

## PRAYER AND THE GOLDEN RULE

Matthew 7:7-12

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We have now had sixteen messages on the Sermon on the Mount, and for you, who have been hearing these messages; you have probably thought that it is humanly impossible to keep these commands and teaching of Jesus Christ. This is exactly what Christ wanted you to conclude, so that you would turn from all human effort and trust only God to live the Christian life.
- B. Last week we showed from 7:1-6 how Christ told us not to condemn other people as though we were their judges. He exhorted us about harboring bitterness and hatred in our hearts, telling us to remove the log out of our own eyes before trying to remove the splinter from someone else's eye. Christ has made tremendous demands on us and set a very high standard. We become humbled and feel utterly hopeless and helpless, and we say, "How can we live the Sermon on the Mount? How can anybody come up to such a standard?" This is exactly what Christ wants from us. He wants us to see our utter helplessness and deep need, and turn to God for help to live the Christian life. This sermon was designed to crush all confidence in the human flesh, so that we would cast ourselves completely on the grace of God, receiving supernatural strength to live a supernatural life.

### II. THE SUPERNATURAL WAY -- 7:7,8

- A. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:* -- The Christian life is impossible to live in one's own strength. It is supernatural and demands a supernatural power to live. Our Lord knows this and begins to talk to his disciples about prayer. Prayer is the means of appropriating God's power to live the Christian life. Prayer is not a mechanical ritual or pious expressions couched in eloquent language. Prayer is looking outside ourselves and seeking help from above. Prayer is the genuine cry of a soul in need; a soul that realizes that God must work **or nothing will dependence upon God.**

**ILLUSTRATION:** Yesterday I was talking to my wife about this sermon on prayer, and she made an interesting comment. She said, "Any victory that I presently experience in my Christian life is somehow related to prayer. When I get up in the mornings and ask God to help me get things done, do the housework, be patient with the children and all the other things I have to do, God always helps me." I know this to be true in my experience but I also know that I do not do this every day. Why is that? It is because unbelief is a strong force in our lives. We begin to think that we can live life apart from God, which we cannot.

1. The original Greek here is interesting for these commands are in the present tense and should be translated, "Keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking." Our Lord is speaking about importunity persistence and perseverance in prayer. We must be continually asking God for the strength, power and grace to live the Christian life. At no time have we ever arrived in our Christian life, so there must be continued prayer and dependence.

**NOTE:** If we really want to be men and women of God, if we really want to know Him, and walk with Him and experience those boundless blessings which He has to offer us, we must persist in asking Him for them day by day. We have to hunger and thirst after righteousness if we want to be filled.

2. Some very sincere Christians believe that we should ask God only once for something and then trust Him to answer. To keep on asking, they say would be a mark of unbelief. But Christ seems to encourage repeated prayers for the same thing, but these prayers should not become vain repetitions. Repeated prayers are not because God is reluctant to give to His own, but repeated prayers show eagerness to have God answer. It is boldness to remind God of our needs.

**ILLUSTRATION:** If a salesman approaches a customer, it is quite easy to refuse him and get rid of him. But if he comes back again and again, he may annoy us but we also know that he would not persevere unless he knew he had a good product and was eager to sell it. His eagerness and intentness makes an impression. So it is that our eagerness and intentness in prayer pleases God.

- B. *“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”* -- This promise is for every one of Christ’s disciples. This promise is not for a privileged few, but for everyone who names the name of Christ.

**NOTE:** Is this promise a blank check to get whatever we want for as Christians without any conditions? Not at all, for in context Christ is speaking about prayers to obtain strength and grace to live the Christian life. Furthermore, God does not answer our prayers when we have unconfused sin in our hearts (Psa. 66:18). God has given Christians intelligence to compare scripture with scripture, and I John 5:14 says that we must ask according to God’s will if prayers are to be answered. Also James 4:3 says, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.” Selfish prayers are not answered. This is a promise that when we as Christians pray for strength and grace to live the Christian life, God will give supernatural power to live it. God desires that every Christian grows in grace and he will not withhold any good gift in this area.

**NOTE:** We should be very happy that God does not answer all our prayers as we made petition, for many were asked with selfish motives that could have ruined our lives. A gracious God knows the better way for His children and does not grant them every request.

**NOTE:** Perhaps some of you are saying, “Well, I asked God to make me more holy and desire a Christian life, but I cannot see any visible results. In fact, I seem to have more conflict than before.” Perhaps God did answer your desire but not you direct petition. You may have prayed for grace and God gave you more light, so as to see your sins more clearly. Perhaps you prayed for overcoming grace, but God saw that what you really needed was humbling grace, so as to crush your human pride. God always answers our prayers but sometimes His answers do not come in ways that we thought they would.

### **III. THE SUPERNATURAL SOURCE -- 7:9-11**

A. *“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?”* -- Now Christ, the master teacher, uses an illustration of a father and a son to depict every Christians relation to his Heavenly Father. To think of a loving Heavenly Father bestowing gifts on His spiritual children as earthly fathers do on their own is a beautiful analogy.

**POINT:** The point is that our Heavenly Father will never trick, deceive or fool us. Because he is gracious, He will meet our needs. Nor will our Father ever make a mistake. He will never give us anything that will turn out to be harmful to us. Our Father will never give us anything evil nor will He lead us astray. We can trust our Father to do what is best for us.

**POINT:** It is not prayer that meets our need it is God. God is the supernatural source for living the Christian life; therefore we must learn to trust Him.

B. *“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?”* -- If men, who are basically sinful, do good things for their children, how much more will God, who is perfect, do for His spiritual children. He will do infinitely more. Our Father loves us with an unchanging, perfect love. The “good things” in context refer to the gifts of power, strength and grace to live the Christian life. Christians have a blank check to ask for anything that will be good for them, that will hasten their sanctification that will bring them nearer to God and enlarge their lives. If we seek holiness, we shall have holiness. If we pray for holiness, we shall have holiness. If we pray for holiness, we shall have it (Jer. 29:13).

**NOTE:** We should notice for a moment that this is a very difficult verse for a person who does not believe in the basic sinfulness of man. A person who says all men are basically good is in contradiction with the teachings of Christ. Here Christ said, *“Ye, being evil.”* Notice He never said that He was evil but that men were. Many modernist want to throw out the teachings of depravity set forth by Paul and stick with the pleasing teachings of Jesus. But Jesus could not say anything worse about man then that he is evil. It is because men are evil that they need the new birth, salvation, Christ and supernatural power to live. As long as a person believes that he or she is basically good, that person will never be saved. One has no need of a Saviour until he sees that he is a sinner!

#### IV. **THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE** -- 7:12

A. *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them:”* -- This statement is known as the Golden Rule. Undoubtedly this is the most universally famous thing that Christ ever said. Here is a teaching that was never stated before Jesus, nor is it found in any other religion. There are parallels in other religions in negative style.

#### **ILLUSTRATIONS:**

**Hillel:** “What thou wouldst not wish for thyself, do not unto thy neighbor. This is the whole law.”

**Socrates:** “What stirs your anger when done to you by others, that do not do to others.”

Aristotle: “We should bear ourselves toward others as we desire they should bear themselves toward us.”

Confucius: “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

**POINT**: All religions give this ethical teaching in a negative form - do not do what you do not want done to yourself. This is a lofty ideal but Christ’s statement is totally positive. The Golden Rule is a positive rule. It does not consist in not harming others. It means much more. We are told to actively pursue the good of others. “I must do no harm to people”, is quite different from the attitude, which says, “I must do my best to help people.” The Golden Rule in effect makes servants of God’s children, for we are to serve others.

**NOTE**: The Golden Rule is a beautiful ideal but it is so difficult to practice. In fact, to practice it at all one needs a supernatural way of ennoblement. This is an extremely high standard and only God can grant the grace to fulfill it. The power to keep the Golden Rule is in prayer. Only as we pray, are we able to live in light of the Golden Rule.

- B. “*For this is the Law and the Prophets.*” -- The whole teaching of the Old Testament is summed up in the Golden Rule.

## V. **CONCLUSION**

- A. Why can’t all men fulfill the Golden Rule? Because men are basically evil. Sin keeps men from doing to others, as you would have others do to you. It is the sin of selfishness that keeps the world from doing what looks so right to do. Only changed men on the inside can keep the Golden Rule. How can man change his basic sinful nature? He can’t but God can. God can change sinful men by the new birth, which imparts new life and a new nature in the individual. Through the new birth one gets a new nature that longs to keep the laws of God. But, you say, how does one get the new birth? The Bible says that whoever receives Christ is born into the family of God. So the new birth comes the moment one receives Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. You will never be changed on the inside until that moment of encounter with the resurrected Christ.
- B. Some of you may be saying, “Well, I see many professing Christians who do not carry out the Golden Rule. How come?” The new birth gives one a new nature or a capacity for spiritual things, but even the child of God must persevere in the Faith and walk by faith as a Christian. He must appropriate by faith God’s power to live a super-natural life. By God’s grace and inducement of power, a Christian walking by faith can begin to fulfill the Golden Rule in his life. Yet, he must keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking; for the task never ends.