

# St. Matthew

## Chapter 7

### **The Sermon on the Mount continued (7)**

Jesus continues to preach His sermon on the mount throughout chapter 7. In chapter 6 He taught about the disciple's (and our) heavenly Father who sees our secret piety and rewards us openly, who hears and answers our prayers, and who provides us with all that we need to support this body and life. In chapter 7 the sermon makes a decidedly eschatological turn. Jesus takes up the theme of judgment, and shows, in the end, that He is the one whom will come to judge the quick and the dead. Jesus is *the* Son of the Father, and is His word which open the door to everlasting life.

### **The Law and the Prophets: The Golden Rule (7:1-12)**

*Judge Not.* For generations the most famous Bible passage was Jesus' beautiful summary of the Gospel in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The last few decades have seen a shift, and now perhaps the most famous passage is Jesus' warning about judgment in 7:1: "Judge not, that you not be judged." This text is wrongly used as the banner text for lawlessness (called "tolerance"): no one has the right to say anything negative about anyone else's thoughts or words or deeds. There is no judging because there is nothing wrong, nothing bad, nothing evil; the standard of good and right is simply what I want or what I feel like. This is the law of tolerance, we are to tolerate each other's actions, live and let live. But tolerance is not merely passive, we are also supposed to embrace all the nuttiness and flat out wickedness of others. To 'tolerate' gay marriage is to approve of it, anything less is homophobic. To 'tolerate' Islam is to approve it, speak well of it, not be critical, "Judge not!" The only act that is considered 'sinful' is being intolerant.

So we often hear the criticism that the Lord's Church is "judgmental" because it is slavishly bound to the conviction that there is a right and a wrong way to believe, think, speak and live. According to the law of tolerance, if we want to keep the Lord's command and "Judge not," then we need to jettison the Ten Commandments as a norm for good behavior, in fact, we need to jettison all norms for behavior and life, and tolerate everyone's free choices.

It this what Jesus is teaching? Perhaps the best way to begin an answer is to consider Jesus' own actions. He is, after all, the supreme example of obedience to the Father. His life is, therefore, the perfect picture of what it means to "Judge not." (This is to be understood absolutely. One of the reasons that we can go about not judging is because we know that the Lord Jesus will do the judging Himself. We can leave it in His hand.) But still the question remains, was Jesus tolerant? We need only think of a few examples to say, "No." Consider the overturning of the money-changers table, or the "woes" to the Pharisees, or the "Go and sell all you have" to the rich young ruler, or even His teaching in the sermon on the Mount. Does this sound tolerant, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven... If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off... When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites... No one can serve two masters... Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye... Beware of false prophets... Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven..." Are these examples of tolerance? Indeed the very idea of a last judgment is anathema to the creed of tolerance.

What begins to emerge, then, is the need to have a better understanding of "not judging." If "being tolerant" is not the opposite of "not judging," what is the opposite? The answer Jesus has already given: forgiveness. "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." [6:14] Whereas tolerance tries to get around the law by ignoring the law, in the kingdom of heaven the law is triumphed over by the Gospel. "Mercy triumphs over judgment." [James 2:13] So the law stands (not one jot or tittle is passing away), but the law doesn't have the only word or the last word. "Not judging" means

that the Lord's word of life and salvation and the forgiveness of all sins has been heard by us, and then cannot but be spoken by us to our neighbor. We know that the exceeding righteousness and the perfection of the Father has been given to us in spite of our unworthiness; that the Father has withheld, for Christ's sake, the judgment that we deserved because of our sin; that God's affections and actions toward us are full of love and compassion and mercy and forgiveness, and therefore, as His children, our affections and actions towards our neighbors ought to look the same.

On the other hand, if our attitude toward our neighbors reflects a harshness and criticalness and an unwillingness to help, that same measure of judgment will be turned onto us by our heavenly Father. "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you." [7:2] We should not be poking around, looking for our neighbor's flaws, speck hunting, trying to 'help' them by showing them their sinfulness and unworthiness. Jesus uses the parable of the plank and the speck to explain. It is the height of foolishness for a man with a plank or a beam stuck in his eye to attempt to help his neighbor dig a speck out of his own eye. This is like the man who goes, uninvited, to help his neighbor fix a leak in the faucet while his own basement is flooding. "Tend to your own unrighteousness first," Jesus is saying. "Judge yourself, and then you will find reason for mercy and compassion." All of our judging is to be tempered with mercy.

This also helps make sense of all the passages in the Scriptures that command us to make judgments. For example:

**St John 7:24** Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

**1 Corinthians 5:11-13** But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (12) For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? (13) But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

**1 John 4:1** Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

We see this teaching of Jesus reflected in the apostles. (See also Romans 2:1; 1 Corinthians 4:5; James 2:8-13)

**Romans 14:10-13** But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (11) For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. (12) So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (13) Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

**James 4:11-12** Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. (12) There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

*Pearls before Swine.* Jesus then commands us not to give the 'holy things' to dogs. So far in the Gospel of Matthew there has been mention of three things that are holy: The Holy Spirit [1:18,20; 3:11], the holy city (Jerusalem) [4:5], and the Name of the Father ("Hallowed be Thy name.") [6:9]. It is especially this name that is not to be thrown to the dogs and cast before pigs. This doesn't mean that we don't preach on the farm. "Dogs and swine are those who, after the gospel has been duly preached to them, retain their vicious, filthy nature. All such the disciples are, indeed, to judge and account as they are." [Lenski, *Matthew*, 291]

The holy things and pearls are the pure teaching of the Word of God (His Name).

Lenski offers the following passages as the most pertinent commentary:

**Acts 13:45-46** But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. (46) Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

**Acts 18:6** And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

**Jude 1:10-13** But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. (11) Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. (12) These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; (13) Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

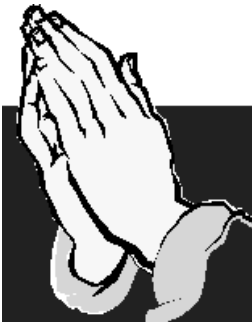
**1 Peter 4:4** Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.

**Romans 16:17-18** Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (18) For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

**Philippians 3:18-19** (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: (19) Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

**1 Timothy 6:5** Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

*Ask, Seek, Knock, The Promise of Prayer.* Jesus again takes up the topic of prayer, and here He promises that all of our prayers will be answered. Luther says this in his *Large Catechism*,



“We should be all the more urged and encouraged to pray because God has promised that our prayer will surely be answered, as He says in Psalm 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you,' and Christ says in Matthew 7:7,8, 'Ask and it will be given you,' etc. 'For everyone who asks receives.' Such promises certainly ought to awaken and kindle in our hearts a desire and love to pray. For by His Word God testifies that our prayer is heartily pleasing to Him and will assuredly be heard and granted, so that we may not despise or disdain it or pray uncertainly.”

As with all true prayer, everything is brought back to the Father. Jesus even takes up the image of an earthly

father to express the confidence we should have when we pray. Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater: when a son asks for something needful from their earthly father, that father, even though he is wicked and evil, still provides his son with every good thing. How much more, then, does our heavenly Father who is perfect take care of us.

*Do Unto Others.* Jesus then concludes this section with a summary statement, of His sermon and of all the prophets, “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.” [7:12] This is Jesus' summary of the law of love. Because no one hates themselves [Ephesians 5:29], we learn what love is when we consider the care we show for ourselves. Notice our loving of the neighbor does not depend on them actually doing the things that we would like them to do. Even when they are slapping our cheek we are living and giving. We are forgiving as we are forgiven, or else we are judging as a picture of our own judgment.

### **Jesus Teaches With Authority (7:13-29)**

*The Narrow Way.* There are always two gates, two ways, two paths, the path to heaven and the one to destruction, to hell. The broad and easy way is the one that leads to hell. The path to the kingdom, on the other hand, is fraught with danger. From the very beginning of Jesus' teach we see this. “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” [5:11-12] The narrow road is the road of suffering, of reviling and persecutions and bearing the cross.

How many find this narrow path? “Few,” says Jesus, and this is the great tragedy of this sinful world, “few be there that find it.” Most of the people for whose sins the Lord Jesus suffered and died walk merrily down the broad and easy way to destruction.

*False Prophets and Their Fruits.* The broad and easy way certainly has its share of teachers and preachers. “False prophets” is what Jesus calls them, and He warns us to beware. In fact in this entire sermon Jesus has been warning us against false teachers and false prophets. Could this be the most disobeyed command of Jesus in the church today? Looking out for false doctrine and false teaching and the false teachers behind it understood as “mean-spirited, divisive, sectarian, closed-minded, etc.” But even if we didn't care to look out for false prophets, we don't have that option. The church is bound to her Lord's Words, and He has commanded us, “Beware of false prophets.”



Jesus uses two pictures to warn us of the false prophets and teach us their ways. First, the picture of wolves and sheep, the second is the image of fruit trees. The false prophet comes looking like a sheep, helpless, part of the crowd, everything about them puts us at ease. We don't worry about having this new sheep around, but all of his kind actions and sweet words were just to break down our defenses so that we are not ready when he gets hungry.

If these wolves are so cleverly disguised, how are we to recognize them? By their fruits, their teachings. The fruits that we are to judge are not merely their outward lives. If this was the case we would judge them to be sheep. “The fruits of the prophet are undoubtedly the doctrines he teaches.” [Lenski, 301] Consider Jeremiah 23.

And here Jesus puts things in the right order. The fruit of the tree is the grounds for judgment, but the fruits are only the result of the tree's goodness or wickedness. A tree is not good because it bears good fruit, rather a tree bears good fruit because it is good. It will not do to go about trying to do good works to become good. We are first made good by the perfect word of the Gospel, and then good fruits follow, both

in our conversation and life.

*I Never Knew You.* It is the false prophet who leads people away from Christ Jesus and His Gospel, and is therefore doomed to judgment. At this point in the sermon the subject really shifts from the Father to the Son. In verse 21 Jesus, for the first time, calls God “My Father.” This 'My' expresses the unique relationship between the Father and the Son. The disciples and the Lord's people have God as their Father, but not in the same way as the Son, and this unique relationship is manifest in that the Father has given the judgment of the world into the hands of His Son.

Not all who speak the name Jesus and do miracles and wonderful works will enter the kingdom of heaven. There is one requirement for this entry: those who “do the will of My Father in heaven.” [7:21] “This 'doing' proves that a real connection with Jesus exists, on which He Himself here acknowledges. For 'the will of My Father' includes, first of all, repentance and faith (5:6, 25, etc., 48; 6:12, 33; 7:3-11), not the perfection of sinlessness but the righteousness of the remission of sins and thus the power to do works that truly please God. On this gracious, saving will see John 6:29, 39, 40; 1 John 3:23.” [Lenski, 305] On the judgment day everything but the name of Jesus will pass away, and everything upon which that name was written. It is therefore to faith and faithful good works that the Lord is calling us, not to hypocritical acts of piety.



How stunning it must have been for the disciples and all the people who hear Jesus preaching this sermon! This Man standing before them is claiming that He will judge the quick and the dead, and even more, that His judgment would be based solely on the persons rejection or receiving His word.

On His word everything must be built if it wants to stand. So Jesus concludes this sermon with the picture of two houses, one which survives the judgment, and one that doesn't. The surviving house is built on the rock, the man who hears the sayings of Jesus and does them. The falling house is built on sand, the man who hears the sayings of Jesus, but does them not.

It is no wonder that the people were astonished. Jesus taught with authority (not with power). He is God, He is Holy, He is the Judge, and His Word and His Word alone brings life.