

SOM: THIRD TASK (6:19-7:12)

Third Task: In Relation to Others: Love others as Jesus instructed (6:19 - 7:12)

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Third Task: Love Others as Jesus Instructed (6:19-7:12)

A. Triad on true treasure (6:19-24)

1. Exhortation: Store up treasure in heaven (6:19-21)

Matt 6:19-24. ¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (NRSV).

Jesus tells people not to store up treasures on earth. He has two reasons: (i) Moth and rust consume them or else thieves carry them away. (ii) One's efforts are better put into storing up treasure in heaven

So Jesus wants us to invest in eternal things, not things that perish. Some Christians—like Anthony and St. Francis of Assisi—have thought that Jesus is telling us to give up all belongings.

¹This division is based on my observation that the word *merimna* (worry) occurs six times in 6:25-34, but only three times with the negative particle *mē* (25, 31, 34), following "the rule of three" throughout Matt 5-7.

However, Matthew is speaking about “treasure” (*thēsauros*) and not earthly goods in general. The verb “store up” (*thēsauridzete*) literally means “treasure up” and refers to accumulation, not simple possession.

Matthew is not against having possessions.² The type of poverty Matthew demands is “poverty of spirit,” which is humility (Matt 5:3).

A key phrase is: “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (6:21). By “heart” Jesus refers to the aim and purpose of our lives. Life is not about playing a monopoly game where the goal is to accumulate more than anyone else. Rather, our purpose to use our money for building the Kingdom of God? Life is not about feeding our narcissistic ego, a type of self-love that shuts out everyone else. Rather, life is about transcending our ego and having Christ consciousness.

The point is about *simplicity*: Jesus tells us not to feed our narcissistic egos by amassing material possessions (on earth), but rather transcend our egos by nurturing our Authentic Self (in heaven).

2. First parable: The good eye [= be generous] (6:22-23; cf 7:3-5)

Matt 6:22-23. ²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy [open, honest; *Gk haplous*], your whole body will be full of light; ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy (evil; *Gk ponēros*), your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (NRSV).

The phrase, “the eye is the lamp of the body,” is a problem. For us, the eye is a window through which light comes in. But, in the ancient world, the eye was thought to have its own light. Light goes out of the eye.³ So Jesus is stating a basic physiology “fact” at that time.

But Jesus turns the physiological statement into a moral one. In Judaism, a “good eye” or “healthy eye” meant *generosity* (Prov. 22:9).⁴ So Jesus is saying, “If your eye is healthy (generous), your whole body will be full of light or full of God.”

In contrast, he says, “if your eye is unhealthy (evil, *ponhro.j*)—selfish or ungenerous—then your whole body will be full of darkness or without God.”

Jesus is inviting us to examine ourselves. Am I filled with light or darkness? Am I generous and in union with God? Or am I egocentric, selfish, and without God?

The person with the “healthy eye” is generous, has Christ consciousness, is nurturing the Authentic Self. In contrast, the person with the “evil eye” is selfish, doesn’t have the mind of Christ, is feeding the narcissistic ego.

² Following Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 140.

³ Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 142.

⁴ Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 143.

The point is about *generosity*: Jesus is saying, be generous to others and you will lay up treasure in heaven and find your Authentic Self.

3. Second parable: The two masters [= serve God] (6:24)

Matt 6:24. ²⁴ "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (NRSV).

Here, Jesus makes a basic economic statement that everyone would agree with: A slave cannot serve two masters. Have you ever heard of a slave owned by two people? It doesn't work.

Then, Jesus turns the economic statement into a moral one: "You cannot serve God and wealth (*mamōna*)."

This amplifies the previous saying: "The 'healthy eye,' interpreted as the generous person, serves God. The 'unhealthy eye,' interpreted as the self person, serves mammon."⁵

The point is about *loyalty*: Jesus tells us to be loyal to God and this is to lay up treasure in heaven and find our Authentic Self.

B. Triad of encouragement about God's care (6:25-34):⁶

Okay, so let's add this what Jesus has been saying:

- Do not store up treasure on earth (19-21),
- Plus be generous with what you have (22-23),
- Plus serve God instead of money (24)
- And what does that equal? Anxiety!

So anxiety is what Jesus addresses next.

1. Do not worry ... (6:25-30)

⁵ Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 145.

⁶This division is based on my observation that the word *merimna* (worry) occurs six times in 6:25-34, but only three times with the negative particle *mē* (25, 31, 34), following "the rule of three" throughout Matt 5-7.

Matt 6:25. ²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. ²⁵ Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Jesus supports this injunction "not to worry" (v. 25) with three arguments.

a. Bird analogy

Matt 6:26. ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (NRSV)

His first argument uses a bird analogy. His argument is from lesser to greater. God takes care of the birds, which are not as valuable as humans, so of course God will take care of you! God fed his people in the wilderness with manna; God fed poor through the jubilee legislation; God fed the multitudes through Jesus' hand; God will feed you.

What is interesting is Jesus assumes that God is active in the world. We cannot see God, but when birds eat, God is feeding them. By implication, when we feed birds or care for God's creatures, human or otherwise, we participate in God's providential care.

b. Life span

Jesus' second supporting argument against anxiety is this:

Matt 6:27. ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? (NRSV).

His says, worrying accomplishes nothing. Jesus is not against planning or prudent concern for the future. Rather, Jesus is concerned about anxiety.

c. Clothing

Jesus' third supporting argument against anxiety focuses on clothing.

Matt 6:28-30. ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you-- you of little faith? (NRSV).

2. Do not worry ... (6:31)

Then Jesus repeats what he has just said:

Matt 6:31-32. ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things (NRSV).

Jesus' repetition suggests we are dealing with—not appropriate concern (which is good)—but with deeply rooted anxiety. The Gentiles (unbelievers) strive for food, drink, and clothing. But those who trust God do not need to strive. Jesus unmasks the root of anxiety and worry—unbelief or the failure to trust God.

3. Do not worry ... (6:34)

Finally, Jesus addresses the issue of priorities:

Matt 6:33-34. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today (NRSV).

One can only seek righteousness, which is the kingdom of God, when the ego is transcended... when the Authentic Self is embraced.

The point is about *trust*: Jesus is saying that spiritual growth requires trust in God. Trust in God is especially important as we leave our ego behind and move toward Authentic Self.

C. Triad on one's neighbor (7:1-12)

1. Exhortation: Do not judge (7:1-2)

Matt 7:1-2. ¹ Do not judge [*krinete*], so that you may not be judged [*krithēte*]. ² For with the judgment [*krimate*] you make [*krinete*] you will be judged [*krithēsethe*], and the measure [*metrō*] you give [*metreite*] will be the measure [*metrēthēsetai*] you get. (NRSV)

a. Judge/condemn (*krinō*)

Jesus repeats the same Greek words over and over in these two sentences. He uses words derived from *judge* (*krinō*) and *judgment* (*krima*) five times and words derived from *measure* (*metron*; *metreō*) three times. The repetition reinforces the importance of this saying.

The verb *krinō* can mean *judge, condemn, separate, or discern*. The noun *krima* can refer to *a judgment of a decision*. The NRSV translates the words *krinō* and *krima* as judge and judgment, but we can just as easily translate it as *condemn* and *condemnation*. Jesus wants us to avoid judgmentalism or a condemnational attitude.

Thus, Jesus' injunction not to judge doesn't refer to judging in the sense of critical thinking. Jesus is not prohibiting us from using our heads to evaluate right and wrong, good and bad. Rather, Jesus wants us to avoid condemning people.

b. What does “condemn” mean?

On the one hand, it refers to someone who is a *chronic faultfinder*; someone who constantly finds fault with what others say and do. This is someone who has an arrogant sense of superiority and feels it is their gift to the world to point out the failures of others.

On the other hand, it refers to something stronger, to someone who plays *the divine judge*. When we play this role, we judge a person as *sooo bad or soo wrong*, that if we were God, we would “send them to hell.”

Sometimes we simply “send them to hell” in our own minds. If someone offends us, if someone hurts us, we say to ourselves something like, “I will never talk to that person again. I will never bless that person with my presence. And they will be miserable without me. May they rot in isolation. May all the calamities of life fall on them.”

Jesus sees a grave danger with this type of judgmentalism. Jesus illuminates the danger with a parable.

2. First parable: The log in the eye (7:3-5; cf 6:22-23)

Matt 7:3-4. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite [*hupokrita*], first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (NRSV)

The image is of someone with a two-by-four in his eye trying to remove a speck of sawdust in someone else's. The image is meant to be comical.

Jesus is saying, “Hey, don’t you know you have Something is in your eye?” What is that something?

a. We condemn what we hate in ourselves

Jesus assumes what is a common psychological or spiritual principle: We condemn what we hate in ourselves.

Whenever we condemn someone in our mind or with our tongue, it reveals we have the same problem:

- If you condemn someone for being stingy, it’s because you are sting yourself, consciously or unconsciously, and you hate it.
- If you condemn someone for being self-promoting, it’s because you are secretly self-promoting, and you hate it.
- If you condemn someone for having a speck in their eye, it’s because you have a log in your own.

The point is: Jesus is calling us to be fully aware of our selves—to be mindful of our selves—especially our faults, which we repress, deny, disassociate from, and then project onto others. We push faults into our unconscious, then unwittingly attack others for that problem.

Paul knew this principle too. He wrote:

Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done. (Rom 2:1; *The Message*)

b. Know your “shadow” (Carl Jung)

Jesus is calling us to know our “shadow” selves. There is a side of our selves, which we do not consciously display in public. Carl Jung called this the “shadow”. It can be good and bad. If the “shadow” remains unconscious, we project it onto other people.

For example, if I experience greediness or anger and I think I shouldn’t be greedy or angry because I’m a nice person and it’s wrong, then my ego will force my negative emotion “underground” into the unconscious. This is called

repression. What I don't like about myself, I repress, deny, and disassociate from. But that greed or anger is still there and unconsciously I deal with it by projecting greed or anger onto other people. We see other people as greedy or angry, when in fact it is our problem. We see a speck in their eye, when there is a log in our eye.

So Jesus is saying, take the log out of your eye first, be aware of your shadow, be aware of your faults that you deny and deal with by projecting onto others.

c. What is a hypocrite?

What is a hypocrite? In the ancient world, a hypocrite (*hupokritēs*) was an actor; someone who got on stage and pretended to be someone else. So a hypocrite is a pretender, someone who pretends to be something they are not.

The goal of Christian life is to become our True Selves. This can be said in a variety of ways: To become our True Self, to become Christlike, to be transformed into the image of God, and so forth. This goal rules out being a hypocrite or a pretender.

d. See clearly, then help someone else (7:5)

After telling us to take the log out of our eye, Jesus says we will see clearly and then we can help others.

Look at verse 5. Jesus says, "Take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly (*diablepō*) to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (NRSV). *Diablepō* means having your eyes wide open—seeing both your self and others—in order to help.

Some Christians believe this text prohibits judging altogether. They believe we are not allowed to point out moral failure at all.

But that is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus says don't judge in the sense of condemnation, but he encourages us to judge in the sense of discerning good and bad. Jesus contrasts "seeing" (*blepō*) in verse 3 with "seeing clearly" (*diablepō*) in verse 5. Jesus is talking about correcting distorted vision, especially distorted moral vision.

Jesus is saying in effect: “Your primary concern should be your own shortcomings, not others’.”⁷ But once we correct ourselves, Jesus goes on to say, “You are permitted to help someone else deal with their faults.”

This is accountability. Matthew is all for accountability. In Matthew 18, we find the “Rule of Christ,” which provides the proper procedure for dealing with harmful behavior” (Matt 18:15-20).

3. Second parable: Pearls and swine (7:6)

Matt 7:6. ⁶ "Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. (NRSV).

In ancient Palestine, dogs were not pets. They were wild scavengers. And, of course, pigs were regarded as unclean animals (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8).

What Jesus meant by “what is holy” and “pearls” is not entirely clear, but obviously it’s something valuable. Jesus is warning about giving something valuable to people—dogs and swine—who will not recognize the value.

What are we not supposed to give to these types of people? There are two options.

a. Option 1: Don’t preach the Gospel to cynics

Many commentators believe that the pearl is the Gospel. Therefore, Jesus is saying, “Don’t preach the Gospel to cynics, who will only mock the Christian faith.” Don’t waste your time with such people. They will only ridicule you and the Gospel.

However, that doesn’t fit the context very well, because Jesus has not been talking about preaching the Gospel.

b. Option 2: Don’t share your faults with cynics

In the second option, the pearl refers to our faults we share with others. Therefore, Jesus is saying, “Don’t share your faults with cynics.” This interpretation fits the context by continuing to counsel not to judge (condemn) others. Jesus has been teaching about how we should deal with our faults

⁷ Richard Gardner, *Matthew*, 130.

(removing the log) before trying to help someone else with theirs (removing the speck).

Take for example a person who has recognized and removed greed (a log) from their life. He recognized how destructive greed was. So he got rid of it. Now he sees a brother he thinks has the same problem. So he goes to him and says, “Hey, brother, I’ve had this problem of greed and I’m dealing with it, and I’m wondering if you’re having the same problem?”

Now, if the brother is open, a helpful dialogue goes forward. But, if the brother is cynical, the brother will act like a dog and a pig, and use the man’s confession of greed against him. So the first man’s humble confession of greed is snubbed and trampled by the second. I think that is what Jesus is warning about.

D. Triad of encouragement about God’s care (7:7-11)

1. Three imperatives: Ask ... seek ... knock ... (7:7-8)

Matt 7:7-8. ⁷ “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (NRSV)

All three imperatives—ask, seek, and knock—refer to prayer.⁸ However, the passage is not mainly about prayer, but it is about us and God.

a. Ask ... receive

The saying, “Ask, and it will be given you,” is in the present tense. It underscores our continuous need for help. We need God. In the grand scheme of cosmological evolution and human history we are infinitesimally small. We are not self-sufficient. Like children, we need to ask.

b. Seek ... find

The saying, “Seek, and you will find,” draws on a number of OT sayings about finding God. For example, Deut 4:29 says, “Seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul.”

⁸ Most commentators agree. E.g., Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1999: 156.

Texts like this witness to the fact that human beings are “finite creatures in the midst of existential mystery, searching for meaning, for some ‘ground of Being’.”⁹ Jesus says we will find what we are looking for. We will find our home in God

c. Knock ... door opens

The saying, “Knock, and it will be opened to you,” presents us with the image of a door ... the entry to the Kingdom of God. For Matthew, “the door is a symbol of salvation, a narrow doorway that leads into the kingdom of God.”¹⁰

In John’s Gospel, the image of the door becomes the gate to the sheepfold, and Jesus declares, “I am the gate!” (John 10:7, 9). Jesus is the entry point to God. Later in John 18, when Peter denies knowing Jesus, the text declares, “Peter was outside the gate!”

In Revelation 3:8, Jesus says, “Look, I have put before you an open door, which no one can shut.”

In all the images—asking, seeking, knocking—leads to one conclusion. “God is eager to answer, to be found, to open the doorway.”¹¹

2. Three conditionals: If ... if ... if ... (7:9-11)

Matt 7:9-11. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (NRSV)

Jesus offers two examples (bread and fish) to support that conclusion

Bread and fish are not only basic foods, but they are symbolic foods. Bread symbolized God’s miraculous care of Israel when they were in the desert, when God gave them manna from heaven. Similarly, at the end of Ezekiel, a river full of fish symbolized God’s new order (Ezek 47:9-10). And we have the story of Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt 13:17).

Jesus argument is easy to follow. If we, who are “evil,” wouldn’t deceive and deny our children, how much more God, being good, will care for His children.

⁹ David Buttrick, *Speaking Jesus: Homiletic Theology and the Sermon on the Mount*, 2002: 179.

¹⁰ Buttrick, *Speaking Jesus*, 2002: 179.

¹¹ Buttrick, *Speaking Jesus*, 2002: 179.

Verse 11 mentions God will give “good things.” God’s response is restricted to “good things.” We might ask for things that appear good to us, but from God’s perspective they might not be. We might ask for a million dollars, but from God’s vantage point it might not be good, because we would lead us away from God. God might give us the gift of diabetes, because God’s knows that will function as a catalyst to draw us to God.

To summarize: Jesus tells us that God can be trusted. There are many things we cannot trust—the stock market, the justice system, politicians, advertisements; sadly, we cannot fully trust teachers, parents, and even ourselves—but we can trust God.

Trusting God is essential for having good relationships with other people. If we trust that God is looking out for us, infusing us with divine power and love, then we will have the confidence to put other people’s interests ahead of our own.

Summary Statement: The Golden Rule (7:12; cf. 5:17).

Matt 7:12. ¹² “[Therefore] In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (NRSV)

A. Universal maxim

The first point I want to make is the Golden Rule did not originate with Jesus. It is a universal maxim that shows up throughout the world in many different religions and philosophic traditions.¹²

- a. Confucius: “What you do not wish anyone to do to you, do to no other.”
- b. Taoism: “Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss” (T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien).
- c. Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you” (Mahabharata 5:1517).
- d. Epictetus: "What you would avoid suffering yourself, seek not to impose on others."
- e. Tobit 4:15: “What you hate, do not do to anyone.”

¹² www.religioustolerance.org/reciproc.htm.

f. Rabbi Hillel: “What is displeasing to you do to no one else; that is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary. Go and learn.” (*b. Shabbat* 31a).

g. Islam: “Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself (*Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi* 13).

Most of these examples are in the negative—don’t do what you don’t want others to do. Christians have tried to make something out of the fact that Matt 7:12 is in the positive, but the distinction is probably overdrawn.¹³

B. Criticized

That brings us to the second point. The Golden Rule has been criticized, because it can be used in less than helpful ways.

Consider the *narcissistic mother*, who loves to smoke weed. Because she likes weed, the Golden Rule would authorize her to give weed to her children too.

Or consider the *insensitive boob* who treats people from another cultures they way he likes to be treated. [Tell the story of having my Mennonite mother-in-law, who had never seen TV and thought it to be evil, watch a documentary on TV in 1989.]

Or consider *the criminal* who won’t report illegal behavior because he doesn’t want his illegal behavior to be reported.

So the problem with the Golden Rule is this: It is not so “golden” in the hands of narcissists, insensitive boobs, and criminals.

C. “Golden” only in context

That brings us to the third point. The Golden Rule is “golden” only in context. What is the context of 7:12?

First, we should note that verse 12 begins with the word “therefore” (Gk *oun*). It connects verse 12 with the previous verse about God giving good gifts.

¹³ So Buttrick, *Speaking Jesus*, 2002: 183.

Matt 7:12 says, “Therefore, in everything do to others as you would have them do to you.” The “therefore” points back to verse 11 regarding how God gives good gifts. Thus it is saying: “God gives you good gifts (v. 11), *therefore* give good deeds to others (v. 12).”¹⁴

Second, we should note that Matt 7:12 parallels Matt 5:17, where Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” Both 5:17 and 7:12 mention the law and the prophets. This is deliberate.

In this way, Matt 7:12 points us back to 5:17 to form an *inclusio*—a rhetorical device meant to remind the reader of everything that has just been said. In this way, the Golden Rule functioning as a climax to everything Jesus said from Matt 5:17 to 7:12, concerning our relationship to the Torah, God, and other people.

Read in context, the Golden Rule is protected from being twisted by narcissists, insensitive boobs, and criminals.

D. Highlights our connection with others

The Rule highlights our interconnection with other people; our destinies are interlinked. The Rule calls us to empathize with others—to see with their eyes, feel with their feelings, to discern what they need and what we can do for them.

Again, in this way, we have an opportunity to transcend our self-centeredness to ascend to a higher awareness. Paul identifies this high awareness as Mind of Christ or Christ Consciousness (1 Cor 2:16).

¹⁴ Following Glen Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 2006.