

# **The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)**

## **The New People of God**

### **Study 15 – The Father who gives**

#### **Introduction**

One of the most common and, spiritually speaking, the most dangerous mistakes that people make with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is to read the sermon as if Jesus were laying down a set of rules by which to earn or to maintain God's favour. And one of the statements that suffers most from this misreading is the so-called *golden rule*, found in Matthew 7:12 – "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you for this sums up the Law and the Prophets".

As we saw in an earlier study, the phrase 'the Law and the Prophets' at the end of verse 12 echoes the same phrase in 5:17 and serves to bracket the material between 5:17 and 7:12 together as the main body of the Sermon. What goes before in 5:1-16 thus serves as an introduction to the Sermon as a whole and is therefore a key to how we should read and understand it. And as we saw in our study of the Beatitudes, the last thing that was in Jesus' mind was the idea that by keeping His teachings people could earn or keep the favour of God. Right at the beginning we were told that the kingdom of God and the blessing that is part of that kingdom belongs to those who do not deserve it, to the poor in spirit, to those who mourn, to those who are meek and who hunger and thirst for a new kind of righteousness that only God can give, a heart righteousness that exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Put in different terms, the Sermon on the Mount makes it crystal clear that God's kingdom and all the blessings that belong to it come as a gift from God to those who seek and ask, not as a reward for those who work. And that is precisely what Matthew 7:7-12 teaches, for in this passage we are urged to remember that God is a heavenly Father who gives good gifts to his people and encouraged to come to Him to ask for those gifts.

The golden rule of verse 12 is thus not a rule at all, but rather the summary statement of what a heart overcome by the love and grace of God will do in relation to others. Grace always leads to gratitude and gratitude should find expression in love – first love for God our Heavenly Father, the giver of every good and perfect gift, and then love for our neighbour expressed in us treating our neighbour in the way that we ourselves would want to be treated by others, even when we do not deserve it. In verse 12 Jesus thus reminds us that His teaching in the Sermon does not abolish God's Law but fulfils it and those who belong to Him will indeed not only love God but also love their neighbour as they love themselves. This indeed does sum up the Law and the Prophets.



## Investigate and Think



Read Matthew 7:7-12

1. In the original language the words *ask*, *seek*, *knock*, refer to continuous rather than once off activities. What is Jesus urging his disciples to do?
2. What promise does Jesus make to those who keep on asking, seeking and knocking?
3. In what way is this promise of Jesus encouraging and important to us?
4. In verses 9-11 Jesus uses a comparison to underline the point that He has been making. What lesson does Jesus want his disciples to draw from this comparison?



