

Matthew 7:7-14 Ask, Seek, Knock

People of God, as we have been going through the Sermon on the Mount, we have encountered some very difficult teachings and commandments along the way. These commandments govern not just external behavior, but even the very thoughts and intentions of the heart and the mind.

If you are angry with your brother, Jesus says you are guilty of murder. If you insult your brother, you are in danger of hell fire. You are therefore required to come to terms quickly with him and make peace.

If you look at woman to lust for her, Jesus says you have already committed adultery with her in your heart. It is better for you to pluck out your eye and chop off your hand and enter in the Heaven maimed, than to give yourself over to this sin.

Marriage is for life and no-fault divorce is adultery.

Jesus condemns flippant oath making and using vows in order to deceive others. Your Yes should be Yes, and your No, No. Anything more than this is from the devil.

You are not to seek personal vengeance. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek and let him hit you again. If he takes your tunic, give him your cloak as well. Go the second mile in order to bless the one who wrongfully uses you and persecutes you.

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do go to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. You are to do good to both the good and the evil, because your Heavenly Father sends rain on the just and the unjust. You shall be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father in perfect.

Do not do your acts of piety in order to be seen by others as doing them. Rather, do them in such a way that you seek the reward that comes from God alone, and not human approval.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, but in Heaven. For where your treasure is that is where your heart is. Keep your heart in Heaven with God, for you cannot serve both God and mammon.

Stop worrying about food, clothes, and the provisions of life. God will take care of you. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Don't judge your brothers harshly, but be merciful, for the judgement with which you judge others, God will judge you. And don't waste your time on trying to reform people who have no desire to change. Don't be a dog or a hog, a mocker or a scoffer. Learn how to receive reproof and correction.

Now by the time that we arrive at our passage today in Matthew 7:7-14, we come to a point of almost despair. From a mere human perspective, these teachings are so idealistic, so high, so lofty, that one could very easily consider that they are downright impossible to do. Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect?! So he brings us to the point where we realize that if we are going to keep even the least of these commandments, we are going to need some major help from God. So he says:

⁷ “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! ¹² Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

While this passage is certainly about prayer, the things for which Christ tells us to ask, seek, and knock for, are not just general prayer requests for general good things. Rather, he is very specifically answering the question about how we are to obey his teachings in the sermon on the mount. He is talking about keeping the Golden Rule which is the essence of what the Law and the prophets teach, and what Jesus himself teaches.

Now, if we go to Luke's gospel, chapter 11 where Jesus gives this teaching about prayer, we come away with a gem that helps us to interpret what the good thing is that we are to ask of the Father:

¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

The good thing that your Heavenly Father promises to give to those who ask Him, is The Holy Spirit. He promises to give you Himself. Which is exactly what you need to be able to obey the teachings which Christ has just given. In order to keep the law and the prophets, you need the Holy Spirit.

Now thanks be to God, the promise of the New Covenant relates precisely to this – that God would give us His Holy Spirit and he would write His law on our hearts, enabling us to keep God's law from the heart so that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and do to others as we would have them do to us.

Even back in Deuteronomy Moses prophesied that the only way God's people would be able to do this was if God circumcised their heart. And so he says in Deut. 30 – **⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.**

Ezek 36:25 also says - ²⁵ **Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.**

So God promises to give us His Holy Spirit, to give us a new heart, and a new spirit, so that we are able to keep His commandments.

Once we are regenerated we go from the place of not loving God, and not even having a desire to keep God's commandments, and of having no desire for God himself – to the place where we now do love God, and we desire to keep his laws, and he becomes the joy and pleasure of our heart and soul, so that we delight in God and he is the joy of our heart.

But even in regeneration we are not to assume that loving God comes easily. We still have indwelling sin trying to choke out the life of the Spirit of God in us. But Christ is telling us that the key to defeating sin and loving God and keeping these commandments with joy is prayer.

Jesus said, in John 15:7 – **If you abide in me, and I in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.** Just like our passage today, Jesus says this in a context in which he is telling his disciples to love God, keep his commandments, to abide in

his love, and to be filled with joy. Again how do we do that if we still are plagued by sin? We ask God for help.

But asking God for help to love him more than sin and asking him for help to keep his word is not going to be accomplished by throwing up a quick prayer. Jesus is teaching about a persistence and a perseverance in prayer. Keep seeking, keep asking, keep knocking, is what he literally says. But only if you love God and delight yourself in him more than sin, can you persevere in prayer.

Psalms 37:4 says – **Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.**

Much of our sin as Christians results from the fact that we stop delighting in God and in His word. We look with lust, because we delight in lust, and not in Christ. We seek revenge because we do not delight in God's justice more than our own petty revenge. We hypocritically desire the reward of man's public approval over God's secret approval, because we do not actually want the reward of God himself.

But we are to delight ourselves in the Lord who loves us, and who died to save us. We love him because he first loved us. But loving God requires that we love him with all our strength. It is a fight and battle to enjoy God. It is not easy. So sin always tempts us to seek pleasure in the lesser easier and cheaper thing, and not fight for greater joy.

As Lewis said, we are far too easily pleased. But if we are pleased in the Lord, if God is our delight, then we will call upon God for help to love him and enjoy him when we are tempted to sin.

Job asked this question in Job 27:10 - **Will he delight in the Almighty? Will he call upon God at all times?** The parallelism here reveals that the person who delights in God will call upon him at all times in prayer.

Do you delight in the Almighty? Do you delight to walk according to His ways? Is His law more to be desired than gold, Yea, than much fine gold? Is obeying Christ's commandments sweeter to you than honey and honeycomb? Is the reward you get from obeying these commandments by faith and with delight in God more of a treasure to you than any earthly reward?

If so, then you will fight for this pleasure and joy in God through prayer. When you are tempted to sin, keep asking, seeking, and knocking in prayer to God for help, and he will give you His Spirit to help you to walk in His commands.

When you are tempted to lust, to break your oath, to hate and insult your brother; when you are filled with anxiety and fear, when you want to seek personal vengeance, or when you want to receive the praise of men, or you are tempted to serve mammon and not God – if you call out to him in prayer, and ask God for His Holy Spirit to keep you in His ways, God will answer you.

Psalm 50:15 says, **“Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”** Which means, if you call on Christ in prayer when you are tempted to sin, he will answer you and deliver you from falling into sin, because he will give you himself as your chief joy and delight of your soul.

Likewise, in Jeremiah 29, God says that there will come a day for Israel when they are in the midst of the Babylonian captivity that they will call upon God in prayer to deliver them from their captivity, and He will listen to them. But they will not call out to him lightly, and in a mechanical and mere ritualistic way. But because they called upon God with all their heart.

He says, ¹²**Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.** ¹³**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.** ¹⁴**I will be found by you,”** declares the LORD.

And when God is found in persevering prayer, that is when he delivers Israel from captivity.

This is no less true for any of us as we consider that sin is always trying to take us into captivity. But the good news is, that God will even deliver us before we fall into sin's captivity. Yes, God will still rise to deliver you even after you fall into sin - If you call upon him in prayer and seek him with your whole heart. But how much better would it be for you to call upon God to deliver you before you became captive to sin? How much better would it be to

delight yourself in the Lord and call upon him in prayer to save you before you give yourself to the corrupting and fleeting pleasures of sin for a moment, and then have to call upon him for forgiveness?

I believe this then sets the context for the next two verses, which state:

¹³ “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The narrow gate is calling upon God to delight in him more than sin. The wide gate and the broad way that leads to destruction is to enjoy sin more than God. Most people go that way. It is easier to not fight your inherent desire to sin and to go with the flow of natural sinful inborn tendencies and desires. Nobody ever really has to fight to sin. It comes easy. Like floating downstream.

It is much, much more difficult to fight against sin, to swim against the current of your lusts, and instead to seek the glory of God and to enjoy Him more than sin. But God promised that the day would come when it would be that God’s people would love Him and enjoy Him more than sin. The promise of the New Covenant is the promise that there will always be a reformation in the hearts and lives of God’s people, and that we will forever be fighting against our sinful nature.

That is why the Gospel lesson for Reformation Sunday is Matt. 11 – **And from the days of John the Baptist until the now the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.**

But this violence is a holy violence against sin in one's own heart. And therefore it is primarily a warfare based upon our loves and pleasures and delights.

Just as we hear in the concluding prayer during the baptism service – “Grant that she may fight valiantly against and overcome all sin – the world, the flesh, and the devil, and his whole dominion, all the days of her life.”

So if you love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might, then that means you will call upon God to give you His Spirit when you don't feel like loving God.

When sin's temptations cloud your mind, and the desires of the flesh start to take over; When you want to resort to indulging the flesh and giving into your anger, when the world and the devil are distracting you, then do violence against your sin by calling upon God to come and deliver you, and take the kingdom of Heaven by force.

Keep asking and you will receive the good gift of Your Father. Keep seeking God with all your heart, and you will find Him and He will be the satisfaction and joy of your heart. Keep knocking,

and the narrow gate will be opened to you. And enter in by a joy filled faith in Christ, and you will receive the gift of life.

This is what Christ promises to all who call upon Him in believing and persevering prayer, and who delight in the Almighty more than sin.

In the name of...Amen.