

Introduction:

The sermon on the mount strips away the pretense of self-righteousness and brings the standard back to the level of human impossibility. It is humanly impossible for anyone to live the kind of life Jesus describes throughout this sermon on their own power. It is impossible to have the characteristics of the beatitudes, to live according to the teachings of Jesus in chapter 5, to follow the practices Jesus describes in chapter 6, and to comply with the commands he has given in these last several sections of the sermon on a human level alone. We do not have enough wisdom, strength or will power to live righteously. We must live it according to God's wisdom, in his strength in simple obedience to him, or we will only live in what Paul described as a *"form of godliness that denies God's power."*

6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

On one hand we are commanded to not judge one another with the stern warning that we would be judged in the manner that we judge others. Yet, at the same time we are to treasure the precious, holy message of the gospel that has been entrusted to us and not give it to dogs and swine, which demands that we make judgements.

How can we possibly keep from falling into the pattern of the Scribes and Pharisees of self-righteously condemning others because they fail to live up to our standards, and yet at the same time have the discernment to tell the difference between those who are dogs and swine and those who are not?

Left to our own understanding, we quickly set up standards for right and wrong and then judge others against that standard. If someone does not do as well as we do, we look down on them. Our pride causes us to think that we are able to win others to our way of thinking by dominating philosophical arguments or triumphing in Bible battles, which will lead us into giving what is precious and holy to "dogs and hogs." The truth is that people come to God through the Holy Spirit's work as we place our faith in his wisdom and timing rather than our ability to persuade.

- ❖ Consider: **Proverbs 3:5-6** *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths [NLT: "show you which path to take"].*

True righteousness causes us to recognize our weakness and to rely on our heavenly Father to help us. This is not unlike one of my children helping me carry something heavy. I am the one providing all the strength needed to carry the object, but they grasp hold simply to be involved. The truly righteous want to be involved in what God is doing but they rely on God's strength and wisdom to accomplish the task. The self-righteous redefines the task until the bucket is small enough for them to carry on their own. A form of godliness, without experiencing the unlimited possibilities of God's power.

We must have the humility that comes with being poor in spirit and be mournful over sin while also being merciful. Meekness, which is relying on and following only God, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness will increase our desire and ability to bring ourselves and others into greater conformity to Christ. When we are pure in heart, we can see clearly the wicked nature of other people who reject what God has done for them. We are called to be salt and light and not be afraid to speak to others even if they persecute us, but in doing so we must value the holy nature of our message and treat it with respect. We are striving to live lives that reflect true righteousness from the heart.

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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

As with so many other passages of Scripture, these verses are often taken out of its context with the result that its meaning is twisted. There are those that look at verses 7 & 8 and say that God is promising to give us anything we desire as long as we ask him for it.

Some even twist **Psalm 37:4** to back that up, *“Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.”* “See,” they say, “anything you desire, God will give you. Just make sure you say, *‘In Jesus name’* at the end of your prayer because in **John 14:14** Jesus says, *‘If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.’* So, *“ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.”*

If you go on in the **Psalm 37:1-6** passage, you find what the writer is talking about. *“Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb. Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgement as the noonday.”*

The Psalm goes on to describe the insecurity of the wicked and the security of the righteous. It is not talking about God giving us whatever we want, but as we delight in the Lord our desires change and we want righteousness more than anything. The Lord will give that to us, and we will find our security in it because we trust him.

In **John 14** we do not find that asking something in Jesus’ name means tacking on a phrase at the end of the prayer like a magic formula. When we place this verse in context we find the true meaning:

John 14:12-14 *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ^{ask} anything in My name, I will do it.*

The passage is dealing with Jesus disclosing his oneness with the Father, not with giving us unlimited wishes. Therefore, we are instructed to ask in accordance with his name [*according to his plan and purpose*], which can only be for whatever will bring glory to the Father.

If you want to live in the righteousness described by Jesus throughout the Sermon on the Mount, then you keep asking, seeking and knocking and God will give it to you. Each of these elements all stress the same point – the mystery and miracle of prayer. God wants us to persevere in prayer as we seek a deeper understanding of who he is what he desires for us to receive, believe and apply to our way of living.

It is easy to assume that you ask once and then receive. You seek once and then you find. You knock once and the door is immediately opened. However, all three of the verbs are present tense and they would be better translated, ***“keep asking, and it shall be given to you; keep seeking, and you shall find; keep knocking, and it shall be opened to you.”*** If you want to live a righteous life, then you must actively pursue it by pursuing after God continually.

Keep in mind as well that what we are asking, seeking and knocking for is not some material possession, but the character qualities of true righteousness in our life. Jesus clarified this in his teaching regarding earthly treasures vs. heavenly treasures. If we only received material objects that would be the end of it, but the character qualities he endeavors to instill in us are developed over time as different aspects of our life are molded.

God wants us to continually ask, seek and knock to manifest his righteousness in every situation at all times. The answer to our quest is made secure in Jesus’ statement in verse 8, *“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.”* If we fulfill our part, God will fulfill his part and respond. How will he respond? Jesus uses two illustrations to bring emphasis to the answer.

9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

This rhetorical question demands a “no” answer. Would any father give his son a stone for food instead of bread? – of course not! They all understood this very clearly. A stone may have looked like bread, but none of them would be this cruel like to their beloved child.

The second illustration is similar. The idea is not that he would give a live snake, which would be dangerous to the father as well as the son, but that he would substitute cooked snake meat which was unclean for cooked fish. The meat might have looked the same, but none of them would pull such a cruel trick on their child and defile them with something unclean.

There are many today that say man is basically good, but society corrupts him. They claim that if man were in the right environment, then that natural goodness would come out. Scripture is clear that the problem is that man is by nature sinful. Paul said that *“all have sinned”* and that we were *“dead in our trespasses and sin”* and were *“by nature children of wrath.”* Our sinful nature is exhibited from day one. Jesus states it plainly here, *“you, being evil.”* The true nature of man is sinful, not good, and God will hold him responsible for his evil even if society does not.

Now if evil men know how to give good gifts to the children because they ask, how much more so will our heavenly Father give good to those who ask him. **James 1:17** reminds us that: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

Every good thing we have ever received has come from God whether we have acknowledged that truth or not. If we come to him as our heavenly Father, he will not necessarily give us what we want but he will give us what is good [*what is necessary and beneficial according to his will*].

Oh, that we would learn to praise him as much for withholding what would NOT be good for us as much as we praise him for the good things he graciously provides!

12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The passage concludes with a statement that is often called the Golden Rule. Again, this is not some isolated statement. Notice that it begins with the word, *“Therefore”*, which connects it to what Jesus has said earlier. This statement reveals the basic principle of righteous living in relationship to one another: judging without condemning, which is the basic rule for how to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Jesus' statement challenges us to be good to others to the degree that we would want others to be good to us. This is a position of love for all people. It is the perfect example of Jesus' character. We ask, seek and knock, believing that he will answer by changing us and empowering us to live by a new standard based in love; to pour goodness into the lives of others, just as God has treated us.

Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

