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Matthew 7



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the topic of judging others and how Christians should approach it. He notes that making assessments based on surface information can be foolish and shameful, and followers should aim to use charitable judgment when assessing others. Gregg also touches on prayer, false prophets, and the concept of building a solid spiritual foundation by hearing and doing the teachings of Jesus. He emphasizes the importance of living soberly, righteously, and denying ungodliness in today's age.

Transcript

...of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel. It is different from the previous chapters in one way that's very notable, and that is that in chapters 5 and 6, the material follows various repetitious patterns. The Beatitudes, for example.

There's eight of them, and the pattern of each of the Beatitudes is very repetitious. Blessed are the...blank...for...blank. And each of the Beatitudes follows that same pattern. Then, after that, you come to the place where he's talking about, you've heard that it was said, but I say unto you, and he does that six times, and that takes up the majority of the fifth chapter.

And then in chapter 6, there is a similar kind of thing, where he says, when you do alms, or when you pray, or when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, and he gives...he follows a distinct pattern there. And follows that largely with the discussion of the need to trust God, and not serve mammon, not trust in money, and finances, and natural things, but to trust in God and not to worry about such things, because God will take care of them. And now we come to chapter 7, and there's not really any kind of repetitious paradigm like that.

In fact, it's hard to...it's much easier with the earlier chapters to say, well, this whole section, the first half of this chapter is all about this subject, and the second half is all about that subject, or something like that. It's not so with this one. It seems like this chapter has...almost as if it were fragments of various other things Jesus wanted to

include, and it's difficult to find a single thread of meaning that they all relate to.

One could say that the general teaching, of course, of it is acting charitably toward others, and that is probably the best way for us to summarize it. But there are a variety of ways in which charity toward others is considered, and it's not the only subject in there. There's other things thrown in there, too.

Things about asking from God, like prayer. Things about discerning false prophets. And so it's really not...it's not the case that you can summarize what this chapter contains.

It's more a variety of subjects that wind down the sermon, and they aren't all about your relationship to your brother, and they're not all about your relationship to God, and they're just about various things. But all of them are important things, and interesting to study. Certainly instructive to the believer, because they present to us a different way of thinking and acting than we would naturally think or act.

The opening line of chapter 7 is possibly the unbeliever's favorite text of scripture, judging from the amount of quotations of this verse that come from the mouth of unbelievers. Judge not that you be not judged. Now, when I say it's a favorite text among unbelievers, I don't mean to say that they don't judge.

I just mean to say that they like to quote from us that we shouldn't judge. And you probably have encountered that often enough. But what does it mean, judge not that you be not judged? It certainly sounds as if it's saying all judgments are forbidden.

And even many Christians have never sorted this out. You know, when someone is caught in scandalous sin, whether it's the president or a television event or somebody else, and the newspapers are raging about it, and everyone's gossiping about it, and everyone's upset. There's always going to be some moralizing Christian who stands up and says, don't you know the Bible says judge not? We're not supposed to judge these things.

And it's obvious that this verse has been grossly misunderstood. And the reason, of course, is, like so many things in the Sermon on the Mount, it is a hyperbole. It is an overstatement.

It is stated as if there is no exception. There certainly are exceptions. There are times when judgment must be made.

But Jesus is attacking that propensity to always be critically judging others. And he's speaking against that tendency. And he gets very specific about what kinds of things are forbidden in terms of judging others.

But it should not be thought that all forms of judgment are to be avoided. That would be crazy. First of all, he doesn't agree with the rest of the chapter.

Because shortly after this, he tells us not to give what is holy to dogs and not to cast pearls before swine. Well, everybody knows he's not talking about real dogs or real pigs. He's talking about people of some sort.

But how can you follow these instructions unless you assess whether a particular person happens to be in this category, a dog or a swine? Obviously, Jesus intends for you to know whether you're dealing with a dog, a swine, or some other kind of person. And that means you make some kind of a judgment. You can't follow these instructions without making some kind of a judgment.

Likewise, later on in verse 15, it says, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You'll know them by their fruits. Well, not unless you judge.

If you're simply nonjudgmental and never make a judgment about things, then you will never know the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet. You'll never know whether the person to whom you're casting your pearls is a swine or not. Obviously, Jesus is opening this chapter by saying, Judge not.

He doesn't mean that no form of judgment belongs in the Christian's mind. Actually, Christians are, in some respects, more obligated to judge than others. Because it says in 1 Corinthians that we shall judge angels, and we shall judge the world.

And if we're to judge angels and judge the world, can we not judge, Paul says, many lesser things? Now, as a matter of fact, Jesus himself made it clear in another place that his statement, Judge not, is not absolute, and it is not a statement for which no exceptions should be sought. In John chapter 7 and verse 24, it begins with the very same words, Judge not. Although the New King James writers do not judge in this case, and judge not in the other case.

I don't know why. In one case, they follow the King James more. In the other case, they modernize a little bit, but it's the same expression.

Judge not. Jesus says in John 7, 24, Judge not according to appearance. But judge with righteous judgment.

Now, in the very same sentence, he says, Judge not, he says, But judge. Don't judge one way, but do judge another way. So it would be ridiculous to assume that Jesus, in saying, Judge not, that you be not judged, meant for this to have no exceptions or no modifications in our minds.

We need to understand what he means about not judging. But we also have to know that there are times when Christians must judge. Now, in particular, how are we not supposed to judge? Well, we just saw Jesus say, Judge not according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment, which would mean, for one thing, that you don't make assessments

of things.

And by the way, we need to understand what judgment means. Judgment is not a bad word. Judgment means you make an assessment, an evaluation.

You discern. You decide between two things. That's making a judgment.

You discern right from wrong. You assess the value of a thing or the truth of a thing. You even interpret sometimes as part of judging.

But all of this is necessary as part of critical thinking. And Jesus is not telling us that we need to check our critical thinking at the door to become nice people who never make any assessments of what's right and wrong in the world. You could not yourself live a Christian life if you didn't make judgments about certain behaviors as being inappropriate for you.

Of course, to make a distinction between sin and righteousness is to make a judgment. If you say, Well, this behavior is wrong, and this behavior is right, you've just made a judgment. That's judging.

And Jesus is not saying that shouldn't be done. Jesus judged all the time. And the disciples judged all the time, and Jesus told them to judge righteous judges.

But what he is saying is, when he says, Don't judge according to appearance, it means do not make assessments based on surface information or inadequate data. Don't jump to conclusions based on the slightest, flimsiest veneer of the support for your opinion. It's often the case that people are called upon to judge between persons in conflict with each other, but they only hear one side of the story.

And the side of the story they hear certainly makes it seem like the person speaking to them is the one who's in the right, and whoever they're in conflict with must certainly be in the wrong. But the Bible warns us against making snap judgments on too little information. I wonder if I can find it without having written it down.

I think it's Proverbs 18, and verse 13. Proverbs 13, that is 18, 13. He said, He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is a folly and a shame to him.

That is, if you have not heard the whole story, but you give an answer, that is a judgment, a decision on it. But you've not really heard it out. You're doing something very foolish and shameful.

Further in the same chapter, Proverbs 18, and verse 17, it says, The first one to plead his cause seems right until his neighbor comes and examines him. And boy, is that ever true. Many times you will hear a criticism or a slander or gossip about somebody, and you may allow yourself to form an opinion about that person who's not present, based on

what you've heard, but you've not heard their side.

And the person who first pleads his cause seems right to you. But if you hear the other side, you might be surprised how right that side seems. It's true theologically or doctrinally.

Many of you would have to say that at one time you heard a doctrinal position presented by somebody who did a reasonably good job of presenting it, and it seemed right to you. Later on you heard just the opposite view presented, and it seemed right to you too. Obviously both are not right.

This makes it clear that snap judgments based on inadequate research, inadequate data, without hearing all that is to be heard on the subject, and making a statement boldly and dogmatically, is one kind of judgment that should not be made. That's one way that we should not judge. We shouldn't jump to conclusions.

And by the way, our human ego often will incline us to have tremendous confidence in the infallibility of our own opinion. And the impression we get from this nearest veneer or shred of data, if it is a strong impression, we are often inclined to simply make a call on it, and say, well, this is my reaction, because it's mine, it must be right. We don't say it quite so crassly as that, but that's how we often feel.

And that is judging according to appearances, not looking deeper into the matter. And that is what Jesus says not to do, but to judge righteous judgment. And a righteous judge will hear all the evidence, and then will make his call, will make his decision.

That's one way that Jesus teaches us not to judge and to judge. Don't judge upon a shallow basis of inadequate data, or on a first report, or hearing one witness only against another. But you need to do like a righteous judge would.

Judge righteously based on the full data that's relevant to the case. But that's not the only thing about judging that we need to realize is a sin. In fact, that's not even specifically what Jesus seems to be addressing right here in Matthew 7. Because he goes on to clarify exactly what he's talking about in the following verses.

He says, judge not that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged. And with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Now, I would point out the parallel to this in Luke, because this particular statement is expanded into several independent clauses in Luke's version.

Luke 6, verses 37 and 38. Luke 6, verses 37 and 38, Jesus says, judge not that you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. And then down to the bottom it says, for with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

Obviously what he means is if you judge with a charitable judgment, then you will be judged with a charitable judgment. Now, this talks about your basic disposition. Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Do you want to do for others what you'd have them do to you? That's the question.

What measure would you like them to measure back to you? What measure would you like God to measure back to you? Well, use that same measure to dish it out to other people. If you'd like God to be merciful to you, to not condemn you, to forgive you, to judge you, you know, graciously and charitably, then you use that same bowl to dish it out to others. You judge them charitably and so forth.

Now, there is a thing called a judgment of charity. The term is not found in the Bible, but Christians have talked about it for centuries. A judgment of charity means what maybe in the secular world is called giving the benefit of the doubt.

I'm sure everyone is familiar with the term giving someone the benefit of the doubt, but I'm not sure if everyone's thought about what that term literally means. If somebody is accused of something, and if you take the accusation at face value, they are to be judged as guilty. But you're not sure that the accusation is true.

There's some doubt. Now, if there was no doubt, you'd have to judge them harshly. But they receive benefit from the fact that there is doubt.

And that benefit means that you cannot judge them harshly until you know more, until that doubt has been removed. Therefore, by not judging harshly, you give them the benefit. That is a result of the presence of doubt.

It's the benefit of the doubt. You're not sure they're guilty. And because they're not sure they're guilty, they might be innocent.

And therefore, do you have to remain totally undecided? In measure, you do, until you know more. But in the meantime, do you treat them with suspicion? Or do you treat them as an innocent party, or as a guilty party? When this country was formed, one of the sort of principles of law that was enunciated as being appropriate is that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Now, that's not always followed in our legal system.

But it is nonetheless a principle that was enunciated, and I think it was a good biblical principle. That if you don't know they're guilty, if they've not proven guilty, then you should still treat them as innocent. Because you would not wish to treat an innocent person as if they were a guilty person.

And you do not want to treat someone as guilty unless they are truly guilty. And if somebody is even guilty, you might yet be able to show mercy to them. And since you don't know them to be guilty, it's much better to take the risk of showing mercy to a person who might turn out to be guilty than of showing suspicion and harshness in your

judgment of someone who might turn out to be innocent.

This is called giving someone the judgment of charity. It's not that you know them to be innocent, but you certainly don't know them to be guilty. You've heard certain things.

They may be true. If they are true, this person is guilty, and you'll have to think badly of them about that. But you don't know it's true, and therefore, what judgment can I make if I haven't heard all the evidence? I'll use the judgment of charity.

I will assume this person may be innocent. I will not declare them innocent because I don't have enough evidence. But in my own heart, I will say to myself, this person may be innocent, and I will treat them the way I think they should be treated if they do turn out to be innocent.

Now, fully realizing they may turn out to be guilty, in which case, the way I treat them may have to change somewhat, or think about them. But since I don't have adequate proof that they are guilty, I will extend the judgment of charity and treat them as I would wish to treat them if they turned out to be innocent. And so you use a measure to judge others that you would want people to use towards you.

Now, it's amazing how we are, as human beings, about this little thing called gossip, because gossip is a slippery thing. It's hard to define. In a sense, one could argue if you ever say anything negative about somebody else when they're not there, that's gossip.

But that's not quite true, because there are times when it's called for. There are times when Apostle Paul writes to Timothy and says some bad things about Alexander and Hymenaeus behind their back. He's not writing a letter to them.

He's writing to Timothy. In private conversation, one might very well warn another person about the dangers of trusting a certain person who's proven to be untrustworthy. There are times when, in counseling or in talking to somebody, you need to hear a side of the story, or you need to hear evidence, like if you're counseling a wife about her husband, for you to know anything about what she's facing or what you're supposed to counsel her to do.

You might have to know a few things about what her complaint is about her husband, or vice versa, which means, of course, she would end up telling you some things. Now, it's a very thin line. Like I say, it's a slippery thing to find what gossip is, because even information given in accession of counseling can end up being gossip.

And counselors too often are not very careful about that. I was reading a book a few, maybe, it might have been a year ago, maybe not quite a year ago. It just came out probably in the past year, a new book.

And it was written by the wife of the guy who started the Promise Keepers. And it was

written for men, a woman writing to men about what their wives want from them. I think the book's called What Does She Want From Me Anyway, or something like that.

And I didn't read the whole book, but I read some of it. And, you know, there were some insightful things there. I like to read books like that to help me understand how my wife thinks and stuff.

And she doesn't think exactly like this woman thinks. Sometimes she does. I mean, there were some insightful things I found helpful.

But my problem was that this woman talked about all the carnal ways that women think and basically assumed that men should accommodate all their carnal sensitivities and so forth. And, you know, I don't know. I mean, the Bible does say that men live considerably towards your wife.

And so I think it's good to know if a woman does have certain carnal struggles. But the problem is this woman never criticized the carnality of those struggles. This woman assumed that even these Christian men married to Christian wives are going to be married to women who can't walk in the Spirit, who can't get victory over their flesh, and you just have to baby them.

You just got to make sure you don't bother. But she gave an example of problems that she'd had in her own marriage. She gave quite a few of these examples.

And I assume that, you know, her husband gave her permission to share them because some of them felt more like gossip. Reading them didn't talk about her husband's mistakes, and sometimes her own, but mostly his. Because she was writing a book about how husbands make mistakes with their wives, so her husband became an example in many of her illustrations.

But she tells of one particular time she was going to a marriage counselor without her husband. And her husband was at home reading, and their marriage was in trouble, I guess. At least she was in trouble.

And she went and talked to this counselor. Now, she says that the counselor asked her why she was so mad at her husband. So she began to tell, she began to, you know, dredge back into her memory everything her husband had done that was not very kind or that bothered her.

In many cases, it was things that he had done inadvertently. He didn't know it bothered her. But every time she gave a case, she says, the counselor said, that wasn't very loving of him, was it? And she'd give another case, and he'd say, well, that certainly wasn't very loving, was it, of him? And the counselor, and I expected the punchline to be, this counselor was a jerk, you know? How dare a counselor who's talking to a wife who's in marital problems only confirm to her that her husband is not very loving when he

hasn't even heard the husband's side of the story yet? I mean, that is so absurd.

I mean, the guy was just building a huge wedge between her and her husband. Is that what marriage counseling is supposed to do? But she just basically told the story as if, yeah, this was a very enlightening night because I went away and realized my husband doesn't love me. And she was infuriated.

She came home, she was furious with her husband. And I was waiting for the story to be, you know, for her to come to the point where she repents of having had this whole night of gossiping about her husband and of being angry at her husband. Her husband was just reading the newspaper when she got home, minding his own business.

She comes in, she rails on him and unloads on him for a few hours and stuff. And of course, I thought, man, this is a book written by a Christian for Christians. And she was writing it for men, trying to tell, so this is how your wife feels.

This is how your wife's going to react to you, and so forth. So I thought, I just started thinking, who was this counselor she was seeing? I mean, if a wife is having trouble in her marriage, unless I'm going to try to split up the marriage, which I'm not going to do, I'm going to try to help her see the ways that she and her husband can get along better and how she can respect her husband more and how he can respect her more and so forth. But to sit there with the wife, and the husband's not even there.

Now if he was with the husband and said, now that wasn't very loving for you to do toward your wife, and he said it to the husband without the wife present, that would be wise. But this turned out to just be a gossip session, with the counselor taking the side against the husband only to aggravate the woman's wrath at her husband. I mean, this guy makes a living as a Christian counselor? I've heard terrible things done in the name of Christian counseling.

That was one of them. But I mean, counseling, what people call counseling, can sometimes just be a gossip session. Many times, much counseling is about husbands and wives seeking counseling for their marriage.

And of course, in most cases, a lot of things are told. A wife tells about her husband, her husband tells about his wife, things that really people don't need to know. I mean, they're just mistakes wives have made, mistakes husbands have made, that just don't need to be talked about outside the family.

There's such a thing as repenting and forgiving and going on with life. Counselors often forget to mention that. But of course, if the people actually did that, the counselor wouldn't make any more money off them because they wouldn't need the sessions anymore.

But I'm saying that gossip is something that people do very readily, partly because it's

hard to define. There are legitimate times to tell somebody something negative about someone else, to warn them of the danger of somebody who's a proven, you know, dishonest person or something. One person gave us a definition of gossip, and I have followed it pretty much, is that you're gossiping when you say something bad about somebody to another party who is neither a part of the problem nor a part of the solution.

In other words, speaking to a pastor or a counselor might not be gossip if that person is indeed part of the solution. If both the husband and wife are talking to that person, asking that person to mediate and so forth, there are times when that counselor needs to know what kinds of things he has to address in the other party. If somebody is in the position to speak to somebody else who's doing something wrong and you tell that person that that person did something wrong, that's not necessarily gossip because there are times when reports have to be made.

Joseph reported his brother's evil behavior to his father when they were out tending sheep. The brothers hated him for that, and most people would call him a tattletale for that, but he had every reason to tell that because they were his father's responsibility. In the Bible, God holds fathers responsible even for their adult sons' misbehavior.

And for the father to be uninformed of what they were doing, when somebody could inform him, would have been wrong, would have not been telling him because he is part of the solution. Or should have been, wasn't. Anyway, I'm saying that gossip, when you hear it, it doesn't seem as bad as if you tell it.

When you tell it, you don't think you're gossiping. Let me say it this way. Hearing it and telling it, both are fairly tolerable, depending on mutual dislike for the person being discussed.

But where you really can tell how bad gossip is, is when you are the one being gossiped about. When you hear that somebody has said something about you behind your back, and that has formed a negative opinion about you to this third party who doesn't have any reason to have a negative opinion about you, except that they heard some report and they never asked you. And if you ever have been gossiped about, some of you are pretty young, probably haven't been, but you will as you get older, take that to heart and realize that when you gossip about others, you're doing that which you would not want done to you.

And really, I mean the best definition of gossip I can think of, is where you say something about someone who's not there, which you would not want said about yourself if you were not there. Because that's really what the teaching of Jesus is. What you don't want done to you, don't do to others.

What you want done to you, do to others. Now, that's what he's saying in this business

about judge. If you're going to judge, and you should at times judge, but don't judge in any way that you wouldn't want to be judged the same way.

Don't judge unmercifully unless you want to be judged unmercifully. And no one wants to, so obviously don't. Judge in judgment of charity.

You would want others to do so if they heard something bad about you. You'd want them to think the best they could of you until they found out from you, your side of the story. And that's what he says, and he illustrates it here in verses 3 through 5. He says, and why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but you not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me remove the speck out of your eye, and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite.

First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. Now, in the Greek, the speck and the plank, it is clear that they're both of the same material. They're both wood.

It's like a speck of sawdust and a plank of wood. So it's like you have the same material in your eye that they have, but you've got more of it. You've got a plank of it.

They've got a speck of it. Now, this having something in your eye, obviously, it means that there's a defect. You've got a defect.

Now, the particular thing in the eye is a defect that hinders vision. It blurs vision when you've got something in your eye. And especially if you've got something big in your eye, you've got a big blind spot.

But when a person has a defect in their life, it is typically, if they're a Christian at least, a result of a blind spot. In other words, Christians, by definition, want to please God. And where they are defective, it is often the case, I won't say always, it is often the case that they're not aware of the defect.

It is something they can't see. Their vision may be impaired. Their assessment, their ability to judge the situation may be impaired because they can't see clearly.

Now, you can see clearly, you think, the flaw in another person. And by judging them and criticizing them or approaching them, of course, you are attempting to help them with their defect. He is assuming.

You're trying to help them get the speck out of their eye. The problem is, if you have a bigger blind spot than they have of the same kind, you may be guilty of the very same thing more than they are. You will certainly not be able to see or make judgments that are objective enough to do them any good.

You cannot bring correction to them if your problem is worse than theirs and the same

kind and you've got a bigger blind spot than they do. Now, what he is saying here, and how this measures back to what he said earlier, or relates back to it, is that you should not use a judgment of others that you could not stand to have measured against you. If, for example, it's wrong to have wood in your eye and your brother has a speck of wood in his eye but you have a plank in yours, you'd better not judge him too harshly for the speck that's in his eye because if the same measure, that is, it's wrong to have wood in your eye, is used against you, you will look worse than he.

Use the same measure in judging others that you'd want used of yourself. Now, what this means, of course, is you don't use a double standard. You don't judge others by a standard that you would not wish to be judged by yourself.

And people generally do, all the time. It's a typical human thing to do. It's not a Christian thing to do.

But human beings do it all the time, that they can see faults in others and criticize faults in others when they have, in many cases, the same fault or a cousin to it in their own life. And they just don't see that. They don't see that they do.

And if you... By the way, it doesn't mean that if we say, well, listen, homosexuality is wrong. Abortion is wrong. If we say that, if we say for the president to have extramarital sex is wrong or for anyone else to do so is wrong, there's going to be someone who says, well, don't judge.

Well, and they think they're quoting Jesus. But in fact, what Jesus really would say is, if you are a homosexual or in some other way a deviant sexual sinner, don't you go raising your voice against people who are sexual sinners until you get your own sexual sin cleaned up. I mean, you can still speak lovingly to them and say, you know, I've got a problem, too, but both of us are in trouble.

You know, I mean, it's one thing to stand above, as you're the surgeon doing the delicate surgery on their soul, removing the speck from their eye. It's another thing to say, hey, I know I've got a beam in my own eye, too, and I'm no better than you. I might be worse than you.

But still, you know, you've got a problem. And we've got problems, and we've got to fix them. We've got to seek deliverance together, right? That's different.

He's talking about being judgmental of people who have faults when you, in fact, are not better than they are. Now, I personally do not, at this time in my life, have anything sexually scandalous going on or, you know, anything. Nothing I'm embarrassed about.

Nothing that I would be embarrassed to have someone's... If I said, that sexual conduct, that person is wrong and sinful. If they say, well, yeah, well, let's shine the light on you. What about you? You doing the same thing, buddy? I'd say, no, I'm not.

You can look as close as you want. I'm not. And there's nothing wrong with that.

Jesus could do that. Jesus said, let him that is without sin cast the first stone. But he was without sin, and he could have cast the first stone had he wanted to.

He didn't choose to. But, you see, some people would have us not make any kind of moral assessments at all on the basis that we're not perfect. You're not perfect? How dare you criticize somebody else? Well, here's the thing.

If I wouldn't mind having the same measure turned back on me, the same spotlight, the same ladle dishing it out to me that I'm dishing it out to others, then I'm not violating this. He said, just know that what you want others to do to you in this respect, what you want dished back to you, you dish it out to them the same way. And if I, in fact, am eager to be perfect and eager to have people look at me and see my sin and tell me of my sin and correct me of my sin, if I'm eager to do that, then there's nothing hypocritical about my doing that for other people, too.

Of course, if someone is in sin and you correct them, it is necessary to do so in a spirit of meekness, remembering yourself, lest you also be tempted, Paul said in Galatians 6.1. But notice here, Jesus didn't say you can't get specks out of your brother's eye. He said, first, hypocrite, first remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Jesus didn't indicate that we should not be in the business of getting specks out of people's eyes.

We should. But not when we have a plank on our own. If you get the plank out of your eye, he said, then you'll be useful.

Then you can get specks out of people's eyes for them. See, many people just assume that Christians shouldn't be going around trying to correct anything, shouldn't be going around trying to label anything right or wrong, shouldn't be trying to admonish or shouldn't be trying to get specks out of people's eyes. That's not what Jesus says.

Jesus didn't say don't get specks out of your brother's eye. Your brother needs the speck removed from his eye. He's just saying don't you do that until you get your own act together, until you get your own eye cleared up.

And of course, he's not saying you have to be a perfect person. It just means that you have to be clear in this matter. In the very matter that you're accusing someone else of or correcting somebody else about, you need to make sure that you don't have a huge blind spot in the same area.

Notice he says in verse 5, hypocrite. The judging he's forbidding here is hypocritical judging. Judging that criticizes somebody for a thing, but if the person doing the judging was criticized for the same thing, he wouldn't look too good.

I mean, everyone remembers, maybe some of you don't, it's fading back into time. Some of you are pretty young, maybe you don't remember very well, but when Jimmy Swaggart, I believe it was accused, Jim Baker, or at least it wasn't originally him that accused him, I don't think, I don't remember the details too well, but Jimmy Swaggart was very, very critical, very harsh with Jim Baker. Both of them were television evangelists.

And Jim Baker had been involved in sexual impropriety as well as some financial things. And Jimmy Swaggart, who was a rival on the airwaves with him, just criticized him extremely harshly and censoriously and caustically and unmercifully. And then it wasn't, what, a couple months before he was discovered, Jimmy Swaggart was having affairs on a regular basis.

I think Jim Baker had been accused of one thing, one time. He may have been involved in more, but I think the accusation, what came to light, was only one incident. By the way, Jim Baker has since repented very humbly in dust and ashes, and is, I personally believe, walking with God today.

But Jimmy Swaggart, I don't think he ever really sincerely repented, as near as I can tell, he might have, but that's between him and God. But here's the thing, when he was laying out the heavy, heavy criticisms in a very unmerciful manner, he was doing the same things, and worse, regularly. And after he was busted and tearfully alleged to repent on television, he went out and did it some more and got caught again a few times.

Now, I mean, there but for the grace of God go I. I'm not trying to seem more sanctimonious or self-righteous than these people, but it seems to me rather hypocritical for someone who was engaged in the activities Jimmy Swaggart was to be so critical of another man who was accused of a similar sin. It seems like Jimmy Swaggart, if he were an honest man, would have gone to Jim Baker and said, Hey, I know exactly what you're going through, man. I'm struggling with this same thing.

I think we both need to step down for a while and get some accountability, have our pastors give us some accountability in this matter until we get our lives straightened up. But human nature, fallen human nature apparently is just plain hypocritical. And that's what Jesus is warning against.

He warned against hypocrisy in religious actions earlier, and now he warns about hypocrisy in judging. He's not saying it's always wrong to judge. It's just wrong to judge hypocritically.

It's wrong to judge using a double standard, that you could not stand to be judged by the same standard yourself that you're using. And from that point, he goes in verse 6 and says, Do not give what is holy, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them

under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. Now obviously, again, he is talking about certain types of people here, it would appear.

I mean dogs and swine. Now dogs was a term that was used commonly by the Jews with reference to Gentiles. I'm not sure that swine was used of Gentiles in general, although they might have used the term swine of some of the more disgusting types of individuals.

Although the Apostle Paul felt like many of the Jews themselves were the real dogs. I think it's Philippians chapter 3, if I'm not mistaken. Yeah, Philippians 3 verses 1 and 2, he says, Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs. Beware of evil workers.

Beware of the mutilation. He means those who circumcise. He's talking about the circumcision party.

He's writing to Gentiles calling Jews dogs. Not all Jews, but the Jews who were trying to enforce circumcision on the Gentile converts. He says, For we are the true circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

When Paul says, Beware of dogs, he's obviously talking about people. People who you need to be wary of, because they're dangerous, spiritually dangerous to you. Now, who Jesus had in mind when he said dogs, I'm not sure.

He didn't mean Gentiles, I'm sure of that. And he may well have meant the same kind of people that Paul meant. In fact, when Paul said, Beware of dogs, he may have been quoting Jesus here, or alluding to Jesus' own remarks.

The Pharisees. After all, Jesus has been warning against the Pharisees throughout this whole sermon. Don't be like the Pharisees.

Your righteousness has to exceed that of the Pharisees. And he might even be applying the word dogs to the Pharisees here. As Paul was applying it essentially to the same kind of people.

Legalistic Jews. And perhaps swine, too. You've got to realize that in this statement, in Matthew 7, 6, we have parallelism.

Don't give what is holy to dogs, don't cast pearls to swine. Two different ways of saying the same thing. Holy things, or pearls.

Now, pearls are not holy in themselves, but they have something in common with holy things. And that is that they have a value that is subtle. And symbolic.

Pearls are not innately valuable. I don't know that they're used very much in industry, for any particular function. They're valuable because they're rare, but it takes a human being to appreciate the value of a rare thing.

All a pig or dog can appreciate is something edible. If you throw them a steak, they can appreciate the value of that. The value of a steak is not symbolic.

It's an actual, practical, valuable thing. A pearl, a dog has no use for it. Actually, people have no use for them either, except to decorate themselves.

And they value them because of their symbolic value, because it's a rare item. I could be wrong. Maybe pearls are used in industry for something, but I don't think they're very essential for anything.

A pearl is valued by somebody who's got the ability to appreciate subtle measures of value. Any animal can recognize the value of a meal, or of a soft bed, or some other physical comfort. But holy things, animals don't know the difference between holy or unholy, and many people don't either.

But it is a distinctly human capacity to know that some things are holy and others are not. Only human beings have a religious sense, a sense of the sacred. Animals don't have that.

And in that sense, the sense of the sacred is sort of like the sense of value of a gem, or of a diamond, or of a pearl. Because those things, of course a diamond has industrial value too, but some gems are principally valuable just because they're rare. And people appreciate the symbolic value of that.

So holy and rare jewels are two different concepts, but they have something in common. They are things that have value that is not perceived by dull-witted animals. So if you give a pearl to a pig, the pig will have no sense of value of it, and he'll just trample it under feet, and trample you maybe too, because he doesn't like you intruding into his pen.

He might have thought that by throwing a pearl at him, you were throwing a rock at him. He doesn't know the difference between a rock and a pearl. And he may come after you.

It's probably not parallel, but there are other places in scripture where pigs are talked about, and sometimes in connection with gems even. But not to make exactly the same point. You might just be curious to know how the scriptural writers like to speak about pigs.

In Proverbs 11 and verse 22 it says, As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion or wisdom. Now, how is a ring of gold in a swine's snout like a lovely woman who lacks discretion? Well, a ring of gold is a thing of beauty. A swine is

repulsive.

A pig is a repulsive animal. I know they're cute when they're little, but they're pretty repulsive when they grow up. And it's being mentioned because it is a repulsive animal.

And so a ring of gold is a beautiful thing, but when you stick it in the snout of a pig, the utter repulsiveness of the pig rather eclipses the attractiveness of the gold ring. A gold ring would look much nicer somewhere else. And while you still think a gold ring is a thing of value, you'd rather not be around a pig with a gold ring in its nose because its repulsiveness is so outweighing of its little nominal upside.

You've got a little bit of beauty there, but a big old piggy nature. And a beautiful woman, well, a woman's beauty is a thing attractive, but if she has no discretion, if she has no character, then she's like a pig with a gold ring. The gold ring is like her physical beauty.

The pigness is like her bad character. And the reason that this is given as an illustration is there's something so incongruent about having a pig with a gold ring in its nose. You say it's just as ridiculous and so unfitting for a woman to have outward beauty, but inwardly be ugly and repulsive.

And that is why Peter says to women, and this gets off on a different subject than that which Jesus is addressing in the Sermon on the Mount, but it works off of the pig's snout gold ring idea. In 1 Peter 3, Peter's talking to women, and he said in verse 3, He did not let your beauty be that of outward adorning, and arranging the hair, wearing of gold, or putting on a fine apparel. It was just outward attractiveness.

He mentions putting on gold. But let it be the hidden, corruptible ornament of a gentle and a quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. So, Peter's saying the same thing the Proverbs are saying, but a little more delicately.

The Proverbs says if a woman is beautiful outwardly, but doesn't have a right spirit, she's like a gold ring in a pig's nose. She's more like a pig with a gold ring in its nose. She's the pig, the gold ring is her beauty.

And so Peter says, well, don't let a woman concentrate on the embellishment of her outward beauty, but let her work on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. But the linking of a pig and a gold ring in that proverb is, of course, incongruous. No one puts those things together.

Likewise, no one casts pearls to swine. It's just as inappropriate. It's just as incongruous.

What's a swine got to do with a pearl? A human can value a pearl, but a pig cannot. A man can value sacred things, but a dog cannot. And so he's talking about giving that which is of value to a recipient who has no capability of assessing or appreciating that value.

In one sense, this is further talking about judging. In fact, two senses. On one hand, it speaks of a person's ability to judge what is valuable.

The recipient of your pearl must be one who can make judgments. A pig can't make the judgment between the value of a pearl or a value of a pebble. Both of them are inedible and therefore of no value to it.

But a person can. And therefore, you should give your pearls to persons of judgment, persons of discernment, people who can say, Oh, that's exquisite, that's valuable, thank you so much, I really appreciate that. Or you should give holy things to persons who are of a holy temper, who have a holy orientation, an appreciation for the sacred.

Not to dogs who cannot. But the other part of judging is that you have to judge whether the person you're giving a pearl to is one kind or another a person. Is this a pig or a person? Now, of course, we don't believe that when he talks about pearls, he's talking about literal pearls here any more than he's talking about literal pigs.

He's saying that giving a pearl to a pig is parallel to something else spiritual. The pig represents a type of person, a spiritual state. The state of not being able to value things of God, not being able to value that which is of true value.

Because, like a pig, he only values what he can eat, what gives him physical gratification or whatever. He has no spiritual aptitude, no spiritual taste, no spiritual discernment. And so you don't give him the valuable thing.

Now, what is the valuable thing? Some people would say it's the gospel, and maybe it is. However, this would almost be saying you shouldn't preach the gospel to certain people. And yet the Bible does say we should preach the gospel to every creature.

And so I'm reluctant to simply have it say, well, you don't preach the gospel to certain people because they just can't receive it. I believe you have to preach to everybody, and those who can receive it will, and those who don't will manifest that they don't. I have usually taken this to mean that you don't disclose everything you know to somebody who is likely to abuse the information.

And that would include things you know about God. There are things that Jesus didn't tell even his disciples, not because they were pigs, but because they couldn't yet receive it. They were not of a capacity to receive it yet.

He said in John 16, 12, I have many things to say to you still, but you are not able to bear them. But he said later on, you will be. The Holy Spirit will come later and he'll teach you these things.

There are times when you're witnessing to somebody or talking to somebody about the things of God or trying to give them counsel or whatever, and it's clear that they simply

don't have a heart for God at all. It becomes clear in the course of conversation. You can't judge that by looking at them before you come to them, but when you begin to talk to them and they begin to exhibit more of a tendency to not value the gem of what you're trying to share about God with them, and they'd rather turn on you and rend you, then you're not under obligation to keep working on them.

Leave them be. Go somewhere else. Work on someone else who doesn't have that kind of reaction.

Because a person can't come to the Lord unless the Holy Spirit is working on them anyway. You can talk somebody into a sinner's prayer, but they won't get regenerated unless the Holy Spirit is convicting them and the Holy Spirit is working on them. And if somebody is reacting in such a way as to exhibit absolutely no appreciation for the things of God when you're presenting them, that person is not being moved by the Holy Spirit at that point.

Maybe later in their life they'll be more receptive, but they're not now. Don't waste time on them. See, some people would like to just keep working on someone like that, but I think Jesus is saying, don't bother.

You're wasting your breath. You're wasting your time. Now, there are also certain things that, just your own life plans and things like that, which, you know, things that God is leading you to do and patterns of life that you probably shouldn't share with everybody.

There are some people who would be critical, even try to stop you from doing things that God would have you do. In a sense, what he's saying is, what you should throw to a pig is a corn husk. When you give a pearl, give it to somebody who appreciates pearls.

And you need to make judgments at times when you're communicating with people, whether you are speaking something that they have a capacity even to appreciate or not. And if not, talk about something else or go talk to someone else. But don't mix unlike things.

Holy things and dogs are unlike in character. Pigs and gold rings and pearls are unlike each other in character. Likewise, you should have the appropriate topic of conversation to the appropriate person.

Because certain things, if you discuss them with certain people, will simply not benefit them and may actually be used against you. He says, And it will be given to you, verse 7, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

I'm going to read further and then we'll talk about these verses. Or what man is there among you, who if his son asks for bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will he give him a serpent? 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? Now, this is obviously something related to prayer, but what is it saying about prayer? He says, if you ask, you will receive. If you seek, you will find.

If you knock, it will be given to you. He says that's true of everyone who asks, everyone who seeks, everyone who knocks. It's given, it's found, it's open to them.

And then he gives the illustration of God giving to us good things, because that's what fathers do. Even earthly fathers, being evil, are inclined toward giving good things to their children. Therefore, God, who is not evil, can be expected to do so even more.

Now the question is, is this about prayer in general, or about some specific prayer? Now he says, your father will give good things to those who ask him. What are good things? Is this a promise that everyone who prays will get exactly what they pray for, no matter what it is they pray for? Some people might think so, but I don't think that's necessarily how we're to take it. Again, remember how much hyperbole appears in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus says, everyone who asks, receives.

Everyone who knocks, it opened. Well, that's not necessarily true. There are people who knock on doors and they don't open.

There are people who ask for things and they don't receive them. In fact, there are even Christians who pray for things and don't get what they prayed for. There is obviously a certain context that Jesus intends for this to be understood within, and it's specifically good things.

How much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him? Well, the Bible says in the Old Testament that God will not withhold good things from his people. It says in Psalm 34, verses 9 and 10, Psalm 34, verses 9 and 10, O fear the Lord, you his saints, there is no want to those who fear him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but they who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

Now, the lions lack and suffer hunger, even the young lions. You know, it's not the old lions who might be expected to lack, because they're too old and people to hunt anymore, and they just go off somewhere to die. But even the young, strong lions.

Lions are, you know, a symbol or an emblem here, an example of some creature that certainly can take care of itself. It's, you know, strong, it's aggressive, it has no natural enemies. Every animal fears it, and it always catches its meat, unless it happens to be, you know, old and feeble.

But the young lions, even though they are strong and provide well for themselves in the natural world, yet sometimes they don't catch what they're after. Sometimes they go hungry at night. And, but that's not true with those who seek the Lord.

Those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. Now, do you lack anything? I do. There's a lot of things I lack.

I lack a million dollars in the bank. I lack a beach home, and a ski resort, and a new Mercedes. I lack all of those things, and a zillion things more.

In fact, there's far more things I lack than things I have. In fact, that's true of everybody. Even the richest man in the world lacks many things.

The question is, do I lack any good thing? Well, what is a good thing? Well, what's it compared with? Well, the young lions going hungry. Okay, the young lions in that case lack food. Do I lack food? Well, I have been hungry at times, but I can't say I lack the food that I need, or else I would be dead now.

By definition, need is what you need. And if you don't have what you need, you die. And I'm alive.

Therefore, I have not lacked anything that I need. I've lacked many things I would like, but I've never lacked anything I need. And I think that a good thing, to say God is promising to give us every good thing and won't withhold any good thing, we have to understand that God's idea of good and ours may not always be the same, and we have to be prepared to surrender to His opinion of what is good for us.

And many times, suffering is good for us. It may be what He prefers for us to go through, actually. There's another psalm that has a similar line in it.

It's the one where it talks about God as a sun and a shield. Well, I'm actually looking for a different one, but I found another verse that says what I'm looking for. Psalm 85.

Psalm 85 says, yes, verse 12, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. There's another one I thought I'd find more easily than I have found it. It's one that, the end of the psalm is, for the Lord God is a sun and a shield.

It says, no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. I thought it was in the 80s, but I don't see it in the psalms in the 80s, but it's somewhere in there. Anyway, it doesn't matter for me to find it.

I've found enough that say the same thing. God gives good things to those who ask Him, but not everything your heart's desire is unless your heart's desire is on Him. You see, it does say in the psalms that if you delight in the Lord with all your heart, He will give you the desires of your heart, or delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart.

But if your delight is in the Lord, then He's what you want. And the desires of your heart are to have Him. And there's good reason to believe that Jesus isn't even talking here

about asking for needed physical things.

Although I do believe that God will provide every physical thing we need until the time that we are to die, but I don't know that that's the point He's making. I believe that perhaps what He's saying here is that if we ask for God, if we seek Him, if we knock at His door, if we're seeking a relationship with God, if we're seeking salvation, if we're seeking God's attention, God's communion, God's fellowship, if we're seeking to be filled with His Spirit, if we're seeking, in other words, the spiritual life, we will never be denied. We will be just as godly as we really want to be.

I'm told you say that all the time. You say that everyone is just exactly as holy as he wants to be. I don't know if that's 100% true, but it sounds good.

It might be true. I will say this, though, that the parallel to this passage is in Luke, and in that parallel, which I don't know if I can find immediately. I might be able to, but I think it's in Luke 11, but I'm not 100% sure about that.

Whether it is or not, I can tell you what it says, because I know. Here it is. It is in Luke 11, verses 9 through 13.

He says, And I say to you, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Sounds just like Matthew.

If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? Now, this passage is exactly like the one in Matthew, with the exception that Matthew says God will give good things to those who ask Him, and Luke's version says He'll give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him, which certainly puts a spiritual spin on it, and gives the impression that what we're asking here for is spiritual. What we're asking here is for more of God. We're asking God to fill us with more of Himself and of His Holy Spirit.

Those who ask and seek and knock there, always find. There is no reason that God would ever deny that request. And so Jesus may well be only talking about that aspect, although He does talk about prayer for other items elsewhere, even earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, give us this day our daily bread.

There's certainly nothing wrong with praying for things we need physically as well. I'm just not sure whether Jesus intends for this particular statement He's making to apply to all prayer requests or simply to requests that are directed for spiritual benefits, spiritual closeness to God, to receive more of the Holy Spirit, to receive more of God. I guess it

could be either way, but in Luke it narrows it to one thing, those who ask Him He'll give His Holy Spirit to.

Now in Matthew 7, 12 it says, Therefore whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. I must confess that I'm not sure why therefore is placed right there, because usually a sentence that begins with therefore is a concluding remark about what has just been said. And yet giving the golden rule, as we call it here, whatever you want men to do to you, do that to them also, for this is the law and the prophets, is a marvelous statement, but I'm not sure why it says therefore.

As if He's just been discussing that or illustrating that in verses 7 through 11? Not really. Not really. However, one could say that in verse 1 through 5 of this chapter He has been, or possibly even that in the whole sermon previous to this, the major thrust has been, do to others what you would have them do to you.

And this therefore may not be summarizing what follows, or what precedes it immediately in the previous verses, but the whole sermon in general. If I could summarize this whole sermon up to this point, it is this. What the law and the prophets call you to do is to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

What that means in real life is that you do to your neighbor what you want done to yourself. That simple. And it is the case that the vast majority of what we've read prior to this in the sermon probably is summarized by that statement, but not every word of it.

There are other subjects too, like the one about asking God for the Holy Spirit. Now, when we go into verse 13, there is a turn in the subject matter, sort of like a final warning that occupies the remainder of the sermon. He ceases to give specific ethical directions here, and speaks more urgently about the need to enter the kingdom of God.

And this may be, in verse 13, enter by the narrow way, may be continuing on this business of ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. If he is talking about asking for the Spirit, asking for a relation with God, asking for salvation, asking for inclusion in God's kingdom. In other words, if all this talk about asking, knocking, and seeking is not really about prayer in general, but prayer specifically for a relationship with God and to be saved and to be included in His kingdom, then it would seem that verse 13 is continuing on that subject.

Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction. You need to knock on that gate to get in, but it will be opened. But you have to seek and knock and ask.

You have to pursue. In fact, in parallel to this, in Luke 13, he says, Strive to enter in at the narrow gate. Luke 13, 24 and 25.

Luke 13, 24 says, Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For many, I say to you, will

seek to enter and will not be able. So, it's not just enter, it's strive to enter.

Labor to enter. Determine to put aside any hindrance, to overcome every obstacle, every hurdle to leap over and to press in to the kingdom of God. He says it is a narrow gate, which makes it the more necessary to show determination.

Now, I don't know how narrow he has in mind for us to picture it. If he's picturing something that's so narrow that you can barely squeeze through it yourself, that'd be one picture, but although gates are almost never that narrow. It may be, he's saying, that there are some gates broad enough that whole crowds can go through all at once.

There are others that are narrow enough that only one person can go through at a time. You have to go through in single file. And if you have to wait in line or if it's, you know, if it's a narrow gate, you might not bother with it.

You know, well, I don't know, it's a long line. But if everyone can go through all at once, you might just take the easy route and just go on through without any effort at all. You have to be selective to go through a narrow gate.

You have to go in alone. You don't go in with a crowd. And he says you need to strive to enter into that gate.

Now, the thing is, it's not as if there's a big crowd to fight there. There are a few going in there. But there is a broader gate, a wider gate, and a broad way that leads to destruction.

And there are many going in it, but the narrow is the gate. And difficult is the way which leads to life. And there are few who find it.

Now, you know, there is a more religiously correct attitude today in evangelicalism that being saved is easy. All you have to do is just say a little prayer. All you have to do is raise your hand.

All you have to do is walk forward. And someone else will do it all for you. We'll have a counselor waiting, and he'll even tell you what to pray.

You just repeat after him. He'll give you some literature, and you're in, man. And that just doesn't seem to... It seems like Jesus never heard that message.

And certainly never preached it. He indicated that fewer enter in because it's a difficult way. And you have to strive to get in there.

Now, I don't know how often I've heard evangelists say this, but Jesus said it. And I suppose any evangelist ought to say what he said, because otherwise they're teaching a different gospel. That when somebody is facing the turning point in their life, will I forsake my lifelong pursuit of self in order to pursue an equally lifelong pursuit of

something contrary to myself, denying myself, taking up my cross and following Jesus, the opposite direction of what I've always wanted to go, myself.

Having opposite habits of what I've always cultivated. I've been out for myself. Drawing attention of a positive sort to myself.

Causing to acquire things for myself. That's what the flesh has always done. And when I come to God, to have absolutely, totally different orientation.

So I'm now not seeking to acquire anything, but willing to give up all that I have. I'm not seeking to bring positive attention to myself. It's okay if I'm hated by everyone and persecuted, so long as God is honored in my life.

I'm not seeking my own pleasure. I'm seeking the pleasure of God and the pleasure of others above my own. This is not an easy thing for a person to do.

And anyone who tells a sinner, it's easy, simple, anyone can do it. Just sign on the dotted line, is perhaps not telling them enough of what they need to know. They're certainly not telling them what Jesus did.

Jesus said, you need to strive if you're going to get in. Actually, he said, there will be many who will try to get in and won't be able to. He says that in the parable in Luke 13.

Luke 13, I already read verse 24. Strive to enter through the narrow gate for many I say, who will seek to enter and will not be able. Now he's not even talking about people who aren't seeking.

There's a lot of people who have no interest in entering. A lot of people don't even want to go to heaven. If they do, they don't want to be Christians.

But there are many who will seek to enter and won't be able to. It makes it sound like you don't just kind of fall in there accidentally. You don't just slide in there because your parents were Christians or you lived in a Christian country or you went to church or you gave up a few sins, made a few small sacrifices.

This is something that you need to give your whole life to. Every effort. A person needs to look at his life or her life and say, Man, is there any goal, any ambition of mine, any personal self-interest that I'm hanging on to that might not allow me to get through the narrow gate? Is there any set of relationships I'm concerned about that would hinder me from doing what's right before God? And because they're not entering the narrow gate, I might not either.

You can only go through there a single file. And it's difficult. It's not even a smooth road.

It's a tough road. It requires a total reorientation of your nature. That's not easy.

It means that a life that has been spent forever trying to avoid pain will be chosen a life that accepts a painful and a hard road and rejoices in trials. I mean, that's not normal. That's normal Christianity.

That's not normal human stuff. And human beings don't do that by nature. So it's a call to go against your nature.

You bet it's difficult. But it's made a lot easier if, of course, if you make the right choice, God enables you. How do you go against your human nature? How do you resist the flesh successfully? Well, by deciding to and trusting God to give you the ability.

You have to make the decision, though. God doesn't make the decision for you. He works in you to will and to do.

He gives you the urge. He gives you the awareness of the desirability of it. But you work it out.

You work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. That's in the Bible. It may not go along with the more popular stream of evangelical teaching, but it's still what's in the Bible.

I'd rather be agreeable with God than with whatever's popular in our particular generation. People get saved by determining to be saved with all their heart and all their soul and all their mind and all their strength and pressing in and determining that nothing will stop them, that they will follow Jesus, no turning back. That's what Jesus is saying here.

And he says in verse 15, Beware of false prophets. Hmm. Like people who give a different message, maybe.

Who come in sheep's clothing. These are Christian impersonators. But inwardly, they're ravenous wolves.

You'll know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Therefore, by their fruits, you will know them. It's interesting that he would talk about entering this narrow way and avoiding the broad way and then immediately have a different message in this. There will be people advocating the broader way.

They dress like sheep, like wolves, or wolves in sheep's clothing. They act like they're Christians. They seem like they're God's people.

But you'll know them by their fruits. Now, what is the fruit? Now, I spent years of my life having the wrong understanding of what is meant by their fruits. Because I always

thought their fruits, I always tried to connect it with the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, that kind of stuff. Now, I think that's important, obviously. I think that a person who's preaching, a person who's in ministry, obviously is going to lose all credibility, and should lose all credibility, if they don't live a godly life.

But what does he mean specifically here by fruit? Of course, Paul had not yet written Galatians, so there'd been no mention of the fruit of the Spirit earlier than this. So how would the disciples understand this fruit? He says it's what comes out of a tree. A good tree produces good fruit.

A bad tree produces bad fruit. And false prophets will produce bad fruit. But what is the fruit? You can answer that for yourself by turning to a parallel statement later in Matthew.

In the same chapter, Jesus says the same thing, but more clearly, as to what he's getting at. Matthew chapter 12, beginning with verse 33. Jesus said, Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad, and its fruit bad, for a tree is known by its fruit.

Brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? How can you, being a bad tree, have good fruit? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth good things. Like a tree produces good fruit.

And an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, brings forth evil things. What does he talk about? Words. Out of the abundance of the heart, what comes out? It's what comes out of the mouth.

But I say to you, for every idle word men shall speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. In other words, you'll be known to be a true or false prophet.

By your words. The fruit that comes from a tree is like what emanates from the heart. Words come from your heart.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. Just like a tree naturally produces fruit and shows what kind of tree it is, so a heart produces words and shows what's in the heart by the words. Every idle word a man shall speak, he'll give account of it.

Why? Idle means careless. You can put on fancy words and say the right words and still have a wicked heart, but you're careless with the ones that slip out when you're not on your guard. Those are the ones that show what's really in there.

A bad tree might occasionally have a good fruit on it. One, you know, one or two, I mean, might have mostly bad fruit, but have a few good fruits on it. Likewise, a good tree might have a few bad specimens on it.

When Jesus said a bad tree can't produce good fruit and a good tree can't produce bad fruit, he's, of course, using hyperbole there again. Generally speaking, a good tree produces good fruit. It doesn't mean that a good tree can never produce one bad apple or that a bad apple can never produce one good apple.

But what is it generally putting out? What is that prophet saying? It's what he says as well as what he's doing. That determines whether he's a true or false prophet. Remember the test of a false prophet that Moses gave in Deuteronomy 13.

He said this false prophet comes, he gives a sign and wonders, it comes to pass, but he says to you, let's go worship other gods. Well, if you're just looking at the guy's life, he looks like a real prophet. He's got signs and wonders happening.

It really works. But what's he saying? He's saying let's go worship other gods. Oh, he's a false prophet then.

You see, you can tell a false prophet by the fact that he disagrees with the true prophet, Jesus. And therefore, if somebody speaks things different than what Jesus does, they may have the sheepest looking clothing around, but they're a wolf. They may be giving a gospel presentation that sounds very sweet and Christian-like, but they're leading people away from the right gate to the broad gate.

They're a wolf. They're leading people on the path of destruction. Let me show you something.

In 2 John, John is writing to a woman who apparently showed hospitality to certain traveling ministers. It might even be a church he's talking to. It's hard to tell.

Different opinions exist on it. But one thing he said to this woman in 2 John, verse 9, whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. So he's false.

Why? How do you know? His doctrine. He doesn't teach the same doctrine Christ taught. Look at 1 John 4, verse 1, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets, Jesus would be aware of false prophets, many false prophets have gone out into the world.

By this you shall know the Spirit of God, that is, you'll know a true prophet from a false. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ comes in the flesh is of God. Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ comes in the flesh is not of God.

This is that spirit of antichrist. Now there's false prophets. How do you know them? By their fruit.

Well, what is that fruit? Well, what do they confess about Christ? Do they agree with what Christ said? Do they agree with who Christ is? Do they uphold Christ in a biblical sense? Do they have a correct understanding of Christ? And do they follow his teachings? Look at 1 Timothy 6. 1 Timothy 6.3 Paul says, If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine or the teaching which is according to godliness, that person is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words. From which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth. Actually, those are things that proceed out of the evil heart, according to Jesus.

But notice that person is known by his words. He speaks words that are contrary to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus are the standard to know true from false prophets.

Look at verse 21. This is, of course, Matthew 7, 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

He's still talking about entering the kingdom. Not. Ask.

Enter. The narrow gate. But not everyone who says, Lord, Lord.

Now, those are the right words. A false prophet might say, Lord, Lord, Jesus is Lord, but if he doesn't mean it, that will be demonstrated in another way. Here's his second way of knowing a false prophet.

Many will say to me, Lord, Lord, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? These are false prophets. Cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name.

And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. Now, he says, beware of false prophets.

In verse 15, he describes that there will be many false prophets on the day of judgment. He'll say, Lord, we prophesied. We even proved we were prophets by casting out demons in your name and doing work.

He says, no, you weren't. I didn't know you. You're not one of my prophets.

You're not lying. Depart from me. Now, here's the interesting thing.

I believe that in verses 15 through 19, he gives one way of knowing a false prophet. That

is the fruit that comes out, the fruit of their lips, the fruit that comes out of their mouth. The other is by what they do.

Not everyone who says the right thing, Lord, Lord, but who does the will of my Father. And what is the will of the Father? Well, he'll go on and tell us that. Verse 24 through 27.

24 through 27 tells us, Therefore, whoever And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was found on the rock. Now, not everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does them, excuse me, now everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does them will be like a foolish, excuse me, does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell, and great was its fall.

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught us having authority, not as a scribe. Now notice this. He describes a judgment scene in verses 21 through 23.

People standing at the judgment, and their testimony collapses like a house of cards, like a house that does not stand the test of the storm. So there is the testing on the day of judgment of those who profess to be Christians, who profess to speak for Christ, those who say, Lord, Lord, but some of them do not do the will of the Father. Well, how do we know the will of the Father? He gives this illustration.

Well, those who fail at the judgment are like a house that collapses. Those who stand firm and are sane at the judgment are like a house that stands and passes the test. What's the difference between the house that passes the test and the house that doesn't pass the test? Well, he says it very plainly.

Verse 24, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them. And verse 26, now everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them. The house that stands is the person who stands in the judgment, uncondemned.

Why? He heard what Jesus said and he did what Jesus said. The person who falls in the judgment is the person who heard what Jesus said and didn't do what he said. Interestingly, he doesn't describe the person who didn't have a chance to hear what Jesus said.

That's the third category he doesn't address. Those who fall are the ones who heard what Jesus said and rejected it, did not do it. Now, obviously, those who say, Lord, Lord, we cast out demons and we prophesy, these people heard Jesus.

These are not ignorant of Jesus. But they didn't do what he said. They're like a house built on sand and they collapse.

This is what he means when he says, he who does the will of my Father in heaven, verse 21. Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, is saved. Those who do the will of the Father.

Well, what is that? Well, what did Jesus say? Do what he said. You hear his sayings and you do them. If you obey Jesus Christ, you're doing what the Father said.

So, there are... Jesus makes it clear that there will be people directing you to a different road than that narrow one that he's advocating. There is a broader road and there's far more people interested in that road than there are in the more difficult, narrow road. But, you need to beware of those who would misdirect you.

There are false prophets who would direct you to another God, to another gate, to another road. And how will you know them? Well, first of all, you know what they say. If they're saying the wrong things, if they're speaking contrary to what Jesus said, they're false prophets.

Like a tree producing bad fruit, a wicked heart producing bad words, bad saying, not truth, but bad affirmations, bad teachings. But, secondarily, even those who say, Lord, Lord, and that's not a bad thing to say, that's saying the right thing, many of them don't do what the will of the Father is. They hear what Jesus says and don't do it.

They don't teach others to do it. Remember way back in the beginning, Jesus talked about those who keep these laws and teach others to do so, will be called great in the kingdom. Until the end of the law, greatness in the kingdom was measured in keeping the law.

But now that Jesus has come, greatness in the kingdom is measured in keeping his words. And there are some who hear but don't keep them, and they are lost. I mean, how could they not be lost? He says, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

What is lawlessness? It's not coming out of Christ's law. It's living as if there is no law, no restriction. And yet, this is the very thing that many gospel preachers tell us is the heart of the gospel today.

There is no law, no restriction. It's all just by grace. Well, let me tell you something.

It is all by grace. There is no question about that. But they misunderstand what grace is.

Grace doesn't just mean, now you can get away with sinning. Grace means that now God has intervened with a new dynamic called grace, which enables you to live a holy life. Paul said, let me show you what Paul said about this in Titus chapter 2. So we'll understand exactly what being saved by grace means and what it does not mean.

In Titus chapter 2 verse 11 and 12, Paul said, For the grace of God that brings salvation How are we saved? We are saved by the grace of God. The grace of God that brings

salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us. Who is doing the teaching in this sentence? Who is the subject of this sentence? Teaching is a verb.

Who is the subject? The grace. The grace of God is teaching us. So the grace of God teaches us that we don't have to live holy anymore because we are under grace.

Oh no, that's not what it says. It says, The grace of God is teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age. In this present age, grace teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly and to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

I know a lot of people who say they teach grace message, but that's not what they're saying. Grace teaches us that. If you receive the grace of God, the grace of God will teach you to live a godly life and to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

And therefore, we are saved by grace. But grace has two parts. Grace has the part that forgives us of our sin and the part that enables us to do better and teaches us to do better.

And unfortunately, some people think that grace means it's now easy. Grace now means there's no more warfare. There's no more struggle.

Grace means it's not a hard path. And yet Jesus said, Many, verse 22 of Matthew 7, Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied your name? And I will say, I never knew you. Many, not a few.

There's many who thought and wanted to be saved. They thought they weren't. But they didn't do what Jesus said.

It seems that Jesus were not what they were doing. Therefore, they were not disciples. Jesus said elsewhere, of course, in John 8, verse 21, If you continue in my words, then you are my disciples indeed.

These people were disciples in name only. They thought they were disciples. They were surprised when they weren't.

But they weren't disciples indeed. How do you be a disciple indeed? If you continue in my words, Jesus said, you are my disciples indeed. So, disciples are those who follow the same diseases.

He points out how wise that is and how foolish it is to do otherwise. A wise man builds his house on a rock by hearing what Jesus said and doing it. The fool is the person who does not anticipate the storm, or if he knows there is a storm, and that's the judgment.

He does not take adequate precautions. And he builds his house in a flimsy manner. Well, that's about all we have time for.

And we did manage surprisingly to get through. That's a session out of our series. That was planned for.

Okay.