

# Rightly Dividing the Gospels

—Installment 40—

The Sermon on the Mount

—Part 14—

Ask, Seek and Knock

The Golden Rule

~ 28 A.D., after Passover

Near Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee

Albuquerque 28 October 2012

## I. Brief Review of Overview of the Sermon on the Mount

- A. We are treating Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount conjointly with Luke’s Sermon on the Plain
- B. Audience
  - 1. His disciples, whom he particularly addressed in a public setting among multitudes
    - a. That is, those whom he was preparing to receive and enter his kingdom
- C. Theme
  - 1. The kingdom and its distinctive qualities

## II. Covered so far

- A. Beatitudes ..... (Matt. 5: 3–12; Luke 6: 20–26)
- B. Salt and light..... (Matt. 5: 13–16)
- C. Relationship of Jesus’ Doctrine to OT and Traditional Doctrine ..... (Matt. 5: 17–48; Luke 6: 27–36)
  - 1. We considered the meaning of Jesus’ declared purpose to fulfill the OT
    - a. Fulfillment of the OT means satisfying its objective—leading to Christ and the NT
  - 2. We showed that he meant for his commands in this sermon to be applied to Christians ..... vv. 19–20
    - a. These commandments pertain to the subjects of the kingdom, i.e. Christians
    - b. Those given in this instructional phase could be obeyed without abrogating the OT law
- D. The Distinctive Doctrines of Jesus ..... Matt. 5: 21–48
  - 1. In this section we saw Jesus modify existing OT doctrines in characteristic ways
    - a. Expanding their scope by spiritual application
    - b. Restricting their permissions in light of underlying spiritual principles
    - c. These modifications make NT law considerably higher than OT law

## III. General Doctrines (covered)

- A. In this section Jesus presents a series of topical NT doctrines without drawing any particular contrast to the OT. Unlike the six commands of the previous section, Jesus' purpose here is NOT to modify the OT commands
  - 1. We see that he carries the OT commands intact into the NT, but with a new characteristic focus akin to that he brought to those commands he did modify
    - a. Interested in the spiritual roots (motive and manner) underpinning the acts
- B. Simplicity and Purity in Service..... Matt. 6: 1–18
  - 1. Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting
    - a. Spiritual character of the acts
    - b. God's reward vs. praise of men
    - c. Problematic prayer
  - 2. The Model Prayer
- C. Single-Minded Service ..... Matt. 6: 19–34
  - 1. Lay not up treasures on earth, but in heaven
    - a. The heart follows the treasure
  - 2. Anxiety
    - a. Take no thought (KJV), do not be anxious (NAS), do not worry (NIV)
    - b. Your Heavenly Father knows
      - i. This is the cure for anxiety
    - c. Seek ye first the kingdom and all these things shall be added unto you
- D. Judgment ..... Matt. 7: 1–6; Luke 6: 37–42
  - 1. "Judge not, that ye be not judged"
    - a. As with many other statements earlier in the sermon, biblical context requires us to recognize limits on what seems to be a universal prohibition
      - i. We know from the teaching of Jesus and his apostles that the certain good kinds of judgment are approved and required:
      - ii. The prohibition is against bad judgment
        - (i) Censorious judgment
        - (ii) Prideful, arrogant judgment
        - (iii) Uncharitable judgment

#### IV. General Doctrines, cont'd

- A. Ask, Seek and Knock ..... Matt. 7: 7–11
  - 1. This doctrine should be understood as a resumption of his instruction concerning *prayer*
    - a. Here he teaches us further about the character of Christian prayer
    - b. Previously in the sermon, Jesus addressed problematic prayer:
      - i. Vain repetition



- (iii) Asking is the means by which a Christian enlists the aid of God
  - b. Promise: it shall be given you
    - i. Though qualified extensively by biblical context, this promise plainly says that we will get what we ask
      - (i) Even astonishingly great things..... Matt. 21: 21–22
      - ii. Prayer is pleasing to God, as incense to the nostrils ..... Rev. 5: 8
      - iii. But our motive is to receive from him
        - (i) People sometimes worry about being “selfish” in prayer
        - (ii) Prayers can be disqualified for several reasons, but wishing to receive is not among them
          - 1. Intent to receive is the very point of prayer
3. Seek, and ye shall find
  - a. Command: SEEK
    - i. Now Jesus takes the effort beyond the realm of will and speech into material action
    - ii. The supplicant, having enlisted God’s aid, now turns his own effort toward the satisfaction of his need
    - iii. In the same way that works are the natural expression of living faith, seeking is the natural expression of living prayer
      - (i) Having asked God to feed his family, a man rightly and naturally seeks employment and plants a garden
      - (ii) Having asked God to forgive his sin, he rightly and naturally seeks to not repeat it
      - (iii) Having prayed for those in authority, he rightly and naturally casts his vote in the election
    - iv. True prayer, like true faith, is living and active
  - b. Promise: ye shall find
    - i. Identically with the first command, Jesus promises satisfaction
4. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you
  - a. Command: KNOCK
    - i. This command invokes a metaphor: the closed door
      - (i) The closed door represents some obstacle in the way of satisfying the need
    - ii. It teaches persistence and perseverance in the face of resistance and difficulty
    - iii. The faithful supplicant is not merely active in pursuit of his desire, he is resilient and courageous
  - b. Promise: it shall be opened unto you
    - i. Again, Jesus promises satisfaction
5. For every one that asketh receiveth; ...
  - a. Jesus recasts each of the promises as a statement of simple fact

- i. This emphasizes that God’s promises are not empty or boastful in the frequent manner of men’s promises
  - ii. He states it in the universal: “every one”
    - (i) The commands and promises are not given just to the apostles, or just during the age of miracles; they are universal
    - (ii) Context requires us to recognize some qualifications on that
      - 1. Local context suggests that it refers to everyone recognized by God as son or daughter
      - 2. OT and NT teaching both reveal limits on what God is willing to hear and grant, for several reasons in two general categories
        - a. Sin in the supplicant
          - i. Rebellion and disobedience ..... Deut. 1: 43–45
          - ii. Iniquitous heart ..... (Ps. 66: 18)
          - iii. Indifference..... (Pr. 1: 24–31)
          - iv. Neglect of mercy..... (Pr. 21: 13)
          - v. Despising the law..... Prov. 28: 9
          - vi. Bloody hands ..... (Isa. 1: 15)
          - vii. Iniquities (evil deeds)..... Isa. 59: 2; (Micah 3: 4)
          - viii. Stubbornness..... (Zec. 7: 11–13)
          - ix. Double-mindedness ..... (Jas. 1: 6–7)
          - x. Lustful desire ..... Jas. 4: 2–3
          - xi. The Pharisees’ summary: “God heareth not sinners.” ..... (John 9: 31)
          - xii. (This summary isn’t entirely true; God hears penitent sinners)..... Psa. 51: 17
        - b. Against God’s Will
          - i. Moses asked to see the face of God..... Ex. 33: 18–20
          - ii. And to enter the Promised Land ..... (Deut. 3: 25–27)
          - iii. David prayed for his stricken child..... II Sam. 12: 22–23
          - iv. “Let this cup pass from me” ..... (Matt. 26: 39)
          - v. John’s summary: “If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us”  
..... I John 5: 14–17
    - (iii) The universal promise is this: All God’s children who pray aright may be sure of being heard; and they further may be sure of satisfaction, provided their prayers are according to God’s will
6. Human fathers and sons
  - a. Jesus declares that God cares for us in the manner of a human father, but flawlessly
  - b. Stones and serpents typify deceitful and harmful gifts
    - i. We sometimes misapprehend God’s will for us this way

- (i) Jesus assures us that God is never deceitful or harmful in his gifts to us
- B. The Golden Rule .....Matt. 7: 12; Luke 6: 31
1. This precept is connected to the previous discussion of prayers and gifts with “therefore”
    - a. We depend on the kindness and forbearance of God; let us extend the same to others
  2. The usual title “Golden Rule” is meant to capture its surpassing excellence as a guiding principle of conduct
    - a. The title (sometimes “Golden Law”) is a relatively recent invention, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century
  3. In the hierarchy of God’s law, it ranks second only to the Great Commandment (OT and NT alike)
    - a. The Great (or greatest) Commandment is so identified by Jesus in a later encounter with a lawyer ..... Matt. 22: 35–40
      - i. The second greatest he also identifies: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”
    - b. Each of these commandments is unchanged from the OT
      - i. Great Commandment ..... (Deut. 6: 4–5)
      - ii. Second Commandment .....(Lev. 19: 18)
      - iii. This illustrates the vital point that OT and NT are more similar than different
  4. I will forestall further discussion of the Great and Second Commandments until we arrive at the lawyer’s question in some later installment (God willing)
  5. The Golden Rule is a different, more practical, form of the Second Commandment.....Gal. 5: 14
    - a. Where the Second Commandment may feel abstract, the Rule is concrete
      - i. The Rule tells you how to obey the Commandment
  6. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” ..... (Matt. 22: 40)
    - a. The Rule captures in a few words the underlying and governing principle of all morality
    - b. If you will obey this one Rule, you will need little additional effort satisfy all God’s law .....Gal. 6: 2
    - c. Like many of Jesus’ doctrines in this sermon, this Rule calls us to a fearfully high standard of righteousness
      - i. Mere rudeness and inconsideration become sinful in Jesus’ law
      - ii. But a Christian determined to follow the Rule will thereby teach himself to see others the way God sees them, as sinners in need of mercy and grace
  7. Variants and counterfeits of the Golden Rule
    - a. Loosely understood, some version of the Golden Rule appears in the doctrines of most of the world’s religions from antiquity to present day, and it is considered by philosophers of religion as being one of mankind’s most important rules of ethical behavior
      - i. This testifies to the writing of God’s law on the consciences of men
      - ii. But most of them are feeble groping after the true Rule as Jesus gave it
        - (i) And they lack the foundation of the Great Commandment
    - b. The Rule is sometimes applied in ways that distort and subvert its intent

- i. “Do not to others as you would not have done to you”
    - (i) Some ancient versions give this limited variant
      - 1. While surely comprehended within the true rule, the negative-only statement lacks the power of the true
    - ii. Reciprocity
      - (i) Philosophers call the Rule the “Ethic of Reciprocity”, thereby lumping it in with other laws of reciprocity such as the “Eye for an eye” rule of the OT and Hammurabi’s Law
      - (ii) In fact, Jesus rejected “Eye for eye” in this very sermon
        - 1. His discussion of that ancient law shows it to be contradictory to the Golden Rule
          - a. By the Golden Rule, “If thine enemy hunger, feed him.”
  - iii. “I demand that you do unto me as I wish for you to do unto me”
    - (i) I’ve heard such statements in Church squabbles
      - 1. “He doesn’t practice the Golden Rule, or he wouldn’t treat me that way”
      - 2. This falls into the censorious judgment category condemned by Jesus in the previous section
8. “And so fulfill the law” .....Gal. 6: 1–10