

## "The Danger of Hypocrisy"

### Part 3

#### Matthew 6:1-15

**Introduction:** For quite some time we have been in a study of the Sermon on the Mount. We have looked at Matthew 5:1-48 where we considered the Beatitudes and we also looked at God's Standard for our lives here on this earth. The content of Matthew 5:20-48 could really be seen as "The Theology for Life". Then as we approach Matthew 6 Jesus is going to deal with several topics that will rest upon the theology that is found in Matthew 5. In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus deals with 3 practices of the Christian life and they are;

1. Giving
2. Prayer
3. Fasting

Then in Matthew 6:19-24 He deals with the subject of "money". He then moves on in Matthew 6:25-34 and in those verses He will deal with the subject of "faith".

Now what we need to know is this; when our theology lines up with the "Theology for Life" in Matthew 5:20-48 then the topics addressed in Matthew 6 (giving, prayer, fasting, money, and faith) will all be lived in a way that honors our Lord. So our theology must be correct before all of these other practices of life will fall into place.

Here in Matthew 6:1-18 there are 3 practices that are focused on as we said and there is 1 warning that is connected to each of the practices. The warning is against hypocrisy. The word "hypocrite" is

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used 3 times in this section. Therefore we must guard against hypocrisy in giving, in praying, and in fasting. The last 2 times we were together we look at the subject of giving and the danger of hypocrisy in our giving. Here in this sermon Jesus instructs us and tells us that we are to give in a very discrete manner.

### **Matthew 6:3**

<sup>3</sup> *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:*

We are to give in a way that our left hand does not know what our right hand is doing. When only one hand knows about the giving then our 2 hands cannot get together and clap. The religious leaders of Jesus day were giving to the temple, to the poor, and to the needy for the purpose of being seen by others. Jesus said they had their reward which was the praise of men. He went on to say that when we give in secret we will be rewarded openly for our giving.

### **Matthew 6:4**

<sup>4</sup> *That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

The open reward will come at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Now we come to **Matthew 6:5-8** tonight in which Jesus will deal with the subject of prayer. Before we get started into the verses this evening let me just give to you a few thoughts about the importance of prayer in our Christian lives. Now one thing is for sure, prayer is a mystery. The Bible tells us that God in His sovereignty has determined how everything is working its way right down to the Great Tribulation

and then into the Kingdom Age. Then at the same time the Bible tells us that prayer changes things.

### **James 5:16b**

*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Moses prayed for the children of Israel when he came down from the mountain and the Bible says that God changed His mind and did not destroy the people.

The bottom line is this; God is sovereign over all of His creation but at the same time much is accomplished through prayer and so we make prayer a major part of our Christian walk. In the text we are about to consider we will see that the Holy Spirit addresses the reader as though they are already practicing prayer in their lives. The first verse says, "**When** thou prayest".

## **I. The Standard for Prayer (6:5-8)**

### **Notice Matthew 6:5**

Here in this verse Jesus points to the religious leaders once again and the way in which they had distorted the practice of prayer. In order to understand what Jesus is saying here we need to understand some history of Jewish practices.

The Jews of Jesus day had 2 prayers that were required to be prayed every day.

1. **Shema** - This was a prayer that consisted of verses from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41. This prayer was to be recited every morning and every evening.

2. **Shemoneh esreh** - This prayer consisted of 18 petitions. This prayer had to be recited 3 times a day. Once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once in the evening. It came about that the prayer was to be recited on specific hours. The 3<sup>rd</sup> hour (9am), the 6<sup>th</sup> hour (12 noon), and the 9<sup>th</sup> hour (3pm). This became such a ritual that no matter where you were when the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, or 9<sup>th</sup> hour came you were required to stop and pray.

These designated hours of prayer can be seen in the book of Acts.

### **Acts 3:1**

*Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*

The prayers of the religious leaders had several problems.

- a. Their prayers had become rituals. They prayed just because it was what they were taught to do. Their prayers were not from the heart but they were just a formality they were going through every day.
- b. Their prayers had become assigned to specific times of the day. These religious leaders would pray at the specific times but never outside of those times.
- c. Their prayers had become repetitive. They would repeat the Shema and the Shemoneh esreh but there was never any personal communion with God outside of this.
- d. Their prayers had become nothing more than a show to make themselves look "spiritual" to those around them.

Now let us get back to our text.

**Notice Matthew 6:5a again.**

Now we can understand this verse a little better. They had 3 times of the day when they were to pray no matter what was going on. If they were in a field they would drop what they were doing and pray. If they were traveling the road from one town to another and it was prayer time then they would stop along the road and recite the prayer.

This verse tells us they were standing in the synagogue and on the street corners praying. Now let me tell you what they were doing here. They had the 3 specific hours of prayer every day and so the religious leaders would time it out so that they were in the busiest part of the city when it was time to pray. They would either be in the synagogue or at the busiest intersection in town and it would be there they would begin to recite their prayer. Now there was nothing wrong with public prayer. It was fine to pray in the synagogue and even on the street corner but it was their motivation which was wrong.

**Notice Matthew 6:5b**

They did it only for the purpose of being seen by other. In other words they planned to be on the busiest street corner when the hour of pray came all for the purpose of being seen by others so they would be seen as "spiritual".

Jesus said they have their reward which means 2 things:

1. Their prayers were just empty words that never reached the throne of God.
2. There would be no eternal reward for their sacrifice of time they gave to prayer.

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Now please understand that the problem was not because they recited certain prayers, or because it was done at specific times, or that they prayed in public. The problem was in their hearts. They had a heart problem and they were going through the motions of prayer only for the reason of being seen as "spiritual" by those around them.

**Application:**

When we look at this warning we would maybe wonder how it would apply to us because we are not out on the street corners praying. Let me explain how it applies to us. If you ever have had the opportunity to pray in a group setting then there is the danger of falling into the sin of hypocrisy. If you have an opportunity to pray in a group of people maybe at a Christmas meal or a Thanksgiving meal or at the side of a hospital bed and you pray in a way to impress the people that are at the table or are around the hospital bed then you are guilty of doing the same thing the religious leaders did. If you have worded your prayer so they will see you as "spiritual" then your prayer never went higher than the ceiling of the room you were in.

If you pray to be heard by men then God will not hear your prayer.

Now let me give to you something else to think about. We would think that if there was one place where we would be free from the temptations of the enemy it would be at the throne of God. That is a lie. Satan will follow you right up to the throne of God because he knows if he can somehow contaminate your prayer then it will not be effective. Let me give you an example:

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Let me take you into the Garden of Gethsemane the night Jesus was arrested. Remember His prayer that night before they came to arrest Him?

### **Matthew 26:38-39**

*38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.*

*39 And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

This is the only time Jesus addressed God as "my Father". Jesus was holding tightly that night to His communion with the Father because Satan was trying his best to take Jesus out of the will of God. As Jesus was praying Satan was saying, "Think about yourself and how people will view you if you die on the cross. You know that everyone who hangs on a tree is considered to be cursed. You don't want to go to the cross and be seen as cursed. Think about yourself Jesus. Think about the pain and the suffering that will meet you at the cross."

All of this is going on while Jesus is in prayer. Satan pursued Him right into the presence of the Father.

That is the very same thing that happens in our lives also. When you are in a group and you are called on to pray Satan will say, "Think about yourself. Pray in a way that will make these people take notice of your spirituality." We must be on guard at all times against Satan and the flesh. Satan puts out the temptation and the flesh will go to any extreme to have self glorification.

### **Notice Matthew 6:6**

When we read this verse it appears as though Jesus is condemning public prayer but that is not the idea here. This verse must be kept in context with what is found in the previous verse. The idea here is that prayer is not to be done with the desire for attention. The contrast introduced in this verse is the attitude of the heart. Prayer is communion with God it is not a public show of spirituality. The prayer addressed here is not public prayer but it is personal prayer. The prayers offered by the religious leaders were personal prayers and they brought them right out in the public places so as to look "spiritual".

Jesus is telling us in this verse that our personal prayers are to be just between us and God. Notice the statement, "**pray to thy Father which is in secret**". When it comes to personal prayer find a place to get away and communion with the Father. The reference to the closet here can be any place where you are alone with God. It can be along a stream, on a mountain, in a car, in your yard, or wherever you get alone with Him.

At the end of this verse there is a beautiful promise. "**Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly**".

When our prayers are from the heart and our attitude is right God promises to hear and answer our prayers.

### **1 John 5:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:*

<sup>15</sup> *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

## **Notice Matthew 6:7a**

This verse has been misunderstood by many over the years. Jesus is not saying that we cannot repeat our prayers. If you remember the night in the garden of Gethsamine He prayed the same prayer 3 times.

## **Matthew 26:42-44**

*<sup>42</sup> He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.*

*<sup>43</sup> And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.*

*<sup>44</sup> And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.*

If we remember Paul asked the Lord 3 times to remove his thorn in the flesh.

## **2 Corinthians 12:7-8**

*<sup>7</sup> And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*

*<sup>8</sup> For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

There is nothing wrong with repeated prayer if it is from the heart. So what is Jesus saying in this verse when He says, "**Use not vain repetitions**"?

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According to Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words the words "vain repetitions" means to "repeat idly" or "to stammer".

The religious leaders would stand on the corners and in the synagogue and they would just mutter words which had no meaning at all. They were just repeating words mechanically and there was absolutely no meaning behind them.

### **Notice Matthew 6:7b**

They did this because they believed the longer the prayer to more God would listen.

### **Conclusion:**

### **Notice Matthew 6:8**

Jesus tells us our Father knows what we need before we ask.

Let's wrap this up. Our prayers are:

1. To be directed to the Father and not to those around us.
2. To be from the heart in pure communion with God.
3. To be direct and to the point.
4. To be prayed anytime throughout the day.