

## A Christian's Prayer

*Matthew 6:1-18*

In the preceding passage (5:17-48), Jesus focuses his attention on moral righteousness; he says that true righteousness in the moral realm lies not in fulfilling the demands of the Law but in going beyond them. In the present passage, Jesus shifts his focus to “religious” righteousness; he warns against mere external religion – practicing our religion in order to be seen by others.

Therefore, when we give gifts to the poor & needy (6:1-4), we are to do it quietly so that one hand doesn't know what the other is doing. When we pray (6:5-6), we are to do it without ostentation – even in a small room with the door shut. When we fast (6:16-18), we are not to screw our faces up and try to look like martyrs in our faith; we are to put on happy faces and not let on to others that we are fasting at all.

A sharp line exists between Matthew 6:5-6 and 6:7-15. As part of the trilogy on almsgiving, prayer and fasting, verses 5-6 deal only with the problem of overcoming the self-serving motive in prayer. At v.7 a new problem is introduced, the pagan or heathen misunderstanding of the purpose of prayer. The problem here is really a misunderstanding of God. The model prayer is a corrective in the sense that it illustrates the motives, concerns, and manner proper to prayer (6:9-15).

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1. (a) Can you think of an occasion when you gave something to someone in secret? What did it feel like? (b) What were you taught & who taught you to pray when you were a child? (c) How long could you make it without your favourite flavour of ice cream?
  2. **Read Matthew 6:1, 2-4, 5-6 and 16-18** (we will read 6:7-15 later). In Matthew 6:1 Jesus warns us not to do our “acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them.” However, in Matthew 5:16 he said, “let your lights shine before others that they may see your good deeds...” Is Jesus contradicting himself? Explain.
  3. Jesus illustrates the principle of Matthew 6:1 by focusing on three religious practices: giving to the poor (2-4), praying (5-6), and fasting (16-18). Jesus assumes Christians will give alms (6:2). But he instructs us to give to the poor (2-4) so that “our left hand does not know what our right is doing.” What does he mean?
  4. In 6:5 Jesus assumes Christians will pray. But he instructs us to avoid the prayer-style of the hypocrites in his day. What was wrong with the way the hypocrites prayed in Jesus' day? How is our praying to be different (6:6)?
  5. In 6:16 Jesus assumes Christians will fast. Why and how should we fast (16-18)?
  6. After each piece of instruction on giving, praying and fasting, Jesus concludes by saying, “Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (6:4b,6b,18b). How does the reward the Father gives us differ from the reward we receive from men?
  7. Now **read Matthew 6:7-15**. How does the pagan prayer problem of “babbling” differ from persistent prayer of the kind Jesus himself prayed (Matthew 26:44)?

How might we be playing manipulative prayer games with God today? <sup>1</sup>

8. Since Jesus states that God already knows what we need, why should we pray?
9. What are the two natural divisions of the Lord's Prayer (6:9-13)? What is the focus of each section?
10. In the first section of the Lord's Prayer we are invited to pray to a God who combines fatherly love ("our Father") and heavenly power ("in heaven") and to express our concern for his glory in relation to his name, rule and will. But what does it mean to "hallow his name" (v.9)?

In what sense is his kingdom still future (v.10)?

11. In the second section of the Lord's Prayer, we are invited to pray for daily bread, for our forgiveness, and for deliverance from temptation. How is our Father's forgiveness related to our forgiving others (vv.12, 14-15)?
12. If God cannot tempt us (James 1:13) and if trials are beneficial (James 1:2), then what is the meaning of Matthew 6:13?
13. Take time now to pray, individually or as a group, using the Lord's Prayer as your model.

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**PRAYER:** "Lord, I am condemned by this brief prayer which Jesus told us to pray. To pray it, my whole life must be sincerely dedicated to you – must be in fact a prayer. When I pray, I am more wordy because I feel an awkwardness in our relationship – I have not been totally committed to your will in my life. Forgive me, as I hope I am at peace with all persons, and let me glorify your name through an authentic faith in the days to come. Amen."

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<sup>1</sup> You might also/instead want to invite two people in your group to read the two part dramatization of the Lord's Prayer (<http://www.users.on.net/~pole/drama/lordsprayer.html>) and then discuss this question.