



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“On Criticism – Censorious and Sensible,” Matthew 7:1-6 – TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading is Matthew chapter 7, verse 1 through verse 6. Matthew chapter 7, verse 1 through verse 6. This is the continuation of the Sermon on the Mount, and in the preceding chapter, we have summarized man’s duty to God. And now, the Lord turns more directly to man’s duty to man. Verse 1 begins,

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

(The term “mote” refers to a splinter, a little piece of wood that might fall off of a large beam that could be used as a rafter in a house). The fourth verse,

“Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto

the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and lacerate you.”

May God bless this reading of his word.

Our subject for this morning in our continuation of our exposition on the Sermon on the Mount is “On Criticism: Censorious and Sensible.” Not many texts are more familiar than “judge not, that ye be not judged.” It is often cited by those who stand outside the Christian faith. And it is often misunderstood by them, and it is often misunderstood by us, too.

Generally speaking, I think that the average interpretation of this text is, one must always think the best of others: judge not, that you be not judged. And therefore, it’s a dangerous thing to pass judgment on anything that pertains to someone else. Or, perhaps we might, in the exposition of it, given by others in popular language, say that it taken to mean that all judgment of others is totally forbidden. That’s a serious error. It’s not only a serious error, but it leads to heresy and false doctrine, and the heresy and false doctrine that might destroy the testimony of the Christian church.

In fact, it is the failure of individuals within the Christian church to exercise discipline, based on biblical, discriminating judgment that has led to a great deal of difficulties that exist in the leading churches of our day. You can, for example, trace a failure to apply the truths of holy Scripture with regard to judgment, discriminating judgment. You can trace the failure of some of the leading churches to this very fact.

I think it is fair to say that the difficulties that exist in the Missouri Synod, Lutheran Church are traceable to the fact that someone in the past did not exercise discipline at the time that it should have been exercised. The failure that has existed in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States may, in my opinion – it is only an opinion – may be traced to the fact that at the appropriate time Scriptural discipline was not applied.

This is of the greatest importance that we recognize that the Bible teaches most strongly that when the saints begin to turn from holy Scripture, it is the responsibility of the leaders of the churches to exercise the discipline set forth there. I’m not suggesting, of course, that we increase the fervency of our criticism. We’re already most competent in criticizing, and particularly in the personal sphere. I fully concur with Moffet’s rendering of Romans chapter 14 and verse 13, “Let us stop criticizing one another.” And I am not suggesting at all, as I mentioned several weeks ago, that we should seek to cultivate a gift of criticism. Most of us already excel at that point. But it is significant that this text does bear upon a proper understanding of the relationship of criticism to the local church.

Another question is raised in this passage. You probably noticed it as you read the 6th verse. Is the gospel that we proclaim for all the lost, or should all the lost be evangelized at all times? Would Jesus be completely happy with, Here’s life, Dallas? Now I think that question’s raised here in the 6th verse. Well, let’s look at the verses now, and first of all, we’re going to look at verses 1 and 2, and just for the sake of an outline, let me sum up what I think the Lord Jesus is saying.

Here in these two verses, it seems to me he is saying we must avoid a spiteful criticism: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” This text comes as something of a startling surprise reading through the Sermon on the Mount. I understand fully why a chapter division has been made here, because there are some who have looked at the first verse of chapter 7 and have wondered if it had any connection at all with the verses that precede.

Now you know that in the Old Testament, when the law was given to Israel, God gave the law in a kind of two-fold pattern. The first of the commandments has to do with man’s duty to God, and then the second part of the commandments has to do with man’s duty to man. And you’ll notice that throughout the Bible, we have these relationships. For example, just recently when we were expounding the Lord’s Prayer, the first petitions have to do with the Lord. The second part of the collections of petitions has to do with

man. When you read the epistles of the New Testament, the first parts of the epistles often have to do with divine doctrine, or doctrine that relates to our relationship to God.

And then in the latter part of the epistles, we have truth that pertains to our relationship to men. And it seems to me that this is probably the analysis of the Sermon on the Mount that we should follow. That is, that in chapter 6, after a somewhat introductory chapter in chapter 5, we have been given that part of the truth which tells us what man’s duty to God is, and now we turn to man’s duty to man, judge not that ye be not judged.

Now we turn to man’s duty to man. Judge not, that ye be not judged. Now this request that the Lord Jesus makes in verse 1 is not a request that we abandon the use of our critical faculties, but it has to do with the habit of censorious criticism. What he has in mind is the “mote-hunter” – if I may put it that way – the person who, as a Christian individual, seeks to just naturally discover the things in other Christians of which he may be critical. There are a number of mote-hunters always in Christian bodies, and all of us, probably, at one time or another, fall into a state of the soul in which this comes to us most naturally. And if we have not been maintaining our relationship with the Lord properly, it’s usually at that time that we tend to become critical, become mote-hunters. So we look for those little splinters, those little pieces of sawdust that may be evident in the lives of others, not realizing, the Lord Jesus said, that we have a plank or a beam in our own eye.

Now, the text has been misunderstood by some important people. Tolstoy construed this exhortation to mean, “Pull down your law courts”—judge not that ye be not judged, and therefore we should not have any law courts. But the Lord Jesus has in mind private judgment here, not public judgment. So, judge not that ye be not judged is not a reference to the law courts. It is directed to that habit of censorious and spiteful criticism that seeks to find flaws in the characters of our believing friends and others. Judge not that ye be not judged.

The Lord Jesus in John chapter 7 and verse 24 states that we should not judge according to appearance, but we should judge righteous judgment. That is a text, I think, that should be put with one. We are to judge righteous judgment. Why should we not engage in the habit of spiteful criticism? Why, the Lord continues, with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you again. Now there are other reasons for not judging than the ones that are set forth in holy Scripture here, but these are very telling.

Criticism, someone has said, is a bludgeon, but it is also a boomerang. It has a nasty habit of coming back and hurting the person who throws it at others. The other day, someone came up to me and said, “Have you heard about the man who bought a new boomerang? But unfortunately, when he threw the old one away it returned and killed him.” Now there are, in our acts of criticism, implicit, the things that the Lord Jesus sets forth here. The kind of judgment with which we judge others is the judgment to which we shall be exposed. And, the measure by which we measure our criticism out to others, is the measure by which we shall be judged by others and by God.

It seems to me that – I’m not sure I can prove this; I can only appeal to authority – the great mass of the commentators feel that in verse 1, the judgment comes from God, and in verse 2, the judgment comes from men. Judge not that ye be not judged by God. And then with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you again by men.

Now the reason for this is that in Luke chapter 6, in verse 38, in a text that is very close to this second verse, we have specific reference made to judgment of men. There, the Lord Jesus says, “Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down and shaken together, and running over shall men give into your bosom, for with the same measure that ye measure it shall be measured to you again.” So in the light of the statement from Luke chapter 6, and the reference there to judgment by men, it has been thought that verse 1 has to do with judgment by God, and verse 2 has to do with

judgment by men. But the lesson is very plain. The lesson is that if we judge in a censorious fashion, if we develop the habit of this spiteful criticism, then we shall be judged by God. And furthermore, we shall also be judged by men. There is, in other words, a principle of mutual reciprocity in judgment, and therefore it is something that Christians should avoid.

Back in chapter 6 and verse 14 and 15 we read, “For if we forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” And there is a kind of reciprocity here. This is so beautifully illustrated throughout the Bible that’s strange that we fail to remember it in our endeavor to be as critical as we possibly can.

You’ll remember Ishmael, in Genesis chapter 16, whose hand was against every man, with the inevitable consequence that every man’s hand was against his. We read in the Bible of Adoni-Bezek, who is referred to in Judges chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, whose enemies cut off his thumbs and his great toes. Why? Because on his confession he had treated seventy other kings in exactly the same way. And perhaps the most outstanding illustration of reciprocity in judgment is the judgment that came to pass on Haman, who built a gallows in order to put Mordecai the Jew upon it, in order to discover to his chagrin and to his death that the gallows that he had built for others were the gallows upon which he himself was to hang.

Judge not that ye be not judged. You can be sure that you cannot violate the divine principles. There is a reciprocity in judgment, and when we judge, we expose ourselves to these principles. Shakespeare would say, “He was hoist with his own petard.” And so often, in our judgment of others we expose our self to judgment in the same way.

There is another reason not expressed in these verses why we should not judge, and it is expressed for us in the 5th verse: “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” It’s

evident that our judgment is fallible. The hypocrite is blinded by failure to exercise self-judgment. And furthermore, we do not know the motives of other individuals, and we cannot know how to effectively judge the life of someone else in actions that in themselves are not contrary to holy Scriptures.

I guess that the most beautiful illustration of the fallibility of human judgment, and the blindness that so often comes to us in the midst of our criticism of others is the story of David. David, when men should have been out on the battlefield, stayed at home. And one evening as he went out, he looked out over the balcony of the palace, and he saw a beautiful woman, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. And you know what happened. He took Bathsheba to himself, and as result of that wicked and adulterous union, Bathsheba became pregnant.

Now faced with an additional problem, David inquired about Uriah. Had him come home. Uriah was such a faithful servant, he would not even enter his house while men were on the battlefield. Finally, David sent word to one of his men, “Put Uriah in the place where the battle is thickest, and be sure and see that he is killed.” That was carried out.

David suffered as a result of this. The Psalms tell us how he suffered. He suffered terribly in his experience with God because, as anyone knows who has been out of fellowship with God, you cannot be happy out of fellowship with God. For a year, he was deeply disturbed within. He describes his experiences in the 32nd Psalm, speaks about how that his whole life seemed to be dry, and how he was suffering.

Finally, Nathan came to him, and the prophet told him a little story. He said, King David, there were two men, one was a rich man, one was a poor man. The rich man had everything that he wanted. The poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb. He said a traveler came to visit the rich man. He hated to spend on the traveler any of his own property, so he took the one little ewe lamb of the poor man and slew it, and was hospitable to the stranger.

Now David became very incensed as it was told to him. He said that that man shall surely die who did such a dastardly thing as that, and Nathan responded with his famous words, “Thou art the man.”

You see, in the midst of our sin, and in the midst of our lack of fellowship with God, our judgment is so fallible that it is impossible for us to see clearly. And in the midst of our criticism it is well to remember that our own judgment is fallible, and the judgment with which we judge others is the judgment with which we expose ourselves.

Montaigne, in one of his essays, tells a story about King Cambyses of Persia. There was a judge in Persia, many, many hundreds of years ago, who as a result of bribery gave a decision in a trial that was obviously wicked and evil. When word came to King Cabyses, he determined to execute that judge, which he did. But then he engaged in a rather unique form of teaching for all judges of the kingdom. He had the man executed, but he had his skin flayed. And he took the skin of the judge who had taken the bribe and had not executed impartial judgment, and he covered a chair with the skin of the man who had judged in this way. And it was the very chair in which all the judges who pronounced judgment had to sit when they pronounced their judgment. It was his way of impressing upon them the fact that judgment must be righteous judgment. Perhaps, the lesson is, when you sit in judgment upon the saints, remember whose seat you’re sitting upon, or something like that.

Now the second lesson is that we must exercise self-criticism. Very interestingly – to me, at least, being a student of the Greek New Testament for a few years – is that in the verses 3, 4, and 5, there are four different words for “seeing” or “observation.” For example, in the 3rd verse we read, “Why beholdest thou the mote which is in thy brother’s eye?” That is a Greek word that means, simply, to look at something, just as I am looking at you. It means to look without thinking, and that, of course, is applicable also to me. “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not” –

this is a word that means “to fasten down upon.” You look out and you see the splinter in someone else’s eye, and you do not spend a great deal of time thinking about it, but you do not consider – fasten your mind down upon – the beam that is in your eye.

And then he goes on to say, “Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull the mote out of thine eye and behold (here’s the third word for seeing, and this is a word that means, in its root, “to see with perception”) a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then thou shalt see clearly”—and this is the emphatic form of the word translated “beholdest” in verse 3 (the first of these words for observation). So that to see clearly, one must cast the beam out of one’s eye. These four words for observation illuminate the emphasis and stress the passage.

Now we must exercise self-criticism, the Lord Jesus says, for our own good. Why beholdest thou the mote that it is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? This has been called the parable of the mote and the beam, or of the sawdust and the plank. And someone has called it the parable of the splinter and the plank.

Now, I’m sure that when the Lord Jesus first said this, this must have produced a chuckle, because the idea of a person looking out and seeing a little splinter in someone else’s eye, when he himself has a rafter protruding from his own eye, must have produced something of a chuckle as the Lord gave this to the disciples. But this judgment, this self-criticism, should be exercised for the good of others. Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye. It is possible to be critical in an approved sense. And, it is evident that the requirements for criticism in the approved sense are that we ourselves be spiritual, and that we have cast the beam out of our own eyes previous to that.

I think the text that the Apostle Paul would have put next to this is the passage of Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1, where speaking to the Galatians, he states, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual”—I think if we were expounding Paul,

we would say that expression, “ye who are spiritual” would mean, “ye that have removed the plank or the beam from your eye”—“ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, remembering (or considering) thyself lest thou be tempted.” So, the attitude of judgment of the saints is a biblical attitude. But before one engages in the criticism of the saints, he must be sure he has removed the plank from his own eye.

And reflecting upon the fact that he had a plank in his own eye, that should give him some sympathy and consideration for the brother or sister who is out of fellowship with God before he speaks to them. And incidentally, the first step in criticism is not when you see a splinter in someone else’s eye to rush off to a third party, but the Scripture teaches that you who are spiritual should restore that person. Your responsibility is to go to them. And so even if it were true that they have a splinter in their own eyes, and you do not go to them first, you have violated the Scriptural principles of judgment, even if you’re absolutely certain that this is a true splinter, and you go to some third party, you’ve only exposed yourself to the judgment of God as a result of it. Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

Well now we come to the third and final of the lessons that come from this passage. We must employ sensible criticism. “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and lacerate you.” To many this verse implies the worst kind of intolerance and prejudice. Look at it for a moment. Do not give that which is holy unto the dogs. Do not cast your pearls before swine. Does that not seem to teach the worst of intolerance and prejudice? Can you imagine the Lord Jesus saying, “Do not take the precious truths of holy Scripture and give them to the unbelievers”? Does not that seem to be intolerant? Does that not seem to be prejudiced?

Why is this text given? Why, it is given to limit the range of the application of “judge not.” It is true that we are to judge not that we be not judged. But we are not

thereby to assume that no criticism is justifiable. And as a matter of fact, there is a particular kind of criticism, and action that follows it, that must be carried out. Now of course, it is necessary, in order to determine who are dogs and who are swine in order to make judgments. It is impossible to do otherwise. People do not go around with a tag on them, “I am a dog.” Others do not go around saying, “I am a hog.” It is necessary for us to pass judgment in order to know who are the dogs and who are the swine.

Therefore, sensible criticism is justifiable on our Lord’s own words.

And then, the action follows as a result of the criticism. Do not give that which is holy to the dogs. Do not cast pearls before swine. So this text, then, is designed to limit the application of “judge not.” There are occasions upon which we must judge. This 6th verse really is a rather curious verse, and I think that a lot of people miss the force of it because they miss the force of the terms “dogs” and “swine.” Now, what are these terms “dogs” and “swine” intended to say to us?

Well, when you go back in the Old Testament, and you read the book of Leviticus, you remember there are sections that have to do with the clean and unclean animals. Dogs were unclean animals, and swine are unclean animals. So these are unclean animals. These unclean animals are unbelievers. They represent unbelievers. They are called by the Lord Jesus, “dogs,” and they are called, “swine.”

The Apostle Paul refers to this in Philippians chapter 3 and verse 2, where he warns the Philippian Christians, “Beware of dogs.” This is not a reference to the fact that in the east there were thousands and thousands of dogs that prowled the streets. This is no reference to present-day Britain where thousands and thousands of dogs prowl the streets. This is a reference to the legalistic false teachers, the unbelievers, as he goes on to say, beware of the dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision – that is, individuals who are practicing circumcision but are practicing unscripturally, so that circumcision has become only concision.

So the statement, then, do not give that which is holy unto the dogs, and do not cast your pearls before swine is a reference to the fact that we are not to expose to the unbelievers the holy things of God, the pearls of divine truth.

Well, now, the question of swine – I think I should cite the text which has to do with it, too – and that is 2 Peter 2 and verse 22 in which Peter writes, in the second epistle, “But it has happened unto them according to the true Proverb, ‘the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow (the female swine) who was washed to her wallowing in the mire.’” So then, dogs and swine are unclean animals.

What, then, does the Lord mean when he says, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs. Do not cast your pearls before swine”? He says this, incidentally, in a very emphatic way in the Greek text. You could translate it, “Never think of giving that which is holy to the dogs.” What does this teach?

Why, this teaches discrimination in evangelism. Discrimination in evangelism. Now I say to you, this is a teaching that is rarely, if ever, taught. I dare say that if you have taken a class in personal evangelism, you have rarely, if ever, heard a lecture on keeping quiet. And you probably have never heard a lecture on, “Do not give truth to the unsaved.” Yet that is not what our Lord says. Give not that which is holy to the dogs. Do not cast your pearls before swine. Discrimination in evangelism.

It is evident from this, of course, that not everybody is to be saved. That’s a very unpopular thing for the permissive age in which we live. The idea that Christianity is exclusive in its teaching is a fundamental stumbling block to the mentality of our age. The idea that at times the gospel should not even be given to certain people – that is a very, very stiff stumbling block for the mentality of our times, and I submit to you that that is precisely what our Lord is saying. Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, do not cast your pearls before swine.

Now it’s possible that there are some of you that participated in Here’s Life, Dallas! I am not against what was done, incidentally. I am not trying to attack Campus Crusade

for Christ. I admire very much the diligence with which that organization has sought to reach the world for Christ. But I dare say that you never heard anyone, when you received your telephone call – I received one, incidentally – when you received your telephone call, I dare say that you did not have an opening statement like this: “I have a beautiful message to give, but I need to ask one question, first; are you a dog? Do you belong to that collective company known as the swine?” No, this passage teaches, however, discrimination in evangelism.

Now it seems to me that we must, in our study of holy Scripture, and in our Christian life, have a part of our Christian life that conforms to this. This indicates that not everybody is to be saved – that’s one truth that emerges from it, just an incidental truth emerges from it. Over in chapter 15 and verse 13, the Lord Jesus says much the same thing again. I know you might be thinking, well this is just an isolated verse, Dr. Johnson and perhaps you’re making more of it than is justified. But listen to what our Lord says in chapter 15 and verse 13 in connection with the Pharisees, “But he answered and said, ‘Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.’” Did you notice that? “Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.” In other words, there are some plants that God has not planted. There is a discrimination made in God’s dealings with men.

But notice the next verse, “Let them alone”—let them alone—“they are blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Let them alone, the Lord Jesus said, of these rebellious Pharisees. Let them alone. Now, that would seem, then, to indicate this important truth. All truth is not for pagans, or the truth is not for all the pagans. In other words, there is a necessity for us to exercise discrimination in evangelism.

Now again you might be saying, “I’m not sure, Dr. Johnson. You haven’t really convinced me.” That’s alright. I don’t expect you to be convinced from the fact that I take a few minutes and give my interpretation of the word of God. My interpretation of

the word of God is only my interpretation. I stand to fall before the Lord for my interpretation. You stand to fall because of yours, not for mine. It is your responsibility to interpret holy Scripture, too. I’m going to point you to an illustration in which our Lord Jesus followed this methodology, and I want you to notice it is in Scripture, and it is not an illustration of any other person but our Lord Jesus himself. And this is the reason why I think we must have a postscript on all books on evangelism dealing with our relationship to the dogs and the swine, and the necessity of discovering the means by which we discern them, and also in the application of evangelism, do them.

Now the passage in which I am going to turn is a passage with which you are very familiar. It is our Lord dealing with one of the most important men of his day. A man who was influential man, a man who, if he had been converted, would have been a very strategic individual to see saved. Have you often heard people say, “Now it’s extremely important that we reach this class of people, because if we do, then they will influence so many others”? So this is a strategic evangelistic move.

Well what more strategic evangelistic move would have been possible for our Lord than to deal face to face with a Herod who was asking for information about spiritual things? I can see the ripples that would move through the saints: “The Lord is speaking through Herod today! What will he say? What a wonderful opportunity, for if we get Herod saved, the King of Israel saved, what a tremendous difference that’s going to make!” So, we’ll see how the Lord took advantage of his opportunity.

“And when Herod saw Jesus,” we read in Luke chapter 23 and verse 8, “He was exceedingly glad”—notice that; he was glad—“for he was desirous to see him for a long time, for he had heard many things of him, and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.” Then he (Herod) questioned him (the Lord) in many words. He asked him many questions, asking the Lord to unfold the answers to his questions, many questions. And so what did our Lord do?

Why, he whipped out the Four Spiritual Laws and instructed [laughter] and instructed him in the truth of God. No. He pointed him to Here’s Life, Dallas! or, in this case, Jerusalem. No. We read in the text of Scripture, “And he answered him, nothing.” Nothing. Do you catch the force of that? He answered him, nothing. And the Chief Priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him.

So here is the great climactic opportunity, Herod asking our Lord many questions, the Lord Jesus not even saying, “Have you found it?” Not a word came from his mouth. He answered him nothing. Why? Why is Herod receiving no answer? Because Herod is a dog. Herod belongs to the company of the swine. Now how do we know this?

Well, the reason we know this is that Herod already had information concerning the Lord Jesus. He had already had information concerning the ministry he had performed. The Lord Jesus had already sent him word. You go back to previous chapters in the Book of Luke, and you discover that there had already been indirect contact between Herod and this Christian movement, and even with the Lord himself. This was not the first time in which Herod was face to face with the truth concerning Jesus Christ. That’s why he was so glad to see him.

He wanted to ask him some questions about miracles. Notice: about miracles. He’d like to see him perform a miracle before his eyes. He was very interested in the sensational value of miracles. He would liked to have seen the confirmation of the fact that he had a charismatic ministry, but Herod was a person who received truth and, having failed to respond to truth, was the subject of the hardening action of God. And by virtue of a refusal to respond to the message of the word that had come to him, Herod has reached the place where he falls into the category of a dog, and no more truth is Herod’s, for Herod now has passed the point at which the word of God is applicable to him. Any kind of evangelism that does not recognize the fact that evangelism is necessary is not biblical evangelism.

Now, of course, this has nothing whatsoever to do with the presentation of the word to someone who has never heard the message concerning the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus says, “Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, don’t cast your pearls before swine,” he refers to individuals who have heard that message and have failed to respond to it, who are in a state of rebellion against the truth of God.

This, incidentally, not only teaches us that the truth of God is not for every pagan but for only some pagans, it teaches us by inference that prayer itself is legitimate prayer only when it arises from the heart of a believer unless it should be, of course, the prayer for salvation.

Thomas Watson, one of the Puritans, said, once, “Prayer that is faithless is fruitless.” Bishop Gore used to say, “We are not to shriek the highest truths of religion at the street corner.” I think the Lord’s words apply to the teaching of those who have failed to respond to the word of God. We are not to give our holy things to the dogs, we are not to cast pearls before swine.

Just recently, in an interfaith seminar at Washington and Lee University, the Professor of Systematic Theology at one of our former evangelical institutions in the South, speaking to that group of people affirmed that the time had come for Christianity to reevaluate its claim to being a universal religion in relation to other world religions. In this interfaith seminar, Dr. Donald G. Dawe, Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond affirmed that Christianity is not unique. Christianity is one of the world religions, and Christianity must recognize the fact that it is more honest of them to acknowledge the fact that they are not universal in scope and they are not exclusive in their beliefs. And therefore, they should recognize the validity of the other religions of the world.

Now, it seems to me in the light of this, that from the standpoint of Scripture, we may apply to such men the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 7 and verse 6: do not give that which is holy unto the dogs, and do not cast your pearls before swine.

Why? Why we read in the latter part of the verse, “Lest they trample them under their feet.” This is a very vivid picture. It’s a picture of the pigs and the hogs before whom you put pearls, they look at them, and they think, perhaps, they look like peas and try to bite them. But, being pearls, find them not very nourishing. Or, perhaps like corn, they find them not very nourishing, and so they spit them out on the ground and trample upon them.

And then the picture of the dogs, turning and lacerating those who feed them that which is holy. So it’s a very vivid picture that anyone who grew up on the farm—I did not, so I must ask your pardon to appreciate this metaphor as I should, describe it as I should—but nevertheless, it’s a very vivid metaphor of the hogs and the dogs taking the things that have been given to them and spitting them out and biting those who have been seeking to feed them. This is one reason why, in the presentation of holy Scripture, very indiscriminating Christians have only exposed themselves to increasing antagonism on the part of the dogs and swine. This is one reason why in presentation of the truth to the dogs, they rather have not only not responded, but they have attacked you.

Have you ever had that experience? Well, I have. I have often had that experience. Until I think I haven’t learned this lesson fully, no doubt, but until I remember this lesson, don’t give that which is holy unto the dogs, and don’t cast your pearls before swine. They’ll ridicule the truth. And when a man like the professor to whom I referred speaks things like this, it’s the barking of the dogs, and it’s the grunting of the swine.

May I conclude? The best critic is, of course, the Holy Spirit. Judgment is best left to him. It is wise for us to remember in all of our judging, that the judgment that is impartial can only come from God. And therefore, to put a halt upon the tongue is a very desirable thing. Oswald Chambers has said, “The only person who can criticize human beings is the Holy Spirit.” And he goes on to say, “If I had let God remove the beam from my own outlook by his mighty grace, I will carry with me the implicit sunlight confidence,

that what God has done for me he can easily do for you, because you have only a splinter. I had a log of wood in my eye.”

The elders are to be eternally vigilant in the true judgment of the dogs and the swine. And finally, you do notice that there are pearls. There is that which is holy. And this word pearls points to Jesus Christ’s evaluation of the true riches, the great truths of the word of God.

What do you do if you think it’s possible for you to have pearls? Well, you seek to obtain them, don’t you? And when you have obtained pearls, what do you do with pearls? You guard them, zealously. You value them, highly. Well let me assure you, that when the Lord Jesus says do not give that which is holy – the holy things – to the dogs, don’t cast your pearls before swine, he is telling us that the great truths of the word of God are holy things, and they are pearls. And they are to be fought for, they are to be dug for, and when they are obtained, they are to be kept, they are to be held onto, and they are to be used for the glory of God.

May God help us to evaluate the true pearls. They are found in holy Scripture. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful, Lord, for these words of practical instruction from the Lord Jesus, and we pray that our own judgment may not be spiteful, may be self-critical judgment, and sensible.

If there should be someone here who does not know Jesus Christ, we pray, God that the truths of the shedding of the blood for the remission of sins may come home in the power of the Holy Spirit to them, and may they turn to him whom to know is life eternal. May grace, mercy and peace be with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.