

Matthew 6:25–34 Do Not Worry

A person does not have to be rich to show too much concern for worldly possessions. Worrying and being anxious about material things is another sign of getting life out of perspective.

FOR DISCUSSION

Christians are told not to worry because

- it shows a lack of faith in God
- it cannot change things
- it makes the situation worse.

Find verses to illustrate these points in this passage.

The text says that worrying in advance about what might happen tomorrow is a waste of time and energy.

This does not mean that Christians should not plan sensibly for the future. It is again a matter of priorities. 'Seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness' puts things into perspective.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 7**Matthew 7:1–6 Judging Others**

This is a warning about the need to think carefully before criticising others. People making the judgement will have no excuse if they do the same thing because they cannot say that they did not know what should be done and what should not be done.

THINKING POINTS

Does Jesus mean that nobody should ever make a judgement about anything?

He himself condemns hypocrites in this passage. To Christians, of course, Jesus is a special case and has the authority to judge others.

What do you think?

The saying 'casting pearls of wisdom before swine' comes from this passage. We use it to mean do not waste your breath trying to teach people who are determined not to listen. Both pigs and dogs were unclean to Jews. The actual purpose of including

these sayings at this point in the chapter, however, is not clear and Christians have differing suggestions about the meaning. It may be that this was a common saying at the time and the Jewish audience certainly would be familiar with Proverbs where (in 9:7–8 and 23:9) there are warnings about wasting time on discussions with people who are cynical about spiritual matters.

Matthew 7:7–12 Ask, Seek, Knock

These verses continue the theme of prayer. The passage is encouraging Christians to pray confidently, believing that their prayers will be answered and that God knows what is best for them.

Verse 12 is often called the Golden Rule. The story goes that a Gentile asked the Rabbi Hillel to teach him the Jewish Law while the Rabbi was standing on one foot. Hillel answered, 'Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to others.'

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turns the negative saying into the positive form of the command, 'In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.'

Again Jesus emphasises the continuity with the Jewish Scriptures, 'For this sums up the Law and the Prophets.'

Matthew 7:13–14 The Narrow and Wide Gates

The Sermon on the Mount ends with a series of warnings about the need to make the right choice. It is easy to follow the crowd on the broad road to destruction and hell. The gate to the narrow path is hard to find but it leads to eternal life.

Matthew 7:15–23 A Tree and Its Fruit

The warning against false prophets says that the good and bad prophets can be recognised by their good or bad deeds. At the same time, however, there is the warning that people should make sure that the deeds they do in God's name are according to God's will and not done for the wrong reasons. References to 'that day' in the Bible usually mean the Day of Judgement. Only those obedient to the will of God will enter heaven.

Matthew 7:24–29 The Wise and Foolish Builders

The final warning in the Sermon on the Mount likens the listeners to builders. They can be wise or foolish builders. They have a choice. They can build their house on rock or on sand. They can put the teachings into practice or they can ignore them.

Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount by reporting the response of the crowds to the teaching. They were amazed because Jesus taught 'as one who had authority'. Jewish scribes and teachers of the law usually argued from scripture and tradition, quoting the chain of people who had given various interpretations. The repetition of the phrase 'But I tell you' is seen by Christians as evidence of this special Messianic claim to authority.

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

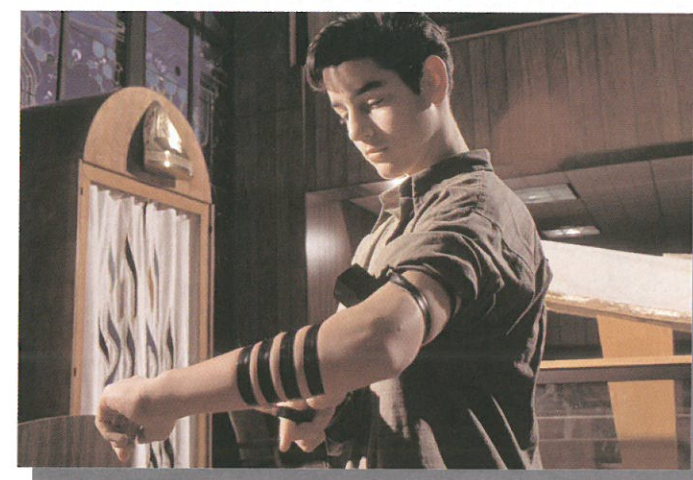
One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.'

'Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28–34)

The question about the greatest commandment was a common topic for debate. In his answer, Jesus does not choose one of the Ten Commandments but another passage from the books of Moses, Deuteronomy 6:4–5. This is the great Jewish declaration of faith which is called the Shema.



Jesus adds a second command from the books of Moses, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' It comes from Leviticus 19:18. Loving your neighbour does not mean the person who lives next door, though it includes them. According to Jesus, it means loving every person you encounter.

In John's gospel Jesus says, 'A new command I give you: Love one another.' (John 13:34)

Loving God and loving other people are two positive principles which cover all the Ten Commandments. They also cover inward intentions as well as outward actions.

Jesus did not invent these two principles and he was not disagreeing with the teachings of Judaism. As the lawyer says in his reply to Jesus, the Jewish Scriptures put religious and moral teaching of the Law above ceremonies and sacrifices.

Besides the teaching about the greatest commandment, this gospel incident also shows Christians that the Jewish Scriptures are the foundation and preparation for the teaching of Jesus.