

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: POWER OVER PRIDE

In GOD'S NEW HUMANITY

A Seminar on Kingdom Principles

Matthew 5-7

Session Three

Matthew 6:1-18

The Text:

*"Always be careful **not** to do your acts of righteousness (deeds of mercy) before people in order to be seen by them, otherwise you have no reward in the presence of your Father in heaven. 2. "Therefore, whenever you do a deed of mercy (act of charity, like giving alms to the poor), don't ever blow a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the narrow streets so that they may receive glory from people (lit. be glorified by people). I tell you truly they are receiving their reward in full 3. But you, when you do a deed of mercy, don't ever let your left (hand) know what your right is doing 4. so that your deed of mercy may be unseen (lit. "in secret") and your Father who sees what is unseen (lit. "in secret") will reward you. 5. "Whenever you pray you must not be like the hypocrites because they love to pray after having taken their stand in the synagogues and on the wide street corners so that they may show off to others. I tell you truly, they are receiving their reward in full. 6. But, when you pray, always enter your private room and when you have firmly shut your door, pray to your Father who is unseen (lit. "in secret, hidden") and your Father who always sees what is unseen will reward you. 7. When you are praying don't ever babble (use empty repetitions) as the gentiles (heathen, pagans) do, for they think that they will gain a hearing by their many words. 8. Therefore, don't ever be like them because God your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. 9. "You must pray, therefore, like this:*

Our Father in heaven

May your Name be sacred,

10. *May your kingdom come,*

May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11. *Give us today our necessary bread*

12. *and forgive us (for) our indebtedness (to you)
just as we also have forgiven those who are indebted to us.*
13. *Please don't ever lead us into testing (temptation),
but on the contrary please deliver us from the evil (one),
Because yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN*
14. *For if you forgive people for their trespasses, then your heavenly Father will forgive you
also; 15. but if you do not forgive people, then neither will your Father forgive your
trespasses.*
16. *"Whenever you fast you must stop being like the hypocrites -- sad-faced, for they distort
their faces so that they may appear to others to be fasting. I tell you truly, they are receiving their
reward in full; 17. But you, when you fast, anoint your head (comb your hair) and wash your face
18. so that you do not appear to others to be fasting but rather to your Father who is unseen and
your Father who sees what is unseen will reward you."*

III. Jesus emphasizes the inward and spiritual nature of the worship of God's new humanity.

Introduction: After having spoken of the superior nature and the superior character of God's new humanity, Jesus speaks of the inward and spiritual nature of the worship of God's new humanity. His teaching continually shows how necessary it is to control our pride as we worship. This was, and still is, a necessary emphasis because almost all religions emphasize the outward forms and rituals of worship which tend toward pride and pay little or no attention to the inward and spiritual nature of worship. In Jewish practice, in the first century, worship of God was mostly a matter of observing religious days with special ceremonies and the regular sacrificial offerings at the temple which were intended to point to spiritual truths, but often neglected them. Prophets like Isaiah and others had emphasized the spiritual nature of prayer and worship, but the people settled for the form and ceremony and were satisfied when they had completed those. Unfortunately, even today Christian worship is often relegated to form and ceremony and obedience to duty rather than to a warm spiritual communion of spirit to Spirit.

Matthew 6:1 is a General statement: *"Pay attention always and see to it that you **stop** doing your deeds of righteousness before men so that they will see what you are doing; for if you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (6:1)*

Jesus gives three examples of doing “righteous deeds” as acts of worship to be seen by other people: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The term “righteous deeds” is one word in the Greek text. It come back to almsgiving as one of these three aspects of worship.

A. **Prayer as part of the worship of God’s new humanity** (6:5-15). It seems that all religions teach the necessity of prayer in some form as an act of worship to their god. The Bible puts a strong emphasis on the practice of prayer as a part of the worship of Almighty God (Jehovah or Yahweh).

As was the case in chapter five, Jesus deals with both the negative and the positive aspects of Christian prayer.



Negatively, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of praying in secret rather than openly, to be seen by others as a public display of pride in piety (6:5). Anyone who prays publicly to receive the applause of others has received all the blessing he or she is due. Then in 6:7-8a He urges his followers not to keep on repeating empty phrases like the heathen. Today, few people pray while standing on street corners so as to call attention to themselves, though some may enjoy praying in a more public place of worship such as a synagogue or church; but it is much more common for those who lead in public prayer to repeat themselves, following a similar pattern each time they pray until their prayers become very predictable. Such praying is usually very general and unspecific and often not very edifying. It also encourages spiritual pride.

Motivation for prayer is very important to God. Do we pray to impress others with our spirituality or do we pray in order to enter into a personal relationship with Almighty God? Do we pray in order to make life easier for ourselves or for others? Are we praying to seek for God’s action on our behalf, to control what He does for our benefit? There are times when our motivation may include some

selfishness, but our primary motive must always be to seek His glory even if that means suffering for us! In our pride let us not seek to bend God's will to do what WE think is best, but submit to His will, whatever that means for us. This is what Jesus did when He prayed, *nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done* (Matt. 26:39, 42). When we pray for missionaries and for the people they serve, let it not be for selfish reasons nor to make the world a better place for the sake of our country, but because those who are lost and far from God need to come to Him for transformation and change of heart.



Positively, Jesus gives us very strong teaching about the kind of prayer that is pleasing to God (6:6, 8b-15).

First of all, He encourages very personal private prayer. Praying in public is usually not very helpful unless the one praying has spent adequate time in private prayer. Jesus gives us specific instructions about how to pray in private: “enter your private room” (even a small closet will do) and when you have firmly shut your door (closing out all outside influences), pray to your Father who is unseen (lit. “in secret, hidden”) and your Father who always **sees** what is unseen “will reward you.” (Note that God answers according to what He **sees** in our hearts, not according to what He hears in our voices!) The word “openly” in the KJV is not found in the oldest and best manuscripts (v. 6). Depending on the kind of prayer we have prayed, the answer may or may not be “open” or public. Verses seven and eight forbid the use of endless repetitions in prayer which one often hears in pagan prayers and sometimes even in Christian prayers. “Many words” do not influence our heavenly Father’s answers! Verse eight indicates why repetition is unnecessary: God knows what we need before we ask Him! Yes, of course, because He knows everything, but He delights to hear us ask, just like earthly fathers delight to hear their children ask for things they need or deeply desire even though he knows what they are before they ask!

The Model Prayer: In verses nine through thirteen Jesus gives us a model prayer which includes at least **seven attitudes** which should be present in all of our prayers. The first is **confidence**: (“Our Father in Heaven”). We are encouraged to address God as our Father. No other religion, as far as I know, allows that sort of intimate personal relationship with a holy, righteous, omnipotent God. Bilhas Sheikh, a Pakistani Muslim woman, came to faith in Jesus as her Savior when she realized that God accepted her as His daughter and she could safely address Him as “Father.” Her book, *I Dared to Call Him Father*, is a powerful testimony to the value of that personal relationship through which she found forgiveness and acceptance. God is our loving Father who wants what is best for us and waits to hear us ask for it in prayer.

The second attitude we find in the Model Prayer is that of **reverence**: “May your Name be sacred.” Yes, we are to pray to our loving Heavenly Father because we are His children, but that does not mean that we can be irreverent or flippant about that relationship. He is God Almighty, creator and sustainer of heaven and earth and of everything in this vast, limitless universe. He is big enough to fill that entire universe and yet small enough to fit in our hearts and into every atom of matter which He has created. To be “hallowed” or “sacred” or “holy” means to be set apart, accepted as different from all the rest of nature. Our prayers are based on that reverence of relationship which sets Him above all others.

Another attitude is that of **submission**: “May your kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane “Not my will, but thine be done,” He was expressing this principle; He was submitting Himself to the Father’s will. This is the essence of prayer. (Please see my seminar: “God’s Lightning, a Seminar on Prayer” at freebiblecommentary.org lower left corner of title page.) Yes, we may ask whatever we will, but as we submit to the Father’s will we are cooperating with Him in His work in this world. Since His will is done perfectly in Heaven, our desires as we pray ought to be that His will may be done in our world situation or our personal situation just as perfectly as it is done in heaven.

The next attitude in the Lord’s model prayer is that of **dependence**: “Give us today our necessary bread.” Most of the people in this world live day by day on whatever food, especially bread, is available. In the Middle East for centuries bread has been baked in the mornings in a communal, central baking oven. Families would go to the bakery and buy bread enough for each day. Any bread left over in the evening was deemed too dry and tough to be used the next day, so bread literally was a necessity for

each day at a time. During the years of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1995) people felt that they could survive if they could just get enough bread for each day. They hoped for something more, like vegetables or fruit or a little meat, but even without those things they knew they could survive on bread. Our neighbors were kind enough to check on us each day to make sure that we had enough bread. This part of the model prayer emphasizes our need to depend on God for the daily necessities of life. Yes, he expects us to work and to provide for our families, but it is He who arranges the work for us and gives us good health so we can do the work. We have to do our part, but we must depend on Him and give Him thanks for all that He provides for us. He enlarges on the theme of dependence in the second half of this chapter.

These first four attitudes focus on our relationship with God. The fifth one deals with our relationships with others; it is **forgiveness**: “. . . and forgive us (for) our indebtedness (to you for our sins) just as we also have forgiven those who are indebted to us.” This is absolutely essential to a successful prayer life. Jesus will emphasize this again in verses 14 and 15 of this chapter immediately after the close of the prayer. We will consider them in a moment; however, let us look at Mark 11:25 where Jesus says: “and when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” Now you may think that this sounds like salvation by good works (forgiving others), but the fact is that the genuineness of God’s forgiveness of us is always to be reflected in our willingness to forgive others (see especially Matthew 18:21-35). Lack of forgiveness of others has hindered the answer to many, many of our prayers.

The next attitude in the Model Prayer is **humility**: “ Please don't ever lead us into testing (temptation), but on the contrary please deliver us from the evil (one).” “*Please*” is implied in the tense of the verb which is aorist subjunctive with the negative particle meaning, “don’t ever start leading us” into temptation. We know that God does not tempt us or anyone else (James 1:13-14), so why does Jesus say that we should pray for God not to lead us into temptation? It seems that this is because, as we pray, we must be aware that when we are tempted we may give in to the temptation; therefore we should be humble enough to ask that God will, instead, deliver us from the evil that we might be tempted to do. Many people are too proud to pray for deliverance; they feel that they can conquer any temptation by their own will and their own strength. They don’t want to admit that they need help. As humility is the first attitude in the beatitudes, so also it is necessary for a sound prayer life. It produces power over pride!

The final attitude expressed in the Model Prayer is the attitude of **praise**. The second half of verse 13 is not found in the oldest and best manuscripts of this paragraph; however, the words fit so well with the other attitudes and parts of the model prayer that it seems appropriate to include them here: *Because yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN.* These words are an appropriate expression of praise to our heavenly Father for all His goodness and mercy in hearing and answering our prayers in ways which bring glory and praise to His Name.

Be especially careful to **pray with a forgiving spirit** (6:14-15): *14. For if you forgive people for their trespasses, then your heavenly Father will forgive you also; 15. but if you do not forgive people, then neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* As we indicated in connection with v. 12, forgiveness of others should always be one of our attitudes when we pray. This is so very important that Jesus emphasizes it in vs. 14 and 15. His statement is very clear: we **must** forgive others if we want God to forgive us. The conditional nature of His forgiveness is very forceful: He will **not** forgive us unless we also forgive others. His strongest illustration of this truth is the story of the unmerciful servant in Matt. 18:21-35. According to this parable, a man owed the king a huge debt. After much pleading and begging, the king forgave the man's debt and completely canceled it; however, that same man found someone who owed him a comparatively small amount and refused to cancel and forgive that small debt. Someone told the king who then called the man to account and severely punished him for not forgiving the small debt that was owed him. Jesus then concludes the story with this summary statement: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (v. 35). In addition, according to Mark 11:24 Jesus said, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." We do not **earn** forgiveness by forgiving others, but when we forgive others we give evidence that we have experienced God's forgiveness. We forgive others **because** we have been forgiven. In Ephesians 4:32 Paul expresses it this way: *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

B. Fasting is also part of the worship of God's new humanity. - 6:16. *Whenever you fast you must stop being like the hypocrites -- sad-faced, for they distort their faces so that they may appear to others to be fasting. I tell you truly, they are receiving their reward in full; 17. But you, when you fast, anoint your head (comb your hair) and wash your face 18. so that you do not appear to others to be*

fasting but rather to your Father who is unseen and your Father who sees what is unseen will reward you. (6:16-18).

Prayer enables us to take hold of God; fasting enables us to let go of the world.

Negative aspects. - *Stop being like the hypocrites who try to impress people with their apparent suffering from fasting (6:16).* The negative imperative prohibits an action in process. Once again Jesus prohibits outward forms and ceremony in worship especially when done to impress others and to inflate the worshipper's pride. In the case of the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, it seems to have been a common practice to use cosmetics, especially dark markers (burnt sticks or charcoal), to etch lines on one's face so as to appear sad and suffering from excessive fasting in order to impress others with their piety and extreme obedience to the traditions and commands to fast as they show how serious they are about their worship of God. Such showing off for the applause of others is all the reward they will get. God will not reward them for such proud expressions of piety. As we practice fasting we are to gain victory over pride.

Positive aspects. - *When you fast, fast for God, not for show. 17. But you, when you fast, anoint your head (comb your hair) and wash your face 18. so that you do not appear to others to be fasting but rather to your Father who is unseen and your Father who sees what is unseen will reward you (6:17-18).* Anointing the hair with olive oil was normal practice. Today, though some may use oil of some kind or a hair dressing, the most common equivalent practice would be to comb and arrange one's hair normally as well as washing one's face. Look as normal as possible so that other people are not aware that you are fasting. What is important is that God knows; He sees what is unseen and is very aware of our fasting and will reward us for seeking Him as we fast.

Followers of Jesus today do not fast as often as was customary in Jesus' day, but it is still a useful and helpful practice especially in times of crisis. In that case, the lack of food or even the elimination of certain foods or other common activities should increase our awareness of God and our relationship with Him. In other words, fasting, like prayer, is an inner and spiritual exercise not for public display.

C. Deeds of mercy (almsgiving) as part of the worship of God's new humanity. - Matt. 6:1-4
Always be careful not to do your acts of righteousness (deeds of mercy) before people in order to be seen

by them, otherwise you have no reward in the presence of your Father in heaven. 2. Therefore, whenever you do a deed of mercy (act of charity, like giving alms to the poor), don't ever blow a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the narrow streets so that they may receive glory from people (lit. be glorified by people). I tell you truly they are receiving their reward in full. 3. But you, when you do a deed of mercy, don't ever let your left (hand) know what your right is doing 4. so that your deed of mercy may be unseen (lit. in secret) and your Father who sees what is unseen (lit. in secret) will reward you. The same principle applies to dealing with acts of mercy, as with prayer and fasting, motive is extremely important and humility must take precedence over pride.

Many people today do not think of good works as acts of worship, but they should! Good works do not bring us salvation (Eph. 2:8-10), but they are the result of our personal relationship with Jesus. They are expressions of our love and worship of the One who has saved us and of our compassion for others less fortunate than we may be.



Negative aspects. - On the negative side, don't call attention to your act of mercy (or almsgiving, for example -- 6:1-2). If you are motivated by the applause of others, then that may happen, but that is all the reward you will receive. It seems that, in Jesus' day, He had observed some pious spiritual leaders who literally had someone blow a ram's horn trumpet ahead of them as they walked to the place of prayer so that others would follow, or at least turn their attention to the spiritual leader. Their motive was to receive glory from others. That might happen, but that would be their reward in full. The word used means "paid in full." It was used on bills of sale or receipts or other similar documents.

Positive Aspects. -- On the other hand, Jesus taught that we should do our deeds of mercy (or almsgiving) secretly, without publicity, for the sake of the people in need, not for others to see or praise us. 3. But you, when you do a deed of mercy, don't ever let your left (hand) know what your

right is doing 4. so that your deed of mercy may be unseen (lit. in secret) and your Father who sees what is unseen (lit. in secret) will reward you (6:3-4). The right hand was the hand of action. The left hand, even today in Middle Eastern society, is considered unclean and is used mainly to help the right hand. Not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing is an expression of secret activity and equivalent to being “unseen,” that is, not for public knowledge. What is important is that God sees and knows what you are doing even though others may not. He loves to reward those who give and act to help others with an unselfish motive and not for publicity. The assault on pride continues.