

Matthew: 7:7-12

From Catena Aurea:

7:7–8

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

JEROME. Having before forbidden us to pray for things of the flesh, He now shews what we ought to ask, saying, Ask, and it shall be given you.

AUGUSTINE. (*ubi sup.*) Otherwise; when He commanded not to give the holy thing to dogs, and not to cast pearls before swine, the hearer conscious of his own ignorance might say, Why do you thus bid me not give the holy thing to dogs, when as yet I see not that I have any holy thing? He therefore adds in good season, Ask, and ye shall receive.

GLOSS. (*ord.*) We ask with faith, we seek with hope, we knock with love. You must first ask that you may have; after that seek that you may find; and lastly, observe what you have found that you may enter in.

AUGUSTINE. (*Serm. in Mont. ii. 21.*) Asking, is that we may get healthiness of soul that we may be able to fulfil the things commanded us; seeking, pertains to the discovery of the truth. But when any has found the true way, he will then come into actual possession, which however is only opened to him that knocks.

AUGUSTINE. (*Retract. i. 19.*) How these three differ from one another, I have thought good to unfold with this travail; but it were better to refer them all to instant prayer; wherefore He afterwards concludes, saying, He will give good things to them that ask him.

CHRYSOSTOM. And in that He adds seek, and knock, He bids us ask with much importunateness and strength. For one who seeks, casts forth all other things from his mind, and is turned to that thing singly which he seeks; and he that knocks comes with vehemence and warm soul.

AUGUSTINE. (Tract. in Joan. 44. 13.) Wherefore God hears sinners; for if He do not hear sinners, the Publican said in vain, Lord, be merciful to me a sinner; (Luke 18:13.) and by that confession merited justification.

AUGUSTINE. (Prosper, Sent. 212.) He who in faith offers supplication to God for the necessities of this life is heard mercifully, and not heard unmercifully. For the physician knows better than the sick man what is good for his sickness. But if he asks that which God both promises and commands, his prayer shall be granted, for love shall receive what truth provides.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 31. 1.) But the Lord is good, who often gives us not what we would, that He may give us what we should rather prefer.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. ii. 21.) There is need moreover of perseverance, that we may receive what we ask for.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 61. 5.) In that God sometimes delays His gifts, He but recommends, and does not deny them. For that which is long looked for is sweeter when obtained; but that is held cheap, which comes at once. Ask then and seek things righteous. For by asking and seeking grows the appetite of taking. God reserves for you those things which He is not willing to give you at once, that you may learn greatly to desire great things. Therefore we ought always to pray and not to fail.

7:9–11

9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. ii. 21.) As above He had cited the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, that our hopes may rise from the less to the greater; so also does He in this place, when He says, Or what man among you?

CHRYSOSTOM. There are two things behoveful for one that prays; that he ask earnestly; and that he ask such things as he ought to ask. And those are spiritual things; as Solomon, because he asked such things as were right, received speedily.

CHRYSOSTOM. This He said not detracting from human nature, nor confessing the whole human race to be evil; but He calls paternal love evil when compared with His own goodness. Such is the superabundance of His love towards men.

JEROME. Or perhaps he called the Apostles evil, in their person condemning the whole human race, whose heart is set to evil from his infancy, as we read in Genesis. Nor is it any wonder that He should call this generation evil, (Gen. 8:22.) as the Apostle also speaks, Seeing the days are evil.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Or; He calls evil (Eph. 5:16.) those who are lovers of this age; whence also the good things which they give are to be called good according to their sense who esteem them as good; nay, even in the nature of things they are goods, that is, temporal goods, and such as pertain to this weak life.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 61, 3.) For that good thing which makes men good is God. Gold and silver are good things not as making you good, but as with them you may do good. If then we be evil, yet as having a Father who is good let us not remain ever evil.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. ii. 21.) If then we being evil, know how to give that which is asked of us, how much more is it to be hoped that God will give us good things when we ask Him?

GLOSS. (ord.) For from God we receive only such things as are good, of what kind soever they may seem to us when we receive them; for all things work together for good to His beloved.

7:12

12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Firmness and strength of walking by the way of wisdom in good habits is thus set before us, by which men are brought to purity and simplicity of heart; concerning which having spoken a

long time, He thus concludes, All things whatsoever ye would, &c. For there is no man who would that another should act towards him with a double heart.

GLOSS. (ord.) Otherwise; The Holy Spirit is the distributor of all spiritual goods, that the deeds of charity may be fulfilled; whence He adds, All things therefore &c.

CHRYSOSTOM. Otherwise; The Lord desires to teach that men ought to seek aid from above, but at the same time to contribute what lays in their power; wherefore when He had said, Ask, seek, and knock, He proceeds to teach openly that men should be at pains for themselves, adding, Whatsoever ye would &c.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 61. 7.) Otherwise; The Lord had promised that He would give good things to them that ask Him. But that He may own his petitioners, let us also own ours. For they that beg are in every thing, save having of substance, equal to those of whom they beg. What face can you have of making request to your God, when you do not acknowledge your equal? This is that is said in Proverbs, Whoso stoppeth his ear to the cry of the poor, he shall cry and shall not be heard. (Prov. 21:13.) What we ought to bestow on our neighbour when he asks of us, that we ourselves may be heard of God, we may judge by what we would have others bestow upon us; therefore He says, All things whatsoever ye would.

CHRYSOSTOM. He says not, All things whatsoever, simply, but All things therefore, as though He should say, If ye will be heard, besides those things which I have now said to you, do this also. And He said not, Whatsoever you would have done for you by God, do that for your neighbour; lest you should say, But how can I? but He says, Whatsoever you would have done to you by your fellow-servant, do that also to your neighbour.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. ii. 22.) Some Latin copies add here, good things, which I suppose was inserted to make the sense more plain. For it occurred that one might desire some crime to be committed for his advantage, and should so construe this place, that he ought first to do the like to him by whom he would have it done to him. It were absurd to think that this man had fulfilled this command. Yet the thought is perfect, even though this be not added. For the words, All things whatsoever ye would, are not to be taken in their ordinary and loose signification, but in their exact and proper sense. For there is no will but only in the good; (but vid. *Retract.* i. 9. n. 4.) in the wicked it is rather named desire, and not will. Not that the Scriptures always observe this propriety; but where need is, there they retain the proper word so that none other need be understood.

CYPRIAN. (Tr. vii.) Since the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ came to all men, He summed up all his commands in one precept, Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them; and adds, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

CHRYSOSTOM. Whence what we ought to do is clear, as in our own cases we all know what is proper, and so we cannot take refuge in our ignorance.

ABUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. ii. 22.) This precept seems to refer to the love of our neighbour, not of God, as in another place He says, there are two commandments on which hang the Law and the Prophets. But as He says not here, The whole Law, as He speaks there, He reserves a place for the other commandment respecting the love of God.

AUGUSTINE. (De Trin. viii. 7.) Otherwise; Scripture does not mention the love of God, where it says, All things whatsoever ye would; because he who loves his neighbour must consequently love Love itself above all things; but God is Love; therefore he loves God above all things.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

7:7–8 Ask, Seek, Knock

Asking, Seeking and Knocking.

Augustine: But when the precept was given that a holy thing should not be given to dogs and that pearls should not be cast before swine, questions abound. Mindful of our own ignorance and frailty and hearing it prescribed that we are not to give away something that we have not yet received, ¹ we might therefore ask, “What holy thing do you forbid me to give to dogs, and what pearls do you forbid me to cast before swine? For I do not see that I have as yet received them.” Most aptly, then, did the Lord go on to say, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and one who seeks, finds; and to one who knocks, it shall be opened.” The asking refers to obtaining soundness and strength of mind through prayer, in order that we may be able to fulfill the precepts that are being given. The seeking refers to finding truth. For the blessed life is made up of acting and knowing. Action requires a store of strength, while contemplation requires the manifestation of truths. Of these two, we are to ask for the first and we are to seek for the other in order that the one may

be given and that the other may be found. In this life, however, knowledge consists in knowing the way toward that blessedness rather than in possessing it. But when anyone has found the true way, that one will arrive at that possession. As for you, it is to one who knocks that the door is opened. In order that these three things—the asking, the seeking and the knocking—may be illustrated by an example, let us consider the case of one who is unable to walk because of weak limbs. Of course, such a one must first be healed and strengthened for walking. Hence the Lord said, “Ask.” Sermon on the Mount 2.21.71–72.²

Knock, and It Will Be Opened.

Chrysostom: However, Jesus did not simply command us to ask but to ask with great concern and concentration—for this is the meaning of the word he used for “seek.” For those who are seeking put aside everything else from their minds. They become concerned only with the thing that they are seeking and pay no attention at all to the circumstances. Even those who are looking for gold or servants that have been lost understand what I am saying. So this is what he meant by seeking. But by knocking Jesus meant that we approach God with intensity and passion. Therefore, O mortal, do not give up. Do not show less eagerness for virtue than desire for possessions. For you frequently sought possessions but did not find them. Nevertheless, although you knew that you could not guarantee that you would find them, you used every means of searching for them. Yet even though in this case you have a promise that you surely will *receive*, you do not even demonstrate the smallest fraction of that same eagerness. But if you do not receive immediately, do not despair in this way. For it is because of this that Jesus said “knock” to show that even if he does not open the door immediately we should remain at the door knocking. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 23.4.³

7:9–11 Giving Good Gifts

Our Gifts to Our Children and God’s Gifts to Us.

Augustine: But how do evil people give good gifts? Those whom he here calls evil are sinners. As such they are still lovers of this world. It is in accordance with their notion of good that their gifts are to be called good. Their gifts are called good, that is, because the givers consider them good. Although these things are good in the order of nature, they are nevertheless temporal things pertaining to the infirmities of life. Moreover, whenever an evil person bestows them, he is not giving what is his own, for “the earth and the fullness thereof is the Lord’s.... Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.”⁴ So even we who are evil know how to give what is asked. How much more confidence ought we to have

that God will give us good things when we ask. God will not deceive us by giving us one thing rather than another when we ask of him. Even we do not deceive our children. And whatever good gifts we bestow, we give what is God's and not our own. Sermon on the Mount 2.21.73.⁵

7:12 How to Treat Others

Whatever You Wish Others Would Do to You.

Chrysostom: In this statement Jesus briefly sums up all that is required. He shows that the definition of virtue is short and easy and known already to all. And he did not merely say, "Whatever things that you want," but "Therefore ⁶ whatever things that you want." For he did not add this word therefore in its straightforward sense, but rather he used it with a deeper meaning. He is saying, "If you want to be heard, do these things in addition to those about which I have already spoken." What are these additional things? "Whatever are those things that you want people to do to you." Do you see how this shows that our wishes imply careful regulation of our behavior? Note that he did not say, "Whatever things that you want God to do for you, do these things to your neighbor." Thus you cannot say, "How is that even possible? He is God and I am a human being!" Instead, Jesus said, "Whatever things that you want your fellow servant to do, you yourself also perform for your neighbor." What is less of a burden than this? What is more just? Then the praise is exceedingly great: "For this is the law and the prophets." From this it is clear that virtue is defined in accordance with our nature. So we all know within ourselves what our duties are. We cannot ever again find refuge in ignorance. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 23.5.⁷

Whether Love of God Is Implied in the Command.

Augustine: Elsewhere Jesus says that there are two precepts on which the whole law and the prophets depend. ⁸ The present precept seems to concern only the love of neighbor and not the love of God as well. Of course, if he had said, "All things whatever you wish to have done to you, ⁹ do you also those things," he would then have embraced those two precepts in the one maxim, for it would be readily understood that everyone would wish to be loved by both God and other persons. So, when someone would be given that one precept—when he would be required to do whatever he would wish to have done to him—then he would of course implicitly be given the other precept as well: that he should love both God and neighbor. But it would seem that the present maxim means nothing more than "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," ¹⁰ for it seems very expressly restricted to persons, since it reads, "Whatever you wish that people would do to you, do so to them." However, we must pay close attention to his further

observation on this point, for Jesus goes on to say, “This is the law and the prophets.” In the case of the previously mentioned two precepts, he did not say merely that “the law and the prophets depend on them.” He said that “the whole law and the prophets depend” on them, for that is the sum of prophecy. But by omitting the word whole in the present instance, he seems to reserve a place for the other precept—the precept that pertains to the love of God. At any rate, the present instruction is one that was most apt for the occasion when he was expounding the precepts that pertain to singleness of heart. For there might be reason to fear that a person may have a double heart toward another, since the matters of the heart are hidden. But there is hardly anyone who would wish that others would deal double-heartedly with oneself. It is impossible for one to render service single-heartedly to another unless one renders it in such a way that one looks for no temporal advantage from it. And one cannot do this unless one is motivated by the kind of intention that we have sufficiently discussed earlier, when we were speaking about the eye that is single. Sermon on the Mount 2.22.75. ¹¹