

Not a Blank Check



Matthew 7:7–12

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My Dad and Papaw were partners in a farming operation called Cunningham and Cunningham. Ever since I was little, I can remember helping my Papaw and my Dad on the farm. I remember when I got old enough to get my driver's license and sometimes they would give me the responsibility of going into town to get a part for them while they were working on the farm. I'll never forget Dad giving me what I thought was a blank check. Up in the top corner, it said Cunningham and Cunningham, and the little line that said "To" was blank, the amount line was blank, and the "For" line was blank. Now, the bottom right-hand corner wasn't blank, it either had my dad's name, Bobby Cunningham, or had my Papaw's name, Garnet Cunningham. So, here I am going to town and I have a check. When I write this check, it's not coming out of my account it's coming out of their account. I would get tickled thinking how much I could write this check for knowing there was probably enough money in the account to cover it, but if there wasn't enough in the account to cover it, there was a bank behind that account. I would think...*I have a blank check!* But it would always dawn on me that it's really not a blank check. See, the

context of why that check was given to me governed how I would spend that check. Because Dad or Papaw didn't know exactly which store I was going to find the part they needed, they couldn't put who it was to. And because they didn't know exactly what the part was going to cost, they couldn't fill in the amount. Now, they could have put "repair" or "maintenance," or "part" on the "For" line, but they just left it blank and trusted me to fill it in. That check wasn't given to me to be used any way I wanted to use it; it was given to me with the full backing of my Dad and my Papaw, but context, why I had that check, governed how I would spend that check. Does that make sense?

Matthew 7 is going to introduce a truth that I think many people misunderstand and they believe that somehow God has given us a blank check to spend anyway we want to spend, and that's not true. The content of these verses is simple, so I'm not going to insult you with a lot of commentary, but I do want to back up and give you the content and the context of why Jesus said what He said as He comes to the end of His famous Sermon on the Mount. It changes everything.

Scripture

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him! "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

What a powerful promise that if we ask, it will be given to us, if we seek, we will find, and if we just knock, it will be opened. It sounds like God is giving us a blank check, but I do not believe He is. I believe this great responsibility that we have that draws, if I can say this, on the bank of Heaven is governed by the context Jesus is coming to at the end of a

sermon. He made it clear in the beginning of His sermon that if we follow Him, we will live such a life of human flourishing that we will have eight characteristics that will be evident in our life — not three of them, not five of them, not six of them, not seven of them, but all eight at some point will manifest themselves in our life.

We will not flourish as a human doer; we will flourish as a human being. As we flourish as a human being, God's design for our life is that we be salt and light in the world, not just in our family, not just in our church, but in the community in which we live. As we flourish, we are going to be used by God as a preservative in our community. He's going to use us to dispel darkness in other people's life as people see us following Him.

Jesus is clear that if we are going to be a follower of Christ our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, let's just be honest. If a scribe or Pharisee moved down the road from us, once we saw how they lived their life we would be inviting them to come to church with us, because we would believe they are good. We would believe they are right with God. But Jesus teaches that if we are going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, our righteousness has to go above. You see, they had outward conformity to Law that God gave Moses. But if we are going to follow Christ, it's not about outward conformity; it's about having an inner righteousness, an inner relationship with God that transforms our outerness so that what's happening on the outside is not just conformity to a law but it's actually expressing that you and I are in a right relationship with God. What is the standard of this righteousness? It's *teleios*, you and I being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. As he is *teleios*, we must be *teleios*.

Then, He discusses our giving. He discusses our praying. He discusses our fasting. He then tells us if we are a follower of His, we have a priority, and our priority is not our little piece of real estate; it's not our little earthly kingdom. Our priority must be the Kingdom of Heaven. Our priority must be His Kingdom, His righteousness, and He tells us if we will seek Him first, His righteousness, His Kingdom, He will take care of our little piece of real estate; He will take care of our part of the world. And then, He knows we are going to build relationships with people. We are going to get to know

people and we are going to see them struggling with some things, and we are going to want to help them. So He warns us we had better be careful before we start to help somebody because when we start making that judgment and start to help somebody who has a speck in their eye, we better make sure we have the two by four out of our own eye. Now, can I just say this, pastorally? Some of us have more than a two by four in our eye; we have a one by eight plank. Can you imagine this — a one by eight plank in our eye and me reaching over you trying to help you get the speck out of yours? You are going to run from me as far as you run. This is why so many people run from us, the church. They can't figure out why we are trying to help them with what they are dealing with when we can't even get what we are dealing with settled, wrapped, and done.

Now, I don't know about you, but every time I look at those eight statements of character, there are some of them that I just feel really good about. I know they are exhibited in my life but there's a few of them I'm struggling with. How about you? I get convicted. When Jesus starts talking about being teleios as my Father is teleios, there are just some times when I want to say, "God, this is hard! Do you really expect me to live up to this? Can I do this?" Now He is going to tell us how. We are finally going to get to how this works. Do you know how it works? You ask, you seek, and you knock. And as a follower of Christ, when you ask, when you seek, when you knock, what you need to develop the character that God wants you to have, what you need to be salt and light in your family, to be salt and light in the church, to be salt and light in the community, to be salt and light in the school, to be salt and light wherever you are at, that ability is there if you ask, seek, and knock. When you are struggling with being right and doing right, the ability is there if you will ask, you will seek, and you will knock. This is not a blank check for God to ask us for something that does not involve our character, our influence, or our righteousness. This promise that if you ask you will be given, if you seek you will find, if you knock it will be opened, is in the context of us flourishing as a human being who will have influence for the Kingdom so that others can see our righteousness which will ultimately point them to God. And then, God can use us to help others. That's the context.

Now, if you are new to the church, can I just take a couple of minutes to talk about the content? There have been times when I have asked and I didn't get. There have been times I have sought and didn't find. There have been times I knocked and no one came to the door. Am I the only one, or are you like me? How can Jesus say what He said if it's not happening? Let's dive a little deeper. First of all, understand these are imperatives. Imperatives are statements of commands. So Jesus is commanding us to do something. What He's commanding us to do is to ask, seek, and knock. He's not inviting us to ask, seek, and knock when we feel like it. He's not suggesting we ask, seek, and knock and we will have a better standard of life. No, He's commanding. If we are going to follow Him, we have to ask, we have to seek, and we have to knock. How are you doing at asking, seeking, and knocking?

Now, this is important...it's hard to see this in English, and if I didn't have a little training and a little help from some others I would miss this, but these are what is called present tense imperatives. Present tense means that when Jesus was speaking He wasn't telling us to do something one time and that's it. He didn't say, "Shut the door," and we go shut the door and then the action is over. Present tense means you keep on asking, you keep on seeking, and you keep on knocking. Do you see that difference? There is a difference if I tell Scott, "Scott, go shut the door," than if I say, "Scott, I want you to always go shut that door." If I tell Scott to always shut that door, that means every time he's here, he has to shut the door. How many of you have asked, and then quit asking? You saw it, but you quit seeking. You knocked, but you quit knocking. Why? See, what Jesus teaching here is if we are going to develop the Christian character that we should develop, if we are going to influence the world the way we should, if we are going to be teleios as the Father wants us to be teleios, we have to stay in a continual relationship of asking, seeking, and knocking. It's not a one-time deal.

This same incident is recorded in Luke chapter 11. In Luke chapter 11, Jesus is asked by the disciples, "How should we pray?" And then when He talks about the disciple's prayer (which is recorded in Matthew) and before He says ask, seek, and knock, He gives a little parable, a little story. He

talks about this man who has a friend that comes to him at midnight. This friend has his family with him and he's in need. He needs three loaves of bread. When the man opens up the cupboard, he sees his wife hadn't been to the grocery store that day so there's no bread in the cupboard. The market is closed. They don't have a twenty-four hour Walmart. So the man goes next door to his neighbor, who is also a friend, and he knocks on his neighbor's door. When he knocks, the neighbor acts like he didn't hear the knocking, but because the man has a friend who's in need, he keeps on knocking. Finally, his neighbor says...*Shhh! If you knock one more time you are going to wake up the whole family, and our little boy's been sick. We have been out with him for three days and we just got him into bed. Please hush. Go home. I'll deal with you in the morning.* The man doesn't go home, he just keeps pounding, knocking. Finally, his neighbor friend gets up and gives him three loaves of bread. Why did the friend give the friend the bread? The friend had nowhere else to go, but he had to have bread.

Is that how you approach God? You just won't quit. You just won't stop because you know He is the only one who can give you what you need. When it comes to developing Christ-like character, when it comes to being the salt and light of the world, when it comes to being teleios, you have nowhere else to go so you just won't quit. Many of us quit. We quit. Why would God ordain it this way? If God knows our needs — Jesus already taught us that before we even pray, when we finally figure out what we need, we come to Him — why doesn't God just give it to us the first time? Are we trying to change His mind? I don't think so. So, then why? Here is my explanation...how we pray reveals who we really are and what we really believe, not just about us, but about God. Have any of you ever went to your dad and said, "Hey Dad, I know you won't, but can I...?" Anytime my kids said, "Dad, I know you won't but..." I said, "You're right. I'm not going to." Don't we kind of pray that way? We aren't really sure, so we stipulate it so when God says "no," we won't be disappointed. How many of you have prayed for something, or maybe asked your parents for something you thought you really want and they said no? When they said no, you pouted for a few days and then you just adjusted and went on. Do you know what that revealed? You really didn't need what you asked for. I think God knows that about us but we don't know that about ourselves.

I will never forget when Kory Wayne was a little fellow he played baseball, basketball, and football. He had to play those sports because his mother would not let him do what he really wanted to do (his dad would let him but his mama would not). He wanted to ride and race motorcycles and she said no. I promise you, he asked her once or twice a week for about six years, and as he got older, he just got more and more and more intense. I will never forget one day during football season (he was a quarterback at Calloway Middle School). He was at home and he was asking Celisa, again, for a motorcycle. He just couldn't figure out why she wouldn't let him have a motorcycle. I won't tell you verbatim what she said, but she finally said, "Okay, if you want to break your neck, go ahead and get one!" That was the short version. ☺ The next afternoon I went to Evansville, Indiana, got a Yamaha motorcycle, and had it in the back of the truck when I pulled up the football practice. Yes. Kory got a motorcycle. Kory pursued professional motocross racing for a short period of time. There's only one reason he did — his heart wanted to give it all he had. Now, before he could ever get his heart totally on the motorcycle, he had to let his mother know where his heart really was. And when he wouldn't quit, that not quitting revealed his heart and what he really wanted to do.

That's what Jesus is saying here. In Luke 18, Jesus is going to tell a story about the Kingdom of God being here, in the present. Then the next story is going to be about a lady who is wronged and she goes to court. When she stands before the judge, the judge doesn't fear God and he doesn't respect man, and he says no to the lady. The lady keeps coming back and he keeps saying no...*Ma'am I'm not going to give you what you want...*but finally, he changes his mind because she won't quit. She just keeps coming and then he says this...*she's going to wear me out!* And he gives her what she wants. Now, I'm not telling you that God wants us to wear him out or that you can wear God out, but Jesus is teaching this to say this, verse 8: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will there be faith on earth?" Meaning what? Many times, we ask God, we seek, we knock, but we really don't believe. Us not persisting in prayer with God reveals that we really don't believe we need it. *Do you need it? Or can you do it on your own?* If you really need this to develop Christian character, if you really need this to be the influence God wants you to be, if you really need this to be

teleios as God is teleios, you will not quit asking God, you will not quit seeking, you will not quit knocking! That's what Jesus desires — He desires for us to reveal our heart to Him, and the way we reveal our heart (that He already knows but He wants us to know) is we don't quit! We don't quit...and some of us have quit.

What is Jesus trying to say here? You are not just a follower; you are my child. Then He tells a story of a father and his son. If his son came to him and wanted bread, would he give him a stone? If he wanted fish, would you give him a snake? Now, that sounds strange to us, but in the biblical day, there was a stone that looked just like their bread. So, imagine a dad having a son who wanted bread and he gives him a stone. He bites into the bread and breaks his teeth. That wouldn't happen. A dad wouldn't do that, not even an evil dad would do that. Imagine being a Jewish dad and your son wants a fish and you give him one of those eels that is unclean. A dad wouldn't do that. Now, in Luke chapter 11, Jesus says imagine a son wanting an egg and the father giving him a scorpion. You think that's weird, but no. A scorpion in that day, when it's claws and head weren't out, when it was rolled up it looked just like a small egg. Would a dad give his son a scorpion instead of an egg? No. When you come to your father, is he going to give you something that's bad for you? No, he's only going to give things that are good for you. He's going to give us what we need to grow in Christian character so that we can be salt and light...so that we can be teleios...so that we can get the two by four out of our eye...so that we can be used of God to help others! Amen? For many of us, the least thing we do is pray. This isn't talking about those little words or little phrases we say when we are going out the door; this is talking about a continual intercession with God where we talk to our Father, and we let Him know that without Him helping us do this, it's not possible!

Now, I don't know if ask, seek, and knock are three different things we do or if they are three different things that modify the same thing. If I was writing this I wish Jesus had said, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened, and ask and it will be given. If He had said it that way, when I needed something, I would seek Him. Then, when I got to where He was and felt like there was something between me and Him, I would know He's

at home, so that wall would be a door and I would knock on it. Then when He opens that door and I was standing in presence, I would ask Him and He would give it to me. Isn't that beautiful? That is not the way He said it. I mean, if you can just ask and get it, why do you have to seek and knock? There's an intensity to this. He wants us to know that all we have to do is ask, but to ask we have to be in His presence; and to be in His presence we have to seek; and when we seek Him we have to realize that there are some things between us and Him sometimes; and we have to knock so that can be taken away so that we can rush into His presence and ask. Be honest with me. Do you sense the presence of the Lord? Then ask. If you don't sense, keep seeking. Keep knocking. Don't you quit seeking, don't you quit knocking, and don't you quit asking.

"Therefore," the ESV says "So whatever..." meaning verse 12 goes with verses 7–11. We call it the golden rule. Don't ever quote the golden rule out of context. Based on this truth — God through His Spirit will give us what we need — to be a human being that flourishes so that we can be salt and light, so that we can be teleios, so that we can be useful in other people's lives. Our dependency is not in our flesh; our dependency is totally on Him. Therefore, if He's meeting our need and we are revealing our heart, if we are having this special time with Him, then when I'm with you I'm going to treat you like I want you to treat me. Do you do that? I'm talking to you followers of Christ. I'm talking to you children of God. Do you treat others the way you would want them to treat you? I'm talking about in every situation your first thought is, not right or wrong, but I'm going to treat you like I would want you to treat me if this situation was reversed. How are you doing?

Historians tell me (I would not have known this) that this principle had been repeated in many other cultures for millennia but always in the negative. So in Jesus's day, here was a common saying: Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you. I like that. If I can brag here, I'm pretty good at that. From time to time, some of you deserve to just be slapped in your face. I'm not going to tell you who you are, but you really do. I am really good at not doing that. I wouldn't want you to slap me in my face, so I'm not going to slap you in your face. I'm going to

withhold from you because I wouldn't want you do that to me, amen? So, in the negative, we can bat almost a thousand here, but this is different. See, it's one thing when I meet you for the first time and treat you the way I would want you to treat me, but inevitably, you are going to mistreat me. Have you ever been mistreated? Now, when the mistreatment takes place, how many of us continue to treat the person the way we would want to be treated? Don't we now give them what they deserve? *Okay, if you are going to do that, I'm going to do this.* No...no, I don't need you taking care of my needs and helping me become who I'm supposed to be in Christ — having influence of salt and light in the world, and being teleios as God is teleios — I only need Him. And because I need Him for that, it now changes what I need from you. So, do you know what I can do? I can treat you the way I want you to treat me. Do you know how I would really want you to treat me? It is the same way God treats me.

You can't have the golden rule in principle without being a follower of Christ who has an inner righteousness that comes from Him that flows outwardly. And as it flows outwardly, you flourish as a human being, not necessarily a human doer. And because you realize the reason you are in this relationship with Him is to be salt and light, this isn't about our little kingdom; it's about His Kingdom. It changes everything. It changed my life. It changed your life. Or, it can change your life if you will admit you can't do this on your own, and you will repent of being a sinner, put your full faith and trust in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross for you, and let Him make you right on the inside. That struggle can be over, and you can go public with what's private...and that's right with God. How are you doing? Then maybe we need to ask a little more, seek a little more, and knock a little more because our asking, seeking, and knocking is revealing our heart. I don't mean to be mean here, but for some of us our heart's not in this and you know it. That's why we struggle with what we are struggling with. We are here to help you.