

Prayer & Golden Rule

by Charles Ryrie

The sermon emphasizes the importance of judging others in a non-hypocritical way, praying with persistence and trust, and being open to God's guidance and blessing.

Duration: 29:38

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-21

Topics: "Christian Ethics", "Prayer Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses a familiar chapter in the New Testament, Matthew chapter 7. He mentions that many people are familiar with either the first verse or the last verse of this section. The first verse, 'judge not that ye be not judged,' is often used as a defense mechanism to silence others. However, the speaker emphasizes that this verse should not be taken out of context and used to avoid accountability. The sermon also highlights the concept of total depravity and how it does not mean that people are incapable of doing good. The speaker concludes by emphasizing the importance of the Golden Rule, which is the last verse of the section, and encourages listeners to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Transcript

It's like I get the exalted position here. Can't stand down there on the floor, huh? Nah, this is alright. Well, I didn't know that you had recollections and roots way back to Alton, Illinois.

I don't think I've been introduced that way for a long time. Those were, must have been a great aunt, and there were, how many of them in that family? Seven, I think. So there were quite a few Ryries and assorted relatives in Alton.

Alton is distinct because at Alton, the Mississippi flows east. Got that? Makes a little curve there, and the sun sets into the river. It's very pretty that way.

Well, I'm pleased to be here on this Labor Day weekend, and tonight and tomorrow, as I have thought about the messages, they will not especially be related, so don't panic if you can't determine a series. If I continue along the same line of thought, then beginning Sunday night and a few times Monday, I'm going to try to put those three messages together under the same general theme, and if you want to know what it is, you will probably have to show up Sunday night to find out. Tonight I want you to turn, please, to a familiar chapter in the New Testament.

I suppose if anybody knows some verse or another from the Bible, they will know one or two from the section we're going to look at tonight. They will either know the first verse of the section, or they'll know the last verse of the section. Former President Truman knew the last verse of the section.

He said when asked more than once what it takes for a man to get to heaven, he said he has to keep the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. Now whatever you think of his politics, I should not dare enter into that, but his theology was terrible, of course. And the Golden Rule is the last verse of this section.

Do unto others as you would have them do to you. If a person knows another verse from this chapter, he is apt to know the first verse, which is, judge not that you be not judged. Of course the person doesn't usually know the setting of the verse, and he or she will use it as a kind of defense mechanism.

Judge not that you be not judged. In other words, just shut up. You're meddling now, so just keep still because you're judging, and judge not that you be not judged.

So by now I hope you've turned to Matthew chapter 7, which opens with judge not that you be not judged, and the section I want to look at concludes with whatever you would that men should do to you, do the same to them, for this is the law and the prophet, the so-called Golden Rule. In this section the Lord talks about two rather different subjects. The first one has to do with judging.

There's no need to try to soften the word, it means judge. And he says, judge not that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge you shall be judged, and with what measure you meet it shall be measured to you again. Why beholdest thou the mote that's in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that's in thine own eye? For how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, the beam is in thine own eye.

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. Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. The Lord doesn't say don't ever judge.

He says the only kind of person who isn't allowed to judge, the person who comes under the prohibition of verse 1, is, verse 5, the hypocrite. If you're a hypocrite, don't judge. Rather, get out of the position of being a hypocrite, then, verse 5, thou shalt see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye.

That's judging. He's obviously not condemning judging, he's condemning hypocritical judging. And when somebody says, judge not that ye be not judged, he's really saying to you, thou hypocrite.

Which isn't too kind a remark, actually. There is a proper judging, a non-hypocritical judging. How do you do that? Well, first of all, you need to discern your own spiritual condition, so that there are no beams or logs in your own eye.

Then you can judge in a non-hypocritical fashion. Or, to put it positively, the first requirement for good, proper scriptural judging is to be clear-eyed. Clear-eyed.

To be able to see, to judge. Sometime, if you want a little interesting study, look up the word eye in the New Testament, or anywhere in the Bible, and eliminate the references that have to do with the physical organ, and just see what the Bible says about the eye. You may remember a few interesting passages.

In the preceding chapter, the Lord said, if your eye is evil, it's full of darkness. If it's covetous, it's full of darkness. And how great that darkness is.

But later on in Matthew's Gospel, when he's talking about those workers that were sent into the field to work at different times of the day, yet they all received the same wage, when the ones that worked all day complained, thinking they should receive more, the Lord put his finger right on their problem and said, is your eye evil because I am good? Matthew 20. Paul prayed that the eyes of our understanding might be enlightened, that we might know the hope of our calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him on his right hand in heaven. So, the eye has a very important place.

The Laodicea was cautioned and exhorted to apply eye salve to their condition, which they really weren't discerning. To judge properly, there must first of all be a clear-eyed person to do it. Pull out the beam that's in thine own eye.

Now the second thing that's involved in non-hypocritical, proper scriptural judging is, you have to see other people's sins. There's no judging, there's no helping, there's no clearing out of the sins of others unless they're discerned as sin. And these are the specks that's in another person's eye.

Specks, just little sins. We have a cliché, all sin is sin, that is true. But all sin isn't the same.

There are big sins and there are little sins. There are public sins, there are private sins. There are gross sins, there are good sins.

There are sinful sins and there aren't so bad sins. Now if that's your theology, I'll remind you of what the Lord said. He said, He that delivered me unto you has the greater sin.

John 19, 11. And that's a pure, unadulterated comparative. Greater.

So one sin was less than the other and the other was greater than the other. And of course the comparison here between the speck and the beam shows that there are some sins that are less than other sins. They're all sinful, but they're not all the same.

John wrote about a sin unto death and a sin that's not unto death. Obviously, different gradations of sin. Now the Lord says we should be interested in our brothers being clear-eyed.

Also, right down to the specks that get into our lives. As I was meditating on this, it occurred to me, something pretty obvious, but it occurred to me that it's probably easier to see and to be concerned about big sins. And probably harder to be concerned about little sins.

It also seemed to me that the older we get, the more comfortable we try to be with little sins. And less concerned with getting the specks out of our eyes or helping others to do the same. Oh well, that's the way I am.

Oh well, that's the way I've been all my life. Oh, you can't expect me to change now. Oh, and on and on the reasons go.

Our Lord was concerned that we help each other get the specks out of our eyes. So there has to be a discerning of other people's sins as well. And then I should think, not only must I be clear-eyed and must I

see other people's sins and try to do something about it, but I have to determine what to do, the correct procedure.

And that's not always easy. Hatred stirs up strife, the proverb says, but love covers all sins. And sometimes it should.

And yet the Apostle Paul said, reprove the works of unrighteousness. Sometimes they need to be exposed. When to cover and when to expose, the right timing.

Those are all difficult questions to answer and have to do with the discerning of procedures. Perhaps that's what verse 6 is talking about because it seems to be referring to the holy meat that was given to the priests, which was not even allowed to be eaten by the layman and certainly not by dogs or by swine. The correct procedure in accomplishing God's will in this matter.

So there is a proper non-hypocritical judging. I have, of course, some remembrances of my own father. One of them has to do with how he would take things out of my brother and my eyes when we get something in our eyes.

I don't know that I've ever had to do that with my kids. Maybe I have, but I don't remember it happening very often. But it seemed to me it happened to us frequently.

He would always be taking something out of our eye that we were complaining about. I think it's probably because I grew up B.C. before contacts. And contacts seem to protect the eye a little more today.

But I can remember how he did that. And, of course, it often always was at the end of the day. And he would take a handkerchief out of his pocket and twist the corner of it and make a little point.

And then pull down the lid or turn under the upper lid and just touch the point of the handkerchief to the stick and lift it off. Much like you would lift off a little speck of dust or dirt from the top of a glass of water that's floating on the water. You don't dunk your finger in.

That would sink it. You just barely touch it and that lifts it off. And likewise, he would just roll up that piece of handkerchief and just touch it and lift it off.

Now that worked. But my father did not have great eyesight. This happened in the evening when we were ready to go to bed.

He would maybe already have taken his glasses off and laid them on his dresser. And he was ready to take the speck out of our eyes. And I always said, Hold on.

Please go get your glasses. I want you to see clearly before you mess around with my eye. Now there's a second subject, apparently unrelated.

It has to do with prayer. This is one of the favorite passages on prayer in the New Testament. Ask and it shall be given you.

Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, asketh receiveth.

And he that seeketh, findeth. And to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? And the implied answer is, of course not.

That's the way the original is constructed. Or if he ask a fish, he will not give him a serpent, will he? We can bring that expected answer into the question in English even. If he ask a fish, he will not give him a serpent, will he? You're supposed to answer, no.

Of course not. If he then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children. How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them who ask him? Now it seems to me the Lord is saying two things about prayer, proper praying here.

The first one is most obvious, verses 7 and 8. Pray with persistence. Some commentators try to make distinctions between asking and seeking and knocking and maybe there are. I don't think the point is distinctions.

I think the point is the repetition. That is, persist. Keep on asking and seeking and knocking.

And the promise of verse 8 is that God will hear. Pray with persistence. Then he says pray, in ease to illustration, pray with trust.

I deliberately am using the word trust rather than faith. There are synonyms, I know that. But I want to use the word trust.

Pray with trust. For the simple reason that I think today pray with faith has become kind of a mechanical thing almost. You've got to have more faith.

If you will have more faith, or a variation of it is, if enough of us will have more faith, then God is obliged to answer. Please don't misunderstand, I believe that corporate prayer is very biblical. Sharing requests is very biblical.

But I'm not sure that God is obliged to anything. He promised certain things and of course he keeps his promises. But when I see on television or hear on some program this pray with faith, I get the impression that the only thing that's hindering God is something in me or in us or in the constituency of that program.

If that were present then, whatever it is, if that were present then God is obliged to answer. The only reason he hasn't is that we haven't got enough people or enough people with enough faith or the right kind of faith or something involved. So I don't want to create that image.

I want to discard that image. I want to nullify that image. So I don't want to say pray with faith.

I want to say that the Lord is teaching in these two illustrations we're to pray with trust. Now look at the illustration. What man is there of you whom is his son asked bread? He won't give him a stone, will he? Bread, stone.

Similar in shape, in look, color, but not texture or usefulness. And if we go to our Heavenly Father in prayer with trust, we may, the first illustration says, we may trust him not to give us something that will deceive us or to substitute a stone when you've asked for a loaf is a deception. Looks the same.

Deceives you into thinking that it might be the same, but of course it's not the thing you asked for. It's not useful. So we can trust God never to deceive us.

And again I got to thinking about this. How could an answer to prayer ever be a deception? Well, I'll use a student illustration if you don't mind. Students when they come up to the point of graduation or a point of decision will often pray to God for leading.

Now suppose that the student or his wife really has an area of unwillingness in their desires or ambitions and they want leading except they want to be led either to Florida or Texas or California. I'll go anywhere in the Sun Belt, Lord. But New England? Oh, give us leading.

Now if God should answer that, you see they might be deceived into thinking they were in fellowship when they really aren't. So I think it is possible to ask for something and if we got the answer it would just reinforce our thinking that everything's fine. We go on in our area of unwillingness and never deal with that before the Lord.

Once I was speaking on the temptation of Christ in a church Sunday morning and I said something about stone turned to bread, of course. And I said, I don't know who's taking me to dinner today but I certainly hope that you're not tempted to do this. Trying to illustrate that Christ's temptation was peculiar to him.

It's not one that we could even be tempted with. You can't be tempted to turn stone to bread. So I said, I hope whoever's taking me to dinner isn't tempted or doesn't think he could be tempted to do this.

Well it so happened that the previous arrangements were for a couple's class in that church to have a potluck dinner. And so we went to a home and it was a spread like you've never seen unless you see it Monday. I don't know what it's going to be like Monday but it was a spread, I'll tell you.

And they had a table twice as long as a communion table and twice as wide and like four of those tables set up and these couples had all brought their fanciest food and they laid it out there and when it came time to eat the hostess said, you go first. And so I went first and about the fourth item down the table was a loaf of homemade bread. I thought, that's great.

So I picked up the knife to cut the first piece and I put the knife on the bread and it was a stone. And somehow between church and dinner they had found the stone and it looked just like a loaf of bread. I was deceived.

I was deceived. Trust God never to deceive you even in an answer to prayer. The second illustration is different.

Or if you ask a fish, he won't give him a serpent, will he? And again the similarities, the resemblances are close. But there's an added matter here. It's not something that's merely deceiving.

If a serpent were substituted for a fish and it was the right kind of poisonous serpent then this would be something that would be damaging. When you pray, you can trust God never to give you anything that would damage you. And you know if God were to answer some of our prayers it would be very damaging.

We think it would be very good but in reality it would be very damaging because we don't always know what we should pray for or what's the best thing to have. And while I think we should tell our Heavenly Father exactly what we feel the bottom line always has to be Lord, I want what you want me to have. And if what I'm asking for would be deceiving or damaging then don't give it to me.

I'd rather not have it. Years ago when our children were little I was traveling to Southern California in the spring of the year and I said to them you know I'll probably go over to Mexico and is there anything you'd like me to bring to you? And this one chorus they said firecrackers. It was in June and the 4th of July was approaching and firecrackers are illegal in Dallas so they said bring us some firecrackers.

Well I said that isn't legal, how can I do that? Well just bring us some sparklers. That won't, well they won't hurt anything. I thought of this and tonight we had a birthday and somebody had a sparkler in the dining room.

I thought of that incident long ago. Just bring us sparklers. That's not dangerous.

We'll light them on the back porch, it's concrete and we'll be careful of the hot wires and all of that. What could be dangerous about sparklers? So I went to San Diego and I went across the border to Tijuana and I thought to myself you know I love my kids, why shouldn't I bring them sparklers? They probably won't hurt themselves with it and I'll be there and we'll watch everything and that'll please them. And every time I thought of buying sparklers or other firecrackers I also thought of a three inch scar I have on my legs from a firecracker accident.

So I went home. Daddy, what'd you bring us? Nothing. No firecrackers? No.

No sparklers? No. And there was great weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. You don't love us! But of course it was precisely because I did love them that I did not grant their request.

You notice both bread and fish. These are basics. These aren't luxuries.

These aren't peripheral things. These are basic things. God will not do anything, even the basics of life to deceive us or to damage us.

But the positive promise of verse 11 is if ye then being evil and that's all of us spoken to the disciples and all of us if ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children this is a wonderful verse to keep theologians honest when they define total depravity. Now if you could watch that film and listen to all those technical terms you can listen to this. Total depravity some people say means nobody can do anything good.

This verse doesn't agree with that definition. If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts evil people can do good things. Depravity is not a question of whether a person can do good or not it's a question of whatever he does is that acceptable with God? And the answer is no.

It's the good things or the wicked things. Evil people know how to give good gifts to your children then here's the positive promise how much more shall your Father in Heaven give good things to those that ask Him? Good from whose viewpoint? From His.

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