

Authentic Christians

Lesson 23 – Matthew 6:5-15

1. The Model Prayer

- “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 that pious/religious extortion (convincing God or trying to get something out of Him) is unbiblical and ungodly, not just the use of 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)
- Notice that Jesus DID NOT say “This is what you pray” but “This is how you pray” – vv. 9-13 is a model prayer, not a sacrament.

“The prayer is mainly a model we can use to give direction to our own praise, adoration, and petitions. It is not a substitute for our own prayers but a guide for them.” (MacArthur, Alone with God)

- There are 6 petitions (or topics):
 - Hallowed be Thy (God’s) name
 - Thy (God’s) kingdom come
 - Thy (God’s) will be done
 - Give us this day our daily bread
 - Forgive us our debts
 - Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one
- There are multiple ways to divide the prayer; basically, though, there are three divisions - 1) Initial address to God as Father; 2) God’s honor – God’s kingdom – God’s will; and 3) human needs.
 - **Our Father** - Jesus did not teach us to pray “MY Father” though He is; Jesus taught us to pray with a broader scope – “OUR Father”. (See 1 Jn. 5:1-2)
 - **Hallowed be Your Name (verb mood is passive – desire to have the name of God be acted upon [not a declaration])** - Our prayer and life’s objective should be to see God’s glory realized in ourselves and in those around us.
 - **Your kingdom come & Your will be done** - Although this petition longs for a day in which God’s righteousness will reign fully and freely, it’s also a petition for “heavenly righteousness” to be accomplished in the “earthly context” (an obvious context of evil, corruption, and rebellion).

Should the Christian be active (socially and/or politically) in advancing God’s righteousness in their community, government, family, etc.? What are the risks? Rewards?

- **Give us this day our daily bread** - God the Father is the ultimate source of all that is good for us – there is nothing that we enjoy or that benefits us that has escaped the provision of God. (See 1 Cor. 4:7 & James 1:17)
- **Forgive us our debts**
 - This petition is the primary reason why its improper to call vv. 9-13 “The Lord’s Prayer” - Jesus did not pray in these terms since He would not have asked God to forgive Him!
 - “Debts” obviously refers to sins committed against God and/or others; the Aramaic Jesus spoke would have implied forgiveness needed for a transgression.

“This use is perfectly natural in itself, since an obligation to God which is not duly met becomes to us a sin ... In like manner the English word duly denotes that which is due, owed.” (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 137)

“Forgiveness of sin is the greatest need of the human heart because sin has a twofold effect: it promises to damn men forever while at the same time robbing them of the fullness of life by burdening the conscience with unrelenting guilt. Ultimately sin separates man from God, thus it is unquestionably the principal enemy and greatest problem of man.” (MacArthur, Alone with God)

- The petition gives us an idea of the nature of forgiveness: 1) Releasing someone from the debt (obligation) they owe us; 2) Resolution (promise) to never bring it up again; and 3) Determination to seek the offender’s good. (See Eph. 4:31-32)
- Two Questions:
 1. QUESTION #1: What are we asking God to forgive – wasn’t all our sin forgiven at the moment of salvation? (See Ps. 103:12, Jer. 31:34, and Rom. 8:1)
 - a. Every person who repents of their sin and places their faith in Christ is justified by God – declared righteous due to our faith in Christ. (See Rom. 3:21-26 & 2 Cor. 5:21)
 - b. This declaration is judicial – God has placed our sin on Christ and given us Christ’s righteousness in return; all of our sin (past, present, future) has been forgiven.
 - c. Practically, however, we still sin and need God’s daily forgiveness for our failure to conform to the righteous standard of Christ. (See 1 Jn. 1:9)

How detailed must our confession be? What are the risks of voicing a very detailed confession? What are the risks of having no detail at all?

- d. ILLUSTRATIONS: 1) Children disobeying parent – relationship does not change but reconciliation is needed; and 2) Jesus washing the disciples feet [Jn. 13:5-10] – they did not need to bathe again, only remove the dirt on their feet.

“So sin, while it is forgiven judicially, is still a reality in a Christian’s life. A decreasing frequency of sin, along with an increasing sensitivity to it, should characterize every Christian’s walk. And while our sins today and in the future don’t change our standing before God, they do affect the intimacy and joy in our relationship with Him.” (MacArthur, Alone with God)

- e. This model prayer begins by acknowledging God as “our Father”, thus establishing a context for the forgiveness sought (familial).
- 2. QUESTION #2: Christ seems to be saying that our forgiveness from God is contingent on the forgiveness we grant others – is God’s forgiveness a work of grace or a work of our flesh?
 - a. Jesus expounds further on forgiveness in vv. 14-15 (the only petition He elaborates on) and on the surface seems to place a condition on God’s forgiveness of us: forgive others so that (implied) God will forgive you.
 - b. A subsequent parable (Mt. 18:21-35) uses similar phrasing.

“The point of the parable [Mt. 18:23-35] it seems does not so much turn on temporal sequence (X must forgive Y before Z can forgive X) as on attitude. There is no forgiveness for the one who does not forgive ... His unforgiving spirit bears strong witness to the fact that he has never repented.” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 75)

“Jesus sees no incongruity in the actions of a heavenly Father who forgives so bountifully and punishes so ruthlessly, and neither should we. Indeed, it is precisely because he is a God of such compassion and mercy that he cannot possibly accept as his those devoid of compassion and mercy. This is not to say that the king’s compassion can be earned: far from it, the servant is granted freedom only by virtue of the king’s forgiveness. As in 6:12, 14–15, those who are forgiven must forgive, lest they show themselves incapable of receiving forgiveness.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary)

“Real repentance, as contrasted with a merely self-regarding remorse, is certainly a sine qua non of receiving forgiveness—an indispensable condition.” (C.F.D. Moule, Donum Gentilicium, pp. 71–72)

- c. Our action of forgiving someone else is not the price of earning God’s forgiveness, but it’s the affirmation/confirmation of our understanding (acceptance?) of God’s forgiveness of us through Christ (assurance of our relationship with God).
- d. Forgiveness begins in a heart that is overwhelmingly thankful for God’s forgiveness through Christ, and then reaches out to others in their moment of need; i.e. we forgive others as evidence of our saving relationship with God through Christ.

Is it possible (... or are believers even obligated ...) to forgive offenders when they don’t ask to be forgiven? How does Lk. 17:3 apply?

“... we must have a profound change of heart, expressing itself, among other ways, in a willingness to forgive others if we have experienced forgiveness ourselves. It is similar to having saving faith. We are not saved by our faith; salvation is by grace. But faith must be present if we are to receive forgiveness.” (Boice, The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1, pg. 100)

○ **Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one**

- “Temptation” can also be translated “trial” as in James 1:2 & 1 Pt. 1:6 – rarely (if ever) was the original word used to mean “solicitation to sin”.

If it means “don’t induce us to sin”, how does that square with James 1:13? Why ask God not to do something He would never do anyway?

If it means “don’t bring trials into our life”, how does that square with James 1:2-3? Doesn’t James say we should rejoice when trials come and not try to avoid them?

- Broadus sees in these last three petitions the three unique avenues in which sin breaches our heart – it enters through our demands for sustenance and our relationships with others; it also enters through troubling life experiences.

“The first three petitions stand independently from one another. The last three, however, are linked in Greek by “ands,” almost as if to say that life sustained by food is not enough. We also need forgiveness of sin and deliverance from temptation.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary)

This brings up the subject of desires vs. needs ... what do we REALLY need?

- This petition is an acknowledgement of human weakness in the face of difficult experiences: we aren’t capable of protecting our happiness (thus we want to avoid difficulty) and we aren’t capable of controlling our sinful heart without God’s grace (thus we want to avoid any difficulty that might provide us an opportunity to sin against God).

“... the solution to this issue is that Jesus is not dealing with logic or theology but with a natural appeal of human weakness as it faces danger. We all desire to avoid the danger and trouble that sin creates. This petition is thus the expression of the redeemed soul that so despises and fears sin that it wants to escape all prospects of falling into it, choosing to avoid rather than having to defeat temptation ... Our proper reaction to times of temptation is similar to Christ’s, but for us it is primarily a matter of self-distrust. When we honestly look at the power of sin and at our own weakness and sinful propensities, we shudder at the danger of temptation or even trial ... This petition is thus another plea for God to provide what we in ourselves do not have. It is an appeal to God to place a watch over our eyes, our ears, our mouths, our feet, and our hands—that in whatever we see, hear, or say, and in any place we go and in anything we do, He will protect us from sin.” (MacArthur, Alone with God)

- God has promised to limit the intensity of our trials and to supply us with the strength (grace) we need to endure them. (See 1 Cor. 10:13)

3. Applications

- The way we pray displays our belief about/understanding of God ...

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.
- The pattern of our prayers should be something like this: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (ACTS – From Bill Hybels in Too Busy Not to Pray).

"One woman discovered she had trouble remembering to pray for the needs of others, so she devised a neat little memory trick:

Holding up her left hand, the woman explained: 'When I'm ready to pray, I look at my hand. This reminds me to pray for those near me—my family, my friends, my neighbors.'

Pointing to her index finger, she added: 'My teachers used to point at us in school. Sometimes the preacher points at us, so as I come to this finger, I pray for my teachers, the preachers, and others who have been my guides.'

'My middle finger is my largest one. It stands above the others. This brings to mind the rulers of our country, the officials of our city. So I pray for them.'

'The next finger is called the weak finger. When I come to it I think of the weak, the sick, those who are poor and need help. I ask God to help them.'

Coming to her little finger, she concluded: 'Last is my little finger. This stands for me. I finish praying for myself and the things I need.'"

- Satan desires to defeat us through our physical needs, our relationships with others, and our handling of trials – God provides protection at all three places of temptation.

“The humble believer, self-distrustful because conscious of remaining tendencies to sin, and weaknesses in restraining them, prays that God will not bring him into temptation. (Cp. 26:41, 1 Cor. 7:5, Gal. 5:7) And yet, when God sees fit, notwithstanding his prayer and effort, to bring him into temptation, he is then to rejoice (James 1:2) because when met in the strength of the Lord, it will certainly be overcome (1 Cor. 10:13), because it will develop his Christian character and thus prove a blessing (James 1:3ff), and because it will secure for him an eternal reward (5:12, James 1:12, & Rom. 8:18).” (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 138)

- What have we learned about prayer?

- I cannot say “**our**” if I live only for myself in a spiritual, watertight compartment.
- I cannot say “**Father**” if I do not endeavor each day to act like His child.
- I cannot say “**who art in heaven**” if I am laying up no treasure there.
- I cannot say “**hallowed be Thy name**” if I am not striving for holiness.
- I cannot say “**Thy kingdom come**” if I am not doing all in my power to hasten that wonderful day.
- I cannot say “**Thy will be done**” if I am disobedient to His Word.
- I cannot say “**on earth as it is in heaven**” if I will not serve Him here and now.
- I cannot say “**give us . . . our daily bread**” if I am dishonest or an “under-the-counter” shopper.
- I cannot say “**forgive us our debts**” if I harbor a grudge against anyone.
- I cannot say “**lead us not into temptation**” if I deliberately place myself in its path.
- I cannot say “**deliver us from evil**” if I do not put on the whole armor of God.
- I cannot say “**Thine is the kingdom**” if I do not give to the King the loyalty due Him as a faithful subject.
- I cannot attribute to Him “**the power**” if I fear what men may do.
- I cannot ascribe to Him “**the glory**” if I am seeking honor only for myself.
- I cannot say “**forever**” if the horizon of my life is bound completely by the things of time.

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