

Authentic Christians

Lesson 21 – Matthew 6:5-15

1. The Anatomy of Hypocrisy

- The truth is fairly obvious and the application is pretty extensive – acts of righteousness motivated by the praise of others are acts of righteousness that have no eternal significance, and in fact are the practices of hypocrites (religious actors) who will be severely judged by God (See Matt. 23:13-23)
- If our public religious devotion to God (our worship) is practiced for or motivated by the praise or approval of others, then we have our reward “in full” – there is nothing more that we deserve ... the debt is satisfied and we have a receipt to prove it!

“The praise of man is what they wanted, and that is what they get.” (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 307)

- The “charitable deeds” or “acts of righteousness” can also mean those actions which display the righteousness of God’s kingdom and which communicate a devotion to the King of the Kingdom – those ways in which we minister the grace of God in a fallen world and affirm our allegiance to Jehovah (i.e. the outworking of the gifts of the Spirit in our lives).

MINNICK MAXIM: *If we pursue private ministry void of the due diligence and the same spirit of excellence that we would a public ministry, then we are guilty of a self-glorifying objective and not glory of the God who sees in secret.* (Mark Minnick is the Senior Pastor of Mt. Calvary Baptist in Greenville, SC ... he attributes A. B. Bruce with the maxim)

- In order to be clear, though, this section is specifically targeting public “religious righteousness” – those actions done to honor and worship God in public.
- Jesus gives three very piercing illustrations of how “*the goal of pleasing the Father is traded for its pygmy cousin, the goal of pleasing men.*” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 59)

2. Three Illustrations of Religious Hypocrisy

- Giving (Mt. 6:2-4) last week – the most public of the three
- Fasting (Mt. 6:16-18) in two weeks – the most private of the three
- Praying (Mt. 6:5-15) this week and next – the hybrid
 - Again we note that Jesus expects public prayer to continue ... “when you pray [publicly]” ... He DOES NOT expect public observation of our “religious devotion” to hinder the practice.

Name some public displays of a righteous devotion to God that Christians will tend to avoid (thanks for a meal at a restaurant, reading the Bible during a work break, listening to Christian music in the office or car pool, etc.)

- This model prayer was repeated at a later time when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Lk. 11:1-4) which makes us think that all of the 12 weren’t present at the SOTM.

- The hypocrites (known religious actors ... definite Greek article ... i.e. the Pharisees) loved the attention of others when they prayed publicly – in this case, when they prayed in the synagogues and on the street corners.

SYNAGOGUE: *“In the NT, an assembling together of men, an assembly of men or an assembly of Jews formally gathered together to offer prayers and listen to the reading and expositions of the scriptures; assemblies of that sort were held every sabbath and feast day, afterwards also on the second and fifth days of every week; name transferred to an assembly of Christians formally gathered together for religious purposes or the buildings where those solemn Jewish assemblies are held ... Synagogues seem to date their origin from the Babylonian exile. In the times of Jesus and the apostles, every town, not only in Palestine, but also among the Gentiles if it contained a considerable number of Jewish inhabitants, had at least one synagogue, the larger towns several or even many. These were also used for trials and inflicting punishment.” (J. Strong, 1996 Update)*

STREET: *Greek word used (plateiōn) is one for a broad path, seeming to indicate that the Pharisee wanted as much exposure as possible. (Cp. Matt. 7:13)*

“In the Jewish culture of Jesus’ time, religious people prayed every three hours, at 3:00, 6:00, 9:00, etc. The hypocrites used to plan their day so that they would be in the busiest part of the village when it was time to pray. When they stopped, raised their arms, and prayed flowery, fluent prayers, people around them would say, “My, what wonderful, godly people they must be.” (Jeremiah, Prayer: The Great Adventure, pg. 77)

Is there a PLACE (location) that we should not pray? If so, where?

- Notice also that they stood to pray ... see Mk. 11:25 & Lk. 18:9-14

Posture in prayer (both public and private) has always been a point of discussion ... what is the proper posture? (Archeology depicts the gods as always sitting while humans stand to pray before them, Jesus condoned standing to pray [Mk. 11:25],

“The posture they used in prayer; they prayed standing; this is a lawful and proper posture for prayer (Mk. 11:25), but kneeling being the more humble and reverent gesture (Lu. 22:41; Acts 7:60; Eph. 3:14), their standing seemed to savour of pride and confidence in themselves (Lu. 18:11). (Matthew Henry)

“Certainly there was nothing wrong with standing and praying in the synagogues. Standing was the most common position for prayer in New Testament times, and the synagogues were the most appropriate and logical places for public prayers to be offered.” (MacArthur, Alone with God)

*“But the location was not the critical factor. Neither is the “standing” posture in itself significant. In the Bible people pray **prostrate** (Num 16:22; Josh 5:14; Dan 8:17; Matt 26:39; Rev 11:16), **kneeling** (2 Chronicles 6:13; Dan 6:10; Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60; 9:40;*

20:36; 21:5), **sitting** (2 Sam 7:18), and **standing** (1 Sam 1:26; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13).” (Expositors Bible Commentary)

*“The proper way for a man to pray,
Says Deacon Lemuel Keys,
And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees.*

*“No, I should say the way to pray,
Says Reverend Doctor Wise
Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes.*

*“Oh, no, no, no, said Elmer Slow.
Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed.*

*“It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front.
Both hands pointing toward the ground,
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.*

*“Last year I fell in Hitchkins’ well,
Head first, said Cyrus Brown.
And both my heels were stickin’ up,
And my head was pointing down.*

*“And I made a prayer right then and there,
The best prayer I ever said.
The prayin’est prayer I ever prayed
Was standin’ on my head.*

(Sam Walter Foss in Handwriting on the Wall, pg. 121)

- Jesus commands two actions when we pray: 1) seek privacy instead of publicity & 2) seek simplicity instead of verbosity.
 - Jesus is not condemning all public prayer (if so, the early church didn’t get it – Acts 1:15-26!)
 - The point is this: *“Sin, He shows us here, is something which follows us all the way, even into the very presence of God.”* (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 300)

“Some have wondered if the prayer of the Pharisee recorded in [Luke 18](#) accurately reflects the attitude of these very religious men. A prayer found in the Talmud (b. Ber. 28b) suggests that it does. The prayer reads,

I thank thee, O Lord, my God, that thou hast given me my lot with those who sit in the seat of learning, and not with those who sit at the street-corners; for I am early to work, and they are early to work; I am early to work on the words of the Torah, and they are early to work on things of no moment. I weary myself, and they weary themselves; I weary myself and profit thereby, while they weary themselves to no profit. I run and they run; I run toward the life of the Age to Come, and they run toward the pit of destruction.

“This prayer as well as the prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable expresses thanks to God for the benefits of dedication to Him. From Jesus’ viewpoint, however, both prayers display a self-righteous attitude and a contempt for others that is out of harmony with God’s love for human beings.” (Richards, Pegoda, & Gross, Every Teaching of Jesus in the Bible, pg. 198)

- Jesus reminds us that our sinful heart can pervert any behavior ... even obedience to God can become a tool of self-centeredness!

What are some practical yet creative ways that a Christian can violate vs. 6? (Lloyd-Jones mentions that there are those who want to be known as “people of prayer” and there are those who love to be seen [or known to be] praying)

- “Vain repetitions” (*battalogeō*) means literally “to stammer or stutter”; some think it originated from Battus, the King of Cyrene, who stuttered or a poet Battus, who wrote long and tedious poems (Vine thinks it’s a nickname [*Battalos – the Gabbler*] given to Demosthenes, a great orator, given by his opponents).
 1. The implication is one of extortion (convincing God or trying to get something out of Him), not just the use of perfect and polished wording in a public prayer.
 2. Another implication is that there are no “special words” or incantations that unlock the resources of God – you don’t have to pray long enough or repeat your petitions in the correct order in order to have your prayers answered.
 3. The last implication is that those outside the faith (pagans) are dependent on their “religiosity” and not their relationship for the answer to their prayers. (See Eccl. 5:1-3 & Mt. 7:7-12)

- **Applications**

- The way we pray displays truths about God ...
- Jesus is not discouraging the repeating of the same request (See 1 Kings 18:26-27, Mt. 7:7-8, Lk. 18:1-8, and 1 Thes. 5:17) but is discouraging a prayer life patterned after “the pagans” (the lost).

Roman Catholicism teaches two key heresies about God through their teaching on prayer: 1) God is distant and doesn’t know what you need, and 2) God doesn’t care about our needs and is generally apathetic toward them (reluctant).

“ All men, moreover, are full of the hope and confidence that prayers which might be received with less favor from the lips of unworthy men, will be accepted by God when they are recommended to him by the Most Holy Mother and will be favorably heard.” (Octobri Mense, Pope Leo XIII [1878-1903])

Roman Catholics are instructed to repeat the Hail Mary a number of times in order to affect the heart and mind of God ... “We have a confident hope that God will at length let himself be moved and have pity upon the state of his Church, and give ear to the prayers coming to him through her whom he has chosen to be the dispenser of all heavenly graces.” (Superiore Anno, Pope Leo XIII [1878-1903])

How do we answer these things biblically? What does the Bible say about God being distant or unknowing? What does the Bible say about God being apathetic?

How does a lost person refer to God in their prayers? How important is the term “Father”?

- Pagan prayer rests its success on repetition and many words; biblical (godly) prayer rests its success on the intimate knowledge of a loving Father who desires to answer.