, but we must exercise discrimination and discretion.

There are characters we must discern and be careful of, for there are things committed to our care which we must safeguard at all costs. This may appear a rough description of the characters, but the King makes use of no vulgar descriptions save when He is describing vulgar things.

Who are the **“dogs,”** the **“swine”**? Let Scripture interpret Scripture. No doubt Peter heard Him say this, and after he had passed through very wonderful experiences he wrote, and used words his Master used.

“It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (II Peter 2:22).

“It has happened unto them.”

In the previous chapter we have a remarkable exposition of these words of Jesus. The chapter begins with false prophets. As we go on through, the chapter we have the terrible teaching that, though we may be in the place of privilege and blessing, if we turn our back upon it we must be cast out therefrom. It is a terrible and dark description of certain men who resolutely set themselves against holy things, but who come into holy places to traffic with holy things with unholy purposes:

- Dogs, who presently will go back to their vomit;
- Swine, who presently will be back to their wallowing in the mire.

Do not judge your fellow man hastily; but when a man has manifested his character do not give holy things to dogs, do not fling pearls before swine.

Remember, if out of false charity or pity you allow men of material ideals and worldly wisdom to touch holy things, to handle the pearls of the Kingdom, presently they will turn and rend you. That is the whole history of Christendom's ruin, in the measure in which Christendom is ruined.

There is a very clear distinction between the Church of God and Christendom. The Church of God is not a failure the great holy entity in union with Him but the outward manifestation is. We gave holy things to dogs.

We imagined that when a Roman emperor espoused the cause of Christianity, it was a great thing. We cast the pearls of the Kingdom before swine; and the men who had to do only with the earthly things have turned again, and rent the outward manifestation of unity.

If a brother stands out, makes choice against the will of God, and refuses the light, then we are to discriminate.

There is a separation made within the borders of Christ's Kingdom, and, while we are to indulge in no censorious criticism and final judgment of our fellow man, if that man, judged by his own action and character, is unworthy, then we are not to give him holy things, we are not to cast our pearls before swine.

Then notice what immediately follows.

This fine distinction between censoriousness and discrimination creates a difficulty, in the presence of which we may well be afraid.

How shall we know just where to draw the line? What is to be the difference between the thing Christ will not have, and the thing He commands? How are we to know in this world whether we are to come to a judgment or no?

The Lord lays down no rule, but He says, "**Ask**" "**seek**" "**knock**." So important are the two injunctions that we should judge not; that we must discriminate that we must for evermore maintain our attitude toward our fellow men by maintaining our relationship with God.

These great words, "**Ask**" "**seek**" "**knock**" may have a far wider application, but this is the application the King made of them in His Manifesto.

Christ could say no little thing, and for two smaller matters He applies great principles. We do no wrong to the principles if sometimes we apply them to larger matters; but we do wrong if we miss the fact that He applies them to the smaller things.

"**Ask**" in relation to "**these things**." If you question this link you have only to go to the repetition in the Golden Rule and remember the word "**therefore**."

The Golden Rule is closely connected with these instructions.

It would be perfectly correct to read the first six verses, and then immediately the twelfth. Do not judge men; do not come to hasty decision; discriminate between them; do not give to dogs. "**Therefore all things whatsoever ye would**." Between this final epitome and the clear statement at the beginning, occurs this command to Ask, Seek, Knock. The King drives us back into perpetual and intimate relationship with God in order that our attitude with regard to our fellow men should be what it ought to be.

Let us, then, consider that threefold command.

“**Ask.**” The Lord never used the same words to describe His own prayers as those He employed to describe the prayers of other people. The word “**ask**” here means as to simplest intention, to beg in the sense of dependence. It is the word of the man who comes with empty hands and says, “I have nothing to buy with.” Christ never used that word of His praying; He never asked God as a pauper. When He spoke of His own praying He used words that might be translated: I will inquire of the Father, I will speak with Him concerning this matter as One upon a perfect equality. But, for us, “**ask**” is the first thing. We must recognize our dependence upon God.

The next word is “**Seek,**” and in that there is the suggestion of care; it marks the true anxiety. Do not merely ask in dependence, but ask with the urgency of a great desire.

Finally, “**Knock.**” In that word we have the mingling of dependence and effort, suggested by the first two “**ask,**” “**seek.**” “**Ask**” when you do not know how to judge. “**Seek**” which is the effort of the sanctified man after the mind of God. “**Knock,**” perpetually making application. We cannot live one day in office, or shop, or ordinary place of action, and know when to discriminate, and when not to judge, except as we live every day and every hour asking, seeking, knocking. We must live near God if we would live in right relationship with our fellow men. We must live right with our fellow men if we would live right with God.

Again, if these are the words that mark human responsibility, let us mark the words which reveal the Divine attitude.

First, God is willing to bestow, and Jesus bases His argument on the character of God. Notice the suggested contrast: “**If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father?**” evidently the suggestion is that He is not evil, nor can be evil. The word “**evil**” does not merely mean sinful; it is a word which includes natural and moral limitation and fault. It takes in frailty, and weakness, and sickness, and sorrow. We are evil, subjects of limitation as well as sin. God is not evil. Time writes no wrinkle upon the Infinite Brow of Deity. He fainteth not neither is weary. He is not limited by observation or bounded by horizons; and if we, with our limitation, know how to give our children good gifts, how much more our heavenly Father?

Are you afraid as you face the demand Christ’s law makes upon you? Ask, seek, knock, and know that the Listener is your Father. Learn, says Jesus, how He listens, and how He appeals to the highest thing within yourself, even though you are evil your own fatherhood.

If your boy asks you for bread you will not give him a stone. The thing is absurd. It is well sometimes to be superlative. We stand among men having to discriminate, never to judge; forbidden the usurpation of a final throne of judgment, and yet forbidden to cast holy things before dogs and swine. How can we do it? “Ask, seek, knock.”

It is not a servant keeps the door; it is your Father. The King has taken us into the powerhouse of all true living; He has brought us back to the place where wheels are throbbing with infinite energy; but at the center of the wheels is not an axle, but a heart. All the infinite dynamic of righteousness is born in the compassion of the heart of God. “Ask, seek, knock;” “Your Father.”

Finally, “**therefore.**” How that “**therefore**” flames upon one as one searches one’s own soul in the presence of these commands. Do not judge, yet discriminate. How devilish is the critical spirit that sees the mote; and yet how necessary is the discrimination that withholds holy things from dogs and swine. The voice of the infinite Fatherhood says, “My child, for obedience to every command I am here to provide you power,” and we are afraid no more. “**Therefore**” links the necessity with the power “Ask, seek, knock.”

What is this summarizing of our duty?

Do unto your neighbor what you would that your neighbor should do to you. That is the whole thing. We are told sometimes that this is not peculiar to Jesus Christ. That the Golden Rule is not the peculiar property of Christianity. But you cannot find this rule anywhere else. Hillel, the great Hebrew master, said, “Do not do to thy neighbor what is hateful to thyself.” That is very like it. He said that before Jesus came. Socrates, before Christ, wrote these words: “What stirs your anger when done to you by others, that do not to others.” That is very much like it Aristotle said, “We should bear ourselves toward others as we would desire they should bear themselves toward us.” That seems even nearer, but it is not the same. Confucius, the great Chinese teacher, said, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” These things were said before Christ spoke, and we are told they are the same.

There is this radical difference these are negative and passive; Christ’s command is positive and active. These say to man, Stand still, and do not do what you do not want anyone to do to you; Christ says, Go and do what you would that he should do to you. It is not merely that you are to refrain from harming him; you are to do him good. It is not that you are not to rob him; you are to give to him. It is not that you are not to murder him; you are to love him. And so the gleams of light which characterize the teaching of Gentiles, as well as the revelation which had come to Jews, He took up, and fulfilled and made final. We might, out of a selfish self-respect, decline to harm our neighbor but we cannot do this higher thing without power. We cannot do continuously what we would our neighbor should do to us save as we ask, seek, and knock, and know that our Father is pledged to us in power.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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