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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“PEARLS AND PIGS”
Matthew 7:6

Have you ever cringed at what another Christian said to people who do not know Jesus?

☑ Maybe it was a famous TV preacher who made headlines for blaming the latest disaster on a particular group of sinners. Or it was an ordinary believer bombarding unchurched people with inflammatory statements about a sensitive topic.

Sometimes I am embarrassed when a sister mishandles Scripture or speaks in ignorance. Sometimes I share my brother’s conviction, yet I am mortified by his ugly tone, his clumsy approach, or his bad timing.

❓ Lord, have mercy! I, too, have stuck my foot in my mouth. When should we be silent?

Have you ever cringed at what another Christian *did not say* in a mixed setting?

☑ Maybe it was a leading pastor who could have spoken out against heinous sins in his own church, but chose not to. Or it was a layperson with a wide-open opportunity to share Jesus with an eager seeker and said nothing.

Sometimes I am embarrassed when a brother won’t speak out for justice, mercy, and love. Sometimes I am mortified by a sister’s lack of awareness, lack of preparation, or lack of courage.

❓ Lord, have mercy! I, too, have kept silent when I should have spoken. When should we speak up?

☐ Please turn with me to Matthew 7:6: **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”**

The meaning depends, in part, on what “[our] pearls” are. (That is, on what **“is sacred.”**)

Messiah uses the pearl metaphor again in Matthew 13:45-46: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”**

There is room for discussion about whether the pearl **“of great value”** represents the kingdom *per se*, or a particular aspect of it, or the human experience of it. Regardless, this is kingdom imagery.

Now, our **“pearls”** cannot be the kingdom of God itself, for it is not a thing to be possessed or distributed. So they have to be something that is closely related to the kingdom.

Hear the word of the Lord in Matthew 4:17: **“Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”** According to Luke 4:43 that was the purpose of his ministry: **“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God... because that is why I was sent.”** There are eight more teachings in that vein sprinkled across the gospels.

❓ What is **“this gospel of the kingdom”**? It is the Good News – not just that we can get our sins forgiven and go to heaven – but that:

- in Jesus, God’s kingdom **“has come near”**; *and,*

- {Rev 19:16} by his Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Ascension he has been inaugurated **“King of kings and Lord of lords”**; *and*,
- by the power of the Holy Spirit we can participate in the life of Christ, becoming citizens and ambassadors of his kingdom now; *and*,
- {Rev 11:15} at his Return **“the kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever...”**

This, in a nutshell, is the **“gospel of the kingdom.”** This is the Good News. This is the **“sacred”** pearl.

We are a giant step closer to faithfully interpreting Messiah’s teaching, but we aren’t all the way there yet. Much depends on the identity of the **“dogs”** and **“pigs.”**

☑ Raise your hand if you have ever loved a dog. I have, and I do now. Scout has a special place in my heart.

Messiah’s original audience did not love dogs. Dogs were not kept as pets, and they were not objects of affection.

Dogs are mentioned more than two dozen times in the Hebrew Bible. Not a single reference is positive. Four are neutral. All the rest depict dogs as greedy, nasty, disgusting, threatening brutes.

That pattern continues in the NT. **“Dogs”** is a biblical metaphor for degraded, bestial people.

☑ City dwellers like us seldom see pigs. Still, they are near and dear to many of us – in the form of bacon, sausage, ribs, chops, ham, and chitterlings.

{Lev 11:7-8} Not so with the Lord’s original audience! To them **“The pig... [was] unclean.”** Israel was forbidden

to consume pig meat and even to touch the animals. Not eating pork was integral to Jewish religious devotion and identity.

{Lk 15:15-16; Mt 8:28-34} In the New Testament it is when the Prodigal Son stoops to feeding pigs and longs to eat their food that he hits rock bottom. The fact that the demons beg to be sent into a herd of pigs, and Jesus agrees, speaks volumes. **“Pigs”** is a biblical metaphor for people who are senseless and profane.

The Lord Jesus narrows these metaphors. Spiritual **“dogs”** are so degraded and bestial that they violently reject the Good News and its witnesses. Spiritual **“pigs”** are so foolish and godless that their irreverence is extreme.

☐ **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do,”** the **“pigs”** **“may trample them under their feet, and then”** the **“dogs”** may **“turn and tear you to pieces.”**

☉ In plain language, do not unnecessarily expose the Gospel to extreme rejection and irreverence, thereby dishonoring Christ. Our words of witness, counsel, and rebuke are meant to serve God’s kingdom; if instead they fan the flames of opposition, it might be better to remain silent.

? When should we be silent? When should we speak up?

There is no hard and fast, one-size-fits-all rule. Allow me to suggest a few key terms that can guide our application of Matthew 7:6.

✍ The first term is glory.

We exist to glorify the LORD in thought, word, and deed. **“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for [his] glory”** (I Corinthians 10:31). Sometimes God is exalted most by our words of witness or counsel or rebuke. At other times, he is glorified more by our silence, especially when the Good News of the kingdom provokes extreme hostility.

You and I cannot control how others respond to the Gospel, nor should we try. Yet we must devote *our* lips to the praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

? The question is will the LORD be glorified more if I speak up or if I am quiet?

✍ The second key term is discernment.

◆ We must discern the other. Is my neighbor receptive, ambivalent, apathetic, or hostile to the Gospel? Are they wide open, a bit open, or completely closed to witness or counsel or rebuke?

● Let us not forget Messiah’s warning in 7:1: **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”** Our Lord has banned the spirit of criticism and the action of condemnation. You and I are not to sit in judgment of others, not even **“dogs”** and **“pigs”**!

Discernment is different. We assess our neighbors, not in order to make decisions about them (about their salvation, for example, or their human worth – that is judgment), but to make decisions about our course of action.

◆ It follows that we must also discern ourselves. Words, even harsh-sounding ones, *might* be needed; but if I am quick to use them, I need to figure out why. No words

at all *might* be best; but if that is my habit I must understand it.

● Scripture is essential for self-discernment, **“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12).

? The question is what is my attitude? What are my motives?

✍ The third term is humility.

{Ro 3:12; 6:23; Eph 2:8} We confess that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** – including us. We say **“the wages of [our] sin is death.”** We say **“it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith – and this [faith] is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God.”**

Do we believe it? If so, you and I will embody humility in relation toward our neighbors – even those whom we discern to be spiritual **“dogs”** and **“pigs.”**

After all, we cannot take any credit for the difference between us and them. Our salvation, our citizenship in the kingdom, our growth in holiness and love are the work of the Lord. If not for his undeserved and un-repayable mercy and kindness we would be in the same condition.

? The question is am I walking humbly with God?

✍ The fourth term is service.

Rightly discerned, words of witness, counsel, and even rebuke are not for uttered to punish, shame, or defeat another. They are offered in a spirit of help.

Rightly discerned, quietness is not a vengeful denial of the words of life. It is given in hope that strategic silence will protect a hard heart from becoming harder.

- Last week we dove into Matthew 7:3-5:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person’s eye.”

Removing my plank does not qualify me to condemn others. It authorizes me to serve them, to seek to grow more like Jesus with them, and to love them with the love of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

? The question is am I using Gospel words and Gospel silence in service to my neighbors?

▣ **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”**

Matthew 7:6 is the Word of the Lord.