

Matthew (Part 10)

Matthew 7:1-14

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Let's go back to Matthew 7, beginning in verse 1:

Matthew 7:1-5 Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

These are some woefully misunderstood scriptures, not so much by us—by you and me—but they are woefully misunderstood by some. Some would take this to the extent of saying, "Well, look. It's even wrong—if we take this at face value—to call a thief a thief. It's wrong to call an evildoer an evildoer. They would take it to that extent. "Look, buddy, you're not supposed to judge me."

Well, does this mean that we can't call a spade a spade? A murderer is not a murderer? We can't judge something that clearly? Does it mean that we can't warn a friend of ours about the loose character of some individual that they may be associating with? Well, I think we know better than that. I think we understand that all of the information in regard to judging is not contained right here in Matthew 7.

I'm going to give you a little bit of background of what I feel it is necessary to understand what Jesus was driving at here. First of all, let's look at it in its overall context through Matthew 5—7. As we said at the very beginning in giving the introduction for the book of Matthew, Matthew arranged things topically; that the Sermon on the Mount is not a sermon that Jesus gave at one place, at one time, but rather is a collection of the sayings of Jesus Christ and His teachings that He did over a long period of time.

There is no doubt that many of these things were probably said in various sermons that He gave, but they were not all given at one place at one time. However, when Matthew arranged it, he did arrange it topically, and it fits right into the context.

Now, in Matthew 5—7, Jesus is laying down fundamental, foundational laws and principles regarding the conduct and behavior of those who are going to be His followers. It's very obvious in some places that He is instituting changes. He says, "You have heard it said of old time, but I say unto you"—six different times that appears in Matthew 5. "But I say unto you....But I say unto you." He's obviously instituting changes.

What we see here at the beginning of chapter 7 is another one of those changes, changes in this case in regard to judging. Also remember that this is in the context of the hypocrites. As Mr. Register was explaining last week, that word can also mean those that are hypercritical, and certainly a hypercritical person is someone who has a tendency—a very strong urge—to judge what other people are doing, to look down his nose at what they are doing.

But actually the subject is much bigger than that because it involves the conduct of government, and government within the church and understanding the principles regarding judging. In the Old Testament—under the Old Covenant—God gave laws that included penalties. Those laws and those penalties were used to govern Israel, and those penalties extended to capital punishment—the death penalty. Some laws, if they were broken, would require payment of fines. You know, the eye for an eye, or the tooth for a tooth. There was a system of equal justice. You do something that was of a certain degree of wrongdoing, you had to pay a certain degree of fine.

If Jesus was establishing a new institution, was that institution going to be governed by the same laws and the same penalties? That's really what's involved here.

Let's go back to II Corinthians. I'm just going to give you broad principles because it would take a whole sermon to go through this. But I think that II Corinthians 3 will show you the principle that that I'm aiming at here.

II Corinthians 3:3 clearly you [church members] are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone [as things were under the Old Covenant] but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

This this new way involves the human spirit and God's spirit. It involves the heart.

II Corinthians 3:4-6 And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God [that is, our power to do this comes from God, and our authority, in Paul's case, comes from God, because Paul was an apostle. He had leadership and rulership over this church], who also made us [in this case, he means the ministry, and specifically the apostles] sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter [which is what is involved in Matthew 5—7, that change from the letter to the spirit of the law] but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

As I said earlier, the application that was used by the Israelites of the law of God included the civil law that had penalties which extended even to the extent of capital punishment. So if somebody murdered, they could be put to death. If somebody stole, they could, at the very least, be fined. There were penalties.

Now notice he says, "for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life."

II Corinthians 3:7-8 But if the ministry [or, "administration"—a better English word] of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry ["administration"] of the Spirit not be more glorious?

Paul is showing those Corinthians in a particular instance that there has been a change in the administration of God's law. The law has not changed, but the administration of the law has changed. And thus in Matthew 7, Jesus was introducing one of those changes.

So, some have understood that, and in their translation of "judge not, that you be not judged," they have interpreted, and inserted the words, "condemn not, that you be not condemned." The word there,

though, is *diakrino* in the Greek, and *diakrino* simply means "to judge; to thoroughly discern; to look through; to perceive; to understand and reach a decision based on that understanding." Depending on the context, it can be used either simply "to judge; to discern", or it can also mean "to condemn."

Paul was saying in II Corinthians 3, it is the duty of God's representatives now under the New Testament, under the new Covenant, not to administer death, but to administer life. We are not in the position where we—that is, the ministry—can execute those penalties of the law, including death.

Let's go to John 8. You can begin to understand this when you think of the difference between Israel and the church. Israel was God's Kingdom on earth. Israel was also a nation of this world, and so the kings of Israel had to deal with their subjects as citizens of their realm, while the church is a very loose organization of scattered individuals. It is scattered all over the world. We have no capital city. We have no specific land, nothing that we can call our own. The Bible constantly shows us that we are to consider ourselves citizens of heaven and that we are to consider ourselves strangers and foreigners in a land that is not ours. We are, in reality. It's not just a fairy tale, but in reality, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, but we also live in a foreign land. So, we can't execute their laws because they are not really our laws.

Here in John 8, we have an example where Jesus was put supposedly between a rock and a hard place. The Jews thought they had trapped Him into judging.

John 8:3-5 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"

They thought they had Him, because if He said to stone her, then He was actually superseding the law of the Romans, because the Romans actually had jurisdiction over those things. If He said, "Don't stone her," then He was thumbing His nose at the Sanhedrin and at the law of the Bible. They thought they had Him.

This is, of course, the time that Jesus knelt on the ground, and He wrote things on the ground. He simply refused to answer. Instead, whatever He wrote—I do not know what it was—but whatever He wrote convicted those people, and they understood that they were just as guilty as she was. Maybe not of the same sin, but they were just as guilty. That's why He said, "Who's going to be the one to cast the first stone? Well, no man could. What Jesus is showing here was that they were not really worthy to do the judging. They would have been part of the unjust judges, just as we would be, too.

John 8:10-11 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

You'll notice He did not say that she should be executed, but neither did He condone what she did. You see, He gave her life. He administered life to her because He gave her the way out, which was to repent, you see—"go and sin no more," which was to repent.

That's the way God's ministers, through the government—through the ministry—are supposed to operate. That's the epitome of it. They certainly are able to discern—certainly able to judge in the

sense of reaching a conclusion based upon evidence that this person is indeed guilty. But we do not condemn. Why? Because God is the Ruler. He will do the condemning. He is the Head of our government, and He has only given us authority to execute to a certain extent.

[Someone asked], "How does this affect us being on jury duty?" First of all, you're going to have to understand that everything here under the New Covenant operates by faith. One of the major elements of our faith is one thing that I just mentioned, that is, that our citizenship is in heaven. We are actually, as far as God is concerned, aliens in a foreign land.

Now, the government of the United States would not understand that, maybe, but you understand it, and your life is being operated by faith. Can you, in good conscience as a citizen of a foreign nation, then execute the government and the laws of a foreign land? You can't do it. You see, legally, you cannot do it. That's the way the Bible look at it. So, that's the approach.

Let's go back to I Corinthians 6. Paul says,

I Corinthians 6:1-3 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

It is so obvious there that we are to judge. It's a requirement of this life. We are being called to be judges. That's going to be part of our responsibility in the Kingdom of God. If you're going to be in a position of authority and rulership in God's government, you're going to have to judge. Your very calling revolves around this matter of judging. So, to go to the extent that some say that a Christian shouldn't be judging other people is ridiculous. It's ludicrous, on the surface of all the scriptures that show that we indeed are to judge. It's our very calling. That is so plain.

"How much more" Paul says in verse 3, "the things that pertain to this life?" So obviously we have to judge in order to be really obedient to our calling. There is an interesting illustration right in chapter 5 of I Corinthians, where this incest was being committed, where the where the son was having sexual intercourse with his mother, apparently a stepmother. But Paul heard about it, and in verse 3, he says,

I Corinthians 5:3-5 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

He says, "Put that man out of the church." Now, who did the condemning there? The person who committed the sin did the condemning.

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

A warning. Now a principle of judgment follows that we have to use because people worry about judging their hearts. And, he says in verse 19,

Matthew 7:19-20 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

You see, the government of God in the church is going to make its judgments based upon what a person's life produces, what his works are. We're not going to judge his heart. But there is nothing wrong with judging what the person does. If a person's a murderer, he's a murderer. If a person is committing incest with his mother, he's committing incest with his mother. It's gross immorality, and we can certainly call a spade a spade. We're not judging his heart. We're just judging what he does. That's all. We leave the judging of the heart to God.

Let's go back to Romans 2. Actually, we would have to go through this whole chapter to really get a good picture of what Paul is dealing with here. We can just pick out a couple of verses and I think it'll be clear enough.

Romans 2:1-3 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

I am bringing this in because it fits right in to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:4-5. He said that in order to be in a position to judge that one first has to get the beam out of his own eye before he bothers with the mote that's in his brother's eye. That's what Paul is dealing with here in Romans 2. This is God's approach to training judges. For people to be capable of judgment, they should be first overcoming their own sins. You can see this principle higher the way through Romans 2.

Romans 2:17-23 Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? [It's a question. He said, "What are you doing about your own life?"] You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?

You see, God's approach is, "Look, I am going to prepare you to be a judge. Therefore, in order to properly discern, one has to be overcoming his own sins." Now, that's what Jesus said. "You hypocrite. First cast out the beam out of your own eye." First of all, overcome your own problems. You could add to this Galatians 6:1-3, where he gives instructions regarding the correcting of a brother. Now, if he gives permission to correct a brother, obviously the one who is going to do the correcting has had to judge something.

There are two kinds of judgment that God shows that He is definitely against. The one is explained very thoroughly in Roman 14, which amounts to nothing more than a nit-picking, self righteous, looking down the nose at something that doesn't amount to a hill of beans. You see, there are always people who want the correct everything and everybody, and not give that poor person an opportunity to grow up on his own, that seem to delight in correcting and embarrassing, even maybe almost in offending people. God shows us what it is. It's nothing more than self righteousness.

On the other hand, far more devastating and far worse is the kind [of judging] that Jesus was getting at in chapter 7, and that is the condemnative judging of a person's heart, his motivation, his intention.

Turn with me back to Isaiah:

Isaiah 11:1-3 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him [obviously talking about Christ], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears;

What He is saying there is this. If we think about that, He is saying that Jesus Christ is able to look on the heart, that He is not dependent as we are on our physical senses. We are dependent upon what we see and what we hear. And what do we do with all that information? We throw in a lot of our feelings and intuition. And what does it make us? You see, we are not really impartial as we should be. So, God is prophesying of Christ, judging by being able to look upon the heart.

He mentions a couple of things very specifically that "upon Him rests the spirit of wisdom and understanding." That's what we as human beings lack in light of judging a person's intention, his motivation, or his heart. We just do not have the understanding. You see, we *can* judge the fruits of a person's life, his actions, and we can certainly call a spade a spade without condemning the person.

Let's go back to Matthew 7:6. One more thing—another principle that's included there in that series of verses. In verse 2 is a very important principle. He said, "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged." It is sort of a tit-for-tat situation. God shows us that as we judge others, we, too, will be judged. It's a tangent of the "whatever you sow, that you shall reap" principle that's in the Bible. Remember, we saw it in the Lord's Prayer, where it says that as we forgive, we will be forgiven. It's a measure a person's maturity when he is able to use as much proper judgment in evaluating something as he possibly can, making those judgments based upon God's word, being very careful because we are going to be judged the same way.

Back to verse 6:

Matthew 7:6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

This actually fits into the context of judgment, which was in the first 5 verses. I think it's obvious that that He is talking metaphorically: "that which is holy" and "your pearls." He means there the truth of God, that which is very valuable to you and me. And by "dogs" and by "swine," again metaphorically, He is talking about people who would be unappreciative of what was given to them. A pig could not appreciate the beauty or the costliness of a piece of fine jewelry. Neither could a dog. What He is saying is that there are people who are just not fit to receive the truth, the light, the precious spiritual truth that you have. That is not condemnative either. It's just that something is going to have to happen to those people before they would be willing to listen. It's just that simple. So, in order to know when that time would be, you have to use discernment. Jesus is *not* saying, "Don't talk about this way of life." He is saying, "Be careful about who you talk about it with." That's all.

I know that you've all had experiences in one way or another in talking with friends or relatives about things that you were very excited about, enthusiastic about—thrilled that you were coming to understand—and it's just like throwing cold water on a fire because they just do not want to hear it, or they ridicule it, or they ridicule you, or they persecute you. Maybe at the very least, they just shrug it off as though it's nothing. It's like trying to talk about all the intricacies of your job to a six year old child. You see, you do not condemn the child for not understanding. He's just not equipped yet to be able to understand.

So, if a person who is of your acquaintance and very close to you just does not seem to get it, and you're beating your gums all the time, forget about it. Forget about trying to educate this person along these lines. Their mind just is not in the position or the condition to be able to receive it. Really, what he is saying here, metaphorically, is that a man can understand only what he's fit to understand, and you and I would have been the same way, years before our conversion. We would have rejected it as well.

It's not said here, but it is certainly implied from the whole context that the responsibility that we have is to live what we know. What's the very best witness that we can make—to live what we know. Then, if a person begins inquiring about it, if you can tell by their demeanor, by their attitude, you can certainly begin to talk to them about it. But do not ever try to force it down them. And do not be like Israel; Israel failed to live the way. Of course, they did not do God's will.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 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 good things to those who ask Him!

We have another section on prayer. We just had one in chapter 6; now we have another one. Just as surely as chapter 6, in the Lord's Prayer, didn't have all the information on prayer, neither does this section here have all the information on prayer. There is much more that needs to be answered.

I think that we can see some very strong implications, though, here; things that were not included in chapter 6. Number one: It very definitely shows that it is God's will to answer. The whole thrust of what Jesus said is positive. "Ask and it *shall* be given; seek and you *shall* find; knock, and it *shall* be opened. For everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it *shall* be opened." That's very plain. It is God's will to answer. God *will* answer prayer.

It also implies God's nature. That is, that God is loving and giving, that He is a generous God. We'll get back to that in just a little bit. He is generous and there is no catch to the things that He gives.

It also says that we should be persistent. That's the implication there: ask, seek, knock, and so forth. Possibly the best example in all the Bible of this is Elijah. Certainly Elijah was a zealous man and a man who was close to God. You would think that if there was anybody who all he had to do was say, "God, do this" or "God, do that," why, it would have been done for Elijah, because fantastic miracles were worked through Elijah. I can show you one place where he prayed for about 15 seconds and fire came down out of heaven.

But you know what? There was the time that Elijah prayed for rain, and he prayed for rain, and he prayed for rain, and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed. Finally, after the seventh prayer, his servant saw a little tiny cloud beginning to form out on horizon. So it's a lesson in persistence.

Persistence is not nagging. It means that we are in earnest about our request. When God delays, He teaches us refinement of our prayers. The more you speak about it to Him, and the more you think about it and talk to Him about it, the more your request is going to be refined, and you're going to see your request in many different contexts.

It does not say *when* or *how* God will answer. It says nothing of obedience, which other scriptures supply, but having having prayers answered by God requires obedience—doing the things that we know to do. He doesn't say perfect obedience. He just says, you know—that's the implication: Doing things we know to do. It says nothing about exercising faith. It says nothing about using the name of Jesus Christ, and it says nothing about asking according to His will. Those things were supplied in other areas.

I'll tell you, there is a beautiful principle here that I did not expound yet. I hope you'll rejoice in it. Did you ever notice what he said?

Matthew 7:9-11 What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 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 good things to those who ask Him!

The implication is that whatever you ask God, He is going to answer it better than you asked. He's going to give you more than you request. That's beautiful. It may not come the way you think, and it may not come *when* you think. But He will always give you more than you asked.

This little bit from Greek mythology will help. The Greek goddess of the dawn was Aurora. That was her name. You know, the gods and goddesses of Greece were always falling in love with human beings. Well, she fell in love with a fellow by the name of Tithonus. This is all mythology. Aurora, the immortal goddess, fell in love with this handsome, virile, dashing, young Greek lad by the name of Tithonus. One day, she was talking to Zeus (Zeus, you know, with the father of all the gods), and he decided to give Aurora a gift. And he says, "Aurora, what would you have me give Tithonus? I'll give you anything you ask." It did not take her long to come to an answer. She said, "Grant him immortality," and Zeus said, "Done." You know what? She forgot to ask that Tithonus would always remain eternally young. And so there she was, the beautiful goddess Aurora who was always young, and her lover was 21, 25, 30, 35, 65, 165. He got old and wrinkled and all decrepit. All his beauty and everything faded.

There is a lesson there. You see, the Greek gods and goddesses (and the Romans', too) were very human gods, and they were always playing tricks on the human beings. And so when people prayed to them, they could never confidently expect that the answer would not be without a barb in it somewhere.

You know, God never plays you and me dirty. He is love. He's the most generous being there is. When you ask Him for something, when He decides to give it to you, it's going to be far more than you ever asked for, and so much better.

You can see that principle in dealing with your children. Your children ask you for something, and here they have all the experience, intelligence, wisdom, and character of a five year old. You see, they make this simple request. Here you are; you're 35 or 40 years old, and you've got all this experience. You know far better how to answer that request than they do, don't you? Certainly you do.

So there is God, sitting up in heaven. He's able to see everything. When you make what—to you—is a very simple, easily fulfilled request, God looks down and says, "You dumbbell"—just the way you would look at your children. You see, He can see the whole landscape; He can see everything, and He says, "Look, if I give you this gift, it's going to impact on somebody else this way, that way, and the other way, and this person over here is going to be affected. And this that and the other thing is... not only that, if I give it to you—if I give you this gift—I already know what kind of character you have, and if I give it to you, it's going to spoil you silly."

"God, give me a \$1,000,000." Did you hear about the guy today who won \$5 million in the lottery in New York State? Already, the guy says he's going to quit his job, he's going to give his wife everything, his children everything. He says the relatives are beginning to line up outside his door. You know what's going to happen? That money's going to go flying away, and it will not be long before he doesn't.....The guy was a lightbulb screw-in-er or something like that. I do not know, but that's the way he was described.

You know, that's the way God looks at us, and with His insight and wisdom, He answers at just the right time, at just the right place, and with more than you asked for, by far, because He has taken care of the whole situation.

You have to understand that you do not make prayers in a vacuum, and that God is not only dealing with you. Though maybe He has not yet called your mate or other relatives—children, parents, or whatever—nonetheless, He has to consider them, at least in some requests that would be made. Not in every request, but He certainly has to consider those people just as surely as if your child makes a request to you, you have to consider your other children, don't you? Certainly.

And so, that's the implication here. If your son asks for something good, you're going to do the best you can, and that's the way God is. He'll do the best He can. Of course, He's all powerful and Almighty, and He can do an awful lot. He will answer far better than we would ever think it could be done. And He'll do it at just the right time.

Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This is probably the most famous thing that Jesus ever said. In just one short sentence, He sums up man's responsibility to man.

There is an interesting thing about verse 12 that I was not aware of until I began to do a little bit of studying. Believe it or not, I've been in the church 22 years, and I do not think I've ever thought of it before. The Greeks, the Romans, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Chinese, and probably many other nationalities as well—their wise men, their philosophers, came up with similar statements. But there are people who look these things up and gather these things like Solomon did. He gathered 1,000 proverbs together. But you know what? Everyone of the statements that these people make all had something different than Jesus did. Jesus' statement here stands out as unique in that it is the only statement of like character that is positive. Everybody else's is negative. Everybody else's statement

says, "You shall not..." But Jesus' statement says, "You shall do..." It's very positive. It's poles apart from the "you shall not" approach.

I want you to notice that at the end of that statement He says, "This is the law and the prophets"—that doing to others as you would have others do to you is the law and the prophets. The whole Old Testament, He is saying, could be summed up in this one sentence. You shall do to others as you would have others do to you.

When you think of the Old Testament, what's the first thing you think of? What comes to your mind? Law. What does the law say? The law says, "You shall not do this.... You shall not.... You shall not.... You shall not.... You shall not...." So we tend to think of the law as something that prohibits. Now Jesus, when He looked at the law, He did not look at it negatively. He looked at it positively. He says, "You shall *do*," not "You shall *not* do." He said, "You shall do."

I'll tell you, this is so important because this is what Mr Armstrong was so angry about at the beginning of that tape about Philippians. He was not all that angry about the women wearing makeup. What he was angry about was what he could read in their letters. It depressed him terribly. That's why he was saying all the way through that Bible study, "I feel this way. I wonder if my ministry has done any good at all." He is saying, "Are you people getting it?" That's what he was saying.

When you think of the word "Pharisee," don't you think of somebody who was walking around stiffly and firmly, afraid to do anything? Sure. Jesus said at the very beginning of this—chapters 5, 6 and 7—"Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not in any wise be in the Kingdom of God." Brethren, the scribes and Pharisees were keeping the law probably as good or better than you and me. They did not get it. Their idea of righteousness was to *not* do something. Jesus' idea of righteousness was to *do* something. Do you see the difference?

Jesus' idea of righteousness was to do good. The idea of the Pharisees was to refrain from evil. Those two things were poles apart. And even though the one will produce a certain amount of righteousness—that is, the Pharisaic approach, which was to not do, or to refrain from doing—the kind of character that God wants will be best produced by those people who are doing good.

Do you realize that this is the answer to the sin question? People are always wondering how to overcome sin. There it is: You overcome sin by doing good. And if your every thought is to do good, you do not have any time for sin.

You see that what these ladies were writing in to Mr. Armstrong with was the Pharisaic thinking. They were not thinking, "How can I do good to God? How can I love Him? How can I obey Him?" You see, they were trying to draw lines all over the place. That's what got Mr. Armstrong so upset. He said, "They are not getting it." Our attitude—our whole approach—ought to be, "What can I *do*?", not "What *shouldn't* I do?"

That's really not so difficult to grasp, but I hope you can. I hope I can find the words somehow to get that across to you, because that's what Jesus says: "This *is* the law and the prophets." It's not what I *can't* do. It's what I *can* do. God set you free from the death penalty so that you can *do* something, and as long as you're in prison by your indebtedness to the law, you're not free to do. So He sets you free so that you can do. Not refrain; you can *do*. Big difference there.

I'll tell you, it is much, much harder to do something than it is to refrain from doing something. That's why better characters built. That's why there is more righteousness that way. It's much more difficult to sacrifice yourself and serve than it is simply to just refrain from doing something. It's far more difficult to give up your time, to give up your energy, to do things along that line that it is to simply stop work to keep the Sabbath.

You see, the law is stated in the way that it is in that it only provides the foundation. It's the beginning of righteousness. It describes it or defines it in simple terms. But that love of God is out flowing concern that motivates the good works.

Did you ever stop to think that to refrain from doing something does not necessarily involve religious beliefs? There are who knows how many atheists who profess no belief at all in God who would not kill. You see, they can restrain themselves, they can refrain themselves from not murdering. They can refrain or restrain themselves from not stealing. Maybe they can do it to keep themselves from lying or committing adultery. But you can see just by that simple statement that it doesn't involve religious belief at all. It doesn't have to.

But to do good *does* involve acting upon religious beliefs—that is, the commands of a God. If you approach it the way the Pharisees did, or the way it's possible for the atheists to do, you have a system of life that is simply legalistic. It does not really involve belief in God. Doesn't God say that faith without works is dead? It's no faith at all. That's why I can confidently say that simply to refrain from doing something does not involve religion at all. All you have there is simply a legal system.

But to do good requires something that is impelling you, driving you, motivating you, to go out of your way to be kind, to be gentle, to be courteous, to be forgiving, to give comfort, to give encouragement, to sacrifice for some other person's well-being; to sacrifice for somebody that you do not even like. I'll tell you, there has to be an entirely different attitude driving that kind of a person. That involves deep-seated conviction and beliefs. Hopefully those deep seated convictions and beliefs are the same as the true God's.

Maybe this simple analogy will help you to understand. The law of the land—the state of South Carolina—says that we must drive our automobiles without endangering or injuring either other drivers or pedestrians. That's what the law says. So I can refrain from injuring other people by the way in which I drive my car. But, you see, no law can compel me to pick up some weary, foot-sore traveler who's walking along the side of the road that might cause me a considerable amount of sacrifice if I stop and help this person. Maybe he is not a walker, hiker, or whatever, but maybe his car has broken down beside the road and he's got a flat tire. Or maybe his engine conked out and he's sitting there with a bunch of kids and it's 20 degrees above zero.

You see, no law can compel you to do that. The law only says, "*Don't* exceed the speed limit." "*Don't* go through red lights." "*Don't* drive on the left hand side of the road." You see, it's an act of concern for the person who is stranded that the law does not cover. That's the difference.

The 10 Commandments only say, "Don't murder. Don't steal." But what they are implying, from what Jesus statement' here is, is "Do good." See, that is the law and the prophets. That's what Mr. Armstrong wants us to catch. Our whole motivation ought to be to love God first and love men equal to ourselves, and you see, love is outgoing concern. Love is doing good for them. That's why we never catch Jesus going around, drawing lines all over the place, because all He was thinking of doing was good.

Let's go on to verse 13 and 14. Incidentally, if you go about doing good, it's going to make your life infinitely more difficult and more complicated—if you have a life filled with sacrifices. But I'll tell you this, you will have a life, too, that will be infinitely more fulfilling and rewarding. I guarantee you, it will be filled with peace, with happiness. Your life will be overflowing with abundance. It's the secret to stability, to sound-mindedness, to all the good things that men are searching for—an escape from all of this. It is so simple in principle.

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Unfortunately, the way the King James has things here—my Bible has a paragraph mark at the beginning of verse 13, which indicates a new thought. Well, it is a new thought, but it is also connected to what preceded it, because executing the law of God, which is out-flowing concern and love toward others, is going to involve sacrifices involving the setting of the will in order to do good. Those verses also involve the principle that He is talking about in chapter in verses 13-14.

What is Jesus saying here? He's saying to you and me, very simply, "Look, life is filled with choices. You have the choice of doing evil. You have the choice up meeting the minimum requirements of refraining, or you have the choice of doing good."

We have many, many choices every day. They are confronting us all over the place, from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night, there is an infinite variety of choices, and many of them involve spiritual, moral and ethical principle. Those are the ones that God is really concerned about.

Now, this is not a new principle at all. If you go back to Deuteronomy 30, it's very plain and clear. God said through Moses, "I set before you this day life on one hand and death on the other." And then He said, "Therefore, choose life." We have that choice. Joshua, when he was about to die and his farewell address is given there in Joshua 24, he told those people that they were going to be confronted with choices. That's the place where he made that statement that "As for me and my house, we have decided to serve the Lord." But those people we know from the book of judges really went down the tubes until every man was doing what was right in his own eyes.

We can go to Elijah there in I Kings 17—19. Elijah said, "How long halt you between two opinions? If God be God, choose Him, and if Baal be God, choose him." He said, "Buddy, get off the fence. You better do something." Jeremiah said virtually the same thing. I think it's in chapter 4 (I'm not really positive about that). But he said virtually the same thing. All of the prophets said that.

Here's Jesus, who is also a prophet, and He's saying the same thing. He's saying, "Look, you're confronted with an infinite variety of choices, and those choices were going to determine the outcome of your life." Jesus expounded upon it a little bit more, though. Let's look at what He's saying here, at least in principle. He says, "Enter you at the strait gate." That's actually a command. If we are going to apply verse 12, to "do unto others as we would have others do unto you," we are going to be always confronted with a choice between an easy way and a difficult way. One way is going to require humility and sacrifice, and the other way may not require that at all. It may be very easy by comparison.

So, one of the things He is undoubtedly saying here is, "Look, the Kingdom of God is off in the future. We are going to enter it by means of a resurrection. We have been called to judge. We have been called to be kings and priests. We're going to be educating people. We need to get prepared for that." There is a great goal out there that we are supposed to be striving for, and when we get in that kingdom, we are going to be great—and I mean *great*, far beyond the greatest king who has ever been on the face of this Earth. But what He is saying is this: that the road to greatness is never easy. "Enter in at the strait gate." "Strait" means difficult. He is saying here that if you're going to be in the Kingdom of God, it's going to be difficult to be there.

You and I might look at somebody performing on a stage, on television, something like that, whether they are playing a piano, whether they are doing all kinds of figures on skates, whether they are doing a ballet dance, whether they are an athlete, putting a basketball in a hoop, or whatever. We may admire the skill and the ease with which these people seem to accomplish and bring forth something that is very beautiful. But yet we know, deep down, that that person paid an awesome price to achieve what seems to be so easy for them. There were many, many hours of practice and failure that went into producing that skill, years and years of working or refining the skill until they finally get to that place where they are able to accomplish this thing that seems so easy.

I can remember reading once about Edmund Burke. I do not know whether you know who Edmund Burke is, but he was a English politician who was living about the time that the United States, the colonies, were breaking away from England. He was one of the very few Englishmen who was on our side. He argued—I shouldn't say very effectively, because almost everybody was against him in Parliament. But nonetheless, he argued for the freedom of the colonies. If you can ever get a collection of his speeches, they are some of the most moving speeches on liberty that you will ever read.

Edmund Burke's brother was also a politician. One day after listening to his brother arguing some side of a case in parliament, he said that he used to wonder how it was that Edmond managed to monopolize all the talent in their family. He said, then he began to realize that when they were boys, when everybody else was playing, Edmund was working. Edmund was studying. Edmund was reading. Edmund was developing his mind. And so by the time he became up in his forties and fifties, he was prepared to take on the job. He never was very effective, even though a brilliant speechwriter, because he was going against the grain. But nonetheless, he was a very talented individual.

I hope you get the principle there, because it takes hard work. Jesus is saying that we are going to have to make a difficult choice. He is also saying there, even though it is implied, it's encompassed within the context. He is saying that not only will it be difficult and require a lot of hard work, also the way is long.

We are generally very impatient. And yet, when we stopped to think about—again, I'm going to use great works of art as an example. We know that most great works of art are not a flash in the pan. Once in a while, somebody will produce something that comes very quickly. But even when it comes very quickly, there has usually been a long, arduous road that led up to that. For example, when George Frederick Handel wrote the *Messiah*, he did it in a very short period of time. A tremendous, masterful piece of music. But Handel had been writing music for some 30 years before he wrote the *Messiah*. Then he rattled that thing off, and it was about the last great thing he ever did, even though he had been the author of quite a bit of very moving and inspiring music.

Who knows how long it takes an artist to produce something. You've probably read stories. Most really good artists are hardly ever satisfied with what they finally produce because they can see the flaws in it that maybe you and I, with our untrained eyes, may not be able to see. Most of us, when we were in high school, probably had to read Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Can any remember reading that? Well, there is a couple back there. It's not a long poem. Do you know how long it took Gray to write that? Eight years. When it was finally published, he still did not like it. But he wrote that way back between 1842-1850, and it survives to this day. Beautiful poetry. But it took him eight years from the time he started it. He kept writing it, rewriting it, inserting words, taking out phrases, putting in new phrases, and on and on and on, until finally, I guess it was published almost against his best wishes.

All I'm getting at here is that we better be prepared for the long haul. I'm saying these things because it has a great deal to do with our decisions. He's talking about here about the decisions that we are going to be making.

So I think that we can reach to conclusions here. The choice that we make is between either an undisciplined way for a disciplined way. Look at it this way. Many of us get flashes of insight or vision, visions of things that we would like to accomplish. We call them dreams. Daydreams. Your wife calls them nightmares. "There he goes again. Now he's going to do this. He's got this big idea. He's going to accomplish these great things." We get these visions of these things that we would like to accomplish. How many of us actually carry them out? Do you know why we do not carry them out? Because most of the time, that's all they are. They're a daydream, and we do not discipline ourselves to bring them to pass.

That's what Jesus talking is about here. The difficult way is to discipline yourself to bring your dream to pass. In addition to that, to add a second conclusion here, we have the choice between the thoughtful way for the thoughtless way.

I'll give you an illustration. This happened yesterday. I went to see a man down in Augusta who was in the Veteran's Administration Hospital. I was on the first floor and I stepped onto the elevator, and there was a young lady already in it, and also a man wearing a smock of some kind, so I took it that he worked there at the hospital. Well, it was not long—the doors were still open—before a fellow with a beard came along, reading a newspaper. He stepped inside the elevator and turned around. His head was still buried in the newspaper. I do not know how he found his way into the elevator reading, but he did. And then before the doors closed, two other fellows came along, and they were very earnestly involved in a conversation. They knew this fellow in the smock, and began to involve him in the conversation as well. *Bang*. The doors went shut. About 15 seconds later, the doors went open. The guy with the newspaper walked right out, and these two fellows that were in conversation walked right out, too. You know what? The elevator had never moved. We never saw the guy with the newspaper again. I think he was just too embarrassed to come back. But the other two fellows did come back, and they made some joke that they got caught in a time warp somehow, and they were in the same spot, the same time, but a different day.

I just wonder if if some of us do not conduct our lives is that we are reading newspapers. Our mind is on something else. Are we so deeply involved, you see, in the things of this life that we would also thoughtlessly step out of an elevator that had never even moved? You see, to keep the kingdom of God in mind requires thought and it requires discipline.

Turn with me back to Hebrews 11. Look at this example of Moses in verse 24:

Hebrews 11:24-25 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing . . .

He made a choice. Here was a man, according to Josephus, who was in line to be the next Pharaoh. He was a man who was a general of the army. He had represented Egypt in their wars, and apparently had come back with victories and a great deal of booty. That's why you saw in that movie *The Ten Commandments* that they showed Moses at the head of his army, bringing back all these slaves and all the booty and everything that had been collected in their warfare. Here was a man who had the most powerful nation on the face of the earth at that time just within his grasp. His fingertips were just about ready to reach out. Now he had a choice to make. Would he choose the way that was going to require abasement, humility, discipline, sacrifice, service, hardship? Is he going to do that? Or would he have the life of ease on the broad way, the easy way, a way where he would be receiving adulation and maybe even the worship of people?

Hebrews 11:25-26 [It says he chose] rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming [He thought about it. It was not a decision that was just a flash-in-the-pan thing. He esteemed—he thought about the future. He thought about the Kingdom of God.] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

That's what Jesus is driving at back here in Matthew 7:13-14, that the way to the Kingdom of God is not the easy way. The way of love involves sacrifice and hardship. The way of doing the law the way Jesus perceived it, as being one of outgoing concern, not just refraining from wrongdoing. That's expected of anybody. That's the basic requirement. Everybody is required to do that. But of doing acts of love. You see, that's the difficult way, the hard way, the strait and the narrow way.

So, every choice really has two aspects that we can see there from Hebrews 11, put together with this. That is, the present and the future. Are you going to think it through and "have respect unto the recompense of the reward," the Kingdom of God, and thoughtfully discipline yourself to go the way that may be more difficult but in the end is going to be right?

And so, I think we can conclude by saying that the only way to get our values straight is to always see things in light of the end of all matters. So, we have to look at things, not in the light of the present, but actually in the light of eternity.