

THE LORD'S ETCETERAS
Christ's Keys for Successful Living
Matthew 7:1-12
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Today we're looking at Matthew 7:1-12. I've called this "The Lord's Etceteras." I'm intrigued how the Lord preaches. I find the Lord to be extremely organized. He starts with lead principles and develops them. He has in mind what kind of character he wants for us to have so he gives us 8 qualities of character called the Beatitudes. He has in mind what kind of influence he wants us to have so he tells us that we're to be like salt and light. Two different analogies. He wants us to have an inward righteousness surpassing the old righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees so he gives us 6 illustrations, which talk about the new morality he seeks to bring into our life. He wants to speak to us about spiritual discipline and about a piety or a religious life that is not done for outward display but for inward reality. So he then states the principle and gives three illustrations to manifest the principle. He wants to talk to us about trusting in the Father. So in the latter part of Matthew 6 he gives us a number of principles by which we can deal with anxiety and worry including 7 specific logical steps to overcoming anxiety. Then beginning in 7:13 to the end of the chapter he provides a number of illustrations, which bring us to a point of making a choice.

His stories, his parables from 7:13 on deal the theme of the choices that you make. But between the end of chapter 6 and the chapter 7:13 are 12 verses that don't seem to fit the organized way that he has dealt with the rest of the material. Doesn't seem to belong to chapter 5 and 6 and doesn't seem to belong to the rest of chapter 7. Simply I've said that here's the Lord sitting a pattern for us that it's ok in public address that when there are some things you want to say that aren't necessarily in the flow say them anyway. I've called them the Lord's etceteras.

There are three things that the Lord is looking for in this particular segment of teaching. The first kind of etceteras life quality that the Lord is wanting developed in us is that we might be absent of a critical or a negative spirit. "Do not judge or you too will be judged." Someone has said that every baseball team could you the player who never makes an error on the field and bats well over 400% at the plate. But there's no way to make him lay down his hot dog and come out of the grandstand.

It is true that the most eloquent critics are the fans, the people that aren't out on the field.

How do you know if you are a critical, negative person? I thought I'd give us a self-inventory today.

Do my feelings get hurt easily?

When someone wrongs me do I keep on remembering that and holding that against them?

Am I consciously suspicious of other people's motives? What's in it for them?

Am I a stingy person? Do I make a habit of giving cheap and meaningless gifts to people or do I avoid giving at all?

Am I more concerned more with what people are doing for me than what nice things I can do for them?

Am I often grumpy or argumentative?

Is my favorite topic of conversation myself?

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Do I more often find fault with rather than praise other people? Is my attitude toward other people to find something wrong with them or find something to praise in them?

Do I have deep feelings of inadequacy and fear others reject me or don't like me?

Do I seldom if ever sing, whistle or play a musical instrument? I have a feeling that critical negative people by and large, music is absent from their life as a general principle.

How did you score? If you answered yes to the majority of these questions the tendency might be that you are a critical type person who others may not really enjoy being with. Either that or you're just being overly down on yourself and answered everything because you've had a rough week.

If you answered no on a majority of these questions or maybe all of them perhaps that's an indication that you are a fairly positive cheerful person. Kind of a hugable individual who other people enjoy being around. Either that or you have an unrealistic view of yourself and you need to talk with somebody else in your family.

Jesus said that highly negative people are marked by two qualities. First, he says, they will receive back the negativity they give out. "In the same way you judge others you too will be judged. With the me assure you use it will be measured to you." If you are always downing someone else then other people are going to retaliate and down you. Someone has said, "Don't ever use a tomahawk on other people unless you yourself intend to get scalped." There is a sense that it's very difficult to cuddle up to a cactus. So if indeed you are a negative prickly person it's going to be something you receive back in turn.

The second thing the Lord says about highly negative people is that they tend to play down their own faults while playing up other's shortcomings. "*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when all the time there is a plank in your own eye.*" The Lord's sense of humor in comparison is really striking here. "*You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*" The Lord is saying that the negative person does indeed play up another person's faults and neglects their own shortcomings.

There always seems to be two names for vices that people have. One name is for the people other than me who do it. The other name is when I do the same thing. For example, when somebody else is being bullheaded and entrenched in their position, I'm simply being consistent. They are very proud but I have a good healthy positive self-image. They're hateful but I am justifiably angry. They are greedy but I am motivated. They are selfish, I'm simply protecting my own legitimate interests. They are gossipy but I am informative.

Jesus simply is saying here that the negative person sees the speck in someone else's eye while ignoring the log in their own. In other words, the critic takes the microscope to look at somebody else's fault but a telescope to look at his own. Jesus tells us the way out of being negative and critical person is to focus upon the need for change in our own life rather than the chances somebody else may need. That's why he says in verse 5 "*First take the plank out of your eye.*" Positive steps in becoming an other than negative person would be to take the questions which I gave and begin to seek the other answers than by the ones you gave if you had a high number of yes.

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A second etceteras life quality that the Lord is looking for is discernment. Verse 6 "*Do not give dogs what is sacred. Do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do they will trample them under their feet and then turn and tear you to pieces.*" Here I balance. On the one hand in verses 1-5, the Lord is telling us that we are to avoid being critical and judgmental. But on the other hand in verse 6 he tells us to use good judgment. There's a balance. Note that the critical negative person is something we're not to have but we are to be discerning. We're not to throw away our power of discerning. Some persons are indeed dogs and pigs, Jesus says, and we must be able to judge character sufficiently so that we do not let these people consume our time, our energies or trample on our values. On the one hand the Lord is telling us not to judge then on the other hand he's telling us to discern. There's a balance between those two things.

For example, when Herod of Galilee was going to try him in the moment on the Lord's way to the cross. Pilot sends Jesus over to Herod of Galilee and Herod asks him lots of questions but the scripture in Luke says Jesus answered him not a word. The Lord at that moment is living out his own teaching "*Do not give what is holy to pigs, do not cast what's holy before dogs.*" Herod had not responded to John the Baptist. He had had John beheaded. He had not responded to all the preaching and teaching of Jesus throughout Galilee where Herod reigned. Now Herod wanted Jesus to do some fancy trick. Jesus said nothing doing. You've had enough witness. I refuse to speak another word to you. Act first on what you know. He did not give to him what was holy.

How can we distinguish between a critical person and a discerning person? Both types of persons are involved in using judgement in assessing character. But the critical/negative person fails to succeed in their relationship to people while a discerning person does succeed in their relationships to people. I think the Lord gives us in talking about the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 23 a clear difference between a critical judgmental person versus a discerning person.

A critical judgmental person is marked by these qualities. They do not live by the rules or the guidelines they insist other people have. Thus they're inconsistent. A discerning person has the opposite kind of quality. They are tough or tougher on themselves than other people.

The second quality of a critical negative person is they load down other people with their idea of perfection but they are not an encouragement to those people to help them attain their goals for them. The discerning person is realistic in their own expectations of themselves and other people and provide positive encouragement and support to help that person attain.

The third quality in Matthew 23 of a critical negative person, a hypocrite, is that they are more concerned with outward appearance than inward realities. While the discerning person sees the positive inner potential and traits in someone else.

The critical negative person fourthly chooses to ignore their own failures and the Lord says that so very clearly in Matthew 23 when he announces to the scribes and Pharisees that the discerning person is keenly aware of their shortcomings and is vulnerable in sharing them.

Fifth, the critical negative person is filled with resentment and anger and hostility whereas the discerning person is marked by a basic life attitude of thanksgiving and praise and love and kindness.

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The apostle Paul had the marks of a discerning person. He continually had to assess as an apostle who he was going to choose to be co-workers. How he would deal with false teachers and those promoting false kind of lifestyle in the body. He had to deal with church problems. So Matthew 7:1-5 was not a teaching to Paul to throw a way all-critical discernment and simply be non-judgmental and totally permissive person. If there is no discernment then innocent people will get hurt and chaos will result. But Paul made choices because he came from the right inner quality of life. He could be a good discerner.

We all have choices to make in being a discerner. If you're a young person you need good discernment because you need to know who your friends will be, choose good friends. Discern who you're going to look to for guidance and what leadership in your life you're going to seek to model after. Who in the Christian community you want to have to be as an example to you. You are making choices about eventually who you may marry if you marry.

If you're an adult you're obviously making decisions about who you can trust. Whether you need to be firm or flexible in given situations. How much time you should allocate to various people in your life. What you should hold on to, let up on, let go of. The Lord is saying be a discerning person just don't be critical or judgmental.

Sometimes we have to make the difficult decisions that there are moments we have to pull out and say we've done the best we could and we need now to let things alone. Sometimes relationships end because a person is unwilling to receive the kinds of counsel and help that we might be able to provide for them.

A third etceteras quality that the Lord asks for is the presence of a persistent trust in God. Verses 7-12 *"Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. And to him who knocks the door will be open. Which of you if his son asks for bread will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake. If you then, though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in heaven given good gifts to those who ask him. In everything do to others what you would have them do to you. For this sums up the law and the prophets."*

Too often these words "ask," "seek" and "knock" are separated from the context of the Sermon on the Mount and therefore the meaning of what Jesus is saying gets distorted. You cannot take a passage of teaching and lift it out of its context. One must treat it within the sphere in which it belongs. All through this Sermon on the Mount, the Lord has been teaching us what to seek. The beatitudes have told us to seek a certain kind of quality and disposition and character. The salt and light teaching is motivated for us to ask God to help us to be an influence in our world. His teaching on inner righteousness has taught us about what we were to seek for in terms of handling the anger in our life, the sexual temptation, our marriages, verbal commitments, difficult people in our lives. His teaching on piety has taught us to seek to be the right kind of a person in terms of our giving and fasting and praying. His teaching on anxiety and worry has taught us to be a person who seeks ardently to trust him. We take all of that that has gone on so far in the Sermon on the Mount and bring it to bear now on this thing and what the Lord is saying to us is, Now take what I have said and diligently pursue that in your life. Go on asking, go on seeking, go on knocking and it will be given to you.

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This is not to say that the Lord is not giving us permission to ask for external things. Indeed what he is telling us is to be persistent people in prayer. But too often people take this scripture and let it relate to something external, financial material or relational benefit that they are seeking. Then when the Lord maybe doesn't answer the request as we thought he should after persistent asking we get mad at the Lord and say, "Did you really mean what you said?" and all the time maybe we didn't adequately understand what he was saying. That the Lord's concern is always more on the internal changes within us than the external things that are happening to us.

What he is asking us to do instead of saying to him, "Lord, change this, change that." He is asking us to focus in on the internal qualities he is seeking to develop in us. I love the account of prayer in Acts 4 where Peter and John have been put in prison for the first time. It's a very threatening time in their lives. Peter was a person who did not behave well under pressure anyway. It must have potentially created some anxiety for them. They're released from prison and near the end of that chapter they gather with the disciples who are meeting in a home for prayer. They recount what has happened to them and then they pray. There are a lot of things they could have prayed for. A lot of things they could have prayed for God to change. Instead their prayer on that occasion was simply this: Lord change us. Lord make us bold. They didn't pray for God to do anything about the circumstances. They prayed for the Lord to do something in them to give them strength to face the circumstances.

In all praying there is balance. Obviously God gives us permission at times to pray for a change of circumstances. We ought to go with that full steam. But God is fundamentally, always concerned with changing our inward perception of things. If we will ask, seek and knock in these a re as he indeed answers and does not disappoint us.

I'm convinced that God is committed to answer every prayer that involves changing us into the likeness of Christ. If I sincerely ask God to change me, he is deeply committed to answering that prayer. He is committed to answering all prayer that extends his kingdom. Therefore I focus my prayers in these areas. I persistently and doggedly pursue through prayer and through asking God that his kingdom will move into my life and into the world in which I live. I know he gives good gifts and he will not disappoint me in those prayers.

The present tense of the verbs may be translated "go on seeking, go on asking, go on knocking. Reminding us that prayer is a process. Change may not happen overnight. We fail many times but the Lord will keep us back on our feet and keep us going so continue to be persistent. What the Lord is saying in these etceteras qualities is giving us room to continue to grow knowing that all that he said in chapter 5 and 6 really ceases to have application if we continue to be negative and critical person. Or if we're persons who lack discernment or if we're persons who lack persistent trust in God. He gives us those little qualities that we might develop more beautifully in our inward life.

God wants us to be a people that not only name the name of Christ but a people who have the person of Christ radiating and living within us.

Our Father we thank you for these moments we have to again look at the word of Jesus and apply that word to our hearts. Make this real. If we ourselves are a person of criticalness and negativeness that are not a pleasure to you and to others we pray that you would move

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your generosity into our lives. Bring changes. If we're living with people that are this way give us the ability to discern how best to help them. To encourage them, to care for them and support them. Make us, Lord, ever dependent upon you. There are people here that want you to do some things in their life and that has not yet occurred. You're calling them today through this word to continued persistence. Knowing that as they are persistent what they seek will indeed be given by you. In the time where we have to share around the communion table we ask your blessing and we ask that your grace would be here in great abundance. In the name of the Lord. Amen.