

Excerpts of Archived Lecture:

GIVE NOT THAT WHICH IS HOLY UNTO THE DOGS

Give Not That Which Is Holy Unto The Dogs
(Matthew 7:6)

KERRY KNIGHT

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you”

This brief proverb, which most religious people can recall from memory, has more to say than typically meets the eye. Its place amid the sublime declarations of the Mount is not a totally isolated one. It appears to have a bearing on what precedes its text and on many other passages throughout the three chapter span (e.g., Matthew 7:15–16). **Although we are not to be censorious and unjust toward our fellowman (Matt. 7:1–5), there must, at the same time, be a discerning of character and heart based upon evidence at hand. There are great and fundamental differences between men and, certainly, “by their fruits they are known” (Matt. 7:16). Most assuredly, our “casting” and “giving” of that which is holy must be regulated and determined by the recipient of that blessing.**

WORD STUDIES

There are several key words in our text that should be examined with careful scrutiny. The tense of **“give not”** (ME DOTE) is aorist, as is the tense of **“cast”** (BALETE). Since the aorist tense denotes a single act without regard to time, the Lord was suggesting that not a **“single”** offering should be made of that which is holy to dogs and swine. This suggests that some discernment must be made to determine if a man falls into either of the above classes. After that knowledge is gained, discretion is then used as to who may hear and receive the blessing.

The **“dogs”** of Matthew 7:6 is KUSIN from KUON, and the term can be used both **“naturally”** (e.g., Luke 16:21; 2 Peter 2:22) or **“metaphorically”** (e.g., Phil. 3:2; Rev. 22:15), denoting moral impurity. The KUON was a cur, a scavenger of the streets, who rumbled through the garbage heaps looking for scraps. Moses spoke of them when he said, **“And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs”** (Ex. 22:31). The other term in the New Testament for **“dog”** is KUNARION, a little dog or puppy, which is a much milder word than is used here to describe certain men.

Then there is the word “**holy**” (HAGION, acc. sing. of HAGOIS). It fundamentally signifies separated (among Greeks, dedicated to the gods), and hence in Scripture, separated from sin and consecrated to God, sacred. Barclay seemed to have some difficulty with the word “**holy**” in our passage.

With the exception of one word the parallelism is complete. **Give** is paralleled by **cast; dogs** by **swine**; but **holy** is not really balanced by **pearls**. There the parallelism breaks down. It so happens that there are two Hebrew words which are very like each other, especially when we remember that Hebrew has no written vowels. The word for **holy** is KADOSH (K D SH); and the Aramaic word for an ear-ring is KADASHA (K D SH). The consonants are exactly the same, and in primitive written Hebrew words would look exactly the same. Still further, in the Talmud, “**an ear-ring in a swine’s snout**” is a proverbial phrase for something which is entirely incongruous and out of place. It is by no means impossible that the original phrase ran:
“Give not an ear-ring to the dogs;
Neither cast ye your pearls before swine,
in which case the parallelism would be perfect.”

It is interesting that Mr. Barclay is not taking the Greek text into consideration. Although the parallelism may not seem to follow the congruity of many in the Old Testament, the import of the passage remains the same. A certain blessing should be withheld from certain classes.

This blessing is also referred to as “**pearls**.” It is from MAGARITAS and is to be found in only one other context of the New Testament. “**Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it**” (Matt. 13:45, 46). Pearls, as a costly and precious commodity, are a fitting representation of God’s kingdom. “**In form not so very unlike swine’s food of beans or nuts, they here represent the beauty and precious wealth of the various parts of the Gospel.**”

The “**swine**” of which Matthew makes allusion is from CHOIRON, gen. pl. of CHOIROS. Lenski writes: “**To the Jew, dogs and hogs represent the height of uncleanness. In the Orient the dogs acted as scavengers, and no Jew was allowed to possess swine.**” To illustrate how little regard a hog might have for pearls, just consider their normal environment. “**But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; AND THE SOW THAT WAS WASHED TO HER WALLOWING IN THE MIRE**” (2 Pet. 2:22).

The pearls are subject to being “**trampled**.” From KATAPATEO, the translation is quite literal. There is the idea of treading down or trampling under foot. McGarvey wrote in this regard:

If a herd of hungry and ferocious hogs are called up to be fed, and instead of grain you throw them a basket of pearls, they will not trample the pearls under their feet, but in their eagerness for the expected food they may rush upon you, pull you down, and tear you to pieces.”

Certainly, what the writer intended by the use of such violent terms and such deplorable characters makes the true exegesis of the passage the more interesting and urgent.

THE MEANING OF THE PASSAGE

The passage obviously employs words that are to be taken with a metaphorical meaning. This is a spiritual message to spiritual beings. Our Lord was not regulating actions toward literal dogs or swine. But there were some canine and beastly characteristics of men that He wished to emphasize. McGarvey wrote concerning the dog receiving that which was holy:

In this precept there is an allusion to the holy meats connected with the service of the altar. Those parts of the victims which were not consumed on the altar, were eaten by the priests or by the people; but as they were holy, no unclean person, much less an unclean brute, was allowed to eat of them. What was left, after the clean persons had eaten, was not, as at the close of an ordinary meal, cast to the dogs, but it was burned with fire. (Lev. 6:24–30; 7:15–21.) To give holy things to dogs was to profane them: we are here forbidden, then, to use any religious office, work, or ordinance, in such a manner as to degrade or profane it.”

Thus, men who are of the disposition to treat the blessings of God with contempt, defiance and wickedness are styled as unclean beasts. The specific blessing that is repudiated by them is heaven’s message to lost humanity. To summarize, the word “**pearls**” refers to the precious truths of the gospel. The word “**cast**” refers to the efforts of disciples to present the truth to others. The word “**dogs**” and “**swine**” refer to people who scoff at holy things. The meaning here is quite clear. In this world there are members of the human race who have no more appreciation for the truth than a pig does for precious gems. To that class of godlessness we are to spare the sacred proclamation of mercy. There are some who not only despise the truth, but persecute you for annoying them with it. When such men are known, they are to be avoided.

MISAPPREHENSIONS OF THE PASSAGE

Refined society does not like to condescend to the common people—but that is not the religion of Christ, that is Pharisaism! **“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be born, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers ... Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widow’s houses ...”** (Matt. 23:4, 14). It is certain that Jesus was not ordering the blessings of the gospel to be withheld from the poor. The Bible says, **“The common people heard him gladly”** (Mk. 12:37).

Still, others might assume that the **“dogs”** and **“swine”** of our text were the illiterate of the day. The Gnostics sought the attainment of knowledge as the means of spiritual enlightenment. They reserved their choicest ideas for the inner circle of the initiated. But again this is not the religion of Christ. Paul wrote: **“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ... For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called”** (1 Cor. 1:22–23, 26).

The most popular misconception concerning the passage is that the Gentiles are the class of people to be resisted. After all, didn’t Jews speak of the Gentiles as dogs? Lenski comments:

These cannot be Gentiles as such although the Jews called them dogs. Nor can this giving to the dogs refer to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles or to publicans and sinners; for this Jesus did and commands his disciples to do. Dogs and swine are those who, after the gospel has been duly preached to them, retain their vicious filthy nature.”

It was never in God’s great plan to keep the gospel from the Gentile nation. Isaiah had written: **“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and ALL NATIONS SHALL FLOW UNTO IT”** (Isa. 2:2). It is true that the gospel went first to the children of Abraham, but that was only in order of delivery, it does not mean that the Gentiles were to be excluded from the benefit and blessings of Calvary. **“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). Paul stated the order of the Gospel’s proclamation in Romans 1:16: **“For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”**

PROPER VIEW OF THE PASSAGE

The Jewish people certainly began with an advantage, for Paul writes, **“Unto them were committed the oracles of God”** (Rom. 3:2). But what did they do with their advantage? Certainly, privilege demands responsibility. Did the Jewish nation convert to Christianity? Hardly! There were many Jewish converts, but principally that nation was unreceptive. That fact created a crisis decision that had to be made by first century evangelists. **“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”** (Acts 13:46). Similarly, Luke records: **“And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles”** (Acts 18:6). It is ironic, indeed, that the same disgusting name that the Jew often attached to the Gentile was now applied to themselves. The Jew was playing the role of **“dog”** and **“swine”** in their rejection of the truth.

But the application goes far beyond the Jewish nation of the first century. **The real key to understanding our original text is the word receptivity.** In Matthew 13 Jesus tells the parable of the sower, whose seed fell on four different kinds of soil. The sower represents the teacher or preacher; the seed is **“the word of God”** (Lk. 8:11); and the sowing, the means of transmitting the truth. The various types of soil sum up the many kinds of hearts of the human family. Also, each type of soil represents a degree of receptivity. The wayside soil describes a heart that is hardened with the constant traffic of unbelief. Because of sin this heart is not sensitive to the overtures of God’s mercy. **“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them”** (Matt. 13:15). This might describe a person today who is irreligious. Having had no exposure to church life, even denominational churches, he finds the message of the cross to be unrealistic and lacking in relevancy. Like the Greek mind, saturated in pagan thought and practice, he finds the preaching of **“Christ crucified”** to be mere foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). The wayside soul, lacking faith in God, sees the Bible story as mere mythology: He is the atheist or modernist of our generation. What should be our approach to such people? The gospel should be preached to **“every creature”** (Mk. 16:15). That includes the atheist and modernist. However, when the preaching of the gospel meets with the resistance of a calloused soul, consideration should then be given to more fruitful fields for sowing.

There is nothing wrong with choosing the most receptive people for the sowing of the seed. Paul did not concentrate on all cities indiscriminately. For instance, he stayed a very short period of time in what we might consider a very strategic city—Athens. Yet he spent many years in the smaller Corinth and Ephesus. Why? “**For I have much people in this city**” (Acts 18:10). And of the city of Ephesus Paul wrote, “**But I will tarry at Ephesus, for a great door is open to me**” (1 Cor. 16:8, 9).

The **stony** soil is the heart that is shallow, superficial and compromising. It represents those today who are spiritually weak, inactive and biblically illiterate. It may be the nominal Christian who attends services when it doesn't interfere with selfish interests. It is a religion of convenience instead of conviction. They have no real appetite for the religion of Christ because their involvement in study, worship and service has been casual. The liberal, who is trying to restructure the church and do away with the Old Paths, is also represented here. Many are woefully ignorant of how to establish Bible authority, therefore they are prepared to introduce any novelty into God's divine pattern of things. Paul wrote: “**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them**” (Rom. 16:17). To those who have no respect for the truth, the preaching of the word will fall upon deaf ears. If we discern that the individual is not presently receptive, why not turn attention to those who are?

And what of the **thorny** soil? This represents the divided heart. There is some interest in spiritual matters, but the primary concern is with the world. He is in a frustrating dilemma. “**No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon**” (Matt. 6:24). There are some who become so enamored by the enticing allurements of this world, that they lose their receptiveness to the Word of God. Paul wrote of the sensual in Philippians 3:18, 19: “[**For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things**].” To the worldly minded, the word of Christ is an intruder. And so Paul recommends appropriate action to those who lack receptiveness. “**Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself**” (1 Tim. 6:5).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To briefly summarize: In the teaching of the truth we must spend some time in judging or discerning the receptiveness of the people we are seeking to reach. This can be readily seen by the way they treat the Word. If they have no more regard for truth than a “**dog**” has for holiness or a “**hog**” has for pearls, then we should move on to more fruitful fields of endeavor. The Bible is too sacred a volume to allow godless souls to trample it underfoot and even persecute us for presenting the “**Good News**” story.

We should be ready always to “**preach the truth**” (Eph. 4:15); “**worship in truth**” (Jn. 4:24); “**say the truth**” (Rom. 9:1); “**hear the truth**” (Eph. 1:13); “**love the truth**” (2 Thess. 2:10); and “**defend the truth**” (Phil. 1:17). The man who will not do that is not worthy of the truth.¹

¹ Knight, K. (1982). [Give Not that Which Is Holy unto the Dogs \(7:6\)](#). In G. Elkins & T. B. Warren (Eds.), *The Sermon on the Mount* (pp. 224–231). Ramer, TN: National Christian Press, Inc.