

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, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?10 "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?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 what is good to those who ask Him! 12* ¶ "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

In this part of Jesus' sermon He once again addresses prayer.

This can be a bit difficult for us to understand at first look because the information as it is presented seems to say some things about prayer, especially in the first two verses that absolutely guarantee the listeners that their prayers will be answered exactly in the way that they are presented.

If I were to open my Bible and read theses verses as a stand alone text or if it were what some call my devotional reading for the day, separate from any other verses, how would I come to an understanding of what Jesus is teaching? Could I come to a proper understanding of this part of the Sermon if this were all the information that I was given?

Let's try and see what occurs.

The first thing I read is "ask" and then I am given a guarantee, "and it will be given to you." But then I have to ask myself "ask what?" Just looking at this verse it would appear that I can ask anything because the it is not qualified by any other statement. So, I might conclude that Jesus is going to give me anything that I ask for. Now, don't get ahead of me here because you know what some other Scripture says. We are looking at this text and this verse to see what it tells us and sadly although there are other scriptures to help us, many Christians teach this passage as a guarantee that God gives us anything that we want and of course they have an equally untrue answer as to why we end up not getting it.

Jesus does not quote from any other text regarding these words and at least has not yet given us any other information if we are only looking at verse 7.

So if I understand the word ask then I know what I am to do and I have a guaranteed result.

So the natural reading of the verse then tells me to seek and if I do so I will find.

The question I have to ask is “seek what to find what?” Again, I have nothing to qualify what I am to seek and to find.

At least when I ask, I know that I am to communicate something to someone.

Next I am told to knock and it will be opened. What am I knocking on, a door, a window, a gate or maybe someone’s head? It is not qualified but at least with knock and open I know I might be being taught by the use of a metaphor to give me a picture in my mind of what I am supposed to do.

And then if I really do a little extra work with word study I might find out that the three verbs, ask, seek and knock are in a present tense that tells to me to keep on asking, keep on seeking and to keep on knocking. Now this gives me a clue that Jesus likes us to not give up and to be persistent but I have still not answered the most necessary questions? What am I asking for, what am I seeking and what am I knocking on?

However I do know that I am to do all three constantly or habitually.

So at this juncture of my study I read on.

9 "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone

Jesus is now, by using an illustration, showing that in a father and son relationship, a father will not deliberately give his son something that is not in any way related to a specific request.

So if a son asks his father directly or seeks out his father for something or knocks to gain entry into the father’s presence, the father is going to respond and his response is going to be in like kind. This idea is repeated:

10 "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he

So we now know, through the use of these illustrations that the prayer request is to be of a specific nature with an expectation of a specific response.

However, it still seems that I am guaranteed that what I ask for will be given, at least according to this text as far as we have gone in breaking it down.

So our next step is to continue with the next idea in the text.

* "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 what is good to those who ask Him!

Now Jesus gives us a rather blunt contrast about human fathers, and the Heavenly

Father. Now remember the audience and who is the primary audience for this sermon.

He is denouncing the hypocrites but even more so laying a foundation for the norms of the Christian life for those who will become His true disciples in the days ahead and in the years to come until His kingdom is consummated.

The startling truth that is first revealed is that Jesus calls those whom He is teaching evil. If, as is the case, you are evil, even you will know how to give good gifts to your children. This is quite a statement. First of all the self righteous hypocrites in the crowd would not in any way consider themselves evil as a qualitative term. They would not accept themselves as inherently wicked. O they would acknowledge by the fact of their sacrifices that they have sinned but that does not mean that they are rotten to the core. That would betray their ignorance of the Scriptures, once again. Jesus has already proven in this sermon how biblically illiterate the hypocrites were as they participated in the theater of piety.

Is this any different today? "What do you mean I am evil and wicked and depraved in my very nature as a human being. Look at all the good I do especially for my family."

But Jesus says we can be evil and give good gifts to our children. And this does not mean that we are all being as evil as we are capable of being.

Think of an extreme illustration. A Mafiosi is married and has children. They have every good gift a father could give to his children and yet he is a cold blooded murderer. A mother works hard and provides all she can for her family and gives her children good gifts and is having an illegitimate relationship with another man. Pastors are giving the good gift of the word to their congregations and then they run off with the church secretary or a deacon's wife and divorce their spouse. These are every day occurrences of one sort or another. Yes, many good gifts are given to children by us who are evil. And we are all evil and wicked from the time of our conception until we die unless we are saved from our sin by the grace of God. Jesus could have quoted David here if He saw the crowd getting hostile,

Ps. 51:3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

This is David's confirmed understanding in the Old Testament of what is found in the New testament in Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But, when God is our Father, who is Heaven, Jesus says He will give to us. And this is the clue we have been looking for concerning what we are to ask for, what we are to seek, and why we are knocking.

We are asking God our Father for good gifts, we are seeking good gifts from God our Father and we are knocking to gain entry to the good gifts that God has stored for us. good gifts that are so much better than anything we as evil ones could ever give our children.

Now that we know we are asking God for good gifts we can get closer to understanding what the good gifts are.

Are the good gifts anything that I might believe are good gifts from God. Can the gifts be that arbitrary? What if what I believe something should be a good gift from God and it is not what God would classify as a good gift.

And what about the sense of getting what I ask, seek and knock for?

Well, any good sermon has themes that run through it and all points are connected to make the final truth understood.

Jesus has taught thus far that which marks a true disciple in Christ's kingdom.

He used the word blessed to designate those who receive certain things from God.

Mt.5 :3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4* "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5* "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6* "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7* "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8* "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9* "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10* "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11* "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

12* "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Then we are told that we will be able to be salt and light in the world because of this blessedness. He lets us know that He has a great concern for us in the matters of the heart and makes it very clear to us as to how we maintain a heart that is pleasing to God. He gives us clear examples of what pleases him and what does not concerning true and false worship and religious practice.

He then proceeds to actually give us a model for prayer, that includes having a right heart in the matters of sin and forgiveness and that if this is followed it can only mean we are praying the will of God and so our prayers will be heard and answered.

So now, Jesus says, if we persist in prayer by *asking* that these good gifts of God manifest themselves in our lives we shall have them. If we *seek* these things that are good gifts from God we will find them. If we *knock* on the door of God's good gift house the door will be opened because all of these things that Jesus has taught in the sermon on the mount are good gifts from God to those whom He calls the blessed, His favored ones and, **how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!**

For any of us who have been listening to Jesus' Sermon up to now it seems to be overwhelming to be a disciple of Christ and an heir to the kingdom. Imagine what it must have been like for them to hear these words and how demanding they are. And they are just as demanding for us. But here Jesus is saying that in prayer that is constant and persistent in asking God for His good gifts is the key to being able to live as Christ demands. As He says but I say unto you, on the one hand, here He says is the means by which you can live as my disciples.

John Broadus has said, "One may be a truly industrious man, and yet poor in temporal things, but one cannot be a praying man and yet be poor in spiritual things."

How great is the grace of god that is all sufficient for us as the children of God.

There is no other way of living that is as demanding as yet provides for all that is demanded. What god demands He gives the ability to accomplish Praise God!!

So often our praying is reckless and unfocused. Too often it is selfish as James says:

James 4:2.You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

3* You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

This is nothing but a commentary on what Jesus taught about prayer.

When we pray for God' good gifts it is obvious that we intend to spend them or use them for the glory of God and His kingdom, *thy* kingdom come *thy* will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus is not just giving us general instructions on prayer>He is giving us very specific teaching on prayer that is essential for living as God intends for us to live and the quality of our Christian lives will depend greatly on how we do what Christ has taught us concerning praying for God's good gifts.

How different this is from the self-gratifying and unbiblical praying that is taught in so many name it and claim it books like *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkerson and on the TV and radio.

By far, the favorite doctrine of all Word of Faith teachers, used over and over again by those asking for money to fund their organizations, is claimed to be found in Matthew 18:19 where the following is stated:

"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."

The claim is made that if two or more Christians agree about a specific issue, then whatever that issue might be, when stated to God in faith as a prayer request, it must be accomplished by God according to the wishes of the believers. This is claimed to be the *Prayer of Agreement* or "*bringing our faith into agreement with yours*" or "*releasing the power of the prayer of agreement.*" When used by the leadership of Word of Faith organizations, it is stated that they and their associates or organization will agree with the prayer requests that are made known to them, and that the power of their *Prayer of Agreement* with those requests will cause those requests to be fulfilled by God, according to what they claim is stated in Matthew 18:19. This is a remarkable claim and, if it were true, it would place tremendous power into the hands of Christians worldwide. Sadly, many people have been deceived by the claims and have expressed

disillusionment because of the false promises that have been made, using the doctrine of the *Prayer of Agreement* as the basis of authority.

It is a dangerous circumstance when teachers misapply the Scripture in order to support their own teachings and attribute to God actions in which He is not involved. Word of Faith leaders, who claim to be anointed teachers and healers who speak for God, deliberately ignore the true message of Matthew 18:15-19, preferring to teach a false message regarding the direct words of Jesus Christ, and by such action reveal themselves to be false teachers. Teaching the *Prayer of Agreement* from Matthew 18:19 is not just a simple error or difference of interpretation, but it is a deliberate, premeditated and intentional presentation of a falsehood that is claimed to be truth. Matthew 18:15-19, in summary form is related to church discipline and the agreement of the two is in accord with the discipline that is enacted and God is in the midst of them because what has been done concerning the discipline is God's will.

But true prayer based on a true knowledge of the Scripture profits much for the disciple of Christ in His kingdom.

D.A. Carson writes, "Far too often Christians do not have the marks of a richly textured discipleship because they do not ask, or they ask with selfish motives."

How we pray affects the quality of our discipleship.

The *best* gifts from God are available *to all* disciples who pray as Jesus teaches us to pray. Our Father in heaven teaches us through this process. We learn where we are failing and we learn where our heavenly desires are not as strong as they should be. This teaching on prayer is a kingdom promise for Christ's kingdom dwellers thru the ages until He returns. Not only do we have assurance from God about praying the right things but we have a model for praying in this sermon as well.

Brethren we as a church and as individuals are without excuse when it comes to growing as disciples of Christ. All these good things are given to us by our Father in heaven. We do not have to rely on our own weak and feeble resources to discover what may or may not be the right things to pray for.

And with this teaching on prayer he begins to come to the conclusion of His sermon which is a call to decision and a call to commitment

He finalizes the body of teaching by saying:

12* ¶ "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Here is the other bookend of this part of the sermon which began in Mt. 5:17:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus is saying that everything that you have been taught that shows that I am the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, that the direction of the Law and the prophets was pointing to Me, in all these things obey this rule which is a summary of all I have taught you so far. There are thousands of moral decisions that can be made using this summary because it is connected to the revealed truth of God from the Law and the Prophets and to Christ's fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

This is not a Golden Rule for moralists, who want to be a good person like Jesus. It is the Law of Christ for His people in the New Covenant. It is a summary of all that it means to live according to the righteousness of the kingdom with that Law written on the hearts of His New Covenant people..

We are do to do unto others as we would have them do unto us not just because we expect the same in return but because this conduct is the rule of Law for Christ's kingdom as it will be birthed on Pentecost.

Prayer, rooted in the grace of God and His goodness for His children, is the means to seeing it accomplished and it is the will of God, so our prayers will be answered if we ask, seek and knock as Jesus has taught us to do.