



The Sermon on the Mount Study  
Bible Study Session 22  
Matthew 7:6

Study By  
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Greek NT

6 Μὴ δώτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσὶν μηδὲ βάλητε τοὺς μαργαρίτας ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων, μήποτε καταπατήσουσιν αὐτοὺς ἐν τοῖς ποσὶν αὐτῶν καὶ στραφέντες ῥήξουσιν ὑμᾶς.

La Biblia  
de las Américas

6 No deis lo santo a los perros, ni echéis vuestras perlas delante de los cerdos, no sea que las huellen con sus patas, y volviéndose os despedacen.

NRSV

6 Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

NLT

6 Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy.\* Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

The Outline of the Text:<sup>1</sup>

This text is one of the most curious passages in the entire New Testament. The highly figurative Saying of Jesus is deeply entrenched in first century Jewish culture, which is not familiar to modern western thought. Jesus mentions dogs and pigs in the same context of holy things and pearls. For many years I have been intrigued by this Saying and have sought to probe its meaning with greater insight. A part of that study was published in a Festschrift in 2004.<sup>2</sup> The Saying presents the Bible student with the opportunity to explore cultural mind sets in the ancient world and how they were used to express ideas, ideas not uncommon in our world but presented in dramatically different ways than would be the case in modern western society.



One should also note the uniqueness of this Saying of Jesus to Matthew's gospel. No parallel exists anywhere else in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the range of interpretive conclusions about this saying is extensive. Solid interpretation of this verb then will depend upon careful analysis of several aspects, beginning with the literary form and structure of the saying.

What is the **literary form** (i.e., genre) of this saying? The literary genre of this sentence is clearly that of a Saying of Jesus, i.e., *Logion Jesu*. The comparative nature of the expression gives its parabolic tones as a Sayings Parable in the teaching of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> The significance of such classification is to stress that the meaning of the Logion literally is very broad, and consequently can have numerous applications. The warning against taking something valuable and giving it to a couple of despised animals is very clear as the foundational meaning. This is the 'earthly side' of the saying. Now what is the 'heavenly meaning' side?

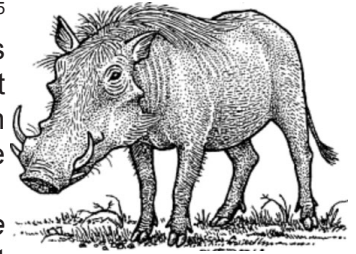
<sup>1</sup>Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

<sup>2</sup>Lorin L. Cranford, "Throwing your Margaritas to the Pigs. A Rhetorical Reading of Matthew 7,6." *Gemeinschaft der Kirchen und gesellschaftliche Verantwortung: Die Würde des Anderen und das Recht anders zu denken, Festschrift für Dr. Erich Geldbach*, pp. 351-363. Edited by Lena Lybæk, Konrad Raiser, and Stefanie Schardien. Münster, Deutschland: Lit Verlag, 2004.

<sup>3</sup>This verse is from Matthew's special source and is not found in any other canonical Gospel. The first half of the verse is found in the "Gospel according to Basilides" as reported by Epiphanius (*Pan. haer.* 24.5.2). It is also found, slightly modified and incomplete, in the *Gos. Thom.* 93. The first clause of the verse is found in the *Didache* (9:5), where "the holy thing" is understood to be the Eucharist. All of these instances are probably to be explained through dependence on Matthew." [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 170.]

<sup>4</sup>"This verse appears to be a detached independent logion apparently unrelated to the preceding (pace Guelich, *Sermon*; Davies-Allison) or following context, inserted here for no special reason but only as another saying of Jesus. It has the character of a proverb, which may have had a range of application. Although it is very obscure as it presently stands in Matthew, when Jesus first uttered these words he quite probably made clear what he meant by them. That explanatory material has not come down to us." [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 171.]

Some commentators see a more precise genre of an ancient 'riddle' in the saying.<sup>5</sup> Such forms were common in ancient writings, and can be clearly found in the Bible as well.<sup>6</sup> Although the 'mysterious' tones contained in the saying excite curiosity about figuring out a meaning, this saying lacks a clear signal of being a riddle in the fashion typical in ancient writings. The parabolic nature of the saying is what gives it the supposed 'hidden' tone of meaning, not that it is an ancient riddle.



*The more precise meaning of such a saying then depends heavily upon the contextual setting used by the speaker and/or writer.* Thus the Bible student must be careful to not lift the saying out of this specific context in which Matthew has placed it. Otherwise no clear meaning is possible for the saying. This reality is at the heart of the struggles of Bible students over the centuries to make proper sense of the saying. When commentators de-emphasize the context, they move toward an impossible goal of concluding meaning from the saying beyond the root meaning of the comparative expression. Also, when commentators fail to give correct weight to the literary setting, they easily draw wrong conclusions about the meaning. Methodologically one can't just 'deconstruct' the symbolical meanings of dogs, holy thing, pigs, and pearls and then arrive at the proper meaning of the saying.

So, to move toward understanding of this more precise meaning, i.e., the probable 'heavenly meaning,' we need to explore both the literary structure and the literary setting of the saying.

Now let's look at the **literary setting**, and trends among modern commentators. **First, the connection to what precedes**, i.e., verses 1-5. One tendency among commentators is to see verse 6 as a continuation of verses 1-5. Davies and Allison reflect this understanding:<sup>7</sup>

Having warned his audience about judging others, Matthew now adds 'gemara' in order to counteract an extreme interpretation of 7:1-5: if there must not be too much severity (vv. 1-5), there must at the same time not be too much laxity (v. 6). Our author is anticipating a problem and searching for a balance, for moral symmetry. The principles advanced in 7:1-5 are not to be abused. They do not eliminate the use of critical faculties when it comes to sacred concerns. One should not always throw the cloak over a brother's faults. One must not be meekly charitable against all reason. Compare 2 Cor 6:14-18.

The problem with this approach is that it reflects a modern mind-set oriented away from critical expression, and particularly away from 'judgmentalism.' The appeal to 2 Cor. 6:14-18 as pointing the same direction is unconvincing.<sup>8</sup>

What appears better is to see a continuation of emphasis found in 6:19-7:5, as the sixth pericope in a collection of sayings that generally demand unconditional commitment to God and to others in the pattern of the 'vertical / horizontal' religious relationships foundational to the Decalogue in the Old Testament, and that we have seen repeatedly surface thus far in the Sermon on the Mount. A destructive spirit of criticism toward our spiritual brothers and sisters is clearly ruinous to proper relationships. And a lack spiritual discernment about the things of God in our relationships with others is equally destructive to healthy connections. The two pericopes are not 'antithetical,' as Davies and Allison propose, among others. Instead, they are complementary to one another.

**Second, the connection to what follows**, i.e., verses 7-11. Somewhat out of desperation, a few commentators

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<sup>5</sup>"1: a mystifying, misleading, or puzzling question posed as a problem to be solved or guessed : conundrum, enigma; 2: something or someone difficult to understand. Synonyms see mystery" ["riddle," *Merriam-Webster Online* dictionary]

<sup>6</sup>"The literary genre of vs. 6 may be related to the riddle, but riddles are or imply questions to be figured out.<sup>1</sup> Its purpose is to let the hearer or reader guess what the meaning is.<sup>2</sup> More likely, vs. 6 is an esoteric saying that the uninformed will never be able to figure out. Finding the explanation is not a matter of natural intelligence but of initiation into secrets. The decision which option is before us depends on the context as well as on the content. Both context and content suggest that the saying conveys something serious; it is not one of the playful riddles that occur in wisdom literature, usually in the company of other such sayings. That vs. 6 is isolated and that its content involves some "sacred object" (τὸ ἅγιον) speaks in favor of some message of importance."<sup>3</sup> [Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount : A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 496.]

<sup>7</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 674

<sup>8</sup>2 Cor. 6:11-18 (NRSV): "11 We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. 12 There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. 13 In return — I speak as to children — open wide your hearts also. 14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? 15 What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'"

link verse 6 to verses 7-11 in rejection of the link to verses 1-5. John Nolland would reflect one tendency this direction.<sup>9</sup> The pattern moves toward the focus on God and prayer requests to Him in verses 7-11. Nolland sees the emphasis as ‘vertical’ and not ‘horizontal,’ like Davies and Allison do. The catch word ‘give’ (*δίδωμι*) between 7:6 and 7:7 can be seen as a linking of the two pericopes. But this is not decisive. One appeal of this approach is to move away from understanding the saying in precise, specific terms. Rather, the saying sets forth a broad generalized principle of careful handling to the sacred. But to argue that the focus is on what we offer to God, rather than what we withhold from others, is a ‘argument from silence,’ (*argumentum ex silentio*) in the sense that the negative images of ‘dog’ and ‘pig’ are implying the positive image of God. The sense becomes ‘Don’t give it to dogs and pigs; instead, offer it to God.’ This line of reasoning has serious flaws, and doesn’t make a strong case for itself. The positive side of Nolland’s approach is to keep the larger focus on commitment to God, clearly in 6:19-7:11, center stage in the discussion.

**Third, the connection to the Model Prayer**, i.e., Mt. 6:13. As we have repeatedly argued in the last six studies, these six pericopes must be understood largely as Jesus’ commentary on the six petitions in the Model Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13). As such this final pericope in 7:6 stands as His commentary on the sixth petition in 6:13, as is reflected in the structural chart that follows.

“And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” (**Petition**)

**Presupposes:**

“Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.” (**Commentary**)

The advantage of this connection is that it argues also, as does Nolland, for a broader understanding of the meaning of the saying. As we turn to the world around us, spiritual discernment of what is genuinely sacred becomes paramount. Experience and observation over the years has demonstrated over and over to me that most Christians have little idea of the truly sacred. And that misconception of the sacred is rampant among supposed Christians. Deep spiritual discernment, the emphasis of the first three petitions (6:9-10) and commentaries (6:19-24), has been Jesus’ emphasis. Then, to balance that out with a clear understanding of physical needs and constructive relationships has followed in 6:11-12 and 6:25-7:5.

How then to properly handle and disperse the sacred becomes critical. Our prayer petition is for deliverance from the Devil’s blinding grip on our lives so that we have clear eyes to see correctly what is holy and what is unholy. Then in ministry and witness to the sacred we will be able to focus on genuinely sharing the authentically sacred with those prepared by God to receive it. Where we detect lack of openness to the sacred we will know how to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit in offering the things of God appropriate to such individuals. To be certain, 7:6 has connection with 7:1-5 in the sense that knowing how to use the sacred properly is crucial to helping a wayward brother recover spiritual health.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, the ‘surgical removal of the splinter’ in the brother’s eye can result in disaster! Yet, spiritual discernment comes only with unconditional focus on God and the things of God. To keep this focus on God we must constantly be asking for God’s protective hand to keep us from the devil’s blinding grip.

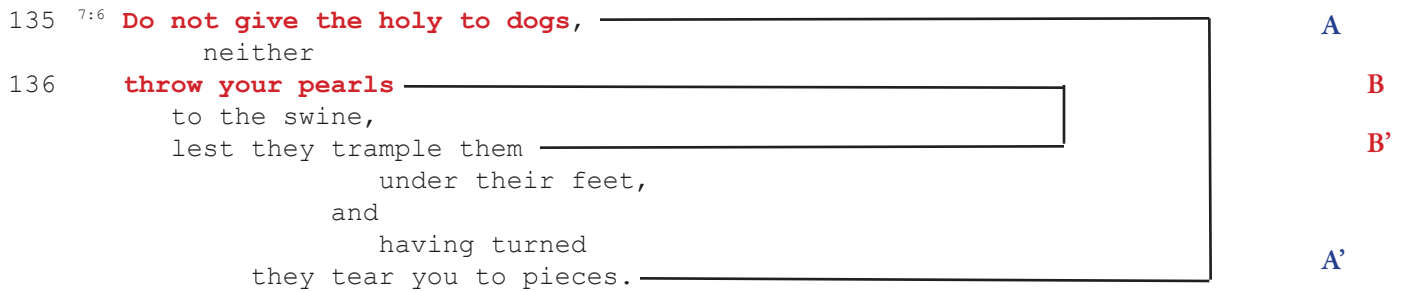
This contextual perspective on 7:6 offers a better way of understanding the text.

Finally, what is the nature of the internal **literary structure** of this saying? The literary structure of this single sentence is at first clear, and then upon closer examination one realizes that it is more complex than it first appeared to be. The block diagram in English of the underlying Greek text of the passage helps to highlight

<sup>9</sup>“It seems to me that we have in 7:6 a fresh image for the challenge to make God our exclusive priority. In 6:19–20 the imagery was that of storing up treasure, in v. 24 it was that of having an exclusive master, but in 7:6 it is that of dispersing our resources (what we do with the holy and the valuable that we have available to us). In particular the rejected option is a use of our resources that is not focussed on God. An image of ‘spending’ now takes the place of an image of ‘hoarding’ (6:19–20) or an image of serving a master (v. 24) to make much the same point. There is the same assumption of a rejected middle ground as earlier. What is not directed towards God is seen to be as inappropriately dispersed as sacrificial flesh given to dogs or valuable pearls offered as pig feed. The pigs do not value the proffered pearls, and the dogs, stimulated by the taste and smell of raw meat, attack the giver in the hope of gaining more. The outcome here is probably the counterpart to the damage by moth and corrosion and the loss to thieves found earlier.” [John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in the New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 321–324.]

<sup>10</sup>This is Paul’s point precisely in his similar admonition in Gal. 6:1-5, “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, **you who have received the Spirit** should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. **Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a cause for pride, 5 For all must carry their own loads.**”

the thought flow to a fair degree. From another angle of literary structural analysis, one realizes that an informal chiasmus is also present in the text. This helps identify the verb subjects in the ‘they’ at the compound subordinate clause level in the ‘lest they...’ segment of the sentence.



Several issues need clarification in order to better understand this declaration. **First**, clearly the two core statements, #s 135 and 136 in **the bold red**, are in parallel to one another. Pearls compares to the holy; swine compare to dogs. But what is the nature of the parallels? Are they synonymous or synthetic? That is, do the second set of ‘pearls’ and ‘swine’ merely redefine the same thing as ‘the holy’ and ‘dogs’? Two possibilities exist. If they are taken as synonymous, then the two sets are talking about one central point. The interpretive task then is to identify this central point. But, if the parallelism is synthetic, sometimes labeled ‘step parallelism,’ then the second set refers to something different from the first. And this second meaning built on, or advances, the idea of the first set. The interpretive task then is to both identify the probable meaning of each set, and how they are connected to one another. In the course of two thousand years to study of this statements, both of these approaches have been taken by different students of the Bible -- and mostly without serious assessment of what is being assumed in each approach. The exegesis below will explore these matters and draw some conclusions.

**Second**, how should the twofold dependent clause<sup>11</sup> be understood? Primarily this has to do with the understood subjects of the two verbs, ‘trample’ (*καταπατήσουσιν*) and ‘tear’ (*ρήξουσιν*). In other words, do the hogs both trample and tear? Or, do the hogs trample and the dogs tear? Technically from the Greek grammar, either understanding is possible. The verb structures slightly favor a single subject for both verbs, i.e., the hogs. But the clearly differing direct objects of the verbs, ‘them’ and ‘you,’ opens the door for differing verb subjects. Added to that was the common literary depiction of swine as ignorant fools who would ‘trample’ their food in their greed, and of dogs as vicious wild animals who would turn on those who fed them in meanness. Increasingly, scholars have opted for different subjects of the two verbs.

The result of this approach is to see the statement as an informal chiasm in the AB:B’A’ pattern sketched out above. But less certain in the minds of many modern scholars is whether this parallelism is synonymous or synthetic in nature. The dominant orientation currently is toward the synonymous view, but a considerable number see it as synthetic.<sup>12</sup> The early tendency in the Patristic Era (100 - 800 AD) was the latter. The better understanding is synonymous with the emphasis on a common theme of the danger of mishandling the sacred. Thus with the general understanding of not giving valuable things to hogs and pigs who have no understanding of their value, one can see in the context the spiritual application of the wise use of spiritual realities in careful sharing with others who do have the ability to grasp what they are receiving.<sup>13</sup>

Now let’s take a look at each segment of the saying.

I. **Holy things to snarling dogs,**

“Do not give what is holy to dogs... or they will...turn and maul you”

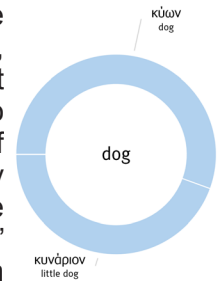
Μὴ δώτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσίν... καὶ στραφέντες ῥήξουσιν ὑμᾶς.

<sup>11</sup>NRSV: “or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you”; GNT: *μήποτε καταπατήσουσιν αὐτοὺς ἐν τοῖς ποσίν αὐτῶν καὶ στραφέντες ῥήξουσιν ὑμᾶς.*

<sup>12</sup>If synonymous, the ‘dogs’ and ‘hogs’ stand essentially for the same thing, as does ‘what is holy’ and ‘pearls.’ But if synthetic, i.e., step parallelism, then ‘dogs’ and ‘what is holy’ stand for another, different set of spiritual designations, and ‘hogs’ and ‘pearls’ for another set. This latter understanding especially has opened up a bizarre range of wild speculation about what is meant. Whatever heresy agenda is on the table with individual interpreters usually ends up being read back into this text with virtually no justification whatsoever.

<sup>13</sup>The identification of the holy with the Eucharist or the Gospel and a forbidding of sharing the Eucharist with wayward Christians or the Gospel with hardened sinners makes little sense and lacks justification. The principle of Jesus cannot be narrowed to such items.

What were dogs in the ancient world? Two Greek words for ‘dogs’ are found in the New Testament:<sup>14</sup> κύων (5x in NT) and κυνάριον (4x in NT).<sup>15</sup> In light of the image of dogs, especially wild dogs in the ancient world, the picture painted here is graphic.<sup>16</sup> Dogs represent individuals who possess not only lack of understanding of what is holy, but also have no appreciation for the sacred. When dealing with such people believers need the wisdom of God in knowing how to share the things of God. In some instances, not sharing anything may be the best approach. In other situations sharing only limited aspects of the sacred will be appropriate. An interesting illustration of this is to trace the so-called ‘missionary speeches’ and ‘defense speeches’ of Peter and Paul as outlined by Luke in the book of Acts. In each instance these two Christian leaders customized carefully what they shared with the differing audiences which ranged to sympathetic to intensely hostile. Particularly instructive is a comparison between Peter’s missionary speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and Paul’s missionary speech before the Greek philosophers on Mar’s Hill in Athens (Acts 17:16-31). The dramatic difference in background and spiritual orientation by the two audiences necessitated dramatically different ways of present the message of salvation in Christ. Both Peter and Paul needed God’s special wisdom in order to know how to approach sharing the sacred with these two groups. Had Satan been able to blind them to this insight their sharing would have backfired, and not produced positive results.



In modern application, how do you share spiritual realities with others? The ‘button holing’ of ‘victims’ with scare tactics is, in my opinion, a serious failure to understand Jesus’ point here. Such approaches play right into the devil’s hands in hardening lost people against the gospel. How do you help a ‘back slidden’ believer come to repentance from his or her wayward living? Again, we must exercise great spiritual insight into using spiritual principles to truly help such individuals, and avoid driving them away from God. In Willie Nelson’s words, “we must know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em!”

## II. *Pearls to trampling hogs*

“and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot”

μηδὲ βάλητε τοὺς μαργαρίτας ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων, μήποτε καταπατήσουσιν αὐτοὺς ἐν τοῖς ποσὶν αὐτῶν.

The same essential theme is presented a second time with the graphic imagery of ancient pigs. What was the attitude of people toward them in the first century world? The vast majority viewed pigs positively, but the

<sup>14</sup>Three separate Hebrew words for ‘dog’ are used a total of 32 times in the Old Testament.

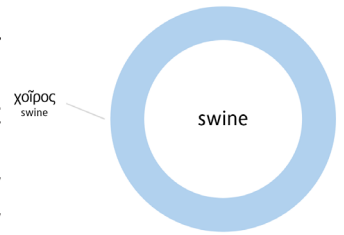
<sup>15</sup>kýōn [dog], kynárion [house dog]

*kýōn*. 1. This word, meaning “dog,” is mostly used disparagingly in the OT for despicable street dogs (cf. 1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Kgs. 8:13; 1 Kgs. 14:11; Ps. 22:16, 20; Prov. 26:11). The rabbis display similar contempt for dogs when they compare the ungodly or Gentiles to them. 2. What distinguishes Israel is possession of the law, which is not to be given to the unclean. Jesus takes up this thought in Mt. 7:6. In view of the majesty of the gospel the disciples must not address it to the wrong people, i.e., where they cannot break through opposition in their own strength. The cultic form of the saying suggests an application in worship too. In Lk. 16:19ff. the licking of the sores of Lazarus by dogs describes the supreme wretchedness of his position. 3. Paul’s warning in Phil. 3:2 has a sharp edge. He is perhaps referring Mt. 7:6 to those who disturb the community, or thinking of the hostility of his opponents in reminiscence of Ps. 22 or Ps. 59:6–7. 2 Pet. 2:22 takes up Prov. 26:11 to describe believers who fall back into sin. The influence of the OT may also be seen in Rev. 22:15 with its exclusion of dogs from the holy city, i.e., those who reject the truth and are hardened against grace (cf. Ignatius Ephesians 7.1).

*kynárion*. This diminutive of kýōn means “house dog” and is probably chosen by Jesus in Mk. 7:27; Mt. 25:26 to show that there is a distinction between Jews and Gentiles but still to give the Gentiles a place in the house. The woman in her reply accepts the distinction but in so doing takes the place that is offered and finds the help she seeks.” [Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 494–495. S.V., O. MICHEL, III, 1101–04]

<sup>16</sup>“Because dogs in the ancient world were known primarily not as pets: but as wild creatures which roamed the streets in packs scavenging for refuse on which to feed, ‘dog’ became a word of reproach (as in 1 Sam 17:43; 24:14; 2 Sam 9:8; 16:9; Ps 22:20; Prov 26:11; Isa 56:10–11; Diogenes, *Ep.* 44). Compare the English ‘cur’ and recall that ‘Cynic’ (= κυνικός, ‘dog-like’) was used as a term of abuse (as in Diogenes Laertius 6:60). In Deut 23:18, ‘dog’ = a pagan, male prostitute (*qādēš*), and similar equations are made in other texts (e.g. Mt 15:26–7 = Mk 7:27–8; 1 E 89:42–9; Ps.—Clem. Hom. 2:19; S 1, pp. 722–6) although it would be going too far to assert that ‘dog’ was a common appellation for the Gentiles (cf. Abraham 2, pp. 195–6). The question for us is, Are the ‘dogs’ of Mt 7:6 Gentiles (as in 15:26–7), or do we have here a general term of contempt (cf. Phil 3:2 (dogs = the Judaizing faction); Rev 22:15 (dogs = sinners outside paradise); Ignatius, *Ep.* 7:1 (mad dogs = heretics); *m Sota* 9:15 (‘this generation is as the face of a dog’ refers to the impiety of Israel)? Surely the latter. ‘Do not give that which is holy to dogs’ takes up for a novel end a known rule (cf. *m Tem.* 6:5; *b Bek.* 15a; *b Pesah.* 29a; *b Šebu.* 11 b; *b Tem.* 117a, 130b) in which τὸ ἄγιον means sacrificial meat or leaven (cf. Exod 29:33; Lev 2:3; 22:6, 7, 10–16; Num 18:8–19). In Mt 7:6 this rule, by virtue of its new context, becomes a comprehensive statement about the necessity to keep distinct the realms of clean and unclean (cf. Exod 29:33; CD 12:8–9).” [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 674–675.]

Semitic cultures of the middle east, and especially the Jewish people, saw them as negative.<sup>17</sup> The Greek New Testament uses *χοῖρος* (12x in the NT) for ‘pigs’ or ‘swine.’<sup>18</sup> The ancient Jewish attitude toward swine was uniformly negative. Thus, the pig was frequently a negative symbol in the literature.<sup>19</sup> This attitude stood in contrast to the more dominantly positive attitude toward swine by most ancient cultures.



Thus Jesus has made His point well with negative images understood clearly by Jewish and later on by non-Jewish believers: *don't misuse the sacred!* Rather, pray constantly for God's help to prevent Satan from blinding you to what is scared and how to use it for God's glory. Then -- and only then -- will we be able to take the precious things that God has given to us and share them with others in a redemptive manner. May God help us *"be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"* (Mt. 10:16)!

<sup>17</sup>“Strict Jews would not even mention swine by name but would always substitute the term “the abomination.” Israelites considered themselves polluted if they were even touched by a swine’s bristle.

To the Hebrews the pig symbolized filth and ugliness. Pigs will eat fecal material, vermin, rodents, carrion, and the like (2 Pt 2:22). Proverbs 11:22 refers to the incongruity of a golden ring in the nose of an animal showing such characteristics. A similar metaphor occurs in Jesus’ statement about casting pearls before swine (Mt 7:6). The prodigal son’s degeneration was shown by his being forced in his poverty to feed pigs and eat their food (Lk 15:15, 16).

Eating the flesh of pigs was forbidden to the Jews (Lv 11:7; Dt 14:8). The Canaanites in the Holy Land killed and ate pigs freely. In intertestamental times Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), a Syrian king whose territories included Israel, used the pig to “Hellenize” the Jews. He first tested their loyalty to the Jewish faith by requiring the consumption of pork, considered a delicacy by the Greeks (2 Mc 6:18). The act of desecration that drove the Jews to rebellion, however, was the sprinkling of pig blood on the temple altar in a sacrifice to Zeus (1 Mc 1:47).

Pigs were frequently used in pagan worship (Is 65:4; 66:3, 17), which may account for their being forbidden to the Jews as food. Evidence in the Holy Land shows that pigs were sacrificed long before Hellenistic times. Pig bones were found in a grotto below the rock-cut place of sacrifice at Gezer. A similar underground chamber with vessels containing piglet bones at Tirzah dates to the Middle Bronze Age (about 2000 B.C.).

Alabaster fragments of a statuette of a pig ready to be sacrificed have been unearthed. Among the Greeks the agrarian rites of the swine god Adonis were popular. Swine were sacrificed to Aphrodite (Venus) in Greece and Asia Minor. In addition, pigs were sacrificed in connection with oaths and treaties; in the *Iliad* Agamemnon sacrificed a boar to Zeus and Helios. So it is not surprising that among the Jews the pig became a symbol of filthiness and paganism.

It is possible that eating pork was forbidden primarily because the pig may carry many worm parasites such as trichina, though that is also true of some “clean” animals. Another reason for forbidding their consumption may have been that pigs eat carrion. Some people are allergic to pork in hot weather, another suggested reason behind the Jewish taboo. The same taboo exists among the Muslims and existed in certain social strata in Egypt. [Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Pig,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 110–111.]

<sup>18</sup>The word ‘swine’ is the more formal but less frequently used term. The English word ‘pig’ is much more common, especially in North American English.

<sup>19</sup>Strict Jews would not even mention swine by name but would always substitute the term “the abomination.” Israelites considered themselves polluted if they were even touched by a swine’s bristle.

To the Hebrews the pig symbolized filth and ugliness. Pigs will eat fecal material, vermin, rodents, carrion, and the like (2 Pt 2:22). Proverbs 11:22 refers to the incongruity of a golden ring in the nose of an animal showing such characteristics. A similar metaphor occurs in Jesus’ statement about casting pearls before swine (Mt 7:6). The prodigal son’s degeneration was shown by his being forced in his poverty to feed pigs and eat their food (Lk 15:15, 16).

Eating the flesh of pigs was forbidden to the Jews (Lv 11:7; Dt 14:8). The Canaanites in the Holy Land killed and ate pigs freely. In intertestamental times Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), a Syrian king whose territories included Israel, used the pig to “Hellenize” the Jews. He first tested their loyalty to the Jewish faith by requiring the consumption of pork, considered a delicacy by the Greeks (2 Mc 6:18). The act of desecration that drove the Jews to rebellion, however, was the sprinkling of pig blood on the temple altar in a sacrifice to Zeus (1 Mc 1:47).

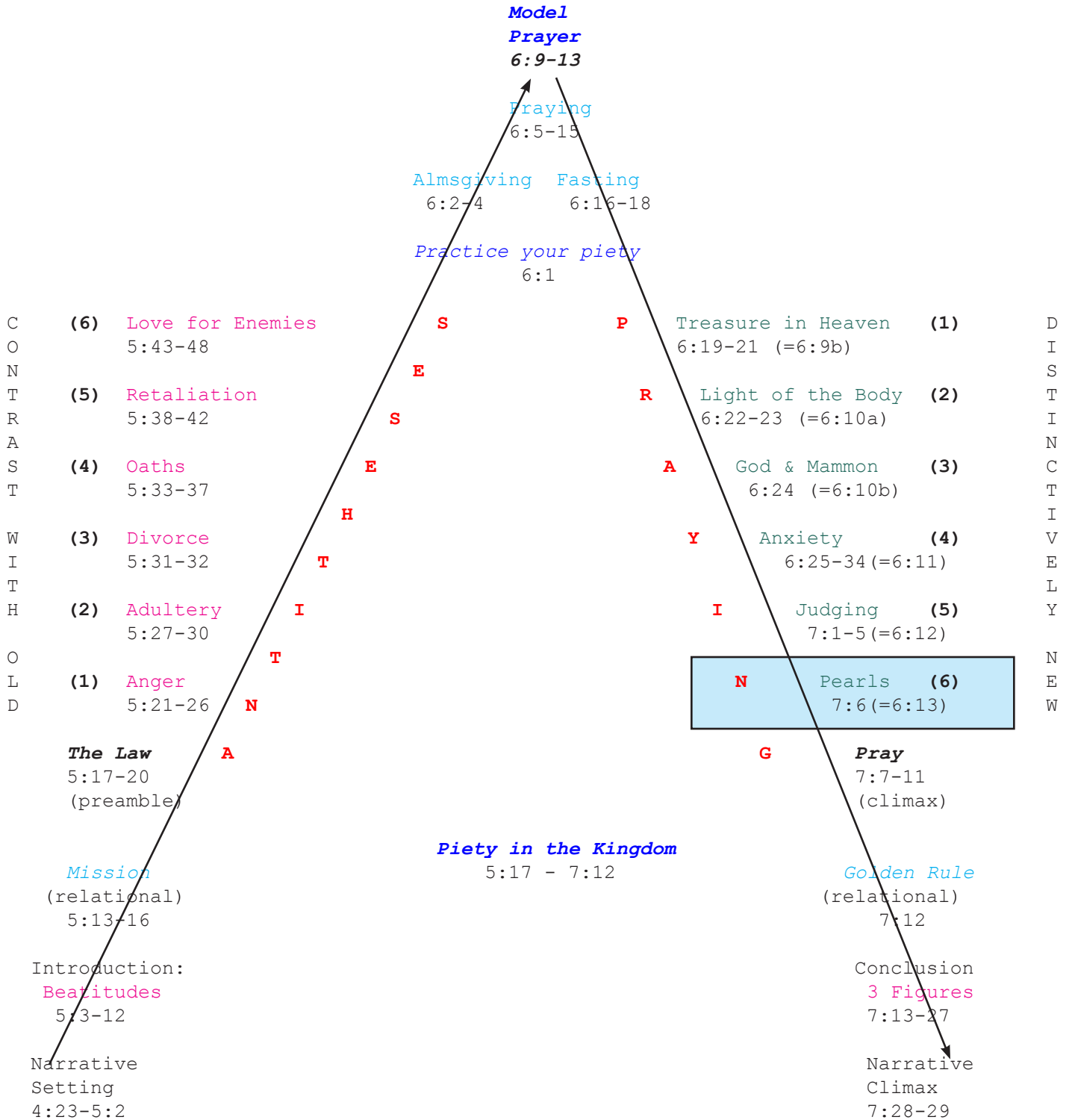
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# The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

*Matthew 4:23-7:29*



**Source:** Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.