



## Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 8, October 28-November 3

### Matthew 7:1-12

- I. “Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” (Matthew 5:1-2)
- II. Opening prayer for Illumination
- III. Read Matthew 7:1-12
- IV. Stott Study Guide: pp. 41-44
- V. *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 215-227 (Matt. 7:1-5), 228-231 (Matt. 7:6), 231-253 (Matt. 7:1-12):

In Matthew 7, Jesus continues to outline what the Kingdom person looks like, again turning his focus to how his followers are to relate to other people in the first 12 verses of the chapter.

He begins by talking about judging. As Dallas Willard puts it, judgment of others is really about condemnation, and condemnation is the de-valuing and de-humanization of other human beings. Willard explains that “When we condemn another we really communicate that he or she is, in some deep and just possibly irredeemable way, bad—bad as a whole, and to be rejected. In our eyes the condemned is among the discards of human life. He or she is not acceptable. We *sentence* that person to exclusion. Surely we can learn to live well and happily without doing that” (218).

Such judgment is ultimately about control. It’s about coercing others into being the kind of person we think they should be. But this rarely works out well. In this context, then, we read Jesus’ enigmatic teaching about dogs, pearls, and pigs. But Willard explains how these parts of the Sermon connect:

And what a picture this is of our efforts to correct and control others by pouring our good things, often truly precious things, upon them—things that they nevertheless simply cannot ingest and use to nourish themselves. Often we do not even listen to them. We ‘know’ without listening. Jesus saw it going on around him all the time, as we do today. And the outcome is usually exactly the same as with the pig and the dog. Our good intentions make little difference. The needy person will finally become angry and attack us. The point is not the waste of the ‘pearl’ but that the person given the pearl is not helped (229).

In the end, the “pearls” of wisdom that we try to throw to people in the midst of judging them make little impact. So Jesus follows up verse 6 with a teaching on humility. When we talk with people humbly, when we show them respect and worth by asking them questions rather than making demands, we see the change that we desire. As Willard writes, “In the very act of asking, in the very nature of *the request*, we acknowledge that the other person can say no, and, ‘innocent as doves,’ we accept that response” (233, emphasis Willard’s). And more often than not, Jesus tells us, when we relate to other people that way, we will receive what we hope for. Such is the dynamic of the Kingdom of God.

In order to again summarize what we’ve studied so far and how the next few weeks fit into the big picture, please read the section “No Condemnation” on pages 215-216 of *The Divine Conspiracy*.

## VI. Questions of 1<sup>st</sup> Importance:

### 1. Questions for the Text

- i. Willard writes that the condemnation itself we show over the “speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye” is the plank in our own eyes that Jesus is referring to. Willard writes, “[Jesus] knows that the mere fact that we are condemning someone shows our heart does not have the kingdom rightness he has been talking about” (*DC*, 224). How does this interpretation inform our understanding of the text? Do we agree with Willard’s perspective? Why or why not?
- ii. Willard interprets verse 6 as saying that we shouldn’t force our spiritual “pearls of wisdom” on people who aren’t ready for them, because they’ll end up angry with us and refuse to listen to what we’re trying to say to them. Does this interpretation make sense to us? What about this rendering of Jesus’ meaning seems true? How does this verse fit into the broader Sermon on the Mount? Does looking at this verse in context help us understand it better?
- iii. Willard argues that, within the context of the Sermon, Matthew 7:7-12 tell us about how we’re supposed to relate to the people we’re tempted to judge. But he also acknowledges the import of this teaching for prayer. How does the act of asking inform how we should pray? Compare this text with the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. What insights do we come up with?

### 2. Questions for the World

- i. Jesus’ command to not *judge* others does not mean that we should no longer *correct* others when they are making mistakes. Willard makes this point well, writing, “We do not have to—we *cannot*—surrender the valid practice of distinguishing and discerning how things are in order to avoid condemning others. We *can*, however, train ourselves to hold people responsible and discuss their failures with them—and even assign them penalties, if we are, for example, in some position over them—without attacking their worth as human being or marking them as rejects. A practiced spirit of intelligent *agape* will make this possible” (*DC*, 225). How do we learn this distinction between “condemning others” and “holding others responsible”? Are we good at this? How do Jesus’ earlier teachings on anger and contempt, oaths, love for enemies, and forgiveness, help us in understanding how to do this?
- ii. How do we pray? What kinds of things do we ask of God? What is the nature of our requests? Do we trust that we will receive the best answer from God?

## VII. Questions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Importance:

### 1. Questions for the Text

- i. How does Matthew 7:1-2 compare to Matthew 6:14-15? How are these two statements similar? How are they different? What do they seem to be saying in light of each other?
- ii. What are some of the “pearls” that Jesus might be referring to? What is Jesus saying in the Sermon on the Mount about how his followers are to offer such things to others?

### 2. Questions for the World

- i. What are other planks (in addition to condemnation) in our own eyes that hinder us as we strive to become kingdom people?
- ii. What sacred things have we tossed to people in the past? Why might these pearls have been rejected? How should we share that which is sacred with other people?

## VIII. If so desired, watch Monday’s chapel on this week’s text at:

## IX. Recommended Spiritual Discipline for this week: Service/Hospitality

