

Spiritual Discernment

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Matthew 7:6

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. Matthew 7:6

Jesus closes this illustration with a thunderbolt that completely shatters the sentimental interpretation that, in the name of humility and love, we are never to oppose wrong or correct wrongdoers. It is clear that Jesus does not exclude every kind of judgment. In fact, He just as plainly commands a certain kind of right judgment here as He forbids a wrong kind in the preceding verses. **Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine.** To obey that command it is obviously necessary to be able to determine who are **dogs** and **swine**.

In biblical times **dogs** were seldom kept as household pets in the way they are today. Except for those used as working animals to herd sheep, they were largely half-wild mongrels that acted as scavengers. They were dirty, greedy, snarling, and often vicious and diseased. They were dangerous and despised. It would have been unthinkable for a Jew to have thrown to those **dogs** a piece of **holy** meat that had been consecrated as a sacrifice in the Temple. Some parts of those offerings were burned up, some parts were eaten by the priests, and some would often be taken home and eaten by the family who made the sacrifice. The part left on the altar was the part which was consecrated exclusively to the Lord, and therefore was **holy** in a very special way. If no man was to eat that part of the sacrifice, how much less should it be thrown to a bunch of wild, filthy **dogs**. Such an act would be the height of desecration.

Swine were considered by Jews to be the epitome of uncleanness. A Jewish person would never have tried to domesticate a pig, most of the **swine** they encountered were, like the dogs, wild animals who foraged for themselves, often in garbage dumps on the edge of town. Like the scavenging dogs, those **swine** were greedy, vicious, and filthy even by ordinary pig standards. If you came between them and their food they would likely **turn and tear you to pieces** with their tusks and sharp hooves.

Jesus' point is that certain truths and blessings of our faith are not to be shared with people who are totally antagonistic to the things of God. Such people are spiritual **dogs** and **swine**, who have no appreciation for that which is holy and righteous. They will take that which is **holy**, the **pearls** (the rarest and most valuable of jewels; see Matt. 13:45-46) of God's Word, as foolishness and as an

insult. A wild animal whose primary concern is scavenging for food will hardly appreciate being thrown a pearl. He will resent its not being something to eat and possibly attack the one who throws it.

Jesus did not give all of His teaching to everyone who happened to be listening. In Matthew 15:14 Jesus said of the Pharisees, "Let them alone (leave them); they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." The disciples were instructed not to try and convert them. John, the disciple known for his love said, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works" 2 John 1:10–11. Like wise, Paul said, As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" Galatians 1:9. Paul didn't say, "Let him be converted..."

Remember it was Jesus who prayed, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes" (Matt. 11:25). On another occasion He said to His disciples, in answer to their question about why He spoke to the multitudes in parables: "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. . . . Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matt. 13:11,13). And after Jesus rose from the dead He showed Himself to no one who was not a believer.

Peter warns, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words" (2 Pet. 2:1-3). A few verses later he speaks of such people as being "like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge" (v. 12). Using as examples the same two animals Jesus mentions in our present text, Peter closes his warning with the words: "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire'" (v. 22).

Dogs and **swine** represent those who, because of their great perversity and ungodliness, refuse to have anything to do with the **holy** and precious things of God except to **trample them under their feet, and turn and tear** God's people **to pieces**.

There will be times when the gospel we present is absolutely rejected and ridiculed and we make the judgment to turn away and speak no more, deciding that we should "shake off the dust of [our] feet" (Matt. 10:14) and begin ministering somewhere else. There will be times when those to whom we witness will resist the gospel and blaspheme God, and we may speak words of judgment. Like Paul, we must then say, in effect, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I

shall go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). When people not only reject the gospel, but insist on mocking and reviling it, we are not to waste God’s holy Word and the precious **pearls** of His truth in a futile and frustrating attempt to win them. We are to leave them to the Lord, trusting that somehow His Spirit can penetrate their hearts—as He apparently did with some of those who at first rejected the preaching of Paul and the other apostles—or leaving them to the just judgment of God.

A warranted judgment is made when we “reject a factious man [one who belongs to a sect, or a heretic] after the first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11). That text shows that in such a situation the believer does not condemn, but rather is able to recognize an already self-condemned person.

Is there hope for such men? We cannot say. If there is, it lies in the sovereignty of God and the demonstration of Christian living. William Barclay, the British devotional commentator once said, “It is impossible to talk to some people about Jesus Christ. Their insensitiveness, their moral blindness, their intellectual pride, and cynical mockery, the tarnishing film, may make them impervious to the [gospel]. But it is always possible to show men Christ; and the weakness of the church lies not in lack of Christian arguments, but in lack of Christian lives.”

Matthew 7:6 is one of the “hard sayings” of Jesus. We must take the command seriously and do our best to obey it, because it is the Lord’s will. But because it is so serious and because we may also be inclined to be self-righteous and judgmental, we need to depend on the Lord with special care and sincerity. Even when we determine that a person is too rebellious to hear the gospel or is a heretical and false teacher, we go on our way not in self-satisfied judgment but in great disappointment and sorrow—remembering how our Lord, as He approached Jerusalem for the last time, “saw the city and wept over” those who refused to recognize and receive their King (Luke 19:41-42). To avoid wrongful judging and to accomplish right discernment is to be marked as a citizen of the heavenly kingdom.¹

God’s Pearls

1. We ought to wisely regard the Word as our true source of riches. Just a few verses earlier Jesus taught about those who were overly preoccupied with the riches of earth. Now He reminds us that the Christian’s riches are found in God’s Word.

*Thy Word is like a deep, deep mine;
And jewels rich and rare
Are hidden in it’s mighty depths
For every searcher there.*

¹ Notes from John MacArthur Commentary

2. We should be content with the treasure that the world despises. A.W. Pink once wrote, "We may lose our health and wealth, our friends and fame, yet this treasure remains. Here is a lamp for our darkest night (Psalm 119:105). Here is I be found comfort in the sorest affliction (Psalm 119:50). Here are to be obtained songs for our pilgrimage (Psalm 119:54)." No Christian is ever poor or destitute who has these riches.

3. This verse teaches us how we are to use this treasure. Pearls have great value, and a wise man takes great pains to secure them. God's word is of infinite value. Do you value it? Do you dig for its pearls? Do you cultivate the mine for its treasure? When you uncover its riches do you preserve them, committing them to memory and locking them in your heart? David did! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Psalms 119:11