

**Text:** Matthew 7:6

**Title:** Holy Pearls, Dogs and Swine

**Truth:** Treat God's truth with deep respect.

**Date/Location:** Sunday July 18, 2021 at FBC

## Introduction

This is a fairly well-known verse which arises in Christian conversation from time to time, but there are some questions as to its correct interpretation. For one thing, how does it fit with the prior and next verses—if it does? For another, what are dogs and swine? It sounds very demeaning, yet these words are out of the mouth of Jesus.

I understand “what is holy” and “pearls” to be parallels. Similarly, dogs and swine are parallels. The two phrases teach one truth.

## I. Holy Things

- A. “What is holy” is valuable because it is likened to pearls which are very precious. Yet, it is generic: whatever is holy. This could refer to holy objects, but in the Christian faith there are few things like that—certainly nothing that is ceremonially pure or “special.” But what is holy refers to a class of things that includes divine truth, miracles, the gospel, and testimony of blessing from God. They are things “sanctified” or set apart by God.
- B. “Do not give” implies that you, dear follower of Christ, *have something to give others!* Ponder on that for a moment. You have truth, you have the word of God, you have God Himself, you have the Spirit of God, you have forgiveness, you have a large Christian family, you have a church, you have so much that is holy and like pearls and rubies and gold. **Know that**, and treat those things as they really are—holy.
- C. You must use discernment in your decision about whether to continue to give (or attempt to give) the precious pearls of the gospel to those with whom you are speaking.
- D. This is a call not to misuse God's truth. Animals cannot understand the value of pearls or the holiness of holy things. Similarly, unsaved

people are unable to understand the things of God. It is like giving a fine piece of china or a diamond ring or a gold coin or a Picasso to a dog or pig and expecting them to appreciate it. They do not, and they cannot. They take the gospel and trample it underfoot (Heb. 10:28-29). They reject God (Ps. 14:1). They become angry when you tell them that their behavior is contrary to the holiness of God.

E. Casting pearls or giving what is holy is to persist in calling for the unregenerate to understand and follow the things of God after they have indicated they reject them. The emphasis is that we see what is holy *as* holy and we do not continue to push it onto those who reject the truth. We respect the truth enough to let truth be truth and holy things be holy things. If the unbeliever will not accept them on God's terms, we do not encourage them to trample those holy things underfoot. Let the scoffers go on their way and do their unclean things. "Hand them over" after a manner of speaking, like what God does with those who reject the knowledge of the truth. The gospel is so much it is entirely out of place to cheapen it or make it satisfactory to them. Certainly do not change the content of the message to suit the hearers. They have to get in line with the things of God, not the other way around! Why we would want to be directed by those who are unclean is beyond me. Our orders come from heavenly headquarters, not from earthly ones.

F. Where in the Bible could you find an example of this? Matthew 13:58 is one, where Jesus did not do miracles in His own home town because they did not believe in Him. I have said before that unbelief hinders the work of God, even "blocks" God from acting. Part of the reason for this is just what our Lord is saying here: they are not worthy of the things of God because they have rejected God. To know the things of God is a blessing; to have them withheld is a curse.

Another example is Jesus before Herod and Pilate. In both cases, He did not say a word (Matt 27:14, Luke 23:9).

Another example is Paul in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:46) and Corinth (Acts 18:6).

G. The gospel is a holy thing. At some point, for each person and even on a world-wide scale, God will take the saving message away. He will not continue to offer that which is holy to those who reject it. Mark 4:25 says that whoever has will be given more, and whoever does not have, even that which he has will be taken away. This refers to someone who hears but rejects the truth (Luke 8:18; see also Mat. 13:12, 25:29; Luke 19:26). This is not speaking of material prosperity. It speaks of spiritual prosperity—the “quantity” of truth that a person has. People who reject will be impoverished even more; people who receive will be enriched and multiply the blessings from God.

## II. Dogs and Swine

- A. Dogs and swine were unclean animals in the Jewish culture. As for pigs, see Lev. 11:7, Deut. 14:8 where they are specifically called out as unclean. The dog was insignificant (1 Samuel 17:43, 24:14, 2 Samuel 9:8) and dispensable (2 Samuel 16:9) and filthy (Prov. 26:11, 2 Peter 2:22). A living dog was very low on the scale, but better than being dead. Even a stately animal like a lion that is dead is worth less than a living dog (Ecc. 9:4). The word *dog* was applied figuratively to sexually immoral men (Deut. 23:18), corresponding to the woman as a harlot or prostitute.
- B. Those nuances of the terms are not exactly what it means in this context. The Lord is speaking about people who are unbelievers, particularly as respects their unclean status before God. (Jews would use the term in a very derogatory/racist fashion toward Gentiles. Our Lord could not conceivably be using the term in that way). These ones are sinners, unwashed, unforgiven, not repentant, and therefore are not able to be close to God, who cannot look on wickedness with any favor whatsoever (Hab. 1:13).
- C. The idea here is *not* that Christians think of unbelievers as swine! That is an evil way of thinking. If you think like that, you are proud and understand nothing (1 Tim. 6:4). Christians still love our enemies when we interact with them on an individual basis (5:44).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Remember, that verse cannot be used to defend pacifism. Societally, enemies or criminals need to be dealt with according to the law.

At the same time, we recognize those who reject the holy things of God are not part of God's family (yet—hopefully). We also do not pre-judge someone based on external characteristics and say to ourselves, “Well, there is a dog/pig, and I'm not going to share the gospel with him so as to cast pearls before swine.” For someone you do not know, or may not have interacted with in a while, you have *no* idea in advance whether a person is going to continue to reject the things of God. Maybe they will, at this time, be moved by God's Spirit *out* of their sin and into righteousness.

### III. The Danger of Dogs and Swine

A. If you persist, it will likely make the dogs and swine mad. Once it becomes clear there is no interest, continuing will only make them mad, and you know what happens when unbelievers—especially ones in power—are angry. See Prov. 9:8, 15:12. They will first trample the precious things of God underfoot. They do not like those things. In fact, they hate God and God's truth. They think they know better.

You as a possessor and giver of those things do not want God's things to be treated poorly by anyone. You do not want to profane that which is holy. Better to leave the scene, so to speak, and save God's name from receiving any more abuse than it already has.

B. And second, in their rage they will go after the messenger. They hate the message and the giver of the message (God and Christ). They often also hate the intermediary who is the closest to God that they can get.

### Conclusion

Verses 1-4 teach us to avoid super-critical judgment. But in doing that, we cannot forget that we must proclaim the truth. We cannot be “so unjudgmental” that we have zero discernment about people or situations or that we do not say anything critical. But we must discern when it is time to move on to greener pastures so that we do not bring God's name down into a muddy wrestling match. That is not suitable for holy things.