

The Good Gifts of the Father and the Command to Ask

Matthew 7:7-12

Introduction – An honest hearing of the Sermon on the Mount leaves one undone – the ‘plank in the eye’ doesn’t seem so absurd. In the midst of God’s demands for perfect holiness, we are utterly at His mercy, for His judgment is sure. Who is sufficient for such things? And so, our Good Shepherd leads us to green pastures of promise; to those who will humble themselves and pray.

The Command (v7) - Really, there are three commands, and they place an emphasis on persistence. Obedience is asking, seeking, knocking. It is not ‘more spiritual’ to keep your desires from God. It is disobedience.

Learning to Pray – The parallel passage is in Luke 11, and it begins with a request from the disciples that Jesus teach them to pray. Repent of the idea that this is a request only for the new Christian. We do not experience the truth of this passage because we do not know how to pray.

It Didn’t Work! – James 4:1-6 teaches us that we do not have because we didn’t obey Jesus by asking, or we did so with wrong motives. And how grateful we should be that God does not answer our requests without His full sovereignty over all things. He is not a genie in a bottle.

Persistence – Why do we have to pray at all? If God has decreed all things, then how does prayer change anything? But Jesus has commanded us. Prayer is a work which God has predestined to accomplish (not change) many things. Persistence teaches us to receive the grace of humility and the grace of hope. Pride begets prayerlessness – *“Prayerlessness is not to be looked upon as an innocent infirmity, but as a sin of the deepest dye, which is to be penitently confessed.”* – Pink. Slothfulness begets prayerlessness as well because prayer requires that we ‘strive’ (Rom 15:30), ‘labor fervently’ (Col 4:12), and ‘wrestle’ (Eph 6:12,18).

The Promise (vv8-11) – We pray because God has promised to hear our prayers.

God Answers Prayer – *“Open your mouth wide and I will fill it”* (Psalm 81:10). He delights in mercy (Mic 7:18). Those who seek salvation and the good things of God will never be turned away.

How Much More – The illustration proves God will not be outdone in kindness, in mercy, in doing good to others. We are evil, and yet we do not withhold good things from our children. Our Father is the essence of goodness therefore He will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13) and *“how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom 8:31). Your heavenly Father is not stingy, and if you do not truly understand this, you will never keep the commandment of verse 12.

Therefore, The Golden Rule (v12) – Whenever people who hate God love some phrase of God, always be suspicious as to whether they are twisting it. Jesus does not command us to keep the Golden Rule. He commands us to ‘Therefore’ keep the Golden Rule.

A Commandment in Context - This commandment is not for ‘dogs’ and ‘swine’, for they will trample it under their feet. We cannot legislate nor educate a society to higher levels of morality *“because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”* (Rom 8:7). The world fundamentally cannot keep the Golden Rule.

Understanding the Currency of Heaven – Men who are unwilling to be open-handed with others cannot understand how the Father is open-handed. It shows that they have not encountered grace. How can we expect God to be merciful to us when we are merciless to others? We must remember if we sow sparingly or bountifully, so we will reap (2 Cor 9:6). But in the context of the promise (we cannot out-give God), we learn to keep this commandment gladly.

The Law and the Prophets – This is the teaching of the Old Testament, not what the false teachers live and teach. Jesus comes to fulfill this law and does so by fulfilling the Golden Rule in His incarnation (Heb 2:10). We need not fear the Old Testament, but must become more and more familiar with it and the New. God is a God of love and wrath in both; He is the same God.

Conclusion – We are commanded to ask for our salvation, and we are commanded to ask for good things from our heavenly Father. It is our only hope in being faithful followers. We need to grow in our ability to pray and to persist in prayer. There have been and are men and women who have been blessed with a great maturity in prayer. Many are now gone. But God is still here, and He still delights to answer faithful prayer in extraordinary ways.