

## Matthew 6b-7

### Matthew 6:19-8:1

#### 6:19-7:12a, Absolute Injunctions

The next two sections have strong parallels between them (noted for the most part by Allison, see notes to 5:1-12) (chart). The first focuses on our godward responsibility to serve God rather than wealth. The second exhorts us to fairness in our dealings with our fellow humans:

Exhortation	Mat 6:19-34 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.	Mat 7:1-12 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.
The Eye	22 The light of the body is the <b>eye</b> : if therefore thine <b>eye</b> be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. 23 But if thine <b>eye</b> be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great <i>is</i> that darkness!	3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's <b>eye</b> , but considerest not the beam that is in thine own <b>eye</b> ? 4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine <b>eye</b> ; and, behold, a beam <i>is</i> in thine own <b>eye</b> ? 5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own <b>eye</b> ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's <b>eye</b> .
Exhortation	24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.	6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.
Encouragement	25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?	7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
... Two Supporting Parables	26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.	9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? 10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
... "Much More"	30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, <i>shall he not much more clothe</i> you, O ye of little faith?	11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how <b>much more</b> shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?
Exhortation with ouv	31 <b>Therefore</b> take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take <b>therefore</b> no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day <i>is</i> the evil thereof.	12 <b>Therefore</b> all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them:

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This entire section concludes, as the previous two sections began, with a reference to “the law and the prophets.” Since that summary encompasses both tables of the law (22:37-40), and since the previous section dealt with both, we should look for the same organizing principle here, and we indeed find it, though in the inverse order. First we deal with our responsibility toward God, then with our responsibility toward man. In both cases, we might fear that doing what the Lord commands might jeopardize our well-being, so each section includes a reassurance of the Lord’s care for his faithful people.

The previous two sections had in common the notion of contrast with the scribes and Pharisees, presented first as guardians of the old tradition, and then as hypocrites. The commonality here is in the theme of the pure eye, first in assessing accurately godly values, and second in judging.

It is important to discern the theme of each section, because that will help us better understand the parts of each section.

### **6:19-34, Godward Exhortation: Trust God rather than Mammon**

The consistent theme of the first section is that God and material things are constantly competing for our worship, and we must be on guard lest we choose the wrong God. Paul echoes this theme when he writes to the Colossians that “covetousness ... is idolatry” (3:5).

### **19-21, Exhortation**

We find a helpful exposition of the first exhortation in Luke, where the Lord discusses this theme in a different context.

**19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:**--Focusing one’s attention on material wealth is a futile effort, because it’s an uphill battle. Everybody and everything will conspire to take it away from you. This is not a new teaching. We read in the Words of the Wise in Proverbs,

Pro 23:4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. 5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

There’s another problem with material riches. Not only may they leave us, but we shall certainly one day leave them, as our Lord emphasizes in Luke:

Luk 12:16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. 20 But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So *is* he that **layeth up treasure for himself**, and is not rich toward God.

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**20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:**--The instruction not to lay up on earth is not encouraging indolence, but rather telling us where to focus our activity. We are to lay up, following Solomon's advice:

Pro 6:6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: 7 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, 8 Provideth her meat in the summer, *and* gathereth her food in the harvest.

The parallel in Luke shows one way to do this:

Luk 12:33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, **a treasure in the heavens** that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The only way to deposit money in the bank of heaven is to give it to the Lord, and as we have seen in our study of Matt 5:42, the consistent pattern of biblical charity is not to support programs or build buildings, but to give to needy believers. Solomon already anticipates this means of "laying up treasure in heaven":

Pro 19:17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

But the principle applies more broadly than to money. Paul may have these verses in mind when he writes,

2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth **there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

And Peter describes the heavenly inheritance that awaits those who faithfully endure persecution:

1Pe 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To **an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you**, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Not only money, but our time, effort, and attention, and ultimately our worship, are all resources that we control, and we must decide wisely how we will allocate them. We can invest ourselves for earthly gain or security, or for heavenly treasure.

**21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**--The individual commands suggest a selfish motive for choosing to invest in heaven: it is a more secure investment, one that won't lose value. But the overarching motive for this instruction is rather different. As the example of the rich farmer shows, the location of our investment will concentrate our thought.

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### 22-23, The Eye

**22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. 23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!**--The adjective “single” *απλους* is quite rare in the Greek Bible, appearing once in Prov 11:25 in opposition to *θυμωδης* “hot-tempered,” and once in Luke in a repetition of this saying in a different context (11:34). As a result, people have offered many different interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

The key to understanding it is to recognize that when a theme is important to a teacher, he often repeats it in similar words. So when the Lord repeats the same saying in different contexts, we can reasonably look for some common meaning between them.

Such a context is Luke 11, which we studied in connection with 5:14-15. In Luke, the Lord is rebuking the unbelief of the Jews, and he makes three statements about spiritual understanding. Each statement corresponds to a statement in the Sermon, and the second and third are virtual quotations.

The first statement concerns the broad revelation of God’s truth to the whole world:

Matt 5:14b A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.	Luke 11:29 And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. 30 For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. 31 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon <i>is</i> here. 32 The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas <i>is</i> here.
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Our Lord recalls that in the OT, God’s people (Jonah, Solomon) made the truth known even to the Gentiles, corresponding to the role of believers in Matt 5:14 as “a city that is set on a hill.” The Jews are rebuked for ignoring truth that even Gentiles can perceive, the public miracles of the Lord Jesus.

The second statement concerns the availability of truth within the community of God’s people:

Matt 5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.	Luke 11:33 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth <i>it</i> in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.
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A lamp gives its light “in the house,” accessible to those “who come in.” The Jews are condemned for ignoring the more detailed revelation that is available to those who come into the community, which in their case would be the prophecies concerning the Messiah contained in their own Scriptures.

The third statement, quoting our verses, concerns the discernment of truth by the individual.

Matt 6:22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. 23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great <i>is</i> that darkness!	Luke 11:34 The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when <i>thine eye</i> is evil, thy body also <i>is</i> full of darkness. 35 Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. 36 If thy whole body therefore <i>be</i> full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.
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<sup>1</sup> See notes for a discussion of the interpretive options for this paragraph.

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Now the organ of revelation is not a city or a lamp, but the individual's eye, which can be either "single" or "evil." The Jews are condemned for their distorted perception. If their eyes were working properly, they would recognize the Lord, but there is a defect that keeps them from perceiving.

What kind of defect is in view? The basic meaning of *απλους* is "single, without guile, sincere, straightforward" (BDAG). The "single eye" perceives things as they are, without distortion. Correspondingly, the "evil eye" insists on distorting the truth and explaining it away. The Jewish attitude toward the Lord illustrates the distortion of the "evil eye." They are so committed to their own tradition that they could not recognize the obvious evidence from the Scriptures and from the Lord's works that identify him as the Messiah. "Single" is a good translation, if we understand it of "clear" vision, contrasted with "double" or "blurred" vision.

This understanding fits well with the context in Matthew 6. Here, we are confronted with a clear conflict in claims to our loyalty. We can serve either God or mammon. We can seek treasure either on earth or in heaven. The "single eye" sees this clearly. It recognizes the folly of claiming to serve the Lord while actually following after material things. But the "evil eye" is distorted and blurred. It thinks it can have it both ways, and rationalizes away the clear claims of God on the devotion of his people.

### 24, Exhortation

Against this background, the Lord repeats the main point of this section:

**24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.**--The Lord's statement may seem strange in a day when people often hold two jobs. We need to recall that the relation in view here is not one of hiring, but rather of ownership.

"Serve" is literally "be a slave to." It will help us to understand the Lord's meaning if we recall the OT law of slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Under the OT law, a poor Hebrew (Lev 25:39) could be sold to his countryman, perhaps to pay his debts, but this servitude was only for a period of six years (or until the year of Jubilee if it came first, Lev 25:29-43). At the end of this time, he was set free, with a grubstake from his master so that he could have a fresh start in maintaining himself (chart):

Deut 15:12 *And* if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. 13 *And* when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: 14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: *of that* wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.

But in some cases, a servant might not desire his freedom. In this case, he could elect to stay with the master:

Deut 15:16 *And* it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; 17 Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust *it*

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<sup>2</sup> This law is presented in Exod 21:2-6; Lev 25:39-43; and Deut 15:12-18. See the notes for a discussion of the different facets considered in these individual statutes.

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through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever.

When a servant made this choice, he became a permanent member of the master's household. He renounced the right to be a part of another household. Such a relation could only exist with one master.

**Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**--"Mammon" is an Aramaic word meaning "property." These masters demand absolute loyalty from those who serve them. We have to make up our mind which to serve. Perhaps the Lord has in mind here the choice made by the servant in Deuteronomy 15, between taking the grubstake and remaining with the master. He couldn't have both. God allows his creatures to amass wealth, but in doing so they sever themselves from his household.

We see the same dynamic in the story of the prodigal son, who had to choose between wealth that he controlled, in separation from the father, and constant enjoyment of the bounty of the father's house. The choice is not riches vs. poverty, but whether we trust God or ourselves for the provision. Compare Paul's insight:

1Ti 6:5 men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. . . . 17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

### 25-33, The Father's Care

We are material beings, dependent on material food, clothing, and shelter for life. It is a frightening thing to contemplate choosing between God and property. In this section, the Lord reassures us that choosing to serve God does not mean that we will starve, but rather, that he (like the master in ancient Israel) will take responsibility for our maintenance in exchange for our single-hearted service.

Note the focus of this section on food and raiment (chart, Table 1). The structure of the passage is driven by three themes: [A] the attitude we should have to our physical needs, [B] our obligation to seek a higher objective than physical security, and [C] God's provision for us in two areas: food and clothing. Paul echoes these same three themes in his exhortation to Timothy, yet another indication that he knows and respects the Sermon (chart):

1Ti 6:6 [B] But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. 8 [C] And having food and raiment [A] let us be therewith content.

**25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought μεριμναω for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.**-- "Take thought" μεριμναω is mostly (19x out of 28) a NT word; there is no clear OT parallel (though it does tend to be used with words meaning "labor" or "toil"). In the NT, it dominates in this section (6x). It also appears in the missionary discourse (10:19) and the parallel sayings in Luke's gospel (12:11, 22, 25, 26). One other Gospel instance is Luke 10:41, which provides a good example of the attitude here condemned (chart):

Luk 10:40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.  
41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art **careful** and troubled about many things:

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	Food	Clothing
A: Don't worry about food and clothing.	25 <b>Therefore</b> I <b>say</b> unto you, <b>Take no thought</b>	
B: Higher good	for your life, what ye shall <b>eat</b> , or what ye shall drink;	nor yet for your body, what ye shall <b>put on</b> .
C: God's care	Is not the life more than <b>meat</b> ,	and the body than <b>raiment</b> ?
A': Don't worry about food and clothing.	26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet <b>your heavenly Father feedeth</b> them. Are ye not <b>much better</b> than they? 27 Which of you by <b>taking thought</b> can add one cubit unto his stature?	
C': God's care	28 And why <b>take ye thought</b> for <b>raiment</b> ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not <b>arrayed</b> like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so <b>clothe</b> the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, <b>shall he not much more clothe you</b> , O ye of little faith?	
A': Don't worry about food and clothing.	31 <b>Therefore take no thought, saying,</b>	
B': Higher good	What shall we <b>eat</b> ? or, What shall we drink?	or, Wherewithal shall we be <b>clothed</b> ?
C': God's care	32 (For after <b>all these things</b> do the Gentiles seek:) for <b>your heavenly Father</b> knoweth that ye have need of <b>all these things</b> .	
B': Higher good	33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and <b>all these things</b> shall be added unto you.	

Table 1: Structure of Matt 6:25-33

Paul warns against carefulness, perhaps with a view to this passage:

1Co 7:32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: 33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please *his* wife. 34 There is difference *also* between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please *her* husband. 35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

Phi 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

**Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?**--v. 33 provides the answer to this question, as does Paul's paraphrase in 1 Tim 6:6. The objective of life is not just sustaining life, but pursuing the kingdom of God, and we do that by pursuing godliness.

Now the Lord reinforces the encouragement not to worry about material needs, with two parables about the Father's provision in the natural world. These parables echo the theme of God's care that pervades the Scriptures, and is concentrated in Ps 104 (chart),

Psa 104:10 He sendeth the springs into the valleys, *which* run among the hills. 11 They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. 12 By them shall **the fowls of the heaven** have their habitation, *which* sing among the branches. 13 He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. 14 He causeth **the grass** to

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grow for the cattle, and **herb** for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; 15 And wine *that* maketh glad the heart of man, *and* oil to make *his* face to shine, and bread *which* strengtheneth man's heart. 16 The trees of the LORD are full *of sap*; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; 17 Where the birds make their nests: *as for* the stork, the fir trees *are* her house. 18 The high hills *are* a refuge for the wild goats; *and* the rocks for the conies.

The Psalmist mentions both the birds and the plants, and our Lord takes each up in turn. The first reinforces the promise that God will feed us; the second, that he will clothe us.

**26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.**--These are the usual activities of the farmer. The birds do none of these things, yet the Lord provides for them. This verse no doubt lies at the root of Elizabeth Cheney's charming poem, "Overheard in an Orchard":<sup>3</sup>

Said the Robin to the Sparrow:  
"I should really like to know  
Why these anxious human beings  
Rush about and worry so."

Said the Sparrow to the Robin:  
"Friend, I think that it must be  
That they have no Heavenly Father  
Such as cares for you and me."

**Are ye not much better than they?**--Literally, "Do you not greatly differ from them?" They are God's creation; we are his children. How much more will he care for us?

This contrast explains why so many people feel abandoned today. They have accepted the Darwinian doctrine that humans do *not* greatly differ from the animals. Modern evolutionary theory denies the special position of man. But the Bible teaches us that we are special, formed in the image of God, standing in a special relation to him, and assured of his special care.

**27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?**--A cubit is about 18 inches, the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger. When we are born, we are about one cubit long. At maturity, we are about four cubits long (72", or six feet). We do nothing to cause that increase; God provides for our growth, just as he provides for the birds.<sup>4</sup>

**28 And why take ye thought  $\mu\epsilon\rho\mu\nu\alpha\omega$  for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?**--The fowls teach us not to worry about food; the beautiful plants teach us not to worry about clothing.

**31 Therefore take no thought  $\mu\epsilon\rho\mu\nu\alpha\omega$ , saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?**--As we have seen, the Lord is not prohibiting ordinary diligence,

3 Best known from the Oct 10 entry in L. Cowan's devotional book, *Streams in the Desert*.

4 On the temporal interpretation that is currently more popular, see the notes.

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but rather fretful worry. The Israelites during the wilderness wanderings had to go out and work for their manna, but they did so knowing that God would faithfully provide. How different this approach is from both lazy neglect and an apprehension that we will come up short.

**32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)**--This attitude of worry could be understood if it came from a Gentile, who by nature does not know the evidence for God's faithfulness. It is inexcusable on the part of those of us who do know and trust the Lord.

**for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.**--He recaps the teaching of 6:7-8, which also contrasts their behavior with that of the Gentiles (chart):

Mat 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

The Gentiles' worry shows itself in vain repetitions, rote rituals that reflect the lack of any certainty in their hearts about their relation to the Lord and his care for them.

**33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;**--This is the first time that Matthew uses "kingdom of God," which appears five times in his gospel (here; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43), over against his usual expression (32x) "kingdom of heaven."<sup>5</sup> At some level, the expressions are the same. They probably reflect the same Hebrew or Aramaic substrate, and in several sayings where Matthew records "kingdom of heaven," Mark or Luke records "kingdom of God." For example (chart):

Mat 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the **kingdom of heaven** is greater than he.

Luk 7:28 For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the **kingdom of God** is greater than he.

The situation would be simple if Matthew always used "kingdom of heaven." "Heaven" is a common euphemism in Jewish speech to avoid referring directly to "God," and Matthew often reflects Jewish sensitivities. However, five times he uses "kingdom of God," suggesting that something more may be at play in how he chooses to translate our Lord's underlying words (presumably the same in all cases).

Matthew's other four instances of "kingdom of God" can help us understand the distinctive nuance of this expression. In each case, the expression emphasizes the confrontation of an unbeliever with the kingdom. Here are the four instances:

Matthew 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

The Lord is challenging the Pharisees and their rejection of his miracles. They accuse him of casting out devils by Beelzebub, but he counters that in fact what they are seeing is the power of the kingdom of God, which is foreign to them.

Matthew 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

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5 See notes for further discussion.

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Here the Lord is speaking to the disciples, but the story concerns a rich man, who loves his riches more than he loves God and to whom the kingdom is a foreign and unachievable objective.

Matthew 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Again, the Lord is confronting the Jewish opposition (this time the chief priests and elders), who are resisting God's rule.

Matthew 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

In the same discourse as the previous saying, the Lord pointedly emphasizes their rejection from the kingdom. Repeatedly, "kingdom of God" highlights the confrontation of God's rule with people who are rejecting it. Notably, he never uses "kingdom of heaven" in either ch. 12 or ch. 21, the chapters where he speaks to the Jews about the "kingdom of God." "Kingdom of heaven" is almost always addressed to the disciples. It echoes the usage of "Father in heaven," which exclusively used with the disciples.

What then does he use "kingdom of God" in talking to the disciples in 6:33? Recall the pervasive emphasis of the Sermon on persecution. Their quest for the kingdom will be in the midst of other people who are rejecting it. They must not let their enthusiasm for God's rule be quenched by the enemies of the kingdom. They are to maintain their testimony in the face of opposition, and continue to confront their persecutors with the truth of God's kingdom, even as they reject it. To "seek the kingdom of God" is not just to desire to attain unto it ourselves, but to seek that unbelievers may be confronted with it.

**and all these things shall be added unto you.**--As we saw in the law of the Hebrew slave, the choice is not between material things and poverty. It is between being in charge of our own welfare, and being under God's care. He promises to meet our needs, if we pursue his objectives first.

### 34, Exhortation

**34 Take therefore no thought μεριμνᾶω for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought μεριμνᾶω for the things of itself.**--Our version presents the same construction twice, "take no thought for X." But the Greek uses two very different constructions.

The second expression<sup>6</sup> is a conventional way to say, "take thought about tomorrow." He personifies the day itself. Even tomorrow, we are not the ones who should worry; let the day take care of it.

The first one, "Take no thought for the morrow,"<sup>7</sup> could also be translated temporally, "Take no thought in preparation for the morrow."<sup>8</sup> Don't worry about tomorrow today.

The whole exhortation is probably inspired by Solomon (chart):

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6 A simple accusative

7 Εἰς τὴν ἄρτιον

8 This is the common use of the phrase in the LXX and in Acts 4: Ex 8:6; Num 11:18; Josh 3:5; 7:13; 1 Sam 28:19; Est 5:12; 1 Macc 5:27; 3 Macc 5:38; Prov 27:1; Acts 4:3.

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Pro 27:1 Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

In both cases, we are forbidden to devote thought to tomorrow (whether worried care, or confident boasting). In both cases, the day itself is personified; Solomon says that it will “bring forth” its own events, and the Lord presents it as worrying about its own problems. The point is that we don’t control the future. We don’t even know that we will see tomorrow. How foolish it is for us to waste energy on it.

The verse may also remind us of Eph 4:26, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,” which is a variation of Psa 4:4, “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” An important principle of mental health is not to go to bed worried or upset. As we go to sleep, we should set our minds on the Lord:

Psa 63:5-6 My soul shall be satisfied as *with* marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise *thee* with joyful lips: 6 When I remember thee upon my bed, *and* meditate on thee in the *night* watches.

Asaph gives us a detailed testimony to the challenge of settling one’s mind in the evening, and how to do it, in Ps 77. He begins with a summary:

Psa 77:1 I cried unto God with my voice, *even* unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.

Next, he confesses his trouble in falling asleep, because of his worries.

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my soul ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. 3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. 4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

But then he remembers that in the past, his nights were filled with singing, not tears:

5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. 6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.

And that leads him to consider God’s broader faithfulness. Surely, God’s character has not changed.

7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth *his* promise fail for evermore? 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

v. 10 is obscure, but may indicate an awareness that whatever God has brought upon him, it is limited in duration.

10 And I said, This *is* my infirmity: ~~*but I will remember*~~ the years of the right hand of the most High.

The solution is to meditate on God’s past faithfulness:

11 I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. 12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. 13 Thy way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary [holiness Exod 15:11]: who *is so* great a God as *our* God? 14 Thou *art* the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. 15 Thou hast with *thine* arm

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redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. 16 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. 17 The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. 18 The voice of thy thunder *was* in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. 19 Thy way *is* in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. 20 Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

**Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.**--The bottom line is to leave each day's troubles to itself.

### **7:1-12a, Manward Exhortation: Deal Fairly with Other People**

We now return to the first table of the law, the one anticipated in the first set of contrasts (5:20-48).

#### **1-2 Exhortation**

**7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.**--This verse is one of the best known in the NT, and is particularly popular among people who want to deflect any criticism of their own conduct. It is used to advocate an "anything goes" attitude. Is this what the Lord intends? Let's consider three observations:

- echoes of this exhortation in the rest of the NT
- other NT passages that seem to run counter to it
- evidence that this is a figure of speech.

First, the rest of the NT does contain strong warnings against judging others, particularly other believers.

Paul seems to echo this passage in dealing with the tension between Jewish believers (who felt they should follow certain aspects of the law) and Gentile converts (who saw no necessity of obeying Old Covenant ceremonies):

Rom 14:3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. 4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. 10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... 13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.

And James, who echoes many parts of the Sermon, surely has it in mind when he writes,

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

What law does James have in mind? Matt 7:1? Or perhaps this is an allusion to what James calls "the royal law" in 2:8, to "love thy neighbor as thyself," quoted from Lev 19:18. Note the preceding context of that verse:

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Lev 19:16 Thou shalt not go up and down *as* a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I *am* the LORD. 17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. 18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I *am* the LORD.

Both of these passages warn us against a critical attitude that is constantly trying to pull down other believers. The defining characteristic of life among believers is to be one of love, not criticism and judgment.

But the NT also contains exhortations that seem to run counter to the command, “Judge not.” One of them is in this immediate context:

Mat 7:6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Obedying v. 6 requires us to distinguish dogs and swine, unclean animals that are examples of ungodly people, from those who are not dogs and swine. Similarly, in his instructions for how the church is to function in ch. 18, the Lord anticipates that the church as a whole will in some situations be required to render judgment as to whether a member’s conduct is consistent with his claim to be a believer:

Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

One of the great failings in Corinth was a neglect of this responsibility to recognize and act upon evidence of a false profession:

1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? **do not ye judge them that are within?** 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? 2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? 4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

In the latter part of this passage, 6:1, Paul probably has in mind Matt 18:17, where the Lord assigns to the church the responsibility of mediating between disagreeing believers.

So far, we have seen a prohibition for believers to judge one another’s conduct, particularly in the issues that divided Jewish and Gentile believers. But we have also seen clear exhortations to make judgments about other people, even in the immediate context of Matthew 7. Our third observation may help reconcile these conflicting observations.

This observation is inspired by a paradoxical verse in Proverbs:

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Pro 26:4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Here are two absolute commands, immediately adjacent to one another, that superficially contradict one another. How can we obey them both? The situation is similar to the tension between Matt 7:1 (do not judge) and Matt 7:6 (recognize dogs and swine).

In both verses in Proverbs, and in Matt 7:1 as well, the commands are associated with motives. In all three cases the motive is negative, and in the LXX, the motives in Prov are expressed with the very same idiom, *ὡς μὴ*, that the Lord uses in Matt 7:1.

- The motive for not judging in Matt 7:1 is “that ye be not judged.”
- The motive for not answering a fool in Prov 26:4 is “that thou be not like him.”
- The motive for answer a fool in Prov 26:5 is “that he be not wise in his own conceit.”

The resolution of the examples in Proverbs lies in recognizing a subtle difference in the sense in which we are to understand the expression, “answer a fool according to his folly.” In 26:4, Solomon warns that we should not speak folly the same way a fool does. In 26:5 the point is that we must answer a fool in a way that is appropriate to his folly, so that he can learn. But how do we discern these different nuances? They are conveyed by the motives. The motive “that thou be not like him” tells us that the answering in question is conduct that would simply lower us to his level, while the motive “that he be not wise in his own conceit” tells us that our answer must be calibrated to his conduct to have the maximum effect.

So in Matt 7:1, the motive tells us what kind of judgment is being forbidden. It is judgment that would make us liable to judgment, criticism that could just as well be turned back on us. And as we will see in the following verses, this is our Lord’s point. He will go on to show that we should judge, but only after making sure that we ourselves are innocent of the issues in question.

We see this same dynamic in other verses as well. Here are two examples.

In correcting the Corinthians for their abuses at the Lord’s Table, Paul writes,

1Co 11:34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation [lest ye come together ...].

He certainly is not forbidding believers ever to share a meal together. But he is warning them not to mix the Lord’s Table with a meal to satisfy hunger, where their experience showed that it led to abuses. The motive clause tells us how we are to understand the command.

Compare also Paul’s exhortation to fathers in Col 3:21,

Col 3:21 Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged.

Note that the words “to anger” are in italics. Paul simply said, “Don’t provoke your children.” And we know that provocation is not always bad. The same word appears in 2 Cor 9:2,

2Co 9:2 For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath **provoked** very many.

Paul’s exhortation in Col 3:21 does not mean that fathers are never to challenge their children, but that

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they must guard against discouraging them.

So in Matt 7:1, the prohibition about judging is not absolute, but a warning not to set ourselves up for judgment, as the following verses make clear.

**2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.**--This is a pervasive principle in Scripture (chart).

Jdg 1:7 And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: **as I have done, so God hath required me.** And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Psa 18:25 **With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful;** with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright;

Psa 137:7 **Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom** in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.

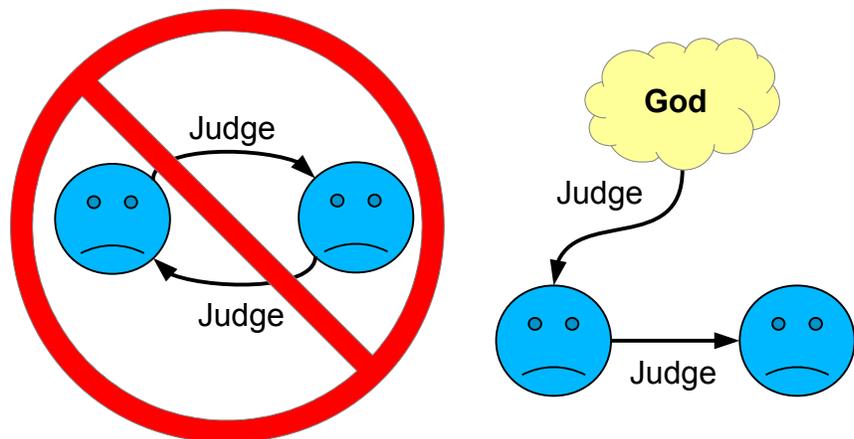
Psa 137:8 O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Oba 1:15 For the **day of the LORD** is near upon all the heathen: **as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee:** thy reward shall return upon thine own head.

2Th 1:6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with **God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;** 7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

Note that it is God who balances the books in each case (chart). He claims this as his prerogative:

Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (Deut 32:5)



*Illustration 1: Who Returns Judgment?*

The idea that God's judgment on men is regulated by how they judge one another is one of the key building blocks in Paul's

argument proving "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" (Rom 3:9). He proves that Gentiles are under sin in Romans 1 by appealing to the evidence of creation. Then in Romans 2, he turns to the Jews, with their elaborate moral code:

Rom 2:1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such

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things. 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

He has given each of us “the law written in [our] heart” (Rom 2:15). This law is what drives us to make moral judgments about one another, and it in turn is the standard by which he will judge mankind.

### 3-5, The Eye

Note the shift from plural to singular. He wants each of us to consider this principle.

**3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?**--It is perhaps natural for someone who grew up in a carpenter's household to know how harmful a speck of sawdust can be, and to contrast it with a beam. He presumes that we have a responsibility to help our brother with his problem.

**5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.**--Here we see clearly that the prohibition to judge cannot be absolute. We have a responsibility to help our brother, but must first deal with our own problem.

This principle is echoed twice in Paul (chart). His earliest letter is that to the Galatians, in which he writes,

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; **considering thyself**, lest thou also be tempted.

We have an obligation to help our brothers and sisters deal with faults, but he offers three cautions.

- This is a ministry for “ye which are spiritual,” mature believers, from whom the Spirit has purged the most obvious works of the flesh.
- It is to be conducted “in the spirit of meekness,” recognizing our own weakness.
- We must be careful not to “be tempted” by the sin of others.

The second echo is the instruction Paul gives in 1 Cor 11 for participating in the breaking of bread. In the Majority Text, he warns twice of unworthy behavior. (The Egyptian tradition omits the second warning.) To participate worthily, we must first examine ourselves, and then discern the Lord's body. As we have often discussed in other contexts, this latter command is not referring to the bread that commemorates his body, but to the body of Christ, the church, which Paul is about to expound in the next chapter. Thus understood, the instruction in 1 Corinthians 11 is precisely parallel to Matt 7:5:

	Matt 7:5	1 Cor 11:27-29
Self-examination	first cast out the beam out of thine own eye;	27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink <i>this</i> cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of <i>that</i> bread, and drink of <i>that</i> cup.
Judging others	and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.	29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

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### 6, Exhortation

**6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine,**--Recall the overall structure of this section ([http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/matt/notes/Matt6\\_19\\_Charts.pdf](http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/matt/notes/Matt6_19_Charts.pdf), chart headed "Structure of Matt 6:19-7:12"). According to the pattern we discerned there, v. 6 should be a restatement or expansion of the basic exhortation of the section (given first in vv. 1-2).

As Alford perceives, this is the counterpart of vv. 1-2. We are not to judge unfairly, but we are responsible to make distinctions, an obligation already anticipated in the second half of v. 5.

What is the practical application of the text? We would like to know:

- Who are the dogs and swine?
- What are the pearls and holy things that we are to withhold from them?

Peter may give us a clue to the first two questions in the only other verse in the Bible that refers to dogs and swine together (Illustration 2, chart):

2Pe 2:21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

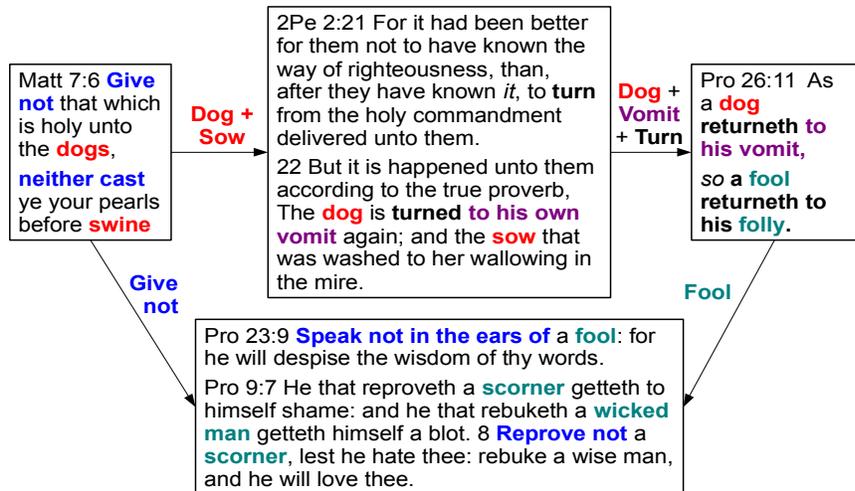


Illustration 2: 2 Pet 2:22 as the clue to Matt 7:6

The first half of 2 Pet 2:22 is from Prov 26:11, but Peter adds the reference to the sow. Does he have the Lord's saying in mind here? Then the crucial characteristic of both animals will be, not their intrinsic uncleanness, but their tendency to return to defilement even when they are cleaned. Prov 26:11 makes the simile explicit:

Pro 26:11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, *so* a fool returneth to his folly.

Solomon's reference to the fool returning to his folly picks up the context in 2 Peter, which is an entire chapter that is discussing apostates, those who turn away from the faith that they once professed.

Other passages in Proverbs also talk about somebody who has rejected what they have already been taught, and warns against continued efforts to teach them.:

Pro 9:7 He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. 8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

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Pro 23:9 Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

These prohibitions bring us full circle to the Lord's original exhortation not to give holy things, beautiful things, to dogs and swine.

This instruction has two applications (chart). Both of them instruct God's people in how to speak to others of the Lord, and thus v. 6 is an amplification of the command in v. 5 to cast out the mote out of our brother's eye.

First, in evangelism, it aligns with the Lord's instructions in the missionary discourse,

Mat 10:14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

We are not to keep forcing the gospel on those who reject it. Paul and Barnabas quote this instruction in their decision to leave Antioch:

Act 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. . . . 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

Paul applies it also to the Jews in Corinth:

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

Second, within the church, the rest of the NT warns us to separate from those who have professed faith, but then turn from the truth.

Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid** them.

1Ti 6:3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw thyself.**

**lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.**--The Lord warns of consequences that may come from neglecting this instruction. Probably, these are associated chiasmically with the two animals (chart): the image is of pigs trampling the pearls into the mud of the sty, while dogs, which are feral animals in the Middle East.

There are two categories of danger here. The verses we have seen in Proverbs anticipate both of them.

The first is dishonor to the truth that is being offered: swine trample beautiful pearls into the mud, and

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those who reject the truth often mock it. Proverbs warns,

Pro 23:9 Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

Sometimes unbelievers not only reject the gospel, but mock it. For example, the “love gospel,” which begins by telling people that God loves them and Jesus died for them, often leads to the response, “Then I’m OK, and can do what I please.” Presenting details of truth to unbelievers is not only a waste of time, but can lead to mockery. A biblical approach to evangelism begins by challenging people with their sin, and only goes on to the solution if there is evidence of interest. Even among believers, the example of Paul is to withhold meat from younger believers until they have the basics down:

1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able.

The second danger is that those who reject the truth will also reject us, and seek to harm us: the dogs will “turn again and rend you.” Solomon warns of this danger as well:

Pro 9:7 He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. 8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

This danger is particularly strong in the church. If you confront believers with issues in their lives that need attention, and they do not agree, they may discredit you to preserve their self-respect. Sometimes the hatred is focused on one individual, the teacher who presents the truth. Sometimes it is the church as a whole that is “torn,” as one person’s error leads astray others. Again, Peter warns of this danger:

2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 **And many shall follow their pernicious ways;**

Note the parallels between this instruction and v. 1. Once we understand v. 6 in the light of 2 Peter and Proverbs, the two commands are similar not only structurally, but also semantically.

- Both are a command not to do something: not to judge someone who is wrong (v. 1); not to communicate truth to unworthy people (v 6). When we judge, we are trying to communicate truth. The meanings of the two commands are very similar.
- Both are modified by a negative motive (“lest”).<sup>9</sup> Again, not only the structure, but also the meaning is similar: both describe some harm that may come to us if we do not obey the command.

Like “judge not,” this instruction is not absolute, otherwise we would never preach to the lost (as ch. 10 and 28:19-20 command us) or exhort other believers (as ch. 18 instructs). In line with the overall thrust of the Sermon, the Lord is preparing his disciples for ministry in a hostile world, and warning them of the risks to which they will be exposed if they do not carry out their work carefully. The words of life that we bring can be distorted and twisted, to the Lord’s dishonor and our own hurt. We need to be discerning about who is listening, and share what is appropriate, to guard against these unfortunate

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<sup>9</sup> The negative particle here is *μηποτε*, not *ινα μη* as in the verses considered earlier. I have not studied the difference between these systematically.

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results.

The symmetry we saw in v. 5 leads to another application. If we are to be careful how we give instruction so as not to bring dishonor on the truth and harm to ourselves, we must be careful how we receive instruction as well. We must guard against being a pig, who tramples the truth into the mud, or a dog, who attacks those who seek to help us. In isolation, we might not see this message in v. 6, but when it follows directly on 7:5, it is natural for us to draw this conclusion.

### 7-9, Encouragement

So far, this section is characterized by two very parallel warnings of the harm that may come to us because of the hostility of the world in which we live. How can we survive in such a hostile environment? This section answers that question by reminding us of a previous episode in the life of God's people in which they were in a hostile environment.

**7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.**--The exhortation here is puzzling, for three reasons.

1. Though the object of the asking, seeking, and knocking is not specified, it is apparently God. Certainly this is the case when the Lord repeats the saying in Luke 11:9-10, in amplifying his teaching about the Lord's Prayer. Yet this panel is focused on our relations with other people.
2. As instruction to prayer, this verse emphasizes persistence, just as the Lord does in the preceding parable in Luke 11, and in the parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18. Yet we have just been told in the parallel panel not to worry about our material needs (6:25), and reminded that God knows our needs before we ask (6:32).
3. While there are many texts that describe prayer in terms of asking and seeking, knocking is a very unusual way to talk about prayer. It implies that there is a door, a barrier, that denies us access to somewhere that we want to go.

We may be able to resolve all three of these questions if we understand the Lord to be alluding to an oracle in Jeremiah 29. Historically, this letter is written shortly after the second of Nebuchadnezzar's three attacks against Jerusalem, in 597 BC, when the court and the skilled craftsmen were taken to Babylon. Throughout his prophecies, Jeremiah has been declaring that the captivity is God's punishment, to which the nation should submit. But there is constant opposition from false prophets, insisting that God will defeat Nebuchadnezzar and return the Jews to Jerusalem. Jeremiah 29 is a letter that Jeremiah writes to the captives in Babylon, telling them to ignore these false prophecies. Instead, they are to prepare themselves to live in Babylon for more than a generation (chart):

Jer 29:5 Build ye houses, and dwell *in them*; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; 6 Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

To encourage them, God reminds them that the time will come when he will return them to Jerusalem. When that time comes, they will turn to him, and he will respond.

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Jer 29:10 For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

The description of their turning and of his response may anticipate our Savior's words in the Sermon. The Lord begins with a promise to those who simply ask. Jeremiah's letter promises,

Jer 29:12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and **I will hearken unto you**.

Next, in the strongest parallel to the Sermon, in Jeremiah the Lord promises,

Jer 29:13 And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.  
14 And **I will be found of you**, saith the LORD:

If this association is correct, the Lord's instruction to seek is not for us to seek for things, but rather to seek the Lord himself, to draw near to him and be careful to remove every barrier that might interfere with our fellowship.

The Lord's third exhortation is to knock so that closed doors will open. Jeremiah doesn't mention any petition corresponding to this third exhortation, but he does describe the result:

Jer 29:14b **I will turn away your captivity**, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

When the Jews returned from Babylon, two sets of doors were opened, figuratively—the doors of the city that held them captive, and the doors of the city to which they returned.

Recognizing this parallel helps us understand the role of this triple exhortation in the Sermon. The Lord intends us to compare our situation with that of the Jews in Babylon. Like them, we are strangers in a strange land. This world is not our home, yet it is the Lord's will that we, like Israel in Babylon, make our lives here. We are to build houses, plant gardens, marry, beget children, and seek the good of the land—all the while remembering that our true home is the coming kingdom.

Because we are aliens, the world will always look down on us. This theme pervades the Sermon. We are to expect persecution, turn the other cheek when attacked, and forgive our enemies. He has just spoken of the danger that savage dogs will "turn again and rend you" (v. 6). This observation explains why the Lord exhorts us to prayer in the midst of a section about our duty to our fellow man. We will need the Lord's help to conduct ourselves appropriately in this setting.

The observation also explains the contrast between the exhortation not to be concerned in 6:19-34, and the insistence that characterizes this exhortation. We are not to worry about our daily bread. But we are to cultivate a continual longing for heaven. As pilgrims, we are subject to two kinds of error. On one hand, we can refuse to engage the land in which the Lord has placed us, withdrawing from it and dulling our testimony. On the other hand, we can "go native," and forget that we are only passing through. Our hearts should be filled with a constant longing for our true home. We should constantly be knocking at the door, loving the Lord's appearing (2 Tim 4:8), praying with John on Patmos, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

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The book of Daniel is an excellent example of the conduct that our Lord enjoins. Daniel and his friends shared “holy things,” his prophecies and divine rebukes, with unbelievers, and many of his associates tried to “turn and rend” hem for their devotion to his God. Their conduct is an example of what the Lord enjoins on us here. They did not seek vengeance on their enemies, but sought the Lord, and he delivered them.

Recall the episode of the fiery furnace (chart):

Dan 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, ... 4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 5 *That* at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: 6 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

Of course, the Jews could not obey this command, and their enemies seized on their piety as an occasion to attack them.

Dan 3:8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. 9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. ... 12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

The Jews’ response was calm. They did not attack their adversaries, but simply stated their faith:

Dan 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

God delivered them (v. 27), and Nebuchadnezzar promoted them in the province of Babylon (v. 30).

We have another example after Babylon fell to the Persians, under Darius the Mede (chart):

Dan 6:4 Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he *was* faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God.

They persuaded Darius to forbid prayer to anyone other than himself, upon pain of death in the den of lions. How did Daniel respond to this antagonism?

Dan 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

We all know the story, how God delivered Daniel. Recall his report to the king the next morning. There is no animosity toward his accusers, just praise to God for his deliverance:

Dan 6:22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt

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me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

The king was not so patient, and commanded the accusers themselves to be thrown into the den.

In fact, Daniel probably takes encouragement from the same passage in Jeremiah that may lie behind our Lord's words. Compare Jeremiah's oracle with Daniel 9 (chart):

Jer 29:10 For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

Dan 9:1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to **Jeremiah the prophet**, that he would accomplish **seventy years** in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

Jeremiah said, "After 70 years, I will visit you, and you will pray and seek me." He did not command them to ask, seek, or knock, but simply promised that when that time came, he would hear them, be found of them, and open the doors to take them home. Daniel recognizes the end of the 70 years, and prays and seeks the Lord.

We do not have a date, as Daniel did. On the contrary, we know neither the day nor the hour (Matt 24:36; 25:13). But we see on every hand the collapse of the present world order. Surely the coming of the Lord draws near, and under such pressures, we should constantly be looking for the Lord's return, asking, seeking him, and knocking at heaven's door.

**9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? 10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?**--The first panel introduced a double parable at this point (the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field). Again the Lord brings in a double parable (the request for bread and fish). Even a human father will seek to care for the needs of his children.

The foods mentioned may reflect a common lunch box in the first century. They were the central feature in the feeding of the five thousand, the only miracle (besides the resurrection) that is reported in all four gospels (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). In particular, note the source of the food, a boy in the crowd (chart):

Joh 6:9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

When a boy leaves the house for the day, a loving father will see that he has nourishment for the midday. Particularly in the fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee where our Lord had his base, this lunch would naturally be some bread and dried fish. The Lord's double parable evokes this image of domestic care. Like the lad in John 6, we are out in the world, not in the security of our Father's home, but he has not left us without sustenance. He knows what we will need, and has prepared lunch for us, to tide us over until we return home to the evening meal, the heavenly banquet that awaits us.

**11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?**--As in the first panel, the

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double parable ends with a “much more” conclusion (chart):

6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven,	7:11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children,
<i>shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?</i>	how <b>much more</b> shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Notice the Lord’s argument in both cases.

- He begins with observations in the natural world that most of us take for granted: the wildflowers, a boy leaving home in the morning with lunch in a sack
- He draws our attention to the true agent behind the event (God who causes the grass to grow; the father who has provided lunch for the boy)
- Then he points out that God’s care for his people is surely greater than these trivial observations.

The simplicity of the examples carries two messages for us.

First, we should pay attention to the spiritual implications of the simple things around us. In our busyness, we are apt to overlook the marvels that surround us on every side. The details of daily life attest to the faithful care of our loving heavenly Father for his creation, even in a fallen world.

Second, note the “much more.” Once we have taken note of these simple things, it should become obvious to us that God will give even more care to those whom he has redeemed at such a great cost.

## 12, Exhortation

**12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them:**--It is important to understand this in the light of the two previous statements of the exhortation. The principle is a good one in general.<sup>10</sup> But we should focus on its meaning here, in relation to the theme of judging with which the section begins. There are two previous summaries of the exhortation: 7:1 and 7:6. Both of them are negative commands with negative motives:

- Judge not, lest ye be judged
- Give not ..., lest they turn ...

At first glance, each of these exhortations appears to be non-symmetrical and absolute. Both warn us not to judge others, that is, not to share spiritual insights (which usually require changes in our lives).

However, the exposition that follows 7:1 (vv. 2-5) shows that the command not to judge is not absolute. We are first to clear our own eyesight, so that we will be able to see clearly to help others as well.

Similarly, 7:6 can hardly be absolute. The whole gospel of Matthew leads up to the great commission, exhorting us to carry the truth to others. But in doing so, we are to be aware that the flesh may reject

<sup>10</sup> Luke’s account of the sermon suggests that the Lord also uttered this summary in connection with the contrasts with the teaching of the Jews (6:31), in particular the exhortation to “give to him that asketh of thee” (Matt 5:42; Luke 6:30). This repetition would reinforce our sense that the two contrast sections, 5:21-48; 6:1-18, parallel the two sections 6:19-34; 7:1-12.

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what we say, and be careful not to bring either dishonor to the truth or harm to ourselves or the church. When we place 7:6 alongside the previous paragraph, we are warned about our own response to the truth we receive from others: we must neither trample it, nor seek to harm those who bring it to us.

This final exhortation reinforces this interpretation of these two commands. We must judge only as we would be judged, and when we are instructed, we must not to respond in the negative ways that the Lord describes in v. 6.

### 7:12b, The Law and the Prophets

**for this is the law and the prophets.**--This phrase concludes, not just 7:12, but everything from 5:17 (chart). Recall that we were led to this structure by our Lord's teaching later in Matthew (chart),

Mat 22:35 Then one of them, *which was a lawyer*, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, 36 Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all **the law and the prophets**.

Simply loving one's neighbor as oneself does not summarize the law and the prophets. It does not even capture the most important commandment of the law. But the material between 5:17 and 7:12 is carefully structured to remind us of the two great commandments. Even during a period of persecution, when the Lord's disciples are excluded from temple and synagogue, God's law as given to Moses continues to be the standard for the conduct that he expects of them.

Now that we have studied all four of the "law and the prophets" sections, let's summarize each of them. They form a chiasm, *ABba*, where *A* and *a* deal with loving our neighbor, and *B* and *b* deal with loving God. In such structures, it is often the case that there is a distinctive theme as well to each half of the chiasm, *AB* and *ba*. We can view the situation as a matrix (Table 2). Having characterized the rows, can we discern the distinctive emphasis of each column?

	?	?
Love your neighbor	A: 5:20-48	a: 7:1-12a
Love the Lord	B: 6:1-18	b: 6:19-34

Table 2: Summarizing the Central Section

The common theme in *AB*, 5:20-6:18 is the contrast with the Scribes and Pharisees. In 5:20-48, they are the ones who promulgate what was "said to them of old time," while in 6:1-18, they are the "hypocrites" whose ostentation the Lord condemns. This was a context in which God was recognized and honored, at least superficially. His law was the law of the land, and transgressions such as breaking the Sabbath or blasphemy were punished. The spiritual danger in such a setting is superficiality, behaving like a believer to attract the praise of men, without any true love for either man or God (chart).

This danger did not start in our Lord's day. Even in Israel before the captivity, true believers faced the danger of superficiality. Jeremiah's main enemies were not pagans, but the temple priesthood, who resented his preaching just as the first-century priesthood rejected our Lord.

Nor did the problem end with the fall of the first temple. In European lands between AD 350 and 1850, church and state were coupled under the influence of covenant theology. The state sought to bring in the kingdom of God, under the guidance of the church. The society was nominally Christian, but

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superficiality was rampant, and true believers needed the warnings against hypocrisy and superficiality of 5:20-6:18.

Now let's consider the second column. We have linked 6:19-34 with 7:1-12 based on *structural* parallels. Can we also discern a *semantic* link between these sections?

Our analysis of "ask, seek, knock" in 7:7-8 may suggest a stronger relation. The parallel with Jeremiah 29 recalls the Babylonian captivity, when Jews were forced to maintain their faithfulness in the midst of a pagan culture. Could the contrast between serving God and serving Mammon in 6:19-34 also have that period in view?

In our discussion of 7:6, we were drawn to the example of Daniel. Daniel also provides a good example of choosing to serve God rather than Mammon. Recall his dealings with Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, to whom God showed the writing on the wall on the eve of Babylon's conquest by Cyrus. Belshazzar sought to motivate his wise men with the offer of financial reward (chart):

Dan 5:7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. *And* the king spake, and said to the wise *men* of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Apparently, he was not familiar with Daniel, for the queen mother had to introduce him. When Daniel comes in, he rejects the reward and any bias it might convey:

Dan 5:17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

Then he proceeds not only to interpret the reading, but to upbraid the king for his rebellion against the God of heaven (vv. 18-23). He recalls how God disciplined Nebuchadnezzar for pride, and then continues,

Dan 5:22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; 23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Clearly, Daniel has chosen to serve God rather than Mammon.

Contrast the behavior of Esther when she was elevated to the palace:

Est 2:10 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew *it*.

She obscures her spiritual identity in order to secure the prestige and security of a position in the palace. Only when her life is threatened does she reveal her Jewish descent, and then without any mention of the God who chose the nation and protected it.

These examples show that the exhortations of 6:19-34 are certainly appropriate to a period of captivity,

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when God’s people live in a culture that does reinforce the choice to honor God. This is a very different context than the one implied in 5:20-6:18. There, the danger was superficial conformity with a society that outwardly recognized the Lord. Now, we are faced with a society that denies the Lord, and we are tempted to deny him along with them.

The danger of compromise that the captivity illustrates arises in later history. Before the conversion of Constantine, believers were persecuted by Rome. Throughout the past two millennia, pagan civilizations and Islam have tempted believers to hide their identity. Today, in so-called “post-Christian” Europe, this temptation faces each of us. In such contexts, believers are like the Jewish exiles, and need the example of Daniel (chart).

With the row and column labels in place, we can now summarize each cell in our table (chart, Table 3).

		<i>Avoid superficiality in a friendly environment</i>	<i>Avoid compromise in a hostile environment</i>
Love your neighbor		A: 5:20-48 Don't let the opinions of others distort your understanding of God's Word.	a: 7:1-12 Know the risks of exposing the sins of others; keep yourself clean.
Love the Lord		B: 6:1-18 Be sure your worship is addressed to God, not to onlookers.	b: 6:19-34 Don't let the world's tinsel distract your loyalty away from the Lord.
Historical Periods	Israel	14c-7c BC, 5c BC – AD 1c	6c BC (Babylonian captivity)
	Church	AD 4c-19c (covenant theology)	AD 1-3c, 20-21c

Table 3: Completing the Summary

This analysis, in turn, guides us to an appropriate summary of the entire section:

We must love God and love our neighbor in spite of the resistance that we will meet whether our associates outwardly oppose the truth, or claim to support it.

## 7:13-27, Warnings of Judgment

Now that we have left the section summarizing the law and the prophets, it may be well to recall the point of this closing section, and how the whole sermon reflects Deuteronomy (chart).

- The body of Deuteronomy is an alternation between the ten commandments (given in ch. 5, amplified in ch. 12-26), and blessings and curses (in 6-11 and again in 27-28).
- The blessings and curses of ch. 6-11 are the source of the Lord’s defense against Satan in ch. 4.
- The central portion of the Sermon reflects the ten commandments.
- The beatitudes correspond to the blessings that Deuteronomy 27-28 promises to those who obey God’s law, while the current section corresponds to the warnings of judgment on those who disobey them.

## 13-14, *The Gate is Narrow*

**13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**--This vivid image conveys the

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following points:

- We must make a choice. There are two gates and two ways.
- They lead to different destinations: destruction, and life.
- The gate and way that lead to destruction are broad, and well-traveled. Many will follow that path.
- The gate and way that lead to life are narrow, and few enter it. God's people are a minority.

There may be a pun in “narrow,”<sup>11</sup> which can mean either physically restricted, or oppressed and persecuted. The former meaning is favored by the parallels with “wide,” “broad,” and “strait,” but the latter echoes the persistent theme of the Sermon that God’s people will be persecuted and oppressed during their earthly pilgrimage.

So the first warning is to be certain that we ourselves are on the right path.

### **15-27, Some Prophets are False**

The second warning is more ominous. The pictures that people often draw of the two paths show that they are separated from one another (chart). But in fact, they frequently cross, in the sense that some people who are really on the broad path appear to be on the narrow path. A primary example of these are false prophets. Our Lord first warns of the fact, then tells us how to detect them.

## **15, The Fact and Effect of False Prophets**

**15 Beware of false prophets,**--We find these throughout the Scriptures (chart). Moses warned of them:

Deu 13:1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

There are numerous examples in the OT:

- The old prophet in Bethel, who persuaded the man of God to eat and drink before returning home (1 Kings 13)
- In Israel, telling Ahab that he would conquer the Syrians (1 Kings 22)
- In Jeremiah’s day, in Babylon, telling the people they would soon return (Jer 29)
- In Jeremiah’s day, in Jerusalem, Hananiah predicting the defeat of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 28)

Our Lord speaks further of them in his parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30), warning that both good grain and noxious weeds will grow together in the church. And the apostles clearly had to contend with them in the first-century churches: Paul warns of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who taught

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<sup>11</sup> Passive of θλιβω, cf. θλιπσις. We might render it “tribulated,” that is, “full of tribulation”

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realized eschatology (2 Tim 2:17), and John warns of the “many antichrists” who were moving among the assemblies (1 John 2:18).

**which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.**--The Lord introduces a vivid image that would strike home to readers in an agrarian economy. The false prophets are like wolves that ravage a flock. In Michigan, we are more likely to encounter coyotes who attack chickens, but the effect is the same.

Paul surely has the Sermon in mind when he charges the elders of the church of Ephesus (chart),

Act 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

The image of a wolf in sheep's clothing conveys the *superficiality* of their testimony. “Ravener” indicates the *harm* they do to the flock, and also their *motive*. The word is often translated “robber” or “extortioner.” A “ravener” is somebody who seeks to enrich himself by harming others. False prophets within the church act not only, or even primarily, in order to harm others, but to enrich themselves. Paul recognizes this motive in a more detailed description of the false prophet:

1Ti 6:3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, **supposing that gain is godliness**: from such withdraw thyself.

Tit 1:10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, **for filthy lucre's sake**.

Peter also warns of such:

2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, ... 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words **make merchandise** of you:

### 16-20, The Principle: Fruit Identifies the Plant.

In the midst of such confusion and deception, how can we discern true prophets from false ones? We can't look at their outward appearance, for they are in sheep's clothing. The Lord's solution shifts from a zoological metaphor to a botanical one, from sheep and wolves to trees and their fruit.

**16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. ... 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.**--Note the internal inclusio, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” (The AV inverts the word order between vv. 16a and 20, but it is the same in both in Greek.) By repeating this principle, the Lord drives home his point.

**Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?**-- “Thorns and thistles” is a rare combination in the Bible. It appears in the OT only twice, the first time in the curse in Eden:

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Gen 3:18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

The second, in Hosea, reports the fate of Bethel and Dan, the idolatrous sanctuaries of the Northern Kingdom:

Hos 10:8 The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars;

“Thorns and thistles” are the divine judgment on sinful people.

In Genesis and Hosea, the thorns and thistles grow on the land that was under the care of the sinful people. Moses takes the picture a step further, and seems to associate the worthless fruit with the people themselves.

Deu 32:32 For their vine *is* of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes *are* grapes of gall, their clusters *are* bitter: 33 Their wine *is* the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.

Sodom and Gomorrah are now under the Dead Sea, but the land around them grows thorns and thistles, not vines, and one seeks in vain for sweet grapes on such plants.

Isaiah picks up this image in the Song of the Vineyard, in which the vines stand for Israel itself (chart):

Isa 5:1 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: 2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and **he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.** 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. 4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? **wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?**

**17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.**

**18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.--**

The principle is that a tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces. So we ought to be able to look at the life of a person who claims to be a Christian, and see something called “fruit” that reflects their true spiritual status.

**19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.--**The Lord closes his metaphor with a sober warning. Fruit not only helps us determine which road a person is on, but also indicates their destiny. God is preparing judgment for the plants that do not bring forth good fruit.

The warning is not original with our Lord. It goes back to Isaiah’s song of the vineyard:

Isa 5:5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: 6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

## Matthew 6b-7

It also echoes the preaching of John, of whom our Lord was a disciple:

Mat 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore **every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.**

But the application is subtly different. John was speaking to those who might themselves be false prophets, while the Lord is warning his disciples against those false prophets.

### 21-27, What counts as fruit?

So far, the Lord has been in the realm of metaphor: the effect of false teachers is depicted under the figure of ravaging wolves attacking the sheep, while the evidence of a person's spiritual status is described in terms of the fruit that a plant bears. The Lord leaves the metaphor to explain just what constitutes good fruit and evil fruit, then enriches it with yet another image.

The imagery is tightly linked (chart, Illustration 3). The metaphor of v. 19, the threat of being chopped down, corresponds to the threat of not entering the kingdom of heaven (v. 21), of being turned away as a worker of iniquity (v. 23), of collapsing like an unstable house (v. 27). The threat of not entering in recalls in turn the metaphor of the gate (vv. 13-14), while the parable of the house is derived from OT passages describing false prophets, and thus ties this section together with v. 15.

His explanation of good and evil fruit differs from what we might expect. v. 21 offers a summary. Then in 22-23 we see evil fruit, good fruit in 24-25, and evil fruit again in 26-27 (chart, Table 4).

### 21 Summary

The Lord anticipates two candidates for fruit: outward allegiance to Christ, and true obedience.

**21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;**--This scenario is amplified in v. 22-23. The Lord envisions somebody who comes in his name. They have a verbal profession.

It is not wrong to confess Christ. Paul tells us that "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom 10:10). But it is not enough. "Not every one" who confesses Christ is a true believer. Some are false prophets.

**but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.**--What makes the

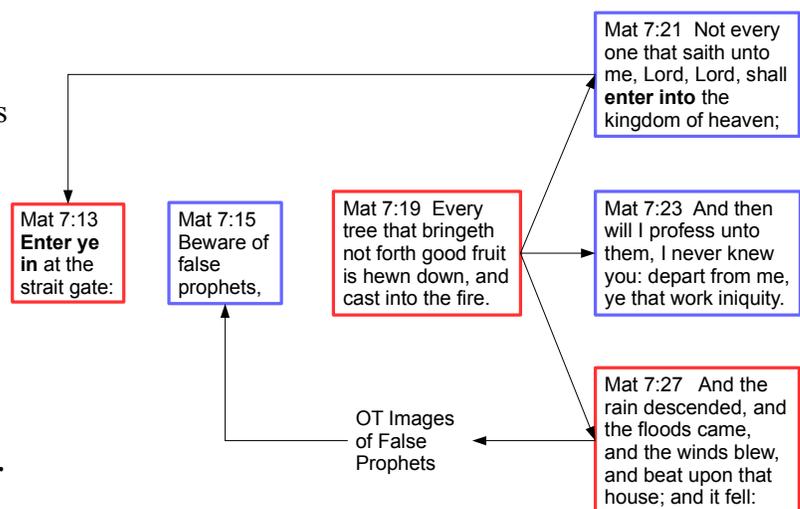


Illustration 3: Linked *metaphors* and *explanation*

## Matthew 6b-7

	Summary	Evil	Good	Evil
Evil	21 Not every one that saith unto me, <b>Lord, Lord,</b>	22 Many will say to me in that day, <b>Lord, Lord,</b> have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?		26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:
Result	shall <b>enter into the kingdom</b> of heaven;	23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: <b>depart from me,</b> ye that work iniquity.	25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and <b>it fell not:</b> for it was founded upon a rock.	27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and <b>it fell:</b> and great was the fall of it.
Good	but <b>he that doeth the will</b> of my Father which is in heaven.		24 Therefore whosoever <b>heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,</b> I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:	

Table 4: Structure of 7:21-27

difference is the person's obedience, which will be amplified in v. 24 as "hear[ing] these sayings of mine and do[ing] them."

The rest of the NT picks up this image of fruitfulness, and in every case it consists of a life lived in obedience to the Lord (chart):

Col 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being **fruitful** in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Gal 5:22 But the **fruit** of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Phi 1:11 Being filled with the **fruits** of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

2Pe 1:5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor **unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **22-23, Evil Fruit: Prominent Ministry (!)**

**22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?**--As an example of "evil fruit," the Lord focuses, not on those who clearly are unbelievers, but those who seem most obviously to be following him. Their claims are all associated with showy ministry:

## Matthew 6b-7

	False Prophets	True Apostles
Using the title "Lord"	Titus 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him,	Act 2:36 God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.
Prophesying	Caiaphas, John 11:49-52	2Pe 2:1 there shall be false teachers among you, ... 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; ...
Casting out devils	Sons of Sceva, Acts 19:13 "Jewish exorcists"	Act 16:18 But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.
Doing wonderful works	Second Beast, Rev 13:13-14 "he doeth great wonders"	Act 5:12 by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people

Table 5: Ambiguous Signs of Apostleship

- They call him, "Lord, Lord," openly professing their allegiance to him.
- They have prophesied in his name, involved in widespread public ministry.
- They have cast out devils to prove that they are on the Lord's side and not Satan's.
- They have performed miracles.

A word of caution is necessary. The Lord is teaching that just using the title "Lord," prophesying in Christ's name, casting out devils, and doing wonderful works are not sufficient to show that a person is a true believer. But they are not wrong in themselves. A person can be a true believer, and still call Christ "Lord," prophesy in his name, cast out devils, and do wonderful works. These signs are ambiguous (chart, Table 5). The book of Acts is full of such signs at the hands of the apostles. But they can all be counterfeited, and so they are not the test of true faith. They are not the "good fruit" that identifies a sheep and distinguishes it from a wolf.

**23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you:**--In spite of their prominent works in the name of Christ, he disowns them.

Two details invite attention here: how an unbeliever can call Christ "Lord," and what it means for him to know us and us to know him.

The first question is how Jesus can reject someone who calls him "Lord," given what Paul later says (chart):

1Co 12:3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

Here we must make a grammatical distinction between "Lord" as a term of *address*, and as a term of *description*. As a term of address, it is spoken directly to someone, as a sign of respect. As a term of description, it is spoken about somebody, to say who they are. The term of address is marked in Greek with a special ending, called the "vocative case." The term of *description* can carry any case ending.

The use in 1 Cor 12:3 is a term of description. Paul is using "Lord" here as the LXX translation of YHWH, the sacred name of God. His claim is that confessing that Jesus is God shows the work of the Spirit.

## Matthew 6b-7

As a term of address, “Lord” was a common sign of respect, virtually identical to our use of the word “Sir.” The NT offers several examples of “Lord” in the vocative where there is no claim that anybody is deity:

- The Greeks come to Philip to seek an audience with Jesus:  
Joh 12:21 The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, **Sir**, we would see Jesus.
- The chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate after the crucifixion to ask that the tomb be sealed. They begin,  
Mat 27:63 **Sir**, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.
- When the Lord appears to Mary, she does not recognize him:  
Joh 20:15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, **Sir**, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

It is possible for us to *address* the deity as “Lord” and at the same time mean the term as a *description*, as we can see clearly in the OT, when κύριος translates יהוה, for example,

Exo 15:6 Thy right hand, **O LORD**, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, **O LORD**, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Moses is addressing the Lord, and also (as the AV shows by using capital letters) recognizing his title as יהוה. But it is also possible for the form of address to appear without any commitment about who the addressee is.

The people quoted in Matt 7:21, 23 are using the vocative case. Those gathered before the Lord address him respectfully, and even use the title that true believers ascribe to him. In fact, they repeat the title twice, to sound especially pious. In the LXX, the double address κυριε κυριε is the regular translation of the Hebrew יהוה אדני יהוה, which our version renders “Lord GOD.” But the only instances of this double address in the NT are with false disciples (here and the parallel in Luke 6:46; the foolish virgins in Matt 25:11 and Luke 13:25). They want to sound like his subjects, but they use an ambiguous form that does not commit them to his lordship. If they had truly meant to confess him as God, they would have obeyed his teaching as the very word of God.

The second point of interest is the Lord’s statement that he never knew them. We often describe our relation to the Lord as “knowing the Lord.” We may say to somebody, “Do you know the Lord?” Those who say “Lord, Lord” clearly think that they know him, for they claim to do mighty works in his name. But the real criterion is whether he knows us, not the other way around, as Paul writes Titus (chart),

Tit 1:16 They profess that **they know God**; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Note how Paul corrects himself in Galatians:

Gal 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, **or rather are known of God**, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

## Matthew 6b-7

The direction matters. Salvation is not a matter of what we know, but of what God knows. It begins with his foreknowledge of us:

Rom 8:29 For whom **he did foreknow**, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

The only true knowledge we can have of God starts with his knowledge of us, and leads in turn to our obedience. Note the order in John 10:

Joh 10:14 **I** am the good shepherd, and **know my sheep, and am known of mine**. ... 27 My sheep hear my voice, and **I know them**, and they follow me:

**depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**--The consequence is that these people are cast out from him.

### 24-25, Good Fruit: Obedience.

As the summary in v. 21 suggests, the good fruit is obedience. The Lord develops this theme in vv. 24-25. Having given a literal definition of good fruit, the Lord returns once more to metaphor with a parallel parable (chart, Table 6). Again he draws on the Old Testament, which provides three lines of images: the foundation, the falling wall, and a destructive storm, and again his words are cited by the apostles (chart, Illustration 4). These images take us directly back to the theme of false prophets that motivated the discussion of fruit in the first place (chart, Illustration 3).

Good Fruit	Evil Fruit
24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine,	26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine,
and doeth them,	and doeth them not,
I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:	shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:
25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house;	27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house;
and it fell not:	and it fell:
	and great was the fall of it.
for it was founded upon a rock.	

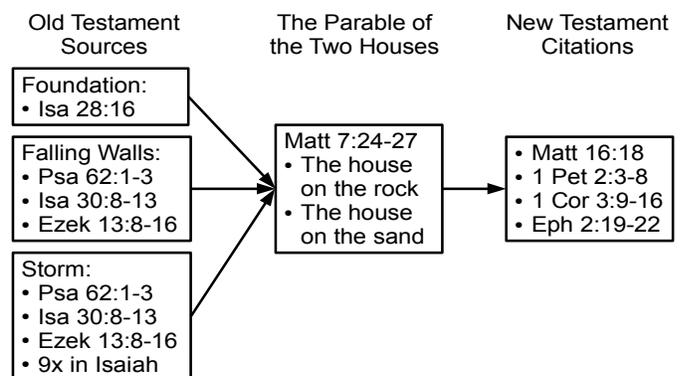
Table 6: Two Houses, Two Foundations, Two Destinies

We have often seen patterns of linked citations like this. These patterns teach us the importance of understanding each passage in the light of previous revelation, which is how the original readers or hearers would have understood it.

### The Image of the Foundation

The first OT image focuses on the foundation.

**24a ~ 26a Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them (not),**--The summary spoke of “doing the will of my Father.” Here the Savior speaks of doing or not doing “these sayings of mine.” The alignment reminds us of the Lord’s function as “the Word of God”



*Illustration 4: Sources and Citations of the Parable of the Houses*

## Matthew 6b-7

(John 1:1; Rev 19:13). The Lord constantly claimed that his words were from the Father (chart):

- Joh 7:16 My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.
- Joh 8:28 as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.
- Joh 8:38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father:
- Joh 12:49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.
- Joh 17:8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me;

Note the Lord's emphasis on hearing and *doing*. We are likely to characterize false prophets in terms of what they *believe* and *say*. But in both the literal summary of v. 21 and the parable of the house, our Lord emphasizes our *obedience*. It goes without saying that we should believe what God says. What sets the true disciple apart from the false prophet is obedience.

This emphasis reflects God's revelation to Moses:

Deu 29:29 The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, **that we may do** all the words of this law.

**I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock/shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:**--The Lord clearly has his teaching in mind as the rock, on which the building is founded. He is drawing on Isa 28:16 (chart):

Isa 28:14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: 16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, **Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation:** he that believeth shall not make haste. 17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the **hail** shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the **waters** shall overflow the hiding place. 18 And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.

Note the points of contact with our Lord's words:

- The "scornful men," who take "refuge" (suggesting a building) in "lies" and "falsehood," anticipating the "false prophets" with whom this whole section is concerned;
- The meteorological threat ("hail" and "waters") to their "refuge" and "hiding place," anticipating the storm and flood described in vv. 25, 27 as threatening the "house."

By describing his teaching as the foundation on which people should build, our Lord is taking his place as the fulfillment of Isa 28:16, the "sure foundation." By contrast, the "sand" of v. 26 would be any other foundation, and in particular, the words of those who do not accept the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

## Matthew 6b-7

### The Image of the Collapsing Wall

**25 ~ 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not (27: fell):**--The next step in the metaphor describes a fierce storm, and the destiny of the house. This imagery draws on a series of OT references to unstable walls that collapse under stress. Successive instance of the metaphor in the OT add increasing detail.

David appears to be the first, comparing his enemies to an unsound wall (chart):

Psa 62:1 Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation. 2 He only *is my rock* and my salvation; *he is* my defence; **I shall not be greatly moved**. 3 How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you:<sup>12</sup> as a **bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence**.

They will collapse, but he will not be moved, because he (unlike “a bowing wall” and “a tottering fence”) is build on a solid rock. He repeats this confidence:

Psa 62:6 He only *is my rock* and my salvation: *he is* my defence; **I shall not be moved**. 7 In God *is* my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, *and* my refuge, *is* in God.

Already we see here the contrast that the Lord repeats: having the right foundation (the Rock) makes the difference between collapsing like a weak wall and remaining unmoved.

David’s rock was the Lord, and the NT writers understand the foundation stone of Isa 28:16 as the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus makes the foundation his words. At first, this may seem a misalignment, but the Lord repeatedly insists that accepting him requires accepting his word, and rejecting word implies rejecting him:

Luk 6:46 And why call ye **me**, Lord, Lord, and do not **the things which I say**?

Luk 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of **me** and of **my words**, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

Joh 12:48 He that **rejecteth me**, and **receiveth not my words**, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

To hear and obey the Lord’s words is to acknowledge him and his authority.

Isaiah picks up and refines this image (chart):

Isa 30:8 Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: 9 That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that will not hear the law of the LORD*: 10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, **speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits**: 11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. 12 Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye **despise this word**, and **trust in oppression and perverseness**, and stay thereon: 13 Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, **swelling out in a high wall**, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

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<sup>12</sup> Our version rests on the Tiberian Massorete ben Asher, who points the verb as passive. Ben Naphthali, in Babylon, points it as active, but in either case it makes sense to see the adversaries as the wall. Our version anticipates that they will be destroyed; the eastern version, that in falling they bring harm to those around them.

## Matthew 6b-7

Note three refinements of David's idea:

1. The adversaries are now false prophets, leading people away from "the law of the Lord." This theme ties the metaphor back to the Lord's basic concern in this passage, the "false prophets" (Matt 7:15).
2. The ones whom they pervert are not the righteous man (as David presents himself in Psalm 62), but "a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord" (v. 9), who invite the false prophets to justify their sin.
3. Now the destruction of the wall is an image for the destruction of both people and prophets.

Ezekiel, like Isaiah, attributes the problem to false prophets (chart).

Eze 13:8 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I *am* against you, saith the Lord GOD. 9 And mine hand shall be upon the **prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies**: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord GOD. 10 Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and *there was* no peace; and one built up a wall,<sup>13</sup> and, lo, others daubed it with untempered *morter*: 11 Say unto them which daub *it* with untempered *morter*, that **it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it.** 12 Lo, when **the wall is fallen**, shall it not be said unto you, Where *is* the daubing wherewith ye have daubed *it*? 13 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; **I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it.** 14 So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered *morter*, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 15 Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered *morter*, and will say unto you, The wall *is* no *more*, neither they that daubed it; 16 *To wit*, **the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace**, saith the Lord GOD.

Here are Ezekiel's extensions and refinements:

1. For the first time, there is mention of the building of the wall, but the builder is indefinite (v. 10 "one built up a wall.")
2. The first time the wall is described (v. 10), a rare word קִיץ is used. In the Mishna this term indicates a wall that has no mortar, but is merely stacked up.
3. In our version, "morter" is italicized, and the Hebrew word for mortar, חֲמֵר, does not appear. The material in view is plaster or whitewash, something "daubed" on the outside of the wall. It is a cosmetic feature, not a structural one.
4. Ezekiel merges in the cause of the destruction: "an overflowing shower; and ... great hailstones, ... and a stormy wind" (v. 11, cf. v. 13), from Isaiah's promise of the foundation (Isa

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<sup>13</sup> A rare Hebrew word; in the Mishna, it refers to a wall built without mortar, consisting only of stacked stones.

## Matthew 6b-7

	Ps 62:1-3	Isa 30:8-13	Ezek 13:8-16	Matt 7:24-25	Matt 7:26-27
Enemies	v. 3 ye imagine mischief	v. 10 false prophets	vv. 9, 16 false prophets	15 beware of false prophets	
(True or) deceptive teaching		v. 10 smooth things	10-12, 15-16, visions of peace = plaster	24 Therefore whosoever heareth (these sayings of mine,)	26 And every one that heareth (these sayings of mine,)
(Obedient or) sinful people		v. 9 a rebellious people		(and doeth them,)	and doeth them not,
Builder of the wall			v. 10 "one"	24 I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house ...	shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house ...
Rock (or sand) foundation	v. 2 [God] is my rock			... upon a rock: ... 25b For it was founded upon a rock.	(... upon the sand:)
A storm			vv. 11, 13	25 = 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house;	
Falling wall	v. 3	v. 13	vv. 11, 13-14	(and it fell not:)	and it fell:

Table 7: The Falling Wall Metaphor

28:17).

Our Lord continues to develop this image of the wall (chart, Table 7). He carries over details from David, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and further refines the picture in two ways.

1. In Ezekiel, we are not told who builds the wall. The subject is indefinite. Our Lord describes each of us as responsible for building a house.
2. In Ezekiel, the false teachings appear to be the stones piled together to make up the wall, their error concealed behind the plaster or whitewash. It consists of their teachings, whose weakness is concealed under a plaster coating. Our Lord shifts attention from the material in the wall to the foundation under it.

It is important to note that the raging storm falls on both houses, that of the wise man and that of the foolish man. As servants of Christ, we are not immune to disaster. In fact, the Sermon has emphasized that men will hate us and persecute us for our devotion to him, so our storms may be heavier than those that fall on the unbeliever. The difference is that our building will stand, because it has a sound foundation.

### The Image of the Storm

Though the storm is not an architectural metaphor, it appears in the OT in connection with foundations and walls, and it is worthwhile to think about how the OT writers use it. It poses an interesting question. On the one hand, floods and storms in the OT, ever since Noah, are associated with God's judgment. On the other hand, this storm falls on the house of the wise as well as that of the fool.

## Matthew 6b-7

Isaiah uses the image at least nine times.

The first occurrence, which is echoed twice later, describes the Messiah (“the branch of the LORD,” “the LORD my God,” “a king ... a man”) as protecting his people from storm as well as extreme heat. These references resemble the parable of the houses because they recognize that the storm comes on the righteous, but that the Lord provides for him.

4:2 In that day shall **the branch of the LORD** [Targum: Messiah of the Lord] be beautiful and glorious, ... 6 And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert **from storm and from rain**.

25:1 **O LORD, thou art my God**; ... 4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, **a refuge** from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

32:1 Behold, **a king** shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. 2 And **a man** shall be as an hiding place from the **wind**, and a covert from the **tempest**; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. ... 18 And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places; 19 When it shall **hail**, coming down on the forest; and the city shall be low in a low place.

The next reference is the description of the Assyrian invasion as an overflowing river, who is himself destroyed by the Lord (30:30):

8:6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 Now therefore, behold, **the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river**, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

Isa 28:2 Behold, **the Lord hath a mighty and strong one**, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. ... 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when **the overflowing scourge** shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: ... 17 ... the **hail** shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the **waters** shall overflow the hiding place.

Isa 29:6 Thou shalt be visited **of the LORD of hosts** with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, **with storm and tempest**, and the flame of devouring fire.

Isa 30:30 And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and **tempest**, and hailstones. 31 For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod.

The Assyrian invasion certainly was a judgment from the Lord, but one from which he defended the faithful. Ch. 17 applies the image generally to any geopolitical uprising, and shows that it is under God's control, and ch. 59 uses the image of nations that rise up against God's purpose:

## Matthew 6b-7

17:12 Woe to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like **the rushing of mighty waters!** 13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but *God* shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.

Isa 59:19 When the enemy shall come in like a **flood**, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.

Isaiah repeatedly applies the image of wind, storm, and flood to geopolitical turmoil, which was a hallmark of the eighth and seventh centuries, in which Isaiah lived. In the nature of this case, this turmoil engulfed entire regions. God sovereignly directs it for judgment, as when he brings Assyria, his “rod” (10:5), against the northern kingdom. But he protects the faithful from it, as in the delivery of Jerusalem in ch. 36-37. It follows the pattern that Peter describes (chart, Table 8), in which both righteous and unrighteous experience the same disastrous event, but one as judgment, the other as an occasion for miraculous deliverance.

Our Lord’s teaching is appropriate for the world in which we live today. After the collapse of the colonial order in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, we have seen in the last century two world wars and many proxy conflicts that pull in widely separated nations. It was also particularly appropriate for the first century. Our Lord’s last major discourse, on Mount Olivet, discusses at length the coming destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, and that may be the particular storm that he has in mind in the parable of the two houses. He does not promise the righteous that they will not experience these disasters, but he does assure them that they will be steadfast, founded on the rock and enjoying his protection.

### NT Echoes of the House Metaphor

Now we turn our attention from the OT sources of the Lord’s metaphor to later citations of it. Our Lord’s teaching about the house and its foundation seems to lie behind the NT description of the church as a spiritual building made up of believers. The first such reference comes later in Matthew:

Mat 16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14 And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of

	Judgment	Deliverance
The flood	2Pe 2:4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast <i>them</i> down to hell, and delivered <i>them</i> into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world,	but saved Noah the eighth <i>person</i> , a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;
Sodom and Gomorrah	6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned <i>them</i> with an overthrow, making <i>them</i> an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;	7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: ...
Summary (reversed)	and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:	9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,

Table 8: God’s Discriminating Judgment

## Matthew 6b-7

the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

<p>7:24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto <b>a wise man</b>, which <b>built his house upon a rock</b>: 25 <b>And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house</b>; and <b>it fell not</b>: for it was founded <b>upon a rock</b>.</p>	<p>16:18 <b>upon this rock I will build my church</b>; and <b>the gates of hell shall not prevail</b> against it.</p>
<p>Table 9: The House Metaphor and Matthew 16</p>	

Note the close parallel between the house parable in the Sermon, and his words to Peter (Table 9). In the light of the parable, the Lord portrays himself as the wise man, and the house that he is building is the church. Given this parallel, the extended debate over whether the rock is Peter seems naive. The parable declares the rock to be the Lord's revelation, which is what Peter has just repeated in declaring Jesus to be "the Christ, the son of the living God" (16:16).

Our Lord's use of this image in Matthew 16 also emphasizes a detail that the apostles will extend. The house in view is not just an individual person's life, but the church. The parable speaks of a man who builds "his house" for the sake of concreteness, but in fact our obedience to the Lord's sayings has far broader impact than our own lives. We are all involved in building the church.

Peter reinforces this conclusion in his first epistle, when he describes Christ himself as the stone (chart):

1Pe 2:3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious. 4 To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, *and* precious, 5 Ye also, as lively stones, **are built up a spiritual house**, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion **a chief corner stone**, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. 7 Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made **the head of the corner**, 8 **And a stone of stumbling**, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Peter actually combines three OT images of Messiah as the stone (chart, Table 10).<sup>14</sup> Messiah is not only the chief corner stone of Isaiah 28 that guarantees the stability of the building, but also the head of the corner (Psalm 118) that completes the building, and the a stone of stumbling to the unbelieving Jews.

Where Peter focuses our attention on the Lord himself, Paul uses architectural language to describe what he has taught about the Lord. He extends the idiom from the corner stone (which sets the location and orientation of the building) to the foundation (which establishes its extent).

1Co 3:9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, **I have laid the foundation**, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he

<sup>14</sup> See notes on Isa 8:14 ([http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/isaiah/notes/Isaiah7\\_8a.pdf](http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/isaiah/notes/Isaiah7_8a.pdf)) for the original discussion of this table.

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Psalm 118:22	Isaiah 8:14	Isaiah 28:16	Romans 9:33	1 Peter 2:6-8
		Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD,	As it is written,	Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture,
		Behold, I lay in Zion	Behold, I lay in Sion	Behold, I lay in Sion
	And he shall be for a sanctuary;	for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation:		a chief corner stone, elect, precious: ... 7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious:
The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.				but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,
	but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel,		a stumblingstone and rock of offence:	8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.
		he that believeth shall not make haste.	and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.	6 ... and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Table 10: Christ as the Stone

buildeth thereupon. 11 **For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

The foundation is Paul's interpretation of our Lord's life and teaching. As in Peter, and as in the Lord's parable, we build our lives, individually and collectively, on this foundation.

The final passage also looks at the foundation that Paul and the other apostles laid (chart):

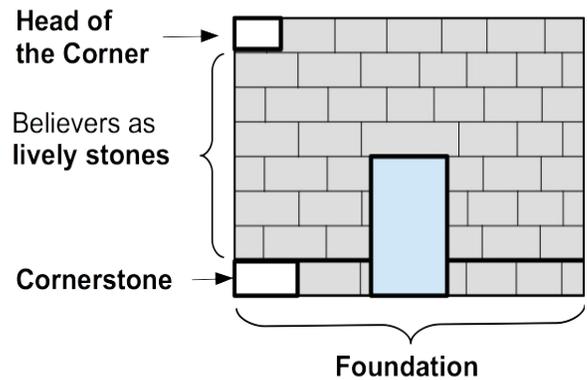
Eph 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The phrase "of the apostles and prophets" should be taken as subjective genitive, not objective. The foundation does not consist of the apostles and prophets. Paul has already told us that it can only be the Lord Jesus. But they are the ones through whom the Spirit preserved the memory of his life and teachings, and interpreted their meaning. Again, we are built up on this foundation. Illustration 5 shows

## Matthew 6b-7

the relation of these various elements:

- The cornerstone (the person of Christ) sets the location and orientation of the building
- The foundation (teaching about Christ, laid by the apostles and prophets) establishes its extent
- The temple (in another image, the body of Christ) is made up of believers as living stones
- The headstone (again Christ) marks the building as complete.



In each case, what is being built is a temple, not just an individual life (chart):

*Illustration 5: The Stone Metaphors in the NT*

Matt 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

1 Pet 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, **an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices**,

1 Cor 3:16 Know ye not that ye are **the temple of God**, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

Eph 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for **an habitation of God** through the Spirit.

Recall that when the apostles developed the image of the false prophets, they made this same extension, discussing the threat to the flock.

This conclusion is reinforced by the use throughout the NT of the verb “edify” οικοδομεω and its cognates.<sup>15</sup> Most uses of this word family (31 out of 58) refer to the construction of literal buildings. The metaphorical uses should all be understood of building up the church, not (as in much common usage) to individual improvement.<sup>16</sup>

As we saw in the Lord’s Prayer, our Lord wants his disciples to function as a body, not just as individuals. Our obedience to him affects the body. The health of the church depends on individual obedience, and only as we obey him personally can we expect the church to prosper and grow.

### 7:28-8:1, Conclusion

These last three verses echo the introduction in 4:25-5:2 (chart, Table 11).

Matt 4-5	Matt 7-8
4:25 And there <b>followed him great multitudes</b> of people from Galilee, and <i>from</i> Decapolis, and <i>from</i> Jerusalem, and <i>from</i> Judaea, and <i>from</i> beyond Jordan. 5:1a And seeing the <b>multitudes</b> ,	8:1b <b>great multitudes followed him.</b>
5:1b he <b>went up</b> into a <b>mountain</b> :	8:1a When he was <b>come down</b> from the <b>mountain</b> ,
5:1c and when he was set, his <b>disciples</b> came unto him: 2 And he opened his mouth, and <b>taught</b> them, saying,	Mat 7:28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people [ <b>multitudes</b> ] were astonished at his <b>doctrine</b> : 29 For he taught them as <i>one</i> having authority, and not as the scribes.

Table 11: The Sermon’s chiasitic frame

<sup>15</sup> For details on this conclusion, see <http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/ephesians/notes/Edification%20in%20the%20New%20Testament.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> There is one apparent exception (1 Co 14:4), but in the light of the overall pattern, it must be understood as ironic.

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First we read of the Lord's teaching ministry, which began in 5:2.

**28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people [multitudes] were astonished at his doctrine: 29 For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.**--The Lord's teaching was characterized by authority. By contrast, the teaching of the scribes, was a compendium of alternative opinions. For example, here is the first entry in the Mishnah,<sup>17</sup> concerning when in the evening one should say the Shema (Deut 6:3) (chart):

From what time is the שמע to be said in the evening?

- From the time the priests again enter [the sanctuary] to eat their heave offerings, until the close of the first watch [of the night]. Such is the dictum of R. Eleazar;
- but the sages say, "until midnight."
- Rabbon Gamaliel saith, "until the break of dawn."

"The people" who hear the Lord's teaching are literally "the multitudes" *οι οχλοι*. When he ascended the mountain (5:1), "his disciples" came to him. He went up to get away from the crowds and be with those whom he had called. But many followed them and overheard the instruction. Compare the Lord's popularity in the feeding of the 5000, which was supposed to be a vacation for the disciples (chart):

Mar 6:30 And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. 31 And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. 32 And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. 33 And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.

Next, corresponding to his ascent into the mountain in 5:1, we read of his descent:

**Mat 8:1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.**--While "multitudes" (7:28) followed him up the mountain, on his return an even greater crowd was waiting, corresponding to the "great multitudes" whom he left in 4:25-5:1. At the beginning of the Lord's ministry, he was immensely popular. Contrast this response with what happened at the end:

Mat 26:56 Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Recall the intermediate stage:

Joh 6:66 From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

The Lord's teaching sounds pleasant, but very few are willing to obey it. May the Lord give us grace not only to be among the multitudes, but also among the few.

## Summary of the Sermon

### 5:3-12, *The Beatitudes*

Corresponding to the blessings in Deuteronomy, the Sermon begins with blessings (chart, Table 12).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/etm/etm002.htm>

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The ninth is not a new thought, but amplifies the eighth.

The first and eighth bracket the series:

- They offer the same promise, the kingdom of heaven;
- The promise is in the present tense, not the future as are the others.

The central six fall into two groups of three.

Frame	3 Blessed <i>are</i> the poor in spirit:	for <b>theirs</b> <b>is</b> the kingdom of heaven.
How we are helped (cf. Isa 61)	4 Blessed <i>are</i> they that mourn:	for <b>they shall</b> be comforted.
	5 Blessed <i>are</i> the meek:	for <b>they shall</b> inherit the earth.
	6 Blessed <i>are</i> they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:	for <b>they shall</b> be filled.
How we help others	7 Blessed <i>are</i> the merciful:	for <b>they shall</b> obtain mercy.
	8 Blessed <i>are</i> the pure in heart:	for <b>they shall</b> see God.
	9 Blessed <i>are</i> the peacemakers:	for <b>they shall</b> be called the children of God.
Frame	10 Blessed <i>are</i> they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:	for <b>theirs</b> <b>is</b> the kingdom of heaven.
Summary	11 Blessed are <b>ye</b> , when <i>men</i> shall revile you, and persecute <i>you</i> , and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad:	for great <b>is your</b> reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before <b>you</b> .

Table 12: Summary of the Beatitudes, 5:3-12

- The first three (two of which, along with “poor,” reflect Isa 61), discuss our needs with which the Lord helps us.
- The last three describe how we help others, as we have been empowered by the Lord.

**Summary: True disciples experience the kingdom now by receiving the Messiah’s blessing and passing it to others, while they wait amid persecution for its full realization.**

### 5:13-16, Our Mission

The beatitudes show that there are two kinds of people: those who are citizens of the kingdom and those who are not. Those who are not citizens persecute those who are. The world is corrupt, needing salt; and dark, needing light. It is our duty to provide that salt and light.

We must be both the city on the hill (our testimony to the world) and the lamp on a lampstand (our ministry to others within the church) (chart, Illustration 6)<sup>18</sup>.

This is the one element of the Sermon that is not echoed in the second half.

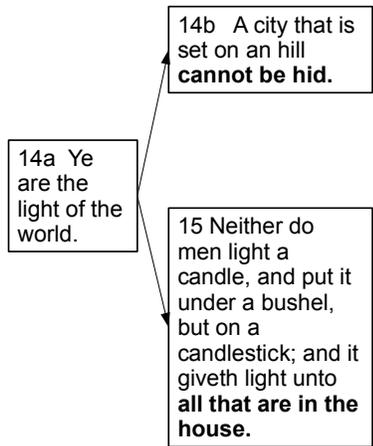


Illustration 6: Two missions for the believer, 5:13-16

**Summary: True disciples show their distinctiveness both to unbelievers and to one another.**

### 5:17-19, The Law and the Prophets

The central section begins (5:17-19) and ends (7:12b) with references to “the law” and “the prophets.” God’s law, as laid down in the Old Testament, is the law of Messiah’s kingdom, and his disciples are to

<sup>18</sup> Top picture: [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/\\_5bo3n\\_N5SQ/SSuNM7fLVYI/AAAAAAAAACdY/fjy0JZ-j4FO/s400/city-set-on-a-hill.jpg](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_5bo3n_N5SQ/SSuNM7fLVYI/AAAAAAAAACdY/fjy0JZ-j4FO/s400/city-set-on-a-hill.jpg). Bottom picture: [http://media.nbclosangeles.com/images/467\\*350/WhaleyHouseSanDiegoSpooky.jpg](http://media.nbclosangeles.com/images/467*350/WhaleyHouseSanDiegoSpooky.jpg)

## Matthew 6b-7

follow it. In 22:35-40, he analyzes the law into two great commandments: love for God, and love for one's neighbor. These two topics then form the framework for the central section.

Some people invoke 5:19, "called least/great in the kingdom of heaven," to suggest that obedience to the law gives status in the kingdom, but not membership.<sup>19</sup> However, v. 20, and later 7:21, insist that obedience is required to enter the kingdom, so it is better to associate "in the kingdom" with the verb than with "the least" or "great." That is, it describes the community that is doing the calling. The world may think ill of us for obeying God's law, but among those who really count, we will be esteemed highly for it.

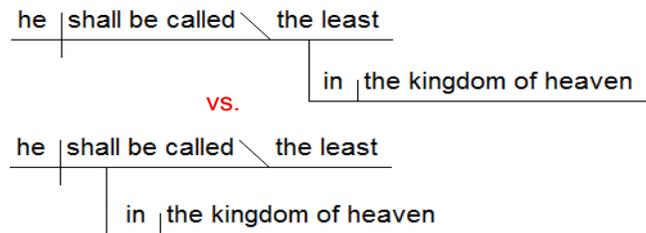


Illustration 7: Grammar of 5:19

**Summary: True disciples show their citizenship in the kingdom by obeying God's law.**

### 5:20-6:18, The Contrasts

Next come the contrasts, first with what was "said to them of old time" (5:21-48), then with "the hypocrites" (6:1-18). Both phrases refer to the scribes and the Pharisees. The Lord calls them "hypocrites" seven times in ch. 23 ("woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites"), and the phrase "said to them of old time" (not "written") points to their invocation of the oral law to soften or twist the written law. v. 20 is a hinge joining the emphasis on the law and the prophets in 5:17-19 with the following contrasts (chart, Illustration 8).

The Lord has distinguished his disciples from another group that will persecute them. This section introduces a shocking insight that will be reinforced in the concluding section of the Sermon: the non-disciples, those who oppose the true disciples, are often not pagans, but those who pretend to serve the same Lord that the disciples do. During our Lord's earthly pilgrimage, these were the religious leaders of the Jews, among whom the scribes and Pharisees were prominent. Today, they are the "false prophets" who appear to be on the narrow way, but are actually on the broad road (7:15). This contrast motives the expression "true disciples" in our summaries.

**Section Summary: True disciples are distinguished from hypocrites by what they obey (5:21-48) and whom they worship (6:1-18).**

### 5:20-48, Manward

This section has six contrasts, each introduced by some portion of the formula, "You have heard that it was said to them of old time" (chart, Table 13). The in-varying part of the introduction refers to what the ancients said, the oral law that Jewish religious leaders used to soften the written law and

5:17-19 The law and the prophets in the kingdom

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall **exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees**, ye shall in no case enter into **the kingdom of heaven**

5:21-6:18 Contrasts with the scribes and the Pharisees

- 5:21-48 Manward contrasts (it was said ... but I say ...)
- 6:1-18 Godward contrasts (be not as the hypocrites)

Illustration 8: 5:20 as hinge

<sup>19</sup> Compare Zane Hodges' distinction, "The thirsty drink, but the hungry inherit."

## Matthew 6b-7

accommodate their “customers.” Our Lord expects us to follow his strict interpretation of the law and the prophets, and not to look for loopholes.

**Summary: True disciples obey God’s word, not the teachings of men.**

	21 Murder	27 Adultery	31 Divorce	33 Oaths	38 Revenge	43 Love
Ye have heard that	x	x		x	x	x
<b>it was said</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
to them of old time	x			x		

Table 13: The six manward contrasts

### 6:1-18, Godward

The next set of contrasts, with the “hypocrites,” warns us not to do religious acts just so that people will think well of us. The Lord highlights three areas of piety that should be personal (chart, Table 14): giving, prayer, and fasting. But the Lord’s Prayer instructs us to come to God collectively.

**Summary: True disciples worship to be seen of God, not men, but gather for prayer.**

1 Take heed that <b>ye</b> do not <b>your</b> alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise <b>ye</b> have no reward of <b>your</b> Father which is in heaven.		
2 Therefore <b>when</b> thou doest <i>thine</i> alms, do not <b>sound a trumpet</b> before <b>thee</b> , <b>as the hypocrites do</b> in the synagogues and in the streets, <b>that they may</b> have glory of men. <b>Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.</b> 3 <b>But when</b> thou doest alms, let not <b>thy</b> left hand know what <b>thy</b> right hand doeth:	Mat 6:5 And <b>when</b> thou prayest, <b>thou</b> shalt not be <b>as the hypocrites are:</b> for they love to <b>pray standing</b> in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, <b>that they may</b> be seen of men. <b>Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.</b> 6 <b>But thou, when</b> thou prayest, enter into <b>thy</b> closet, and when thou hast shut <b>thy</b> door,	Mat 6:16 Moreover <b>when</b> ye fast, <b>be not, as the hypocrites,</b> of a sad countenance: <b>for they disfigure their faces, that they may</b> appear unto men to fast. <b>Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.</b> 17 <b>But thou, when</b> thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 <b>That thou</b> appear not unto men to fast, but unto <b>thy</b> Father which is in <b>secret:</b> and <b>thy</b> Father, <b>which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.</b>
4 That <b>thine</b> alms may be in <b>secret:</b> and <b>thy</b> Father <b>which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.</b>	pray to <b>thy</b> Father which is in <b>secret;</b> and <b>thy</b> Father <b>which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.</b>	
	7 <b>But when</b> ye pray, <b>use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do:</b> for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not <b>ye</b> therefore like unto them: for <b>your</b> Father knoweth what things <b>ye</b> have need of, before <b>ye</b> ask him. 9 After this manner therefore pray <b>ye:</b> <b>Our Father which art in heaven, ... 13 ... Amen.</b> 14 For if <b>ye</b> forgive men their trespasses, <b>your</b> heavenly Father will also forgive <b>you:</b> 15 But if <b>ye</b> forgive not men their trespasses, neither will <b>your</b> Father forgive <b>your</b> trespasses.	

Table 14: Alternation and exception in the contrast with the hypocrites

### 6:19-34, Godward Exhortation and Encouragement

Now the Lord repeats our twofold duty. The structural relation is reflected in an alternation of two panels (chart, Table 15), each with

- three exhortations that make the point of the panel
- a parable about the eye
- encouragement about the Lord’s care for us when we obey him, built around a double parable.

The first panel, describing our Godward duty, urges us to serve God rather than material things.

**Summary: True disciples serve God, not wealth, and trust him to care for their needs.**

	<b>Godward: Serve God, not Wealth</b>	<b>Manward: Be Fair</b>
<b>Exhortation</b>	Mat 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, ... 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, ... 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.	Mat 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.
Eye Parable	22 The light of the body is the <b>eye:</b> ...	3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s <b>eye,</b> but considerest not the beam that is in thine own <b>eye?</b> ...
<b>Exhortation</b>	24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.	6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.
Encouragement	25 ... Take no thought for your life, ...	7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ...
... Double Parable	26 Behold the fowls of the air: ... 28 ... Consider the lilies of the field, ...	9 ... if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? 10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
... “Much More”	30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, <i>shall he not much more clothe</i> you, O ye of little faith?	11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how <b>much more</b> shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?
<b>Exhortation with ouv</b>	... 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; ...	12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them:

Table 15: The Godward-Manward Alternation of 6:19-7:12

## Matthew 6b-7

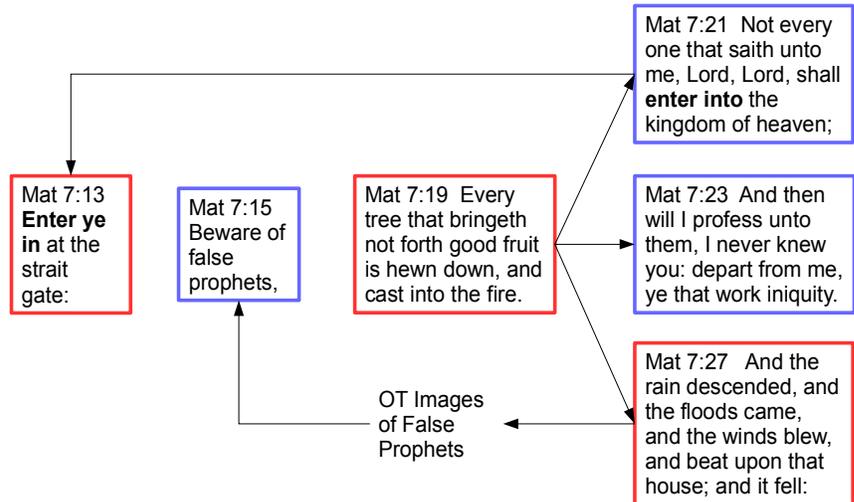
### 7:1-12, Manward Exhortation and Encouragement

The second panel tells us how we are to share truth with others, paying attention both to our own faithfulness to it (7:1), and to the reception it is likely to receive from others (7:6).

**Summary: True disciples are fair and cautious in judging others, and trust God to vindicate them.**

### 7:13-28, The Warnings

Corresponding to the opening blessings, the Lord warns that not all who appear to be disciples, truly are (chart, Illustration 9). True disciples are in the minority, and are constantly threatened by false prophets, who outwardly look like disciples, but in fact are seeking only to serve themselves. The distinguishing characteristic of the true disciple is not prophesying, nor casting out devils, nor doing wonderful works, nor even addressing the Lord as “Lord.” It is obedience to him.



*Illustration 9: The Final Warnings, 7:13-28*

**Summary: The few true disciples are distinguished from the many false ones by their obedience.**

**True disciples of the Lord Jesus are marked by obedience to God's word, witness to the world, and their relation to one another, and will enjoy his care during persecutions now and his welcome into his earthly kingdom when he returns.**

Throughout the Sermon, we encounter the same themes repeatedly. We read of true and false disciples, of obedience to God's word, of witness to unbelievers and fellowship with believers, of God's care in persecution, and the promise of a kingdom to come (chart, Table 16). These themes suggest a single summary of the sermon (chart).

**Overall summary: True disciples are marked by obedience to God's word and their relation to one another, and will enjoy his care during persecutions now and his welcome into his earthly kingdom when he returns.**

Setting	4:25-5:2	7:28-8:1
Blessings & Warnings	5:3-12 His care, Persecutions	7:13-27 True vs. False, Obedience, God's word, Welcome
Our Mission	5:13-16 Witness, Relation	
Law & Prophets	5:17-19 Obedience, God's word	7:12b
Toward Man	5:20-48 True vs. False, Persecutions	7:1-12a Relation, His care
Toward God	6:1-18 True vs. False, Relation	6:19-34 His care

Table 16: Summary of the Overall Sermon

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### Notes

#### 6:22-23, *The Single and Evil Eye*

The meaning of the “single eye” is widely discussed. The Greek word *απλους* is rare in the Bible, appearing only here, in the parallel instance of this saying in a different context in Luke 11:34, and in Prov 11:25 in opposition to *θυμωδης* “hot-tempered.” It is related to the more common noun *απλοτης* (15x in the Greek Bible) “simplicity, singleness,” which is often applied to the heart to refer to singleness of mind and focus.

Modern translations tend to translate “sound,” as though the Lord is contrasting a healthy eye with a sick one. But there is no evidence that *απλους* means “healthy, sound.”

A strong case can be made that it refers to generosity

The “evil eye” indicates niggardliness, stinginess, cf. Matt 20:15; Morris references OT usage, but in none of these cases does the LXX use *οφθαλμος πονηρος*: Deut 15:9 [with *πονηρουμαι* instead of *πονηρος*]; Prov 23:6 [Hebrew רע עין but LXX simply renders *βασκανος*]; 28:22 [same as 23:6]). A closer parallel is Sirach 14:10, A wicked eye envieth [his] bread, and he is a niggard at his table. For the opposite, Pro 22:9 He that hath a bountiful eye *עין טובה* shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

The opposition then suggests that the “single eye” would mean generosity, as Cadbury (HTR 47 (1954), 69-74, advocates. Then the reference to laying up treasure in heaven will focus on charitable giving, a meaning that has been advocated for the *απλους* word family in 2 Cor 8-9. This meaning would certainly be consistent with the pervasive emphasis on giving in the prayer (5:42; 6:1-4; and in connection with laying up treasure in heaven, given Solomon’s principle,

Pro 19:17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

LXX uses singleness *απλοτης* of heart to express David’s generous spirit in 1 Chr 29:17. But the shift from “eye” to “heart” suggests a different idiom.

Numerous commentators cite Prov 11:25, the only OT use of *απλους*., in support of this meaning. The AV is a good translation of the Hebrew:

Pro 11:25 The liberal soul *נפש ברכה* shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

But the LXX diverts from the Hebrew, turning the synonymous parallelism into an antithesis:

Pro 11:25 *ψυχη ευλογουμένη πασα απλη ανηρ δε θυμωδης ουκ ευσχημων*

Pro 11:25 Every sincere soul is blessed: but a passionate man is not graceful.

The translator sets *απλους* in opposition to *θυμωδης* “hot-spirited, restive.” He seems to understand the term more in the sense of “calm, steady,” closer to its basic meaning of simple and unassuming, with no reference to charitable giving.

When the Lord uses the saying in a different context in Luke 11:33-36, the context has to do with

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understanding spiritual things, not with managing material substance. He has just rebuked the people for their desire for a sign, and calls the men of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba to witness against them, for they had more spiritual perception than do the Jews. Then he continues,

Luk 11:33 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth *it* in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. 34 The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when *thine eye* is evil, thy body also *is* full of darkness. 35 Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. 36 If thy whole body therefore *be* full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.

The focus in Luke is on perception, not giving. The OT Gentiles had more perception than our Lord’s contemporary Jews. Here’s the analysis of the Luke passage that I did in connection with Matt 5:

Extent	Matt 5:14-15	Luke 11:29-36
Outward, to all the world	14b A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.	29 And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. 30 For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. 31 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon <i>is</i> here. 32 The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas <i>is</i> here.
To the community	15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto <b>all that are in the house.</b>	33 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth <i>it</i> in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that <b>they which come in</b> may see the light.
Individual		34 The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when <i>thine eye</i> is evil, thy body also <i>is</i> full of darkness. 35 Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. 36 If thy whole body therefore <i>be</i> full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.

Bengel notes the contrast of “single” with “two masters” in v. 24. This accords with the sense of “singleness of heart” (not “eye”) elsewhere in the NT, Co 3:22.

Since we have a repetition of the whole saying (not just the word) in Luke 11, it seems useful to look there for understanding. A teacher who repeats a saying on multiple occasions is using it to encapsulate some insight, and it is fair to look for commonalities in the different contexts. (Note how this principle differs from the hermeneutic that would apply if Matthew and Luke are the ones deploying a saying in different settings—two different authors who perhaps attach different significance to the saying.) On this basis, we reject the “generosity” meaning, which does not fit at all in Luke.

In Luke, the “single eye” is simple, straightforward, taking the revelation that is offered in its most natural sense and not twisting it. The “evil eye” will then be the eye of the Jews, who twist the Lord’s revelation until they cannot make sense of it. There may indeed be a physiological reference: vision maladies sometimes manifest themselves as “double vision,” in which somebody can’t see clearly. We

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should value a straightforward interpretation of God’s revelation, and not seek to twist it or deconstruct it.

So in Matthew, we should not qualify or twist our devotion to the Lord. He alone must be our master (as Bengel notes), and we must not equivocate on what obedience we owe him vs. the world. We must serve him and not Mammon, accepting and stewarding the “all things” that he gives us “richly to enjoy” without being held captive by “the love of money,” which we must “flee” (1 Tim 6:10-19).

### ***Slavery in Israel***

Moses gave three pieces of legislation concerning servants, but reconciling the provisions is tricky.

Exod 21:2-6	Lev 25:39-43	Deut 15:12-18
2 If thou buy an Hebrew servant,	39 And if thy brother <i>that dwelleth</i> by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: 40 <i>But</i> as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee,	12 <i>And</i> if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee,
<b>six years</b> he shall serve:	and shall serve thee <b>unto the year of jubile:</b>	and serve thee <b>six years;</b>
and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.	41 <i>And then</i> shall he depart from thee,	then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.
3 If he came in by himself, he shall go out <b>by himself:</b> if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.	<b>both he and his children with him,</b> and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return.	13 <i>And</i> when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: 14 <b>Thou shalt furnish him liberally</b> out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: <i>of that</i> wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.
	42 For they <i>are</i> my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. 43 Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.	15 <i>And</i> thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.
5 <i>And</i> if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:		16 <i>And</i> it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee;
6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges;		
he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.		17 Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust <i>it</i> through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. <i>And</i> also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise.
		18 It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant

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		<i>to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.</i>
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There are two major differences among these three accounts.

1. Exodus and Deuteronomy provide for a release after six years; Leviticus describes a release in the year of the Jubilee. These are not mutually exclusive. The regular period of service would be six years, but if the period of servitude begins fewer than six years before the Jubilee, then it ends with the Jubilee.
2. They differ with regard to what property the servant takes with him when he leaves.
  - (a) In Exodus, the servant takes only what he brought. If his master provided a wife, she and the children stay with the master.
  - (b) In Leviticus, the servant takes his children. This might be an exception to the rule in Exodus, due to the Jubilee, just as the duration of the servitude is an exception. Or Leviticus may contemplate a situation in which he was married when he entered the relation, in which case his children would naturally be his.
  - (c) In Deuteronomy, nothing is said about family members, but the master is required to provide the servant with a liberal gift, including seed and livestock. Lev 25:39 suggests that the reason for the servitude in the first place is the poverty of the one who becomes a servant; this gift may be intended as a grub-stake, to enable the servant to have a fresh start.

Exodus and Deuteronomy provide the servant with the option of remaining with the master perpetually. This is a voluntary decision, motivated by love for the master, and the sincerity of the decision is guarded by the requirement of Exodus that the servant appear before the judges.

### 6:27 “stature”

Modern commentators focus on the possibility that ηλικια can mean “age” as well as “height,” and cite John 9:21, 23 in support of this notion. But the idiom in John 9, “he is of age,” is ηλικιαν εχει, literally “he has height,” that is, he has attained his full stature. The word in this place does not mean “age”; the man born blind would add more time to his life, but the expression itself suggests that he would not add more stature.

Better examples for the sense “age” are 2 Macc 4:40; 6:18 προβαινω την ηλικιαν “to advance in age.”

The rendering “age” is certainly possible, and the reference to Ps 39 shows that measures of length can be applied to time:

Psa 39:5 Behold, thou hast made my days *as* an handbreadth; and mine age *is* as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state *is* altogether vanity. Selah.

But see the citation of Field and Lutteroth in the Expositors’ Greek Testament:

Lutteroth helps us here [with the question of the meaning of “stature”] by finding in the question of Jesus a reference to the growth of the human body from infancy to maturity. By that

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insensible process, accomplished through the aid of food, Gods adds to every human body more than one cubit. “How impossible for you to do what God has done without your thinking of it! And if He fed you during the period of growth, can you not trust Him now when you have ceased to grow?” Such is the thought of Jesus.

This rendering is straightforward and very reasonable.

### **6:33 Kingdom of God**

This is the first of five references to the “kingdom of God” (as opposed to Matthew’s more common “kingdom of heaven,” 32x):

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. *To the Pharisees*

Matthew 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. *To the disciples*

Matthew 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Matthew 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Both forms may go back to the same Hebrew מלכות אלהים or Aramaic מלכות דיי-אלהא. Evidence is the occurrence of the same saying with KH in Matthew but KG in Luke, e.g.,

Mat 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. = Luke 7:28

Mat 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. cf. Lk 18:17

Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. = Lk 13:29

Mat 10:7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. = Lk 9:2; 10:9

Mat 13:11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. = Lk 8:10

Then KH would reflect a nod by Matthew, with his Jewish orientation, to Jewish sensitivities, which would often use “heaven” as a euphemism for “God.” But then why would Matthew ever use KG?

Numerous suggestions have been made as to the meaning of the different forms.

Bullinger (Companion Bible, Appendix 114) distinguishes them thus, though the basis for these

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distinctions is not made clear:

	Kingdom of Heaven	Kingdom of God
Ruler	Messiah	God
Location	It is from heaven ; and under the heavens upon the earth	It is in heaven, over the earth
Scope	Limited	Unlimited
Sphere	Political	Moral and spiritual
Character	Jewish and exclusive	inclusive in its character (embracing the natural and spiritual seeds of Abraham, "the heavenly calling", and the "Church" of the Mystery).
Aspect	National	Universal
Revelation	It is the special subject of Old Testament prophecy	It is (in its wider aspect) the subject of New Testament revelation
Duration	Dispensational	Eternal

Pamment<sup>20</sup> follows a similar line, which Foster summarizes: “KH is a totally future, though imminent, reality. KG, then, refers to the present reality of the kingdom experienced in the lives of Jesus and his disciples.” But Foster notes the following problems with this:

- Matt 11:2 speaks of KH as a present reality.
- Matt 19:23-24 put the two in parallel, showing that they refer to the same reality.
- Several of the parables of Matt 13 present KH as a present reality to which one can respond.

Foster derives the meaning from the use of “Father in Heaven” as a title to distinguish the community of believers from the Jewish leaders. “just as FH is addressed only to the disciples and not to the religious leaders, so KH is used almost exclusively in speeches to the disciples or disciples/crowds (31 of 32 times).<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, when Jesus speaks to the religious leaders about the kingdom, he uses the phrase KG (three of four times).<sup>22</sup> This is in keeping with the fact that in the gospel Jesus and John the Baptist use the noun θεος mostly in their speeches to their religious opponents (32 of 50 times). Initially, these statistics indicate that KG refers to God’s rule over both the obedient and the disobedient, while KH exclusively designates his reign over those who become his family through faith in Jesus.”

This distinction makes sense, and would also account for KG in 6:33. Our task is evangelistic outreach, seeking to make clear that God rules over the ungodly as well as the godly.

20 M. Pamment, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel’, NTS 27 (1981) 211–32. (cited from Robert Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven’?: Matthew’s Terminology Revisited,” NTS 48, 487-499)

21 Foster doesn’t discuss the exception, which is 4:17, echoing John the Baptist’s challenge to unbelievers in 3:2, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

22 Foster apparently rejects the reading in 6:33, but this is clearly addressed to the disciples. But his insight actually can be applied here as well; see discussion above.

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### v. 34 *μεριμνᾶω εἰς*

The preposition is a curious way to express the object of the worry. The usual government is through *περί* or the simple dative, or even the simple accusative as in the very next clause. Is the prepositional phrase perhaps to be taken in a temporal sense: “Don’t let your worry persist until tomorrow, don’t carry your worry to tomorrow. Instead, deal with it today,” as Peter says, “Casting all your care upon him,” I Pet 5:7.

This exhortation would then resemble Eph 4:26, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” Don’t take negative emotions to bed with you. Commit them to the Lord and clean them out.

### 7:1 *Prohibition + “Lest”*

In addition to the examples discussed above, consider Eve’s paraphrase of God’s command in Eden. The Lord’s command consisted of an absolute command, and a conditional promise:

Gen 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Eve paraphrased this as a prohibition with “lest” (the first instance of *ἵνα* and *ἵνα* *μη* in the Bible):

Gen 3:3 But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Given the nuance of a prohibition with “lest” that we have detected, her paraphrase is a weakening of the command, from an absolute prohibition to a warning to watch out for undesired consequences. In this light, Satan’s following statement, which actually quotes God’s threat more accurately than does Eve, can be understood as an encouragement to the thought process in which she was already engaged:

Gen 3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

“You’re right,” he is saying. “The certainty that God attaches to that threat is excessive. If you’re careful, nothing will go wrong.”

### 7:6 *Pearls before Swine*

The body of the exposition gives the solution I find most satisfying. Here are some other notes I considered along the way.

The Didache, from the second century, applies it to the Lord’s Table:

Did 9:5 But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving (Eucharist), but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord hath said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs.

We know from 1 Corinthians (5:11; 11:29-32) that in fact we are to be discriminating about those with whom we break bread, but there the reason is not lack of baptism, but inappropriate conduct. And without further context, it would be difficult to claim that this verse is focused on the Table.

We might look for other instances of the metaphors that the Lord uses.

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He uses “pearl” to represent the kingdom:

Mat 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:  
46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

The Jews considered Gentiles to be unclean, like dogs,<sup>23</sup> an opinion that our Lord references:

Mat 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

But the woman there laid hold by faith of the crumbs that fell from the table, and ended up satisfied. Notably, Paul later transfers the idiom to the Judaizers:

Phi 3:2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

### **7:7 Ask, Seek, Knock**

The section seems at odds with the manward orientation of this section. To whom is our asking, seeking, and knocking addressed? The usual thought is that the Lord is encouraging us to ask of God,<sup>24</sup> and this is not absent from the context (v. 11). But the context also concerns fairness and justice in our dealings with others (vv. 1-6), and a recognition of the reciprocity that is intrinsic in human affairs (v. 12a). Perhaps we should understand vv. 7-8 as a promise that God will providentially prosper our dealings with our fellow-men if we conduct ourselves in them as we ought.

All commentators understand the imperatives to refer to prayer to God, rather than the manward interactions that are the focal point of this section. This sense is reinforced by the location of the saying in Luke 11, where it immediately follows the giving of the Lord's Prayer (11:1-4), and is not only followed (11:11-13, as here), but also introduced (11:5-8) by a parable about how our human associates respond to our requests.

Luke's introductory parable emphasizes persistence and importunity, which corresponds to the present tense of the three imperatives. Compare 18:1-8, the parable of the unjust judge.

### **What is the Storm in 7:25, 27?**

The storm falls equally on both houses, that of the wise man and that of the wicked man, so I have interpreted it of the trials of life. But we should also consider whether it might represent God's judgment.

The worldwide flood of Gen 6-9 is a prototype of flood as God's judgment.

Isaiah uses the storm and flood for Assyria's advance, and more generally for nations that rise up, but not always as God's rod.

Isa 8:6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 Now therefore, behold, **the Lord bringeth up upon them the**

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23 See Gill for refs: he cites Zohar in Exod. Fol. 63. 1, 2; Tzeror Hammor, fol. 147. 4.

24 Alford: “The three similitudes are all to be understood of *prayer*,” following Chrysostom (Homily on Matthew).

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**waters of the river**, strong and many, *even* the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach *even* to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel. *Ascribed to the Lord*

Isa 17:12 Woe to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! 13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: **but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off**, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. *This time, the Lord hinders them.*

Isa 25:4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, **a refuge** from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. *Now the Lord protects the righteous.*

Isa 28:2 Behold, **the Lord hath a mighty and strong one**, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. ... 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when **the overflowing scourge** shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: ... 17 ... the **hail** shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the **waters** shall overflow the hiding place. *As in ch. 8, the storm is the Lord's judgment.*

Isa 29:6 Thou shalt be visited **of the LORD of hosts** with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. *Again, from the Lord, against Jerusalem.*

Isa 59:19 When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. *As in ch. 17, the Lord opposes the flood.*

Of special notice are the three passages that present {the Branch, the LORD, the king} as a shelter from wind and storm:

4:6	25:4	32:2
And there shall be a <b>tabernacle סכה</b> for a <b>shadow</b> in the daytime from the <b>heat</b> , and for a <b>place of refuge מחסה</b> , and for a <b>covert מסתר</b> from <b>storm</b> and from rain.	For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a <b>refuge מחסה</b> from the <b>storm</b> , a <b>shadow</b> from the <b>heat</b> , when the <b>blast</b> of the terrible ones is as a <b>storm</b> against the wall.	2 And a man shall be as an <b>hiding place מחבא</b> from the <b>wind</b> , and a <b>covert סתר</b> from the <b>tempest</b> ; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the <b>shadow</b> of a great rock in a weary land

Ezekiel offers the most developed image, and the most similar to our Lord's parable.

13:11 Say unto them which daub *it* with untempered *morter*, that **it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it.** ... 13 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; **I will even rend it** with a stormy wind **in my fury**; and there shall be an overflowing shower **in mine anger**, and great hailstones **in my fury** to consume *it*. *Here, the Lord brings it as a judgment.*

Eze 38:22 And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon

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him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that *are* with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. *God's judgment on Gog*

Other references to God's wrath:

Psa 11:6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

Other references to God's protection of the righteous:

Psa 32:6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

If the storm of Matt 7:25, 27 is understood as God's judgment, then in what sense does it come against the righteous? The Lord may have in view civil disruptions that occur as a result of sin, and his protection of his people through this time of trouble, which is the immediate application of the metaphor in Isaiah. As in the Olivet discourse, he may have in mind specifically the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.