

## Jesus Continues to Explain God's Standards of Holiness Matthew 6:1-18

### ~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

During the first part of His mountainside sermon, Jesus told His disciples that they had to obey God better than the Pharisees and religious teachers, or else they wouldn't enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 5:20). After that, He began explaining the difference between what God expects and what the Pharisees and religious teachers practiced. One of the many faults that Jesus found with them is that they did their good deeds to be admired by other people. When they gave money to the poor, they announced what they were doing with trumpets! When they prayed, they did so on the street corners and in the synagogues where everyone could see them. When they fasted, they adjusted their appearance so everyone would know they were fasting and admire them. Their good deeds were really evil deeds because their motives were selfish. Jesus said that the only reward they would ever receive would be the praise of people.

God expects more from His children than that. When we give, we should be motivated by love for the person we're helping. As much as possible, we should give and serve in secret. If we will, Jesus promises that God will reward us. The same is true for our secret praying and fasting. Although our salvation is received purely through God's grace (undeserved mercy), many of God's blessings are bestowed because we earn them through our obedience.

In this part of His sermon, Jesus gave further instruction about prayer. He said that people of other religions pray the same thing over and over again, continually repeating the same requests. They think their god will hear them if they just pray long enough. But we are praying to a God who knows everything! He knows what we need before we ask Him, so it would be foolish for us to think we need to keep saying the same things over and over again! Continually repeating the identical prayer is insulting to God. We should converse with Him as we would with our most respected and trusted friend. He's listening to us, not ignoring us, and we don't need to pray long prayers to be heard.

Jesus gave us an example of a model prayer we could pray. Notice that it isn't a long prayer. Don't think that short prayers are a waste of time or that you don't have enough time to pray. You can pray short prayers all the time and any time!

We should begin by realizing that we are praying to our heavenly Father, which means we have a special relationship with the One we're addressing. We're not talking to a stranger! We're talking to someone who loves us dearly!

Beginning our prayers with worship is appropriate. "May your name be honored" (Matthew 6:9) is an example of a worshipful statement we could make, but there are many others.

After worship, we can begin with our requests, and the first ones should be for things that concern God. We should want, more than anything else, for God's kingdom to expand and for His will to be done on the earth. Many people want their desires to become God's desires, and they try to change His will by their prayers. But God wants His desires to become everyone's desires, because His desires are best. More than anything, He wants people to hear the gospel and be saved. So we should pray first for things that relate to the spread of the good news of Jesus. We should pray for missionaries, the people of our church, and for opportunities to spread the gospel ourselves.

Next, we can pray for our own needs. Later in this same sermon, Jesus assured us that God will take care of our need for food, clothing and other material things, but only if we are living for Him and making the Kingdom of God our primary concern (see Matthew 6:33). If our prayers are only for our own needs, that's a good indication that God's kingdom is not our primary concern.

One of our foremost needs is for forgiveness when we've sinned. Jesus said we can be assured that our requests for forgiveness will be answered as long as we forgive people who have sinned against us. Of course, God doesn't expect more of us than He does of Himself, and we know that He doesn't forgive people unless they admit their sin and ask for forgiveness. When people request our forgiveness, admitting their wrongs against us, then we must forgive them, or else God will not forgive our sins when we ask. This does not give us the right, however, to hate people who sin against us but who never ask our forgiveness. Jesus still expects us to be merciful and kind to such people, loving them and praying for them, as we have already learned from this sermon (see Matthew 5:43-47), and to even confront them if they are Christians. But forgiveness is impossible to give unless it's first requested.

Finally, we should pray that God will help us during times we are tempted to do the wrong thing, delivering us from giving in to the devil. This prayer request also indicates that our primary concern should be with pleasing God. We need His help to be obedient, and He will help us when we're tempted if we'll ask Him to help us.

**Q.** We read today what is commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer." Many people have memorized this exact prayer and pray it, word for word, all the time, without even thinking about what they are saying. Do you think that is what Jesus had in mind when He first taught this prayer?

**A.** No, because Jesus said in the verses preceding the prayer that our prayers shouldn't be meaninglessly repetitious. Of course, we can pray the Lord's prayer with meaning if we concentrate, and we are not limited to just praying this one prayer! It is a wonderful model for all prayers, however.

**Q.** If you had to summarize with one word what we've read so far of Jesus' sermon on the mountainside, what one word would you choose? Does this tell us anything about what is most important to Jesus?

**A.** I would choose the word "holiness." What is most important to Jesus is how we live our lives. Obedience to God is what should be most important to all Christians.

**Application:** Do I act differently when I'm in public than when I'm alone? If I do, what does that reveal about me? What should I do about it?