



**BIBLE STUDY**

# **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

Ryan Bush

*The Sermon on the Mount: Bible Study*

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## From the Author

*Ryan Bush serves as president of ICP | Didache Institutes, a missions organization that endeavors to disciple pastors across the globe so that they might become faithful servants in the church of the living God. He is also the Associate Professor of Missions at Grace Bible Theological Seminary in Conway, AR. Ryan resides in Arkansas with his wife and five children.*

Learn more about Ryan's work by visiting [www.ryanbush.org](http://www.ryanbush.org).

Dear Teacher,

I commend you for your commitment to teaching the Word of God to the people of God for the good of their souls and the glory of God. May the Lord give you grace and wisdom as you open the Scriptures and lead the sheep to green pastures and still waters.

I wrote this study of the Sermon on the Mount specifically for small groups, though it could certainly be adapted to fit other needs. I believe it would be best for the teacher to use the comments, outlines, and discussion questions in these lessons as a way to carefully prepare the lesson beforehand. During the Bible study, you may want to have these notes on hand, but they are not intended for group participants.

While I did attempt to include and expound upon important theological concepts that arise in the text, the study is meant for church members of all maturity levels and ages. Adapt these lessons to fit the needs of those in your class.

May the Lord give you grace and wisdom as you teach his Word to his people.

In Christ,

Ryan Bush



## Lesson 1

# Matthew 5:1–12

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1 *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

2 *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

5 *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

6 *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

8 *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

10 *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

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## Overview

Jesus's conception of what it means to be blessed is an affront to our natural inclinations. In this passage, Jesus explained that his followers are blessed no matter their present reality because of the sure future hope that is stored up for them in and by God through Christ.

## Outline

1. Be Aware
2. Be Conformed
3. Be Encouraged

## Theological Theme

The beatitudes hinge upon the theological concepts of justification, sanctification, and perseverance. Only those who have been justified can be in a state of blessedness. Those who are justified are sanctified, which is why they are humble, repentant, meek, righteous, merciful, and pure. Finally, the follower of Christ looks to a secure future hope because they will endure because God the Father will not lose any of his own.

## Christ Connection

These theological concepts are founded and rooted in Jesus's finished work on the cross. There is no justification, sanctification, or perseverance without our Savior and Mediator, Jesus Christ.

## Missions Application

The most loving, kind, and compassionate actions that a Christian can show toward someone is both praying that God would open their hearts to the gospel and, then, opening their mouth in their hearing and humbly explaining the gospel message to them. A person cannot be truly blessed unless they are in Christ. Neither can they look toward a secure future hope apart from the saving work of Christ wrought in their hearts.

## Introduction

Superstars want the ball when the clock is running out and someone has to score. When the players huddle up to receive instructions from the coach, everyone already knows who the ball is

going to. The pressure is there, the task seems impossible, and the hopes of winning seem slim. Yet, this person wants the ball. They want to take the shot. They are relaxed and focused. They are confident. Why? Because they believe in their ability, trust in their training, and have confidence in their skill. They are calm under fire because they believe that the thing in which they have confidence (themselves) is greater than the challenge that lies ahead.

Followers of Christ have even greater confidence, but it isn't because they are superstars and can rely on anything within themselves. Christians have peace, joy, and hope in the midst of the fiercest storms of life because they are moored to an unshakable anchor. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in their place and then died a sinner's death in their place. Now, he intercedes for them before God the Father. Those that are in Christ rest in the grace, mercy, power, and promises of their Savior. They know that he will not fail or falter.

Jesus's words in Matthew 5:1–12 are meant to remind Christians that their hope isn't in themselves but in what their great God has done and will do.

## || **Session Summary**

The beatitudes introduce Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is the longest continual teaching of Christ recorded in the gospels. The beatitudes are short statements that summarize the essence of the sermon. The essence is this: those who are in Christ are characterized by a state of blessedness in this fallen world, a life that is humbly submitted to God's word, and a confident hope of eternal life with God.

One pitfall that we must be careful not to tumble into while reading the Sermon on the Mount is to see Jesus's words from a gospel of works framework. We naturally tend to understand the world in terms of merit, self-reliance, and achievement. The gospel of works says that if I will discipline myself and do what I ought to do then all will go well with me, God will approve of me, and I will go to heaven one day. But, that point-of-view is dead wrong. It's a false gospel. It's isn't the gospel of Jesus (though it very much is the message of every other religious system in the world).

In the beatitudes (and the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus directly addressed his disciples. He described what a life devoted to him looks like (humble, meek, peaceable, pure, etc). Notice what he was not saying. He did not say that people should make themselves to be more humble, meek, pure, etc. Nor did he say that those things qualify them for eternal life. Rather, Jesus simply said that those who exhibit those qualities (Christians) will receive eternal life. Not as a result of exhibiting those qualities, but because of their position in Christ. It isn't a cause and effect relationship, but simply a correlation. This is an incredibly important distinction. If we don't get this, then we will badly misunderstand and misapply what Jesus says in the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount as a whole.

Think of it this way. In the beatitudes, Jesus addressed born-again believers (they will have those qualities) to assure them of and comfort them with their future hope of eternal life with God.

## **1. Be Aware (Matthew 5:1–12)**

Each beatitude begins with the word blessed. Jesus began with this word in every formulation of his introductory statement because it is the main thrust of his thesis. (As a side note, we should remember that when we are reading Scripture and we see a word repeated more than once, then we should take note. In this instance, the word “blessed” is repeated nine times.)

### **What does “blessed” mean?**

Unfortunately, the word blessed has been redefined and watered-down by current usage to such a degree that we may not understand what Jesus meant here. Let’s try to recapture the essence of this word. “Blessed” in the biblical sense refers to a state of well-being in relation to God that is secure now and forever. On the other hand, current usage of the word generally refers to material or circumstantial prosperity. The oft-trending #blessed is very rarely applied to statements of the assurance of eternal life with God in heaven or a deep abiding peace in the midst of unbearable pain or unjust persecution.

We would be more likely to find references to a job promotion, the purchase of a new car, a bathroom remodel, or someone’s child receiving accolades for sports or grades if we searched for posts that are tagged with #blessed. The term “blessed” has been gutted of its power and has become a bumper sticker to slap on to anything that makes us proud or happy in the moment.

### **Could Jesus have meant that Christians will be blessed with material things?**

No. Not in these verses. In fact, a straightforward reading of the beatitudes leaves Christians with more assurance of hardship, struggle, and loss than it does material blessing here on earth. Jesus said that Christians are blessed when they are persecuted, mourn for sin, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. He didn’t mean that in the midst of their persecution he was going to make a way for them to build the deck with the jacuzzi that they had always wanted. He said, “your reward is great in heaven.” People who say they are Christians and think they are going to gain materially because of their allegiance to Christ have received a false gospel and need correction in their understanding of the nature of Christ’s work.

### **Which “blessed” is better? Why?**

True Christians cling to and rejoice in their blessed state of being reconciled to God. Those that have tasted the goodness of the biblical gospel wouldn’t trade their blessed state with all the material blessings on earth. A Christian’s treasure in heaven isn’t riches or fame, it is God himself who is their Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, and Provider. The promise of this blessing isn’t tied to their ability to be worthy of it. Christians are blessed because of their position before God which



is secured through Jesus's work on the cross. Christians depend completely on Jesus Christ to be and remain blessed. Christians will persevere in their state of blessedness before God the Father because the gift of salvation that God has given them in Christ Jesus is irrevocable.

**Application Question:** Has your understanding of “blessed” been wrong? Why or why not? How does the biblical view of “blessed” change the way you think about your circumstances?

## **2. Be Conformed (Matthew 5:1–12)**

Let's not lose sight of our framework as we continue our study of the beatitudes. Jesus addressed primarily his disciples (though there were certainly others who were hearing as well). Just a few verses before Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount Matthew gives an account of Jesus's calling of the disciples (4:18–22). Then, to introduce the Sermon, Matthew describes it this way, “Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying...” (v. 1–2). Jesus addressed all who would listen, but he is directly speaking to his disciples and, by extension, all who would hear today.

### **How do we know that Jesus was describing true Christians in the beatitudes?**

We know Jesus was talking about those who have been born again for three reasons. First, the context of the passage tells us that Jesus was speaking directly to his disciples. It's true that they weren't called Christians yet and Jesus had not completed his mission to save sinners through his substitutionary sacrifice yet. However, his disciples were those that were being drawn by God to the Son (John 6:44). They were those who would believe in Christ's gospel first. Second, we know Jesus was talking about Christians because the descriptions he uses are consistent with what a Christian life looks like. Christians are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, etc. Finally, we know Jesus was talking about Christians because he described a future hope that is only promised to Christians in the rest of the New Testament. Only Christians inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. If we take all the beatitudes together we get a description of what Christians should expect as they follow Christ.

### **Are the good works that Jesus used to describe Christians (pure in heart, merciful, etc.) what qualifies them for the reward?**

No. This is probably the most common and most dangerous mistake people make when they read the beatitudes. They read the words “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (v. 8) and they think, “OK. Well, if I ever want to see God I better keep my heart pure.” Or they read,

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God” (v. 9), and they think, “Well, if I want to be a child of God, I should try to make peace.” That interpretation of the beatitudes is a fruit of the influence of the world and a trap of Satan. It’s wrong. It may be helpful to read through the beatitudes and replace all the descriptions with the word “Christian” to help you see this more clearly.

Another way to think of it is like this. A man who has a son might say, “I love that little blue-eyed boy. He will inherit my estate one day.” Now, we would never say that the boy will inherit the estate on account of his blue eyes. His inheritance is secured because of his relationship to his father. He has blue eyes because he is his father’s son (the father also has blue eyes), but those blue eyes are the result of his sonship not the cause of it.

### **Are the descriptions Jesus used to name Christians the cause of their blessed position before the Father or the result of it?**

People are humble, meek, merciful, pure, peaceable, etc because they are Christians, not the other way around. A person doesn’t make themselves a Christian by being those things. They are made to be those things as a result of being saved by God the Father through Jesus Christ. This is known as sanctification.

### **What is the definition of sanctification?**

Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus. It commences after a person is born again, not before. Sanctification is progressive. It does not happen all at once. Also, like justification, it is the work of God. God does this work in Christians. Those who are united to Christ and saved have a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection (Romans 6:5-6).

Christians are ongoingly and personally sanctified by the work of the Spirit dwelling in them and the application of God’s Word to their lives. Christians are freed from slavery to sin and the various desires that are rooted in their old nature are more and more weakened as the Christian grows in faith and grace. Further, their desire to be obedient to God’s word increases more and more. That’s why Jesus addressed Christians by using the characteristics that true Christians exhibit. Their increasing presence in the lives of Christians is sure because he who accomplished this work never fails.

**Application Question:** In what specific areas is the Lord sanctifying you?

### 3. Be Encouraged (Matthew 5:1-12)

Let's turn our attention to the final element of Jesus's statements. First, he noted what is experienced (blessed state). Then he described by whom it will be experienced (followers of Jesus). And finally, he explained why they are blessed.

#### What promises did Jesus make to Christians in the beatitudes?

The promises that Jesus gave to those who are in Christ are astounding:

*theirs is the kingdom of heaven*  
*they shall be comforted*  
*they shall inherit the earth*  
*they shall be satisfied*  
*they shall receive mercy*  
*they shall see God*  
*they shall be called sons of God*  
*theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

It's easy to see why we must conclude that Jesus is talking about those who have been born again. If we survey the rest of the Scriptures, it is clear that only those who are saved can hope for such promises as these. Remember, the standard rule for interpreting the Bible is that Scripture interprets Scripture. When we find something that is not altogether clear and we have a question concerning the full and right meaning of any part of Scripture, it must be understood in the light of those passages that are more clear. Each passage has only one meaning, not many.

#### What is Jesus's purpose for expressing these great promises to Christians?

A Christian's future hope that is secured by Jesus's work on the cross is a great encouragement to them to stay faithful to God's Word, continue in faith, and keep repenting. In fact, God's promises to his beloved are one of the mechanisms that God uses to keep his children from falling away.

**Application Question:** In what areas of your life do you need encouragement? How does the assurance of eternal life in heaven with your good Father help you?

## || Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount is unique because it is such a long, uninterrupted teaching of Jesus. While he was probably speaking to a large crowd, the fact that he had just called his disciples and they gathered around him as he began this teaching indicates to us that this message was specially directed to those whom the Father was drawing to Christ.

One way to think about the beatitudes is to notice that Jesus was giving the same general message worded in nine different ways. He is essentially saying that Christians are blessed because of the great and precious promises that have been secured for them. They are statements to help Christians remain faithful and joyful as they walk in obedience and submission to their Lord.

- What is the difference between the world's version of "blessed" and Jesus's version of it? Which version do you subscribe to?
- In what ways is the Spirit of God conforming you to the image of Christ?
- Do promises of heaven encourage you? How can you let those precious promises of God have more influence over the way you see the world?

## || Prayer of Response

Take time to pray with thanksgiving and praise. Give thanks to God for drawing you to Jesus and exchanging your heart of stone with a new heart of flesh. Thank God for the blessed state in which you live no matter what is happening in your life, good and bad. Ask God to continue the good work that he started in you by continuing to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. Finally, praise God for the good future that he has promised you and ask him to continually remind you of it as you seek his face.



## Lesson 2: Matthew 5:13–37

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13 *“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*

14 *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

17 *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

21 *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

27 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin,*

*tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

*31 “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

*33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.*

*38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*

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## **Overview**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus confirmed the importance of the Law of God. The Law of God serves both as a mirror that shows mankind their sin as well as a blueprint for children of God as they seek to live in accordance with the Word of their Father.

## **Session Outline**

1. Where There's Fire, There's Smoke
2. God's Word Shows the Way
3. Not Just Hands, But Heart

## **Theological Theme**

God's Law has everything to do with people's lives today. For followers of Jesus, it is the blueprint to a life that pleases their Creator and Father. For those who do not follow Jesus, it is a mirror that reveals their desperate need for a Savior.

## **Christ Connection**

Christ is the key to understanding God's Law. Those who are in Christ see God's Law as a blessing because it helps them know how to walk in joyful obedience to the one who saved them. For those who are not in Christ, the Law sends them running to Christ because they realize that they are unable to keep the commandments of God. Finally, the Law shows us the standard by which God measures true righteousness, and when we look at the life of Christ we see that he was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin. Jesus earned the righteousness of God.

## **Missions Application**

When Christians read God's Law they respond in obedience with joy and thanksgiving because they remember that they were hell-bound, ruined people. Now they are free to know God and live in obedience to him. Christians desire for others to share that joy, peace, and hope. Christians love their neighbors enough to tell them the truth about God's Law, their transgressions, and Christ the cure.

## **Introduction**

The flight between the two Ecuadorian cities of Quito and Lago Agrio is amazing. It only lasts about 45 minutes, but during that time the airplane weaves its way between multiple snow-capped peaks in the Andes Mountains. You may find yourself glancing through the window only to see a magnificent mountain peak at eye level. It is surreal. You are flying amongst the clouds and here is a mountain that you hope the pilot doesn't veer too close to.

From that vantage point, the views are breathtaking and awe-inspiring. Passengers pull out their cellphones and take pictures and videos. People smile and chat about what they are seeing as they sip on ginger ale and eat pretzels. In a few short minutes, they are on the ground in the sweltering jungle.

From the airplane, the view of the mountains is exhilarating. However, if you were at the base of one of them knowing that you had to summit the peak, exhilaration would immediately give way to desperation. As you looked up at an impossibly steep grade that went on forever, you would quickly determine that getting over that mountain is beyond your ability.

Isn't it interesting that our position or vantage point determines feelings and perspectives? The same mountain looks very different from an airplane window and a basecamp.

God's Law is like that. For those who are not in Christ, God's Law is a desolate, lonely, and impossible place. But for Christians, God's Law is good and helpful and a sign of God's lovingkindness toward them. How does God's Law look to you?

## **Session Summary**

In the previous passage, known as the beatitudes, Jesus aimed to encourage his followers by affirming their current blessed state and assuring them of a future hope. Jesus was careful to identify who his true followers were by naming them by their fruit (meek, humble, etc). In essence, Jesus said that his followers were blessed because all of God's promises to them will be kept. Now, Jesus turns his attention to what it means to live as his follower. But, this message isn't just for Christians. It is also a powerful message to those who are outside of Christ. Jesus's standard here is impossibly high for people operating in their own strength and depending on their self-righteousness.

### **1. Where There's Fire, There's Smoke (Matthew 5:13–16)**

In verses 13 and 14, Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world." We know that he was talking to his disciples because of the context of the passage and also because of the meaning of the passage. Only those who love and fear the Lord will inherit the kingdom of God and only those who fear and love the Lord can be salt and light in a sin-soaked world.

#### **Why do you think Jesus referred to his true followers as salt and light?**

These two metaphors for the Christian are appropriate for several reasons. First of all, both provide a great service to humanity. They are useful and undeniably good for mankind. Salt's preserving quality was invaluable in the ancient world. And, it goes without saying that light was essential. So Christians are to be a blessing to those all around them by being witnesses both in word and deed of the one true and living God.

But there is another lesson we learn from these two metaphors. Both salt and light are naturally useful and good. There is nothing you have to do to light or salt once it is in your possession in order to make it useful. We simply have to let them do their job. Christians, because they have been transformed by the power of the gospel, are naturally useful. They aren't perfect, but they



are a new creation, indwelt by God's Spirit, both meant and fitted for good works (2 Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10).

## **When are light and salt useful? What does this help us understand about Christians?**

Jesus said that if salt loses its saltiness, then it's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out. Further, Jesus asked who in the world would light a lamp to put under a basket. Salt that isn't salty and a light that is smothered under a basket makes about as much sense as a Christian who doesn't do good works.

Whenever the gospel fire has been lit in someone's heart, the smoke of works will be seen. Always. No exceptions. A rescue as glorious and wonderful as the gospel can only result in a person who is totally committed to the Rescuer, which can consist of nothing less than joyful, humble, and faithful obedience to the Rescuer.

True Christians are humble, repentant, meek, merciful and the like because God has made them that way by the power of the gospel. That's the inward reality of a follower of Jesus. The outward reality will follow and can no more be detained than a wave crashing against the seashore or a candle giving off light or salt being salty. Of course, Christians are not perfect and sanctification is a process, but there is no denying the reality of one who has been born again.

**Application Question:** Does your outward living reflect an inward transformation? Have you been saved by the power of the gospel message? If so, what is your testimony of salvation?

## **2. God's Word Shows the Way (Matthew 5:17-20)**

We cannot overemphasize the importance of considering the context when we read the Bible. We must resist the temptation to lift out a verse or two and formulate a lesson or doctrine on those words alone. They relate to the verses around them (not to mention the whole counsel of God). Those words were written by specific people to specific people with a specific intention.

Jesus told his followers that they should be salt and light and let their good works be seen so that God would get glory. The next logical question is this: What works are the works of God? We naturally want to stop reading there and start brainstorming. We could probably come up with a long list of ways to be salt and light in our homes, schools, and workplaces, but Jesus didn't intend for his followers to put their heads together to come up with ways to obey God. The sermon doesn't stop there. In the very next verse, he said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the

Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (v. 17) Here is the meaning plain and simple: those that have been saved will read and obey God’s word.

### **What did Jesus indicate was his relationship to God’s Law? What did he say about people’s relationship to God’s Law?**

Jesus said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (v. 17) Jesus came to uphold the Law of God. Furthermore, he said, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). Later in the sermon, Jesus said: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48).

Jesus said plainly that he would uphold the Law. This means that Christ not only esteemed it and believe that it was God’s Law, but that he would keep it perfectly. Further, Jesus said those who wanted eternal life must be found blameless in relationship to God’s Law. In other words, if a person is imperfect in his obedience to God’s Law then he is unfit for the Kingdom.

### **What does this mean for the Christian? What does it mean for the non-Christian?**

God’s Law is joy and life for the follower of Jesus, but it is misery and death for the unbeliever. The reason for the vast chasm between the two is the position of each (recall the mountain illustration). Christians are no longer condemned by God’s Law because Christ has redeemed them from the punishment of all the times that they have and will break God’s Law. They are no longer condemned by it. Those who are not Christians, however, must keep God’s Law perfectly and perpetually or they will be found guilty. Of course, they are already guilty and even if they weren’t, their innocence wouldn’t make it past lunchtime.

For Christians, the Law is like a blueprint or a roadmap. It shows them how to walk in obedience to their heavenly Father. It shows them how to please their Father whom they desperately desire to please. This isn’t drudgery for true Christians, it is a joy. Christians are people who have experienced the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. They are eternally grateful and joyful. They long to worship God. They desire to obey him. They crave fellowship with him.

Not so for unbelievers. The Law of God for non-Christians is a mirror, and when they look into it they see a corrupted, sin-sick heart. They see transgression on top of transgression and eternal punishment that will be justly administered. This is why those who are not in Christ do one of two things when confronted with the truth of the Scriptures. They either mock them and write the Bible off as an ancient storybook or they twist the Scriptures to fit their conception of what God should be like. Both of these pathways lead to destruction.

God's Word is sufficient and effective. God accomplishes his purposes by applying his Word to both believers and unbelievers. For the Christian, God's purpose is to give them clarity about how to live as a child of God, nourish their faith and repentance, and preserve them for heaven. For the non-Christian, God's purpose is to show them their sin-sickness, which will either result in their embracing the Savior or scoffing at him. God will be glorified in both scenarios by showing his mercy or his justice.

**Application Question:** What do you see when you look at God's Law, an impossible, condemning standard or a joyful blueprint for obedience?

### **3. Not Just Hands, But Heart (Matthew 5:21–37)**

In the next section, Jesus explained specific examples of having a righteousness that supersedes the scribes and the Pharisees. In these examples, Jesus communicated three primary truths. Let's take them one by one.

#### **What was Jesus's overarching message to his believers concerning these specific commands?**

Jesus revealed that the sort of obedience God expected was more robust than what they had come to believe. It wasn't to be only their external actions, but also their internal state; not only their hands but also their hearts. They were to not only obey the letter of the Law with their hands but also the spirit of the Law by submitting their hearts. It isn't enough to simply not murder, we must love our neighbor. It's not sufficient to avoid adultery, but we must guard our hearts against even looking lustfully upon someone. Don't just fend off a divorce, but esteem marriage the way that God esteems it. Finally, let your speech be the overflow of a heart that fears, loves, and worships the Lord.

Jesus expressed this same principle in the negative when he called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs. "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" (Matt 23:27).

Thus, these commands help the Christian know how to walk in obedience and how to repent. They don't see the Law as a means to make themselves right with God, but as a means to live in accordance with their new position in Christ as a child of God.

## **What did these commands express to those who were not in Christ and depended on their own righteousness for salvation?**

They show the impossibly high standard of God's Law for those who want to be justified by it. God is holy and he demands holiness. If a person seeks to be right with God by his own merits, then this is the standard that he must reach.

Of course, it's impossible. Every person is born in sin and is bent toward sin from birth. There are none who are righteous, not even one (Rom 3:10). Nowhere is the unbeliever confronted with his spiritual inability more forcibly than when he reads the Law of God.

## **What did these commands say about Jesus, the one who came to fulfill God's Law?**

Jesus didn't come to abolish God's Law, he came to keep it perfectly. The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus this way: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). When Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God he proved that he was the Son of God. No mere man with a sinful nature can perfectly and perpetually obey God, but Jesus did. He did this because he wasn't a mere man, he was the God-man, fully God, and fully man.

Further, when Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience he earned God's righteousness and made himself to be a sufficient and effective substitute sacrifice. The righteousness that Jesus earned through perfect obedience was applied to our account, while our sin was applied to Jesus's account.

**Application Question:** If you are a Christian, which of these commandments are you struggling most with? What are some strategies that you can enact to fight against sin? If you are not a Christian, what will you do about your inability to obey God's Law? What will you do with your sin?

## **Conclusion**

God's Law is good. It is good for both believers and unbelievers. For the Christian, the Law of God provides a blueprint by which they can joyfully and worshipfully obey their Heavenly Father. For the non-Christian, God graciously reveals to them their need for a Savior by exposing their spiritual inability when they compare their lives to his Law.

Christians will produce the fruit of obedience because they are new creations in Christ. The fire of gospel transformation *will* produce the smoke of joyful obedience and humble repentance. If there is no smoke, then there can be no assurance of fire.

Finally, Jesus fulfilled the Law of God perfectly. He was tempted in all the ways that we are, but he never sinned. Jesus always did what God commanded and he never did what God forbade. This very same righteousness that Jesus exhibited is what is applied to the accounts of those who respond to the gospel message with faith and repentance.

- Do you understand the concept of Jesus's righteousness being applied to the Christian's account? If not, talk with your pastor about this essential Christian doctrine.
- What do you see when you look at God's Law? What does that indicate about the state of your soul?
- Is it your joy to obey God's Law? Why or why not?
- Does it grieve you to break God's Law? Why or why not?
- Which of the commandments that Jesus commented on do you find the most applicable to your current situation?

## **Prayer of Response**

Give thanks to God for his Law. Thank him for providing a blueprint by which you can walk in joyful obedience and humble repentance.

Rejoice that Jesus kept God's Law perfectly earning a righteousness that would be applied to the account of all those that would respond to the gospel message with faith and repentance.

Finally, pray for those who are outside of Christ. Pray that they would be humbled as their lives are exposed to the Law of God. Pray that God would open their hearts to the gospel.



## Lesson 3: Matthew 5:38–48

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38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’  
39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you  
on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you  
and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces  
you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from  
you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your  
enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who  
persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.  
For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the  
just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do  
you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only  
your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles  
do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is  
perfect.

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## Overview

Jesus taught that authentic faith should shape how Christians relate to the people around them. Living according to the Laws of their king will put them out of step with the world. It is out of the ordinary to tell the truth, go the extra mile, and love your enemies. God demands that his creation live this way, and to do so with perfection.

## Session Outline

1. Instructions for Perfection
2. The Model of Perfection
3. Only the Perfect are Rewarded

## **Theological Theme**

The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus's instruction to both his disciples and the gathered crowd. The sermon accomplishes one overarching purpose for both distinct groups. Jesus clearly portrayed God's standard for all people. And all who hear Jesus's words know that they have not met the standard. For those who were trusting in Christ, this message caused them to cling to Christ all the more for grace and transformation. For those who were not trusting in Christ, this message revealed to them their spiritual bankruptcy and their need for a Rescuer.

## **Christ Connection**

The person and work of Christ is the key that unlocks the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. For Christians, Christ is the one who made a way for them to live a life that is pleasing to God. He is also the one who gives them the spiritual power to do it. Finally, he is the one who continues to advocate on behalf of Christians when they do fall short of God's standard. For non-Christians, Christ is the only shelter they can run to when they are confronted with their woeful shortcoming in comparison with the perfection that God deserves and demands.

## **Missions Application**

The kind of living that Jesus described in these verses is foolishness to unbelievers. It makes no sense to the world. Many souls have been drawn to Christ through the humble meekness and servanthood of faithful followers of Jesus. When the message of Jesus is undergirded by a life that looks like Jesus, it is like dynamite in the hands of a missionary God.

## **Introduction**

Mark was a missionary in Afghanistan for almost 10 years. We would assume that an assignment in Afghanistan would be difficult. Difficult, however, is an understatement. A large amount of Mark's time was spent negotiating hostage situations. Yet, in the midst of chaos and violence, many Afghan families turned to Christ through his witness. After several years Mark asked one of the first Afghan converts about what had originally made him consider the claims of Christianity. The man told Mark that the first time that he and his family visited Mark's house something happened that completely changed the way they saw the missionaries and their message. The whole group was watching something together on television. Suddenly, Mark's small daughter spilled a bowl of popcorn. Much to the Afghan man's surprise, Mark didn't yell at her or ignore it and wait for his wife to do something. Mark got down on his hands and knees and helped his daughter pick up the popcorn piece by piece. The Afghan man had never seen anything like that. It was crazy to him. A man stooping down on the ground to help a child is something he would

have never done. He couldn't stop thinking about what he witnessed or the message of Jesus that he shared.

## **Session Summary**

So far, in the Sermon on the Mount, we have seen how believers are blessed now despite the difficulties of living for God in a fallen world because their future hope is good and assured (5:1–12). Next, Jesus used God's Law and applies it to the heart in order to give Christians a blueprint to follow and to give non-Christians a clear picture of their depravity (5:13–37). In our text in this session, we will see how Jesus emphasized to his hearers (both Christians and non-Christians) that God doesn't simply expect a valiant effort, but a life of perfect obedience to and imitation of God himself. This simultaneously pushes Christians to cling to Christ for grace and transformation and non-Christians to call out for mercy or reject the Way.

## **1. Instructions for Perfection (Matthew 5:38–44)**

In the first section of our passage, Jesus expanded on two verses from the Old Testament. The first is found in Exodus 21:23–25 which says, "But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." The second reference, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy" is found in Leviticus 19:18, which says "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

### **What is the essence of Jesus's teaching in verses 38–44? What was Jesus commanding his listeners to do?**

The Sermon on the Mount is full of surprising statements, but these few verses are probably the most controversial and, for some, infuriating words that Jesus spoke in this sermon. Think about what Jesus was saying. Let's consider these statements:

- Don't resist an evildoer
- If anyone slaps you on the cheek, let him slap the other also
- If anyone sues you, give them more than they are seeking
- If anyone manipulates you to serve them, serve them even more
- Don't turn anyone away
- Love your enemy
- Pray for your persecutors



This counsel is ludicrous. How do we even make sense of it? In these verses, Jesus commanded his hearers to go against every fiber of their beings. He was asking them to do something that seems completely foolish and even dangerous.

### **How are these commands different than the commands that came before in the Sermon on the Mount?**

Before this section, Jesus warned his audience about anger, lust, divorce, and oaths. All of those commands may seem somewhat manageable. Or at the very least it seems like we have control over those situations. We decide if we will become angry or if we will allow ourselves to think lustful thoughts. These commands, however, are different. We are asked to give up control and place ourselves at the mercy of those who hate us and desire to hurt us. We are asked to abandon a perspective of self-preservation and respond to whatever curse comes our way, not with passivity, but with blessing!

### **What do we learn about ourselves when we truly examine our lives against this standard?**

These commands are frightening and frustrating. Did Jesus really expect people to live like this? What was he getting at? What did he mean? We don't like it and we look for some sort of alternate interpretation because if we are honest we will have to admit that we don't measure up to this standard. In fact, we may even have to say that it seems crazy to even try to. Do we really want to live like that?

How these commands make us feel is a barometer of our spiritual state. They are a barometer because the way a person responds to them will show what their relationship to Christ is. Those who are outside of Christ and are righteous in their own eyes will reject these commandments as being weak, unrealistic, or just plain stupid. Those who are in Christ will recognize that Jesus is describing exactly what he did for them. Further, the person who is in Christ because they have heard and responded to the gospel with faith is given new spiritual life and the desire to obey these commands. A true Christian won't reject these hard teachings but will cling to Christ all the more tightly for both their forgiveness of sin and power to obey.

**Application Question:** How does your heart respond to Jesus's commands in these verses?

## **2. The Model of Perfection (Matthew 5:45)**

Jesus commanded his listeners to “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48). That verse is a bookend to all of the commands that Jesus clarified beginning in verse 21. In verse 20 he said, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” So, those two verses helped his listeners see both the consequence and the standard. The standard is perfection and the consequence is eternal.

### **Must we perfectly and perpetually keep Jesus’s commands in Matthew 5 in order to inherit the Kingdom of God?**

Yes. Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed the scribes and the Pharisees else we shall never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Further, Jesus said that we must be perfect as God is perfect. He didn’t leave it to our imaginations what it meant to meet that standard. He laid it out quite clearly in verses 21–47.

The problem is that no one’s righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. No one is able to keep Jesus’s word perfectly and perpetually and be perfectly righteous as God is perfectly righteous, and in this way earn entrance into the Kingdom of God. All have sinned and fall short of God’s standard (Rom 3:23). There are none who are righteous, not even one (Rom 3:10).

### **How then might we become more righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees so that we might enter heaven? How might we become perfect like God?**

A dead fish would sooner swim upstream than we could make ourselves perfect as God is perfect. We can’t do this of our own strength, because we are helpless. We can never be righteous by obeying the Law. We’ve already broken it. We are already guilty. Our hearts are bent toward sin from birth and as soon as we are able to break God’s Law we do, and then we keep doing it.

But Jesus was, though he was like us, was different. Jesus was fully God and fully human. He was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus’s righteousness was greater than the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus did live a perfect life in perfect obedience to the Word of God. He pleased God in every way. He was perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect.

What does that have to do with us? Well, it has everything to do with us because Jesus’s righteousness was credited to our account when we believed on him. In other words, Jesus’s didn’t just die a sinner’s death in our place, but he also lived a righteous life on our behalf. Not only was our sin reckoned to Jesus’s account. But Jesus’s righteousness was reckoned to our account.

So, if you are in Christ, then you do have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. In Christ, you are perfect. But this, dear friend, is all of grace and it is only through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

### **Why are these last two commands especially poignant in terms of Jesus's perfectly obedient life?**

Jesus never became sinfully angry. He didn't lust. He didn't divorce. He never made careless promises that he broke. Jesus practiced what he preached. The commandments that we are focusing on today, however, are especially meaningful in relation to Jesus's perfect obedience. Let's be careful not to miss this. Jesus didn't resist the evildoer, he turned the other cheek, he gave to his accusers, he served his persecutors, he loved his enemies, and he prayed for his attackers. Jesus did all of this in obedience to the Father as payment for your sin. Furthermore, some of the enemies that Jesus loved as he hung on the cross are sitting in this room. It may take a moment to understand this, but allow it to sink in. When Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, he commanded his listeners to be like God by loving their enemies. All the while Jesus knew that he would himself obey that command by going to the cross in love for enemies who were standing before him listening to his sermon. He knew that he would obey that command by shedding his blood for those reading these very words. Oh, the infinite wisdom and grace and mercy of God our Father through Christ Jesus!

**Application Question:** Does your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees? Why or why not?

### **3. Only the Perfect are Rewarded (Matthew 5:46–48)**

Jesus told his listeners to be perfect as God in heaven is perfect. In order to be perfect and righteous they would have to obey the set of Laws that he laid out for them. The standard was much higher than anyone in his hearing probably would have imagined, but that was the point. In order for people to seek salvation in Christ, they must first understand that they have fallen short of the mark and are in need of rescue. Furthermore, if Christians are going to walk in a manner pleasing to God, they must cling to Christ, both for salvation and sanctification. They have to understand that apart from him, they can do nothing (Jn 15:5).

### **What did Jesus say that those who obey will have?**

Only those who live according to these standards will be rewarded. The ultimate reward is eternal life. Those who live this kind of selfless life do so because of the power of Christ working in them.

We should be careful not to think that Jesus is saying to non-Christians that if they can somehow start to live in this way they will earn passage to heaven. First of all, a person cannot simply start to live this way by their own strength and according to their own will. Secondly, even if they could somehow turn their way of living to perfect obedience to God's word, they have already been found guilty of transgression. No amount of good deeds can erase that stain.

## **Is there also a reward for Christians who obey these commands?**

Christians have the promise of heaven. An eternity with God in heaven is a Christian's sure and anticipated hope through Christ. But, there are also rewards and blessings for Christians when they obey God's commands. We must be careful not to drift into a prosperity theology that espouses that God must bless a Christian materially or financially if they have faith and follow God's commands. But at the same time, we should recognize and enjoy the biblical rewards and gifts that God gives his children when they walk in obedience to him. For example, God promises to give his children peace that passes understanding when they offer their anxieties to him through prayer.

## **How can Christians obey the commands found in this passage?**

Christians still battle the flesh and still fall short of perfection. However, a true Christian will desire to obey God's commands and rejoice in them. A true Christian will hate sin and grieve over sin when they transgress God's Law. Over time Christians are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, and less and less to the ways of this world.

When Christians remember and rehearse the gospel of Christ, then they are more able and willing to live according to these commands. Milton Vincent puts it this way: "Doing good and showing love to those who have wronged me is always the opposite of what my sinful flesh wants me to do. Nonetheless, when I remind myself of my sins against God and of His forgiving and generous grace toward me, I give the gospel an opportunity to reshape my perspective and to put me in a frame of mind wherein I actually desire to give this same grace to those who have wronged me."<sup>1</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The commands that Jesus delivered in this passage set the bar too high for us. We can't live up to it. But Jesus did. Further, he obeyed these commands as he was suffering and dying for sinners. Jesus loved his enemies by bearing their sin on Calvary.

Christians now strive to obey these commands because they want to please their heavenly Father and they have the power to do so because of Jesus's work on their behalf, both in his righteous

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*, 25.

living and his dying a sinner's death. Nevertheless, the standard is so high that Christians would never try to obey in their own strength. And they are continually driven back to Christ for healing.

Those who are not followers of Christ are urged to look to Christ to take away their sins and to make them righteous. Apart from Christ, there is no hope.

- What is your reaction to the commands of Jesus in this section?
- Do you think you have the ability to keep them?
- How did Jesus himself keep these commands?
- How should Christians respond to these commands?

## **Prayer of Response**

Begin your prayer by recognizing the goodness and glory of God. Adore him because he is worthy and thank him for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Pray also for a heart that is humble before him. Confess your inability without his intervention to save yourself or sanctify yourself. Pray that you would love your enemies and pray for your persecutors just as Christ did.



## Lesson 4: Matthew 6:1–18

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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.*

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. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

5 *“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. 6 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.*

7 *“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. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this:*

*“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.*

*10 Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,*

*on earth as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us this day our daily bread,*

*12 and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*13 And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

*14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

16 *“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. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 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.*

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## || Overview

Why do you do what you do—to gain the approval of God or of others? Jesus taught his disciples to be careful to not practice their righteousness for the praise of man but instead for the glory of God as they give, pray, forgive and fast.

## || Session Outline

1. Giving that Glorifies God
2. Praying that Pleases God
3. Fasting that Focuses on God

## || Theological Theme

Truly righteous deeds proceed from a heart that is humble before the Lord and seeks to please him only. A soul gets humbled by seeing its pitiable state and clinging to Christ’s work on his behalf. Therefore, righteous giving, praying, and fasting are fruits present in those who have been counted righteous for Christ’s sake. Those who are God’s will desire to obey God’s word and their progressive transformation into Christlikeness will be sure and steady.

## || Christ Connection

When God draws people to Christ so that they might repent of sin and believe the gospel, he graciously justifies them, declaring them not guilty. He also mercifully adopts them, giving them the right to become children of God. The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ powerfully saves people from death and sin and separation from God. It also powerfully transforms people from self-centered, sin-seeking rebels into God-centered, good-loving worshipers.

## **Missions Application**

There are fewer things more distasteful than hypocrisy. Hypocrisy in religion is repugnant. On the other hand, humility and sincerity in religion is compelling and attractive. That's especially true in Christianity because gracious, merciful living is a vivid picture of a gracious, merciful work that has been done in them by God. Jesus's humble, devoted life is the backdrop of the humble, devoted life of believers. The glorious gospel is the diamond. That diamond is beautifully displayed in the pure gold fitting of our good works. In short, humble, sincere acts of devotion are compelling testimony to a lost world.

## **Introduction**

Did you have a pet goldfish as a child? Do you still have it? What happened to it? We don't want to bring up any traumatic childhood memories, but many of us have had the experience of discovering a childhood pet goldfish dead. It's doubtful that any of us were trained veterinarians as children, but we knew immediately that something was wrong. We had enough sense to know that what used to be alive had no more life in it. How did we know that the fish was dead? Well, the evidence was clear. It was floating upside down. It didn't swim anymore. It didn't eat or move. That's the difference between dead fish and live fish. Dead fish move only in response to outside forces. Live fish, however, move and swim.

In our passage today, Jesus commands his listeners to obey his words, giving them instructions on giving, prayer, and fasting. What we have to understand is that not only is Jesus strengthening the faith of those who love him and trust him, but he is also outing those who do not love him and trust him. True spiritual life is always accompanied by obedience. Those who are spiritually dead don't care about God's Word, they float carried along by the world and sinful desires. Charles Spurgeon put it like this: "Living fish may go with the stream at times, but dead fish must always do so. There are plenty of such in all waters: dead souls, so far as the truest life is concerned, and these are always drifting, drifting, drifting as the current takes them. Their first inquiry is — what is customary? God's Law is of small account to them, but the unwritten rules of society have a power over them which they never think of resisting."<sup>1</sup>

## **Session Summary**

Followers of Christ must be careful to practice true righteousness by being obedient to God for his sake alone. Many non-believers and immature Christians do good works so that they might have glory and praise from man. But, the mature, faithful Christian has left that sinful way of doing

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden*.



good works behind. The growing Christian repents of hypocritical righteous deeds and seeks only God's face, not the praise of men.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, we see a recurring formula. It goes like this:

1. DON'T do good works unto God in public
  - a. so you will be seen by man
    - i. man's recognition is your reward
2. DO do good works unto God in secret
  - a. so God will see you
    - i. and he will reward you

## **1. Giving that Glorifies God (Matthew 6:1–4)**

Jesus said, "when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you" (v. 2) He didn't mean that people were literally blowing trumpets every time they made an offering. He was using hyperbole to describe the intentions of their hearts. Giving tithes and offerings was an integral part of the religious life of ancient Israel. Today, we are familiar with the weekly passing of the offering plate, which can give us somewhat of an idea of the practice of giving in Israel. Both are regular opportunities to give and both are public in nature and can be manipulated by the giver in order to garner the applause of men.

### **Should Christians give? Why?**

Yes, Christians are commanded to give their resources directly to the work of the Lord. We need not debate whether or not Christians continue to be held to the rule of a tithe (10%) or not. The question does matter, but the motivation behind this debate is often wrong. For some, the 10% question matters to them because they want to figure out how much of the money in their bank account is God's and how much is theirs. This is a Pharisaical, hypocritical religion. The fact of the matter is that every bit of all that we have and are is God's. We are stewards, not owners.

There are numerous passages in the NT that make it clear that the faithful Christian life is characterized by generous, joyful giving. The question of whether or not a follower of Christ should give isn't even on the table. Jesus doesn't bother with it. He jumps straight to *how* we ought to give.

### **What should a Christian's posture toward giving be?**

Christians are givers because they have been and continue to be the most blessed of receivers. Christians have a terminal degree in the school of generosity. They have received a pardon for sin, adoption as sons, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and a secured and hopeful future in heaven with their God. Those good gifts are a Christian's treasure. Christ is their joy, hope, and peace and it will never be lost. What earthly possession that is susceptible to rust and moth could ever be held so tightly by a Christian that they would refuse to offer it up to their Redeemer for whatever purpose he sees fit?

**Application Question:** How have the good gifts that you receive in the gospel of Jesus Christ shaped your perspective on and habits of giving.

## **2. Praying that Glorifies God (Matthew 5:5–15)**

Just as the grace and mercy shown to us in Christ Jesus are the ground of our giving, this is also what undergirds and sustains our praying. Prayer is a precious gift to us. It is the primary vehicle by which we direct ourselves to God. God speaks to us through his Word by his Spirit, and we respond to God through prayer by his Spirit. John Piper wrote, "Prayer is the way you walk by the Spirit. Prayer is the way you walk by faith. In other words, it's the breath of the Christian life all day long. Just breathe in, breathe out. It's the way you live."<sup>2</sup>

We should note that all three of the disciplines that Jesus mentions in this section are designed to be "unto God." That is, they are meant to be directed toward God. But, of the three, prayer is most Godward in that it is the very act of coming to God and addressing him directly. Thus, Jesus gives it more time of explanation. Jesus's main point is that prayer is about God, not us.

### **What kind of praying does Jesus tell his listeners to avoid?**

He warned his listeners against falling into the habit of praying as hypocrites who do it so that they would be seen by men. They "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others" (v. 5) The common thread we see in all three of the disciplines that Jesus mentioned is the desire to "be seen by others." Jesus condemned praying that is re-purposed to bring glory and applause to the one who was praying. He condemned it because it is a distasteful perversion of the true purpose of prayer. We are meant to love God above all and seek his glory above all. However, this kind of praying turns that on its head. When

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper in *The New City Catechism Devotional*.

we pray to be seen by others, then we are loving ourselves above all and seeking our own glory above all.

People love themselves more than God and seek their own glory instead of God's glory all the time, but there is something especially sickening about someone doing that by manipulating a gift from God that is as precious as prayer. The person who is truly born again won't stomach praying for their own profit for long. The Spirit of God won't let them.

## **How does the model prayer help us understand what prayer is really all about?**

The Model Prayer or the Lord's Prayer is a template by which we can pray in our own words. We should be careful of two pitfalls. One is to assign some sort of magical power to the repeating of this prayer word for word, as though we could manipulate God by chanting it. The second mistake is to disregard it altogether. This is an important lesson on prayer given to us by our Savior, but we must keep the proper perspective on it. Jesus gave us this prayer as a guide or model for us that can serve to shape our priorities and posture in prayer. We ought to pay close attention to it and learn from it.

Notice what our priority should be. First, we address God as our Father. We look to him as children recognizing his tenderness, nearness, and authority. Then, the first two petitions set the tone for this prayer and, if we will allow it, our whole lives. Jesus tells us to pray for God's name to be honored as holy and for his will to be done. These petitions are direct attacks on the attitude of anyone who is praying for their own glory. Can you see the dissonance between praying these petitions while praying to be seen by men to get their praise? Again, the truly born-again person can't continue in that disharmony for long.

It is only after those fundamental petitions that Jesus taught us to ask for our personal needs. Notice how simple they are: daily bread and forgiveness of sin. Our praying should prioritize God's glory (both our words and our intentions) and they should be marked with a posture of humility. We should also note that these petitions serve the first. We need daily bread so that we would live and labor for the glory of his name.

**Application Question:** Are your times of prayer about you and what you want or are they about God and his glory?

## **3. Fasting that Glorifies God (Matthew 5:16–18)**

Our giving, praying, and fasting ought to be unto God both in our exterior actions and the motivation of our hearts. All three of these disciplines are good gifts that the Lord has given

Christians as a means by which they can relate to him and grow in faith and grace. But, as Jesus pointed out, they can also be weaponized by unbelievers and immature Christians to extract praise and glory from man for themselves.

Fasting is the most uncommon discipline of the three in our time. In Christian churches, members give regularly and they pray regularly, but fasting is practiced very little, if at all. We ought not to turn fasting into a law that is forced upon the consciences of Christians. However, fasting is a good gift that is useful in the Christian's process of sanctification. When it is properly understood, then Christians will be attracted to it because they will see it as a means to grow in godliness and worship of the one true and living God. In this passage, Jesus recaptured these useful disciplines that had been corrupted, abused, and misused. They were originally intended for the good of man to help him draw near to God, but they were now being used by many for self-promotion.

### **How should the Christian approach fasting (and the other disciplines)?**

That sort of self-promoting approach to the disciplines has no place among born-again followers of Christ. Christians can rightly practice the disciplines by doing them with a soul that is clinging to Christ, in secret, unto God, seeking no other reward but God's good gifts.

### **What is the reward that Jesus promises in his teaching?**

When a follower of Jesus Christ practices these disciplines with a humble heart and with God's glory in mind, then there is great joy and peace and communion to be found, but only for those whose hearts are clean, humble, and redeemed.

The reward isn't worldly riches, fame, or health. The reward isn't a successful business or advanced degree in your field. Christians may experience those things, but they understand their greatest treasure isn't anything that this world offers. No, the reward of the Father is joy in suffering, peace in persecution, and his own faithful love. The reward of the Father is a heart and mind that are being conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

**Application Question:** What sorts of rewards and blessings do you most seek from God?

## **Conclusion**

Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount by giving assurance to his true followers that they were blessed because of a sure and future hope no matter their present circumstances. He then emphasized just how high of a standard a person is expected to meet in order to live a life pleasing

to God. Christians respond to this impossibly high standard with repentance of their sin, a deeper conviction of their need for Christ, and gratefulness to Christ for his perfect obedience that is credited to them.

In the passage we are studying in this lesson, Jesus emphasized the orientation of the soul of a redeemed person. A person who has experienced the power of the gospel continues to cling to Jesus and will be first and foremost focused on the one whom their soul loves: God. Thus, their giving, praying, fasting, and any other discipline will be Godward. Further, if the Lord graciously brings to their attention that they are in opposition to his will, their response won't be stiff-necked rebellion, but humble repentance.

- Why are Christians blessed no matter what their external circumstances happen to be?
- How does the Law of God serve those who are not Christians?
- How does the Law of God serve Christians?
- In what way does the Law reveal those who are truly Christians and those who are not?
- What was the key theme running through the instructions that Christ gave?
- Do you struggle with this kind of hypocrisy?
- Do you find yourself more worried about impressing those around you with your religious devotion than you are about pleasing God?

## **Prayer of Response**

Worship God with a humble and fervent heart. Recount his attributes, especially his holiness. Give him thanks for saving your soul and for shepherding you as his child. Give thanks for the good teaching of Jesus that helps us see our hypocrisy so that we can repent of it and avoid it. Ask for strength to walk in obedience.



## Lesson 5: Matthew 6:19–24

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19 *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

22 *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

24 *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. 16 *“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. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 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.**

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## Overview

In the first half of Matthew 6, Jesus described the believer’s private life (giving, praying, fasting); in the second half, he was concerned with our public life (questions of money, possessions, food, drink, clothing, and ambition). Jesus made it clear that you cannot serve God and anything else. Evaluate the use of your time, talent, and treasure to evaluate what is truly on the throne of your life; see and smash any idols you have placed there.

## Session Outline

1. The Treasure
2. The Eye

### 3. The Servant

## **Theological Theme**

The doctrinal theme of this section of the Sermon on the Mount has to do with the orientation of the Christian's heart. It is helpful to consider the doctrine of regeneration, which states that God removes the corrupted, sin-dead hearts of stone and replaces them with a heart of flesh. This is all of grace and it is the sinner's only hope. This new Spirit enlivened heart is oriented toward worshipping its Creator and Redeemer. Jesus exhorted his listeners to labor toward things of eternal value, not temporal; to hold loosely to the things of this world because they are passing away; and to choose whom they will serve. Those who are born-again hear the words of Jesus and desire to obey. Those who have not been born-again hear his words and revile.

## **Christ Connection**

Those whom God has rescued from sin and death live a new life before the face of God. They are under His sovereign rule and live to love, serve, and worship him. Their rescue was carried out by God's will and Jesus of Nazareth's perfect obedience unto death on a wooden cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem. God's good work toward his children has everything to do with Christ. Not just in their saving, but also in their sanctifying. He who began a good work in Christians will be faithful to complete it (Phil 1:6).

## **Missions Application**

When Christians seek the kind of treasure that endures into eternity, hold loosely to the things of this world, and serve the one true and living God with an undivided heart then they beautifully adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is in the habit of drawing people to Jesus Christ through the word and works of faithful, humble, worshipping servants.

God is worthy of undivided worship and full devotion. Christians not only render this kind of worship to God, but they also pray for his fame to spread so that more and more people might worship in this way. Christians go across the street, state, and seas to tell of the glorious gospel so that they might be used of God to save the lost.

## **Introduction**

What makes a person rich? Imagine that you have a distant cousin who contacts you and asks you to come to his house as soon as possible. When you arrive, he explains that it's time he put his affairs in order. He explains that he doesn't have any children and so he has decided to leave his fortune to you. Every bit of it. You can hardly believe what you are hearing. You begin mentally

planning what debts you can pay off, what vacations you can take your family on, and how to invest in the future.

As he leads you down into his basement, he tells you that he has been saving for decades. Then, he opens the door and proudly proclaims, “It’s all yours!” You can’t believe your eyes. Milk cartons, newspapers, plastic grocery bags, and coffee containers are stacked almost to the ceiling. You inherited a basement full of things your cousin thought could be useful one day.

Even though a man may have a shipload of it, trash is still trash. Amassing worthless goods doesn’t convert them to something of value. We have to ask ourselves what is truly valuable. What makes a man rich? A worldly person counts himself rich when he has stored up for himself money, stocks, properties, and businesses. Just as a child collects marbles, rocks, bugs, and toys because these things suit his maturity and childish desires. The Christian, however, counts himself rich when he has God for his portion, Christ as his advocate, and the Spirit as his helper.

In Matthew 6:19–24 Jesus taught his followers to use an accurate scale to weigh the value of things. He called his disciples to understand and recognize the treasures of those whose only hope is found here on earth are susceptible to rust and moth. Christians must audit their storehouses and examine whether or not they have been thoroughly accurate in their accounting. In other words, does your life and what you are laboring toward really matter? Does it have eternal value?

## **Session Summary**

As we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount we would do well to remember that Jesus was accomplishing two goals with one sermon. First and foremost he is speaking to his disciples, those that love him and trust him. He was encouraging them to remember their future hope and blessed present as they seek to walk in obedience to the word of God while clinging to Christ. For the auditors who are attending the sermon but are not trusting in Christ, the sermon holds a mirror up so that they may see just how desperately wicked and helpless they are.

In this section, Jesus described the orientation of the heart of the Christian. The heart in this sense refers to a person’s devotion, loyalty, and affection. Jesus exposed the hearts of his hearers through a series of contrasts.

### **1. The Treasure (Matthew 6:19–21)**

In this first section, Christ contrasts two kinds of treasure.

**There are two commands in verses 19–21. What are they?**



The commands are actually the positive and negative of the same command. In verse 19 we read “Don’t lay up” and then in verse 20, “But lay up.” This is a command for Christians to labor diligently. Christians are called to produce fruit while they sojourn in this foreign land. When God rescues a lost soul his purposes go beyond saving him from the penalty of sin and eternity in hell. God’s great rescue of sinners is a starting point of a life of joyful service to the King until death. That’s why Paul told the Ephesians that they were created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10).

True Christians can’t remain idle or lazy. They are compelled by the grace and command of God to labor faithfully. They put in long hours without concern for their own agendas. They live for the pleasure and will of the one true and living God. Their work is different from the work of the world, however, because their labor is rooted in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. They don’t labor under the cloud of the curse, but in the power of the Spirit with full assurance that all of their work done in faith, according to the Scriptures will be fruitful in its time.

### **What kind of person has no inclination to store up treasure for heaven according to God’s word?**

Jesus commanded his followers to labor for treasure. Christians who aren’t storing up for themselves treasure are being disobedient. Furthermore, Christians who are storing up treasure for themselves here on earth are also breaking the commands of Christ. Christians aren’t called to simply work for work’s sake, but they are to labor for treasure. Further, they ought not to labor for just any treasure, but the kind of treasure that gets stored up in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy.

Does this seem stifling to you? Does it seem constrictive that Christians are not free to labor to whatever end they desire? If this truth is a bitter pill to try to choke down, it is because of one of two possible reasons. First, Christians who are immature in their faith will continue to kick against the goads until such a time that they are brought under greater lordship of their God. Like a rebellious child who believes that he knows better than the parent, Christians must be taught to see that they are ignorant and foolish and that their hearts, ambitions, emotions, and dreams must become subservient to the revealed will of God.

The second option is that, despite what you may believe about yourself, you are not a Christian at all. As we have discussed before those who profess Christ ought to examine themselves to see if they are truly in the faith. A person who has no interest in submitting to God’s purposes in their lives and continues in that hard-headedness with no repentance or desire to obey God’s Word can have no assurance of salvation, regardless of any other Christian memorabilia they may have collected through the years.

### **What should Christians do that results in treasures in heaven?**

Christians labor for that which God determines to be valuable, not what the world pursues. We can discover what God finds valuable and how we are to go about storing those things up by diligently searching the Scriptures. The good works that we are called to do are plainly laid out in God's Word. An excellent place to start is by looking at the commands and commissions of Christ. Jesus told his followers to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15), be baptized (Matt 28:19), participate in the Lord's supper (Luke 22:19–20), pray (Matt 6:9), give (Matt 23:23–24), love God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–40), and teach others to obey the words of Christ (Matt 28:19–20) to name a few.

**Application Question:** Are you storing up treasure for heaven or earthly treasure? What changes do you need to make concerning your work?

## **2. The Eye (Matthew 6:22–23)**

In this section, we find a potentially confusing teaching of Christ. This is because the teaching was grounded in cultural idioms that have not been passed along to us. We need to dig a bit deeper to better understand the intention of Jesus. In ancient Israel, the idea of having a healthy eye was a reference to someone who was generous. A person who was generous and not stingy was full of light. The person who hoarded his goods and was unwilling to share was full of darkness.

**What does generosity have to do with storing up treasures in heaven?  
How are these two sections connected?**

When Christians labor to store up treasures in heaven, then they aren't holding on tightly to the treasures of this world. Though followers of Jesus may be entrusted with many temporal resources to steward, they don't horde these things up for their own good and glory giving no thought to what the actual Owner may have in mind. Remember, Christians are stewards, not owners.

A person who is primarily concerned with obeying the Scriptures to honor God and store up treasures in heaven will have more to share with those in need because he is not fretting over storing up treasures on earth

## **What could possibly motivate a person to give of his material resources freely and sacrificially for the work of the ministry and for the good of his neighbor?**

Some people give money to atone for their sins. This, of course, is a foolish reason to give money because the forgiveness of God isn't for sale. God's judgment against sin cannot be placated with money. It is only the perfect and sufficient sacrifice of God the Son that can pay for sin. Nothing else.

Born-again Christians give for a totally different reason. Followers of Jesus don't hold tightly to material things because the mercies of God make the heart generous. When a farmer lays out more cost upon a plot of earth, it bears a better crop. In the same way, a rescued soul honors the Lord with his devotion, love, and obedience. Furthermore, that devotion, love, and obedience translate into kindness, love, and generosity toward his neighbor.

**Application Question:** Are you a generous person? Do you think that others view you as being a joyful giver or a worried keeper?

## **3. The Servant (Matthew 6:24)**

Finally, Jesus went to the heart of the message of this passage by pointing out the real potential for money and possessions to become idol worship. People can only serve one master and it is only fitting for Christians to serve God as their Master.

## **Why can't people serve two masters? Why are we unable to serve both God and money?**

Jesus finally named the thing that this whole section centers around, money. He had not been attempting to hide his intention, the meaning of his words would have been very clear to the ancient Israelite ear up until this point. But, just in case there were any who were still confused about what he was saying Jesus came right and said that they must either serve God or money, but they can't serve both.

Christians are unable to serve both God and money because they will hate one and love the other. They will despise one and be devoted to the other. In other words, the human heart isn't designed or able to worship in two distinct directions at the same time. The worship that God demands is characterized by whole-hearted devotion. Anything less is taking the name of the Lord in vain.

## **Does this mean that money is evil? Is Jesus prohibiting Christians from having anything to do with money? Should Christians view it as a necessary evil?**

Money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Tim 6:10), but it isn't inherently evil. Money is a product of functioning human societies and can be used for many kingdom-advancing purposes. Money also serves to ferret out the facts about one's heart. In these verses, Jesus makes it clear that there is a proper place for money and it isn't on the throne of one's heart. Christians should see money as belonging to God. They are simply stewards of it. And because it belongs to God it is to be stewarded according to his purposes and his will.

The human soul wasn't crafted to cling to money or any other created thing, even though they may give the appearance of peace and protection. No, the human soul is meant to adore, praise, exalt, rejoice in, cling to, trust in, and love the one true and living God in Christ and nothing else. When a person's affections and devotion are fully oriented toward the Triune God, then all other issues of life fall into place. But, one thing is for certain, Christians cannot serve God and money.

**Application Question:** Has there ever been a time in your life when money became an idol to you? How did you smash that idol?

## **Conclusion**

No one envies the man who is feasting on lobster tail, filet mignon, or some other delicacy when it has been provided to him as his last meal before taking his seat in the electric chair. Nor is anyone jealous of the mirth and laughter of the man dancing below the gallows. Their momentary pleasure is soon to be snuffed out by a permanent curse.

Christians don't envy the unpardoned sinner but pity him. The person who has had his sins forgiven stores up treasures for himself in heaven. He doesn't hold tightly to the things of this world because they are passing away. The Christian knows that only one Master is worthy of his undivided devotion and he will live before the face of God with thanksgiving, repentance, love, fear, and joy. He will seek to live a life rendering worship to the one true and living God.

- What is your greatest treasure? What would those who see your life day in and day out say your treasure is?
- What possessions do you have that you are simply unwilling to let go of? Is there anything that you might be holding onto with too tight of a fist?
- Are you a generous person? Why or why not?

- Do you believe that an itemized list of all of your expenditures over the last year would clearly show that you serve God above all?
- If you are a Christian, would you say that you serve God above all? What are some ways that your life bears that out? What sacrifices have you made in order to worship and obey God?

## **Prayer of Response**

Begin your time of prayer adoring the Triune God for who he is and what he has done. Ask for the discernment to examine your own heart and life, especially your relationship to money.



## Lesson 6: Matthew 6:25–34

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*25 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

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### Overview

In the previous passage, Jesus emphasized that we must choose between serving God or stuff. That choice has another natural consequence—*anxiety*. If we have learned to seek and trust God first, then we'll believe in God's promise to take care of his children.

### Session Outline

1. Consider His Word
2. Think About Eternity
3. Reflect Upon His Work

## **Theological Theme**

Like much of the Sermon on the Mount, this passage is about the sanctification of a believer. In these verses, Jesus especially spoke to the issue of worship and idolatry.

## **Christ Connection**

The glorious gospel woos Christians away from idolatrous striving and worry because the same God who has so wonderfully cared for their souls through Christ's sacrifice will care for their physical needs as well.

## **Missions Application**

Jesus said that "Gentiles seek after all these things" (v. 32) When Christians joyfully bow down to the one true and living God and forsake the worship of money, their lives become like a gleaming pearl against a backdrop of crimson. The strangeness of their lives is unmistakable and a living testimony of a life that has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **Introduction**

What is the fundamental difference between earthly ambitions and heavenly ambitions? The difference is obvious. That which is earthly will pass away, but that which is heavenly is eternal. Jesus told his disciples to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth where rust and moth destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Charles Spurgeon said, "It is time that I am done with all butterfly-hunting!"<sup>1</sup> What he meant was that pursuing earthly and temporal ambition is like hunting butterflies. When a child captures a butterfly, more often than not they destroy it because, though it may be beautiful, it is frail. Earthly ambitions fair no better. People chase after careers, investments, houses, clothes, vehicles, achievements, honor, fame, and power only to find that they crumble into dust in the end.

Not only that, but a butterfly hunt leads a child into dangerous situations and even if the thing is caught, it is crushed. Spurgeon concluded by saying, "My years are warning me that I may hope soon to be with Christ Himself, and see greater beauties than this whole creation can set before me. I am not ben on pursuing nothing but that which is eternal and infinite."

Unbelievers ought to be pursuing these earthly things. After all, they have nothing more to hope for. Christians, however, claim to look forward to something that is beyond description and far

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden*.

greater than anything this world has to offer. If their hope is certain and their faith true, then they dare not bow down to the idols of this world.

## **Session Summary**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed his disciples about what it means to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven. He was preaching a message that can only make sense to and received with gladness by those who have experienced the saving grace of God in the marvelous gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our passage today is best understood with the previous section in mind. Remember that Jesus told his listeners to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. He told them clearly that they cannot serve two masters; that they cannot serve both God and money. If we had to sum the previous section up in one command it would be this: Don't worship the idol of money.

### **1. Consider His Word (Matthew 6:25a, 31)**

Christians are not owed more than the simple command of Christ. Many parents have had the experience of commanding their children to put on their shoes, take their plate to the sink, or turn off the television only to be met with a counter demand for more explanation. Parents expect immediate and unquestioning obedience from their children. God expects the same from Christians. Jesus deserved the same from his disciples. But, God in his mercy and grace bears with his children. He gives them more than they deserve because of his patience and mercy.

The cornerstone of Jesus's argument against an idolatrous preoccupation with temporal needs is the authority of his Word. Jesus taught with authority throughout his ministry and did not have to appeal to someone else. This was in sharp contrast with the Pharisees and Scribes who appealed to external authorities to validate their teaching. Jesus taught on his own authority and it amazed those who heard him. This is a significant principle for Christians today. Every believer and local assembly must come to grips with the authority of the Word of Christ in their lives.

#### **Why do Christians need the authoritative Word of God in their lives? Why is Jesus's lordship over his people a kindness and mercy toward them?**

Many Christians have had the experience of reading a story of Israel's failure from the Old Testament and wondering how they could have been so hard-headed. After all, Israel had witnessed the power and deliverance of God. They had the Law and men of God who spoke on behalf of God. If anyone had what they needed to live in faith and obedience to the one true and living God, surely it was the Israelites.



They did not, however, have what they needed to live in perfect and perpetual obedience to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were hampered by their deceitful hearts due to their radical corruption they inherited because of the sin of their first parents. They were in desperate need of circumcision of the heart. They needed God to put his Spirit in them and remove their hearts of stone and give them a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26).

The same spiritual disability that plagued the Israelites also plagues our neighbors. It plagues us, too. Is it possible for any one of us to cast stones at the Israelites for their grumbling for food and water in the desert when we flash anger at those close to us if the milk carton is empty in the fridge? The point is that the rottenness of sin has reached every nook and cranny of our hearts, minds, and bodies and when we read of the sin of the Israelites we may as well be looking in a mirror.

The constant refrain and summary statement in the book of Judges is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. When we combine radical corruption with self-rule we end up with disaster. Thus, the need for authority. We need someone to tell us what to do. We need government and law. For the fallen world, governments are a part of God's common grace toward all humanity regardless of whether or not they submit their hearts to God. For born-again believers, the reign of Christ is essential to a joyful, Spirit-filled life. The lordship of Christ is a great mercy and kindness to Christians. We cling to it, cherish it, and live by it. Milton Vincent said it this way: "According to Romans 6, when I obeyed the gospel call I was both declared righteous and 'became a slave to righteousness' at the same time. Quite literally, the righteousness that God credited to me became my master on the day I was converted! And now I am daily called by God to surrender the members of my being as slaves to do whatever this righteousness dictates."<sup>2</sup>

## **What happens when we have no king or faithful word of authority over our lives?**

When we have no authority, no North Star to guide us, then we will do what is right in our own eyes. We will justify our sinful actions with all sorts of excuses and arguments. Christians must remember that Jesus is their King and their duty is to submit to him in every way in all of their lives. Of course, we fail at this because we still live in a fallen world and battle against the old nature. It's for this reason that we must daily commit ourselves to submit to his lordship by submitting to his commands in Scripture. As we read, study, meditate upon and memorize the Word of God, we will be convicted of sin and renewed in our fervency to serve our reigning King. The Holy Spirit will enable us to reject our tendency to do what seems right in our own eyes and live in humble obedience to the Word of our King.

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<sup>2</sup> Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*, 21.

**Application Question:** Do you highly esteem the Word of Christ? Do you let it dwell richly in you? What are some ways that you can give God's Word a priority in your life?

## **2. Think About Eternity (Matthew 6:25b, 32–33a)**

One of the primary themes in the Bible is that there is so much more than what we can see. Christians aren't materialists. Christians believe that they can see, taste, touch, and hold is only a small sliver of what is real. Furthermore, that which can be handled isn't what they should give their attention to. Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." (Col 3:1–2).

### **Why is it right and fitting for Christians to give their attention and energy to "things above" and not to "earthly things"?**

Jesus said, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (v. 25) and "the Gentiles seek after all these things" (v. 32). A life that is spent on gathering up all that one can on this earth is too small for the child of God. It makes no sense. It isn't fitting. A Christian who gives himself to the world is like a child of a king who is found sleeping in the streets or playing in alleyways. Not only is it sad, but it is disturbing. It should not be so. A Christian who neglects things above for things of this earth is like a bride-to-be who fails to enter the sanctuary when the bridal march begins. Upon further investigation, she is found to be in a side room fornicating with an old high school boyfriend. It should not be so.

### **What positive command does Jesus give in verse 33? What is the essence of the command? What are Christians to do?**

Jesus told his followers to seek first the kingdom of God. Let's recall that this passage is Jesus's follow-up to his teaching in verse 24, "You cannot serve God and money." In verse 33 Jesus restates that command in this way, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." When we take these two verses together we can discern what Jesus intended here. He meant the following:

- God is to have the highest priority in our lives.
- We are to serve God.
- We cannot serve God and something else.
- If we serve something else, then we are not seeking God's kingdom first.

The essence of this passage is worship. While it may seem on the surface to be about money, food, clothes, and worry, it is actually about the affections of the heart. It's about the devotion, worship, and idolatry of Christians. Jesus is calling his followers to wholehearted devotion to God. This isn't anything new, but the messenger and his authority is. God himself has entered the scene in flesh. God the Father is drawing people to his Son, and those that believe are called to live in a way that is congruent with their position in Christ. Jesus's teaching has been with Israel since the beginning. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4–5). But, now God is doing a new thing in Christ. Now, he is giving them a heart to do carry this out (Ez 36).

**Application Question:** What is your heart drawn out to, things above or things on earth? Why? What can you do to cultivate a heart that is caught up in the beauty and goodness of God?

### **3. Reflect Upon His Work (Matthew 6:26–30, 33b)**

Jesus, in his mercy, gave his followers a practical means by which to combat idolatrous worry about and striving for material things.

#### **What does Jesus tell them about their physical needs?**

Jesus told them that God is going to provide for them! How wonderful and gracious of our Lord to make this promise to his children. He told his followers that God himself will carry the burden of providing for them.

#### **So, what should we do if we start to worry?**

We should pray. In Philippians 4:6–7 Paul instructed the believers in Philippi to pray instead of worrying. Further, Jesus told us specifically to pray for our daily needs (Matt 6:11). We should replace worry with petition and prayer and thanksgiving. In other words, we should worship instead of worry.

Praying to God for our daily bread is no fool's errand. Prayer isn't some sort of Christian meditation in which we gain some sort of inner peace by releasing our concerns into the cosmos by verbalizing them. As Jesus pointed out, God is able and willing to care for his children. God hears prayer and he answers prayer.

When a Christian prays, he is bringing a request to the one true and living God, the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8). He is asking something of his Father. This is a God who delights in his creation and for whom nothing is too hard (Jer 32:27). We are praying to the one of whom Jesus said, “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!” (Matt 7:11).

### **Is God trustworthy and faithful? Can he be depended upon to meet our needs? Or should we supplement what God can provide for us with provisions from another source?**

Our prayers mean nothing if the one to whom we petitioning is unable to meet our needs. This fear, however, is quickly laid to rest when we read the Scriptures and also when we consider God’s provision in our lives up until this point.

God has promised to care for his children. Philippians 4:19 says, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” And God is faithful (Deut 7:9). If God’s Word promises he will care for his own and if God is always faithful to his Word, then we have a double guarantee that our prayers are not in vain. This, of course, doesn’t mean that God is obligated to give us what we ask. God is no vending machine. He is too good of a Father for that. He won’t give us a snake even if we ask for one thinking that we are asking for a fish.

### **For whom does God provide?**

God provides for his creation. But, does he provide for all of his creation? How does God interact with and provide for those who are his children and those who remain under his condemnation for their sin? Psalm 145:8–9 says, “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.” And Matthew 5:45 testifies, “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” In other words, God cares for all his creation, whether they have willingly submitted to him or not. His kindness extends to all up to a point. This is God’s common grace. God’s common grace also extends to his children, but it goes far beyond that. Not only does he provide for the physical needs of his children, but he also blesses them with his presence, his friendship, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life.

**Application Question:** Do you trust God with your daily needs or are you relying on yourself to provide? Are you a person of prayer or do you have the mentality, “if it’s going to get done I’ve got to take care of it myself”?

## || Conclusion

Jesus knew that this teaching was hard. It's likely that his disciples had served money all of their lives. He knew that the question that would naturally come to their minds (and ours) would be, "If I don't take care of myself, then who will?" Jesus's aim in verses 25–34 is to comfort and encourage those who would follow him to serve and worship God alone and to trust him to provide for their needs. He commanded his listeners to not worry. His desire is that his followers would live a life of faith and obedience, not fear, worry, and self-reliance. This passage is an apologetic against idolatry.

Jesus's argument consists of three parts. First, he commanded them to eschew a worrisome outlook on life. Jesus's Word is authoritative and a command from his lips is reason enough to be obedient, but he graciously bears with the doubtful heart by continuing his argument. Second, he laid plain the reality that the child of God was redeemed for nobler purposes than the pursuit of that which will turn to nothing in the end. Christians have bigger fish to fry than a comfortable retirement. Finally, God himself has taken on the responsibility to provide for your material needs. Just consider what you already know about him and then trust him with your needs now.

- Would people closest to you say that you serve God or that you serve money?
- What do you find yourself worrying about most? Why?
- What is your heart drawn to? What excites you most? Do those things line up with God's will and purposes for you?
- Do you truly believe that God is your provider and sustainer? Do you think that the fact that God is your provider means that you can be lazy?

## || Prayer of Response

Begin by confessing that you have found yourself serving money instead of God at times. Confess your need for forgiveness and the need for sanctification. Give thanks for Jesus your advocate with the Father. Ask God to help you identify areas in your life where you are worshipping created things instead of God.



## Lesson 7: Matthew 7:1–6

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*1 Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 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? 4 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? 5 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. 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.*

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### Overview

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus moved from personal temptations to interpersonal temptations. He warned against inappropriate judging and commends appropriate evaluation. The warning not to judge doesn't mean that we don't use discernment, but it does mean that we stay out of matters that belong to God alone. In what areas of your life are you hypocritical? In what specific areas of your life right now do you need greater discernment?

### Session Outline

1. A Two-Way Street
2. How Not to Be a Hypocrite
3. Dealing with Dogs and Hogs

### Theological Theme

The theological thrust of this passage centers around how the gospel shapes the way Christians interact with other Christians in regard to sin. Specifically, how should Christians confront other Christians about sin in their lives? This is an area of sanctification that Christians often neglect because of the potential for conflict.

## **Christ Connection**

The gospel of Jesus Christ provides two important services to Christians as they consider sin in the lives of their brother and in their own lives. First, when Christians consider the extent of grace that is found in the gospel, then they will call upon fellow Christians who are in sin to return to the author and finisher of their faith so that they may be conformed to the image of Christ. It is an act of love. Second, the gospel reminds Christians of their own desperate need of forgiveness and wretchedness before the Father, which will cause them to first examine their own hearts and then confront sin in their brother with a heavy dose of humility and grace.

## **Missions Application**

One of the stark contrasts between Christians and non-Christians is the fact that Christians have a remedy for their guilty consciences and the fear of death. Christians can face their own sin with hope, non-Christians cannot. Gospel-saturated dealing with sin by Christians is a potent testimony to an unbelieving world and is an effective tool in the hand of the one true and living God to open the hearts of unbelievers to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **Introduction**

What are the essential elements of camping? What are the things that you must have for a good campsite? There are all sorts of things that we might take along to make camping a better, more enjoyable experience. A tent could be helpful. Food is usually a good idea. Fishing poles might come in handy. But, there is one thing that is absolutely indispensable: a campfire. The cardinal sin of camping is to let the fire burn out. Furthermore, whoever is up first in the morning has one job, get the fire going strong. It isn't usually necessary to start the morning fire back from scratch. There are almost always embers raked up in the wood ashes still smoldering. All it takes is a little bit of stirring and a bit more fuel to get the fire roaring again.

The early morning campfire provides a helpful illustration of the Christian's battle against sin. We must remember that although a Christian is no longer a slave to sin, he continues to remain under the influence of sin. The Christian must still fight against the old nature, old desires, and old habits of disobedience. Like the early morning remnants of a campfire, a Christian still has the embers of sin raked up in the ashes of the old nature. Christians must be diligent to make sure that they keep these embers smothered and that they have no access to a fresh stirring and fuel to give them life.

In our passage today, we will consider one of the ways a Christian's old wicked ways can flame up into the sin of hypocrisy. The overarching theme of Jesus's teaching in this passage is the war between pride and humility in the heart of a Christian.

## Session Summary

Hypocrisy is claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which your own behavior doesn't match. In other words, it means that you don't practice what you preach. Another word for hypocrisy is *pretense*.

In this passage, Jesus condemned judging that isn't first self-applied. He was advocating for living that matches believing. In Christ, we have a new identity and that identity should lead to new living. Christians are people who have been transformed on the inside and are now reforming the outside. The medicine of the gospel begins its work on the human heart and always works its way out to behavior. The old, raked-up sin nature, however, bursts into flame if we aren't careful. One common scenario in which this is particularly tricky is when Christians use judgment and discernment in regard to the sin of their fellow Christian. In this passage, Jesus exhorted his disciples to first be grieved for their own sin before pointing out the sin of others (Matt 5:3). Christians are to judge others only from a position of humility, repentance, and mercy.

## 1. A Two-Way Street (Matthew 7:1–4)

This teaching of Jesus rests between a warning against idolatry and an assurance of God's sovereign working through prayer on behalf of his children. One thing is clear, the points that Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount are central to the Christian life. These are not ancillary issues that we may encounter from time to time. Jesus addressed the battles that Christians begin to fight the moment their eyes open in the morning.

### According to Jesus, what happens when we apply a standard of judgment to someone else?

Jesus warned that "you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use." Many people read verse 7:1 and automatically conclude that Christians should never evaluate the life of another Christian. This, of course, is not what Jesus is teaching here. If all we had to go off of was Matthew 7:1, then one may reasonably conclude that any sort of judgment is off-limits, but the overarching teaching of Scripture expresses something different than that interpretation (including in Matt 7:2–6). So, we need to put aside the notion that Christians ought not to pass judgment on one another. Christians are, in fact, to be subject to one another (Eph 5:21), bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), speak truth to one another (Eph 4:25), encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11), and teach one another (Col 3:16). All of those activities require judgment and discernment. The New Testament is



unambiguous about the fact that Christians are to judge and use discernment. (1 Cor 5:12; John 7:24; Phil 1:9)

### **If this isn't a prohibition on judgment, then what is it?**

The term "judgment" carries some very negative connotations in our culture today. As a result, the Word itself has become almost exclusively associated with pious, holier-than-thou, hypocritical condemnation. This is because much judgment is passed in this way. However, discerning judgment in and of itself isn't bad. It's actually a good, helpful, and necessary part of the Christian life. The problem comes when judgment is misused and abused, when it is passed from a position of superiority and condemnation.

This passage isn't a prohibition on passing judgment, rather it is a prohibition on condemning judgment. James described this kind of judgment in this way: "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge" (James 4:11). Paul phrased it this way: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom 14:4).

### **Why should we avoid passing condemning judgment on our brothers and sisters?**

Christians should not judge unto condemnation for three reasons. First, judging unto condemnation is God's prerogative, not any man's. No person has the ability to know the heart of another, thus they cannot rightly and confidently condemn them. Secondly, if another person is a brother or sister in Christ because they are depending upon the finished work of Christ on the cross as their hope of salvation, then they won't be finally condemned. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ and for someone to judge them unto condemnation then the judge is bearing false witness. Finally, Christians dare not judge a brother or sister unto condemnation because they themselves cannot stand under their own criteria. The Bible is clear that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and that none are righteous, not even one (Rom 3).

**Application Question:** When you evaluate the life of another Christian, do you do so with the finished work of Christ on the cross in mind? When you see the sin of another Christian do you desire for the Lord to work in their lives to bring them to repentance or do you have feelings of superiority and disdain toward them?

## **2. How Not to Be a Hypocrite (Matthew 7:5)**

Christians must judge, evaluate, and discern all the time. This includes judging and evaluating the lives of other believers. If Christians didn't do this, then they wouldn't know how to love one another, encourage one another, and teach one another. However, this judgment and evaluation must be done with gospel-centered discernment.

### **What does it mean to judge with gospel-centered discernment?**

It means that Christians should take stock of their own situation in order to gain a proper perspective on the sin of another. This is why Jesus told his followers to first "take the log out of your own eye" (v. 5). All Christians are in the same boat. None pass the background check. Every single one was guilty, condemned, spiritually dead, and under the wrath of God. How could any Christian think highly of himself when he has in mind that a shameful, brutal slaughter of the sinless Son of God was necessary that he might be saved? A self-righteous reputation crumbles to pieces when exposed by the blaring truth that proceeds from Golgotha's hill. Those who judge with gospel-centered discernment do so with humility, repentance, and mercy.

### **Can you think of a parable Jesus told concerning showing mercy toward sinners?**

The parable of the unmerciful servant is a shocking contrast of merciful discernment and condemning judgment (Matt 18:21–35). We don't need to recount the entire story here, but let it suffice to summarize the spiritual lesson that we learn from it. We might say it this way: those who have been shown mercy ought to show mercy. Or we may relate it this way: it is good and fitting for those who have been shown great mercy to show great mercy to others. Of course, the opposite took place in the parable, and that is what is so shocking about it. It should be equally as shocking when a born-again believer condemningly judges his brother.

Christians have been shown great mercy by God the Father. Ephesians 2:4–5 sums it up like this, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." Why should the mercy that God has shown us draw out our souls to show mercy to others? Richard Sibbes wrote, "We have this for a fountain of truth, that there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us."<sup>1</sup> This truth causes our hearts to leap with joy, but it doesn't end there: Godward affection always leads to godly living. If we have truly experienced the mercy of God, then we will, however imperfectly, show mercy to others.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*.

**Application Question:** How does the gospel change the way you view the sin of others? Do you think you would be more inclined to be merciful and humble with a brother's sin if you are keenly aware of your own need for forgiveness? Why?

### **3. Dealing with Dogs and Hogs (Matthew 7:6)**

In verses 1–5 Jesus prohibited Christians from judging other Christians unto condemnation as though they were God themselves and without sin. Further, he taught that Christians should evaluate and judge the sin of others with a humble, gospel-centered posture that is characterized by humility and mercy. When Christians have that perspective, then they can give good counsel and helpful reproof to their brother. Gospel-soaked confrontation of sin is a valuable thing within Christian fellowship. A Christian who has taken stock of his own situation and lovingly and humbly confronts sin in the life of a fellow believer is a wise reprover and is like a tree of life (Prov 25:12; 3:18).

#### **What does Jesus prohibit in verse 6?**

Jesus said, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs.” The metaphor here is clear: it is a great waste of a precious thing to give it to someone who shows no appreciation for it, or, worse yet, despises it.

The point of this saying is that Christians who have the precious gift of humble confrontation of sin to offer, ought not to give it to those who show contempt for it. Jesus called on Christians to show discernment and rightly judge the character of another. If a person is unwilling to receive with thanksgiving something as valuable and precious as the humble, gospel-centered counsel, then it should be kept for a more appropriate audience.

Jesus provided here for Christians a rule to any who would seek to obey verse 5. A Christian's commitment to speak the truth about sin to another must be guided by discernment and discretion. Christians should not go about giving counsel, rebuke, or comfort to one who is stiff-necked and scornful and will not benefit. These kinds of people will only be exasperated and enraged by that good gift. If you throw a pearl to a pig, he will resent it just as if you had thrown a common stone at him.

### **Conclusion**

It is a misrepresentation of Jesus's teaching to say that Christians should not judge. That isn't true. Christians must judge, but they must do so rightly. Christians should not sit in the seat of judgment over other Christians as though they were God and without sin. Rather they should

humbly discern, evaluate, and judge through the lens of the gospel and confront sin with humility and mercy.

- Are you more likely to see the sin of others or your own sin?
- How can you guard against judging unto condemnation and make sure that you practice gospel-soaked discernment?
- Do you know anyone who treats good counsel like a pig does a pearl? Do you treat good counsel that way?

## **Prayer of Response**

Begin the time of prayer by acknowledging the fact that the one true and living God and that he is the Judge of heaven and earth. Recognize that it is appointed for people to die and then face the judgment. Give thanks that you will not face the judgment without a Mediator, an Advocate. Give joyful praise because Jesus, your Intercessor, has made the way for you to be right with God. Now, ask God to teach you to judge rightly, not as though you were God, but with humility and mercy knowing that you also are in desperate need of correction, forgiveness and mercy.



## Lesson 8: Matthew 7:7-14

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*1 “Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 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? 4 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? 5 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. 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.*

*7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 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!*

*12 “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. 13 “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. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

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## Overview

As Jesus nears the end of the Sermon on the Mount, he encouraged persistence in praying to the Father, gave us the Golden Rule, and then gives the first of four comparisons that illustrate choosing the way of life with the illustration of the narrow gate.

## Session Outline

1. You Must Ask
2. You Will Be Answered
3. Pray Also for Them

## Theological Theme

The theological theme of this passage is the believer's position before the Father on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. All those who have responded to the gospel with faith and repentance are adopted into the family of God. The privileges of a blood-bought child of God are too wonderful for words. One of those great privileges is prayer. Another privilege is selflessly serving others, which can be done in prayer. These are activities of those whose hearts are turned toward Christ, who have found and stay on the narrow way.

## Christ Connection

The saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ clears the way for a person to have access to and take hold of these commands. Only because of a Christian's position as a child of God by the gospel's work does he have the glorious right to come before the Father and to serve others in the name of Christ. The gospel of Jesus shows Christians that the Father is good and faithful. Not only that but in the gospel Christians are completely satisfied and come before their Father not as neglected beggars but as well-satisfied children. Christians serve others because they have been served.

## Missions Application

Oftentimes, prayer is first and foremost associated with the quest to meet one's needs. It shouldn't be so. The focus of prayer is God and the Christian's agreement with God's will and purposes around the world. That's why Jesus taught Christians to pray, "Hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done" (Matt 6:9–13). A Christian's petitions ought to be shaped more by God's global purposes than whether or not they will have a good day. Christians should be asking, seeking, and knocking for the gospel of God to be proclaimed and treasured in every tribe, tongue, and nation. A Christian's prayer life should be characterized by intercession for those who have yet to hear the gospel, don't have a Bible in their language, and who have no born-again believers living among them.

## Introduction

What a wonderful thing that Christians are commanded to pray and serve others. In fact, one of the greatest ways a Christian can serve others is by praying for them. Jesus Christ obligated those who trust in him to boldly petition the Father. Of course, they come to the Father through Christ and stand before him guiltless because Jesus took on their guilt. Some may think of the commands of God as drudgery. They may even see this command as a burdensome duty to shoulder. Christians need a different perspective. John Piper can help us recapture the joy and privilege of prayer. He said: “Is intentional, regular, disciplined, earnest, Christ-dependent, God-glorifying, joyful prayer a duty, a discipline? Do I go to prayer meetings Tuesday morning, Wednesday afternoon, Friday morning, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday morning because it’s a duty, out of discipline? You could call it that.

It’s a duty the way it’s a duty for a scuba diver to put on his air tank before he goes underwater.

It’s a duty the way pilots should listen to air-traffic controllers.

It’s a duty the way soldiers in combat should clean their rifles and load their guns.

It’s a duty the way hungry people eat food.

It’s a duty the way thirsty people drink water.

It’s a duty the way a deaf man puts on his hearing aid.

It’s a duty the way a diabetic takes his insulin.

It’s a duty the way Winnie the Pooh looks for honey.

It’s a duty the way pirates look for gold.

So, you could call it duty if you want.”<sup>1</sup>

As we study this passage, let’s keep in mind the fact that prayer is our direct line to our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and God. For the Christian, to live and breathe is to pray. Further, that Christians should serve others by praying for them. This is what life on the narrow way looks like: laboring in prayer on behalf of others. The narrow way is a life of dependence upon God and service to others.

## Session Summary

It is fitting that Jesus would teach about prayer and service to others in a sermon directed toward those who love and trust him. Further, it makes sense that these would be so closely linked to the life of a believer on the narrow way. Christians come to God through prayer and they come to God in prayer on behalf of those around them. In our study of this passage, we will reflect upon various aspects of Christian prayer and how prayer isn’t meant only to bring our own needs to God, but to serve others in prayer. This is life on the narrow way.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, “How Can I Jumpstart My Prayer Life?”

## 1. You Must Ask (Matthew 7:7)

Jesus taught his disciples that they ought not to shrink away from prayer. In fact, he commands that they be diligent in it! There is no doubt that children of God fear God, but it isn't the sort of fear that causes one to avoid contact or interaction. Rather, love and reverence comprise the kind of fear that Christians have toward their heavenly Father. This good and fitting fear draws God's children toward him, it doesn't drive them away. And, the way that Christians approach God is in Christ through prayer.

Those who are in Christ pray. If someone professes Christ, yet does not pray, then he cannot have confidence in the veracity of his profession. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "The Holy Spirit's evidence by which he convinced Ananias of Paul's conversion was not, 'Behold, he talks loudly of his joys and feelings,' but, 'Behold, he prayeth,' and that prayer was earnest, heart-broken confession and supplication. Oh, to see this sure evidence in all who profess to be a Christian!"<sup>2</sup>

### **What kind of praying does Jesus command his followers to do? Do you think he intends for them to be shy and half-hearted or bold and confident?**

Jesus directly stated that Christians must boldly bring their petitions to their heavenly Father. Christians ought to expect God's ready response when they come before him with their requests. This is true when they are bringing their own needs before him, but it is also true when they intercede and petition on behalf of others. It is a great kindness and service when Christians utilize their position in Christ to seek the good of others. Christians are a blessing to those around them when they bring their needs boldly and humbly to the Father.

It is important to understand why we can come before God confidently in prayer. Hebrews 4:14–16 is useful to us here as we seek to rightly understand our boldness before the Father. This passage (indeed, the whole book) expresses the all-important doctrine of mediation. Jesus Christ is the great High Priest who has first come before God on our behalf to make atonement for our sin. Now that Jesus's righteousness is credited to our account, we also have the privilege to approach the throne. We can do so boldly because of the nature of the mediation. Jesus's sacrifice was the perfect and final atoning sacrifice. Our confidence before God is not based on anything that we have done, but on the efficacy of Jesus's sacrifice for our sins and imputed righteousness to our account. Our boldness isn't mingled with pride or self-justification. Rather, our boldness rests fully and firmly in the completed work of Christ on the cross on our behalf.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Soul-Winner*.



## What is a suitable petition for a child of God? For what should a Christian pray or not pray?

The Bible gives no list of items that are prohibited from the realm of prayer. What the Scriptures do make clear is the fact that we should bring all our burdens, cares, and anxieties to God in prayer. We should do so in the name of Christ, with the help of the Spirit, and according to the will of the Father. Nothing is off-limits. We are to cast all of our cares on him. We must bring the smallest of matters to him no matter how insignificant they may seem. Likewise, we are to ask for great things of our Father, for nothing is too difficult for him. John Newton said,

*Thou are coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For his grace and power are as such,  
None can ever ask too much.<sup>3</sup>*

**Application Question:** Do you approach God through prayer resting upon the finished work of Christ on the cross? Do you believe that God hears and answers you? Why or why not?

## 2. You Will Be Answered (Matthew 7:8–11)

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith like this: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The sort of faith that the Bible describes is different than the common use of the word in the English language today. We often associate faith with the idea of having a positive outlook and an optimistic expectation about what will happen. Biblical faith is different. The Christian’s faith is firmly grounded in God himself. Our faith doesn’t rest on our ability to make something happen but on the person and character of the one true and living God. Our faith is as certain as the rising sun because the object of our faith, God, is as certain as the rising sun.

### Does this mean that if we pray in faith we can expect results? Will God always answer us?

Yes. Absolutely. When a child of God prays with faith to his or her heavenly Father, results are certain. We must be careful, however, to remember that God will answer according to his wisdom and will, not our preferences. We do not have the right to demand that the results he brings about match our expectations. God may very well answer us “No”, but we can be certain that he hears us and answers us.

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<sup>3</sup> John Newton, “Come, Thy Soul, My Suit Prepare.”

## Why is it necessary to pray with faith?

James 1:5–8 helps us answer this question. He wrote, “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; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

James wrote specifically about obtaining wisdom here, but there is a principle that we can apply to all our petitioning. We should ask in faith, not in doubt. The key is to understand that James was talking about the idea that we should diligently repent of doubting the ability and promises of God. He is not saying that we should never doubt or question our own motives, hearts, or interpretations. The promises and character of God that are made clear in Scripture are never to be doubted, but we are prone to misunderstandings and self-deception. So, it is good to doubt ourselves as we enter into prayer. We ought never to doubt, however, that God will fulfill his Word to us.

## Does our faith force God to give us what we are asking for? Is God obligated to always say “Yes” to our petition if we have sufficient faith?

Of course not. God will do what is good and right always, but we don’t always ask for what is good and right. It is, however, pleasing to God when we approach him with faith. We don’t attempt to wield faith as a weapon to hold God hostage until he gives us what we want. Rather, we approach God with faith because of who he is and what he has done in our lives. In other words, faith is the good and fitting posture for the redeemed as they approach God in prayer. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:16).

Verses 9–11 clarify to us that God will only give his children good gifts. We need to let that truth sink in. God is good and he will not give his children evil gifts. God will not give his children evil gifts if they ask for good gifts. Furthermore, God will not give his children evil gifts if they ask for evil gifts. Moreover, God himself determines what is a good gift and what is an evil gift. It is quite possible that we may ask for something thinking that it is a good gift when in reality it is an evil gift. And, what we think is an evil gift, may actually be a good gift. God has the wisdom to see these things, and so we trust him.

**Application Question:** When you pray, is your heart submitted to God’s authority and ready to receive with joy whatever answer he gives? Or do you become angry if God doesn’t answer your prayers as you think that he should?

### **3. Pray Also for Them (Matthew 7:12)**

Christians go against the flow. Their lives look different than the lives of people who have not submitted their hearts to the one true and living God. One of the ways that their lives look different is in their praying.

Prayer is foolishness to an unbelieving world. It is idiocy to someone who believes that the material is all that exists. If prayer is foolishness, then praying for others is lunacy. Christians are never more counter-cultural than when they are in their prayer closets pleading to their heavenly Father that he would save the soul of their neighbor, co-worker, teacher, spouse, boss, child, or enemy.

Jesus commanded his followers, ““So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (v. 12). In light of the immediate context, we may very well think of it like this: *Therefore, whatever you want others to pray for you, pray also the same for them.*

#### **Why is prayer helpful and effective as a way to serve others?**

Prayer is effectual because the one to whom Christians pray is powerful. When a person approaches the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the name of Christ, then they have real access to the Being who spoke creation into existence and split the Red Sea. Christians should highly value and esteem prayer. What could be more weighty than their petitions being brought before God in prayer? They should desire that other Christians pray for them. They should covet prayers. This is why the “Golden Rule” applies to prayer, perhaps more than any other activity. Just as Christians desire that others would pray on their behalf, they should pray for others.

#### **What if someone doesn't desire that we pray for them? What if they don't see the value in it? Should Christians still pray for a person like this?**

Yes. Just because a person doesn't see the value in prayer doesn't mean that its usefulness and benefit is negated. Christians pray for others not because they are trying to please them, but because they know that it is one of the most loving and helpful things that they can do for someone. When Christians pray for someone who doesn't ask for it or doesn't desire it, then they are reflecting the character and goodness of their heavenly Father who gives good gifts to his children even when they desire evil gifts.

**Application Question:** Do you selflessly labor in prayer for others? Have you seen this as a way to serve others and treat them the way you want to be treated?

## || Conclusion

Christians live in a way that is contrary to the ways of this world. They walk along the narrow way that leads to life because they have heard the gospel call and responded with faith and repentance. Their hearts are oriented toward their Maker and their desire is to obey Him. Two distinctives of those who are traveling toward the small gate are a life marked with prayer and service to others. These two work hand in hand as Christians labor in their private times of prayer to intercede for others.

- Are you a person of prayer? What does your prayer life reveal about your dependence upon God?
- What does Christ's work on the cross have to do with prayer? Why does it matter?
- How is prayer related to a Christian's relationship with God?
- Does prayer work? Explain.
- If we have enough faith will God give us what we ask for? Why or why not?
- Is praying for others actually helpful or is it just a cop-out?

## || Prayer of Response

Ask God to make you a person of desperate dependence upon him. Ask him to teach you to pray without ceasing. Ask him to help you to feel your need for his work in your life.



## Lesson 9: Matthew 7:15–28

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15 *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*

24 *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

28 *And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,*

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## Overview

This passage brings the Sermon on the Mount to a close. Jesus gave an invitation to respond to his teaching by telling the parable of the wise and foolish builder. The Scribes asked Jesus by what authority He taught. The same question will be asked of us. On what authority are you building your life? That fact will determine if you’ll be able to survive the storm. Commit to building your life on the words of Jesus and no one else.

## Session Outline

1. Be On Guard
2. Watch the Fruit
3. Build on God's Word

## Theological Theme

The final verses in the Sermon on the Mount have to do with the sufficiency of God's Word in the life of the believer. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has implications for Christians in their ability to discern false teaching from true teaching as well as their sanctification and perseverance in the faith.

## Christ Connection

Paul told the Colossians "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (3:16). This is basically a summary statement of Jesus's final teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Christians feed upon the Word of Christ. They build their lives upon it. They bet the farm on all that he said and promised.

## Missions Application

Christians who take the Word of Christ seriously are likewise serious about getting the gospel to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Not only were Jesus's final words before his ascension dripping in mission focus, but his final revelation to John featured a glorious worship scene in which people from all the families of the earth were blessed and blessing God. Those who build their lives upon the rock of Jesus's teaching do so with the gospel on their lips and their feet ready to cross borders, streets, and cultures.

## Introduction

Since we as humans can't read the heart of someone, what are some ways that we try to determine what is going on inside of a person? What do we look for when we want to discern the motivation and condition of a person's heart? Often we will look at a person's words, actions, and emotional expressions at that moment and make an assessment. There are two problems with this approach. The first is that a person's immediate response and emotional expression to something doesn't necessarily indicate the long-term condition of someone's heart. For example, you may feel compassion and mercy toward a homeless person on the side of the road. You may

even give him some spare change. However, it is doubtful that you will go sell your home and good and cash out your retirement and give it to the poor. This same principle holds true with a person's spiritual condition. Thomas Manton said it like this: "We do not judge of men's complexions by the color they have when they sit before the fire. Just so, we cannot judge of a man by the emotions which he has when he is under the influence of a compelling sermon."<sup>1</sup>

The second problem has to do with our standard of judgment. We need a measuring stick to hold up against a person's life in order to discern true inner condition. Sadly, what tends to grab our attention is sensational, overt expressions of what we deem as super-spirituality. Jesus refers to prophecy, exorcism, and miracle in this passage and calls on his disciples to be careful not to be fooled by someone who claims to be of Christ and uses this sort of evidence of proof. It's not proof at all. What do you think our measuring stick should be?

## Overview

Jesus closes out the Sermon on the Mount with a call to obey his words, God's Word. Those that are "blessed" are the ones on the Narrow Road. And the ones on the Narrow Road are those that hear and obey the word of God. Obedience to the Word of God is the good fruit that is produced by those who know and love God. While other fruit may seem tempting (prophecy, miracles, exorcisms), they can be smokescreens and snares set by the devil to lead Christians from the Narrow Way.

## 1. Be on Guard (Matthew 7:15)

The Sermon on the Mount, up until this point, has been a blueprint for souls that have been given new life by Christ. Jesus's teaching has served to encourage and instruct the saved as well as expose and convict the lost. Now, in the final verses, Jesus sums up his teaching in one overarching command. It comes in the form of a parable. But, before we get to this crucial lesson, we need to understand the runway leading up to it and how the two parts fit together.

### What is the command found in verse 15?

Jesus tell his disciples to be on guard. It's interesting that he doesn't say to be on guard against the influence of the world, the temptations of their own flesh, of the snares of the devil. Jesus tell them to watch out for "false prophets." He explained that they would come in sheep's clothing, but are actually violent, dangerous wolves.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Manton quoted in *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden* by Charles Spurgeon.

## **What is so nefarious about this threat to followers of Jesus?**

The problem with false teachers is that they often have the appearance of true teachers. They use deception to gain trust and infiltrate fellowship in order to spread their teaching and lead sheep off of the difficult road that leads to the narrow gate. The danger here is great. We are talking about a trojan horse full of enemy soldiers bent upon the destruction of the city.

In Kenya dairy farmers will often add water to the milk to keep their levels up, which will keep their income up. These false teachers are like the dairy farmers who do this, except they don't add water, they add poison. They present something that they claim is nourishing and appears to be nourishing, but it is actually soul-killing.

Jesus's warning wasn't unfounded. Very soon after the gospel spread into the Gentile world from Jerusalem, this very problem arose. That's why Paul wrote the letter to the Galatian church. This was also what Jesus had against the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira. Paul had traveled to Galatia to share the gospel. It was a different culture than Israel, but the gospel found fertile soil there and many people came to Christ, and churches were formed. After Paul left another group of "Christians" came in and began to teach the churches that in order to be saved they had to place their faith in Jesus and follow the Law of Moses. Many believers accepted this false teaching. Paul was deeply distraught due to this turn of events. Jesus was equally concerned with what is happening in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira because souls were at stake.

Souls are still at stake. Many churches across the United States and the world today have been infiltrated by false teachers. This is a critical problem today and must be addressed. That's why this passage is so very important and relevant.

## **What should Christians do in light of this command?**

Christians must be on their guard against wolves and be careful to not let their guards down. They should be careful not to accept any and all teaching that they come into contact with. They should be diligent to test all teaching they are exposed to before trusting it. Finally, Christians should get their primary nourishment from the pastors and teachers in their local assembly and personal times of Bible study.

**Application Question:** Have you ever heard false teaching? What was the setting? How did you respond? Have you ever been fooled by false teaching? What made it appealing to you?



## **2. Watch the Fruit (Matthew 7:16–23)**

The early church faced two primary threats. The first was persecution from without. These attacks only served to strengthen the church and spread the gospel. The second attack was false teaching from within the church. This threat was far more dangerous and effective. It still is today. The fundamental issue to consider in light of this threat is how a Christian can discern between false and faithful teaching.

### **According to Christ, how can his disciples recognize false teachers?**

Jesus said, “You’ll recognize them by their fruits” (v. 16). Christians can determine truth from lies by looking closely at the products that they produce. Consider how to tell a fake among products with which you are familiar. There is an abundance of counterfeits of different products in the world. We don’t see them as often in the United States, but if you have spent any time in the developing world and have visited a market, then you’ve seen them. Do you think you would be fooled? Brands you wouldn’t dream of purchasing in the U.S. can be quite economical in other countries. Don’t be deceived, however. These aren’t genuine products. They are fakes. Their quality isn’t there. The craftsmanship doesn’t compare. These are not authorized products; they are a poor copy of the real thing. If examined closely, the fruit doesn’t hold up. It’s one thing to get fooled on a pair of Nikes. It’s quite another to take the bait on a false message of salvation.

### **What do we have at our disposal by which to measure fruit? How can we tell if a product is fake or genuine?**

If Christians were left to their own wisdom and discernment, they’d be in trouble. People are easily deceived. That’s why Jesus gave this warning. He knew that Christians would struggle to stay on the difficult road headed toward heaven as voices called out to them. Thankfully, Christians aren’t left to their own wisdom as they seek to discern false prophets from true prophets. Jesus explained that just because someone comes into the midst of the church and claims the name of Christ and even does sensational things in front of them doesn’t mean that they are faithful teachers. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (v. 21). The way to judge a teacher is to look closely at his doctrine and his life and measure it against the will of God the Father. What that means for Christians is that they must compare the life and doctrine of a teacher with the Scriptures. This, of course, implies a Christian must know the Scriptures, otherwise they have no measuring tape.

Christians should be careful not to be swept up with the excitement of so-called prophecies, exorcisms, healings, or miracles. It’s clear from this passage that those things aren’t to be sought after or lauded. Rather, Christians should hold in high esteem the biblical fruit of doing the will of God. And, if you happen to be unsure about what God’s will is, then going back and re-reading the

Sermon on the Mount would be an excellent place to start. Furthermore, Christians should never accept and fellowship with false teachers. These ravenous wolves should be exposed to be what they are and avoided.

**Application Question:** Have you examined the fruit (doctrine and life) of teachers that you listen to and follow? How do they measure up against God's Word?

### **3. Build on God's Word (Matthew 7:24–29)**

The command to be on guard and Jesus's explanation of how to discern false from faithful teachers culminates with a parable that ought to be understood as a controlling motif for the entire sermon on the mount. In other words, the parable of the wise and foolish builders serves as an overarching theme that holds all of the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount together.

#### **What is the theme of the parable of the wise and foolish builder?**

The theme is that Christians should cling to Christ by clinging to his Word. The Christian is a pilgrim and is making his way toward the celestial city. He is journeying down the difficult road toward their eternal home. The road is difficult because it is fraught with many dangers, temptations, and deceptions. The wise and prudent Christian will be vigilant to heed the Word of his Master. He will cling to his Savior, Christ, and he will cherish every Word that Christ said.

This parable has everything to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gospel power puts Christians on the narrow way (justification). Gospel power keeps them on the narrow way (preservation). Gospel power transforms Christians along the way (sanctification). And gospel power produces faith in Christians toward the Word of Christ and causes them to cherish it and cling to it. In cherishing and clinging to the Word of Christ, the faithful Christian finds safety and comfort for his soul.

#### **Read John 8:31–32. What does Jesus say about his word?**

Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). Christians need to be free, but freedom is only found in knowing the truth. Further, truth is found in its densest, purest form in the Word of God.

Christians need to develop the discipline of telling themselves the truth, not the lies of the world or of the devil. They must diligently work to block out false messages and deception from the media, friends, and false teachers. This can only be done when Christians play offense through reading, memorizing, studying, and meditating upon the Word of Christ.

Christians should set aside time each day to take up and read the Scriptures. They must read prayerfully and humbly with thanksgiving and repentance. They must receive the truth of God's word with joy and live in accordance with it.

God's Word is a lamp for the Christian's feet and a light for their paths. Followers of Christ need something to guide them and when they tell themselves the truth of God's word then they have a North Star, an inextinguishable torch that lights the way through the darkest valley and deepest forest. No matter what comes their way in this life, God's word is sufficient to guide them and make them complete (2 Tim 3:16–17).

**Application Question:** Do you cling to Christ by clinging to his Word? What habits and commitments do you have that show your love and esteem for the Scriptures?

## Conclusion

We learn critical truths in this passage. God has provided his Word for Christians. His Word contains his will that Christians should submit to with joy. Furthermore, God will tell some to depart from him because he never knew them. We also see that just because someone claims to be spiritual because of their signs and wonders doesn't mean that they are spiritual. In fact, these things are used to deceive people into following false teaching. Christians must be on their guard against false teachers by testing all teaching by the standard of the Scriptures. Furthermore, Christians should cling to Christ by clinging to his Word. They should cherish and treasure the Scriptures. They should read and practice them with great zeal and joy and thanksgiving.

- What are some safeguards that you have up for yourself and your family against the influence of false teachers?
- Who are some well-known false teachers today?
- What is the best way to discern between false teachers and faithful teachers?
- Are you a Christian who loves the Bible? Why or why not?

## Prayer of Response

Ask God for discernment and wisdom in your own life as you consider which teaches you allow to have influence in your beliefs.

Pray also for a love for God's Word and that he would help you to read it, believe it, and obey it. Ask for the grace to cling to Christ by clinging to his Word.

For more helpful resources  
that encourage, equip, and educate the church,  
visit [www.G3Min.org](http://www.G3Min.org).

