

and receptive or disrespectful and abusive? Does their reaction stem from misunderstanding or an attempt to harm our efforts? Paul told the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, **“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles”** (Acts 13:46). Some today will make the same choice and we must turn our efforts to others.

How am I presenting the message? If I believed as the unbeliever does, how would I need someone to speak to me in order for my heart to change? Jesus commanded, **“whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”** (Matt. 7:12).

How am I using my time? Is this the best use of the time God has given me? Am I missing more productive opportunities because of the time I have devoted to this interaction with someone? Christians must, **“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one”** (Col. 4:5-6). Our time is a precious and limited resource. We must use it wisely.

Why am I avoiding or fleeing from a situation? Have I judged the person’s response to be unproductive or am I ashamed to stand up for the truth? Jesus warned, **“whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels”** (Luke 9:26). May each of us always have the courage to speak the truth without fear but the wisdom to know when to speak and when to refuse to **“cast your pearls before swine.”**



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Casting Pearls before Swine

By Kyle Pope

Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a command to His disciples that presents some questions and challenges to all who would follow Him. He declares, **“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”** (Matt. 7:6, NKJV). What is the Lord teaching here and how should it be applied in our lives?

What Is the Context?

These words come at the end of a section on judging others (7:1-6) and just before the charge to **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you”** (7:7), which begins a new section on God’s willingness to provide for His children (7:7-11).

How does this command fit into instructions about judging others? The Lord begins with the prohibition, **“Judge not, that you be not judged”** (7:1), warning that our own judgment by God will be determined by the attitude we show in our judgment of others (7:2). Ironically, this command about what we give to **“dogs”** and **“swine”** requires that we make some judgments about how to treat different people. This makes it clear that Jesus is not condemning all types of judgment (cf. John 7:24), but the harshness of our judgment (7:2) or making hypocritical judgments focusing on the **“speck”** in someone else’s eye while ignoring the **“blank”** in our own eye (7:3-5).

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
9:30 AM
10:30 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McNear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

If Jesus is referring back to what He has just taught, His words about **“dogs”** and **“swine”** may relate directly to what He has just said about the types of judgment Christians should not make. Harsh or hypocritical judgment of others may be like taking a holy and precious thing (such as God’s forgiveness) and abusing it in such a way that it becomes destructive to us. If so, this may be understood as a different way of restating His earlier words—**“with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you”** (7:2b).

On the other hand, it may be that as Jesus ends this section, He slightly shifts the focus away from personal judgment of others to a focus on the consequences of subjecting ourselves to the judgment of others. Dogs were often used as a figure of that which was unclean or sinful (cf. Phil. 3:2; Rev. 22:15). Swine were unclean

to eat (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8) but they were also dangerous. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament done before the time of Jesus, as Hushai warned Absalom about pursuing David, the fleeing king was compared to **“a bear robbed of her cubs in the field and as a savage sow in the plain”** (2 Sam. 17:8). In the United States feral hogs have attacked and even killed people. When Christians interact with unbelievers their reaction to what we consider **“holy”** or precious may provide opportunities for them to **“trample”** those things **“under their feet”** and abuse and persecute us. This is the most common interpretation of Jesus’s command in this text.

How Do we Apply This?

If Jesus was merely restating His teaching on avoiding harsh or hypocritical judgments the application is clear. Do we expect God’s mercy but refuse to give it to others? James echoed the Lord’s teaching, writing, **“judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”** adding that **“Mercy triumphs over judgment”** (Jas. 2:13). No one likes to be wronged, but we all need the mercy of God. Do we give what we hope to receive, or do we hold a grudge and burn wrongs done to us deeply into our hearts and memories?

Some judgments have nothing to do with a wrong done to us but to God or others. In the time of Jesus, some **“trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others”** (Luke 18:9). Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector to rebuke this spirit, ending with the warning **“everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”** (Luke 18:9-14). Harsh judgment of others may one day cause us to be humbled. If we act as if we could never fall, we will be humiliated when our self-confidence fails. Hypocritical judgment can also lead to humiliation. As we overlook our own sins while unmercifully condemning others, when the truth of

our deeds is exposed our self-exaltation will result in being torn **“in pieces”** in shame and embarrassment.

If instead, Jesus shifts to focus on the consequences of being judged by others this is a call to use wisdom and discretion in our dealings with those in the world. Certainly, Christians are to be light in the midst of darkness (Matt. 5:14-16). We must not hide that light **“under a basket”** (5:15), but does that mean we subject ourselves to every opportunity for abuse and persecution that comes along? Later, Jesus would say to the Twelve, **“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”** (Matt. 10:16). How should this wisdom be used **“in the midst of wolves”**? Sometimes it must involve choosing when to speak and when to avoid the opportunity to be abused. On the same occasion, He also told them, **“When they persecute you in this city, flee to another”** (Matt. 10:23a). Disciples are still **“the light of the world”** even when they choose to avoid some situations that lead only to rejection and abuse of the truth.

Why would Jesus speak of fellow human beings as **“dogs”** or **“swine”**? Is He teaching us to view some people in this way? We must remember that Jesus **“knew all men”** (John 2:24). He could know who would choose not to accept the truth of the gospel. In such cases, even the best efforts to enlighten and teach them would never result in changing their rebellious hearts. We can’t know that, but we can evaluate behavior. Jesus is not teaching His disciples to make judgments about matters only God can know, such as the heart of another person. He is teaching His disciples to be good stewards of the time and opportunities set before us. A Christian could easily exhaust all of his or her time and energy on the stubborn, rebellious heart of one we might hope to convert, while missing the good and honest hearts all around us. We are to judge some as **“dogs”** or **“swine,”** not because of their value—all souls are made in the image of God (Jas. 3:9). We judge them in this way based on the reaction they

demonstrate to **“what is holy”** and the danger they pose to our efforts.

This is often a difficult course to determine. We live in a time when we now have opportunities like never before to reach the lost with the gospel. Yet, with these opportunities we are also seeing an increasing hatred, aggression, and opposition to faith in Christ. When should we act on opportunities and when should we **“flee”** to pursue other opportunities? Perhaps a few questions can be helpful:

Why am I speaking to someone? Do I honestly hope to bring a soul to Christ or am I just looking for a fight? Paul taught, **“a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will”** (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

How are they responding to what has been said? Are they open