

PERFECT PRAYING—PART 1

Matthew 6:5-8

I. INTRODUCTION—PRAYING TO GOD

II. THE TEXT

KJV—5 *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

NIV—5 *And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.*

NASB—5 *When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 7 And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

ESV—5 *And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

The Message—5 *And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? 6 Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. 7 The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. 8 Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need.*

III. BACKGROUND

A. REVIEW OF COMMON TRADITION AND OTHER PRACTICES

1. Paganism
 - a. Highly ritualistic and formal—exact formulas—often written to ensure accuracy
 - b. Designed to invoke presence of god—to get his/her attention
 - c. Legal contract with deity—*quid pro quo*—offering to do something in return for something
2. Jewish
 - a. Observant Jews pray three times a day—Sacharit, Mencha, and Arvit
 - b. Lengthier prayers on the Sabbath and special holy days
 - c. Communal prayer in Orthodox Judaism still requires presence of 10 adult males
 - d. Siddur—the prayer book used by Jews worldwide—outlines set prayers
 - e. In Jesus' day—trumpets blew during fast/feast days—for immediate prayer facing Temple
3. Muslim
 - a. 'Salat'—second pillar of Islam
 - b. Five times daily—with ritual ablutions each time
 - c. Times based on position of sun
 - d. Facing the Kaaba in Mecca
 - e. Procedure—each set of prayers has prescribed set recitations—rak-ah (rak-at = plural)
 1. Ritual prayer begins standing, stating “Allah is Great”
 2. While standing—next comes recitation of first chapter of Koran
 3. Then bowing/bending and praising God
 4. Then prostrate and praising God
 5. Then sitting and praising
 6. Then prostrate second time and praising
 7. Ends with, “Peace be with you and God’s mercy.”
 8. Afterward—personal prayers can be offered—called ‘dua’ (supplication)
 9. One cannot converse or do anything else during prayer

B. CONTEXT

1. Prayer already mentioned in **5:44**—pray for your enemies
2. Two negatives and two positives—in this passage
 - **Do not** be like the hypocrites—seeking recognition
 - **Do** be secret in your prayers
 - **Do not** be like the Gentiles—vain repetition
 - **Do** trust God to know you need
3. RT Kendall says this section follows paradigm of **John 5:44**

How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

4. This fits Paul's same idea in **II Cor 10:12, 18**

For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. . . . For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

IV. EXPLANATION

1. Whenever you pray—v 5

a. Whenever

1. Any and every time you pray
 - We are to pray continuously—**I Th 5:17**
2. But also 'when' means—there should be a *time* of prayer
 - We should have regular times set aside to talk with God

b. You

1. Plural—directed to all his followers
2. Not 'one' or 'someone'—but personalizes for them all—picks up on personal responsibility established with almsgiving

c. Pray = present subjunctive

- Not if—this form assumes—as you are regularly praying—habitual action

2. You are not to be like the hypocrites—v5

- a. Hypocrites—again—as with almsgiving—these are ‘play actors’
 1. Do not be deceptive—duplicious (two-faced)
 2. Note—the deception always begins with *self*-deception first!
 - b. Do not be
 1. The verb ‘to be’ is not normally used/needed—could be “you, not like them”
 2. So ‘to be’ insertion is important
 - a. Verb emphasizes being
 - b. God is just as—even more—concerned about *who* we are as *what* we do
 - c. And only God can see inside—who we *really are*
 - d. Also—remember—action always flows from being
 - c. Jesus’ other warnings about hypocrisy
 - **Mk 7:6-7**—these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me
 - **Mk 12:40**—teachers of the law like to be seen and have most important positions
 - **Mt 23:5**—Pharisees do what they do in order to be seen
- 3. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so they can be seen by men—v5**
- a. Love = φιλεω—fondness, affection
 1. Not godly selfless love—not agape—but carnal
 2. But love that derives benefit from the act
 3. Not a love motivated to please God but self
 4. They do not love talking with the Father—they love the notoriety of public attention
 - b. Stand and pray
 1. Posture is not the point—can stand, kneel, lie down
 2. The point is—standing *to be seen* = standing to get attention
 - c. Synagogues—again as with almsgiving
 1. Religious place—seeking religious recognition—using religion for selfish purpose

2. Concentrated meeting of Jews all in one place—maximum exposure
- d. Street corners
1. Two terms used for streets
 - a. Alleyways in previous passage—**ρυμη**
 - b. Broad street here—**πλατεια**
 - c. Both these terms are used in **Luke 14:21**—streets and lanes
 2. Here—the corner intersection of broad streets—again maximum exposure
- e. So that = purpose—**οπως**
1. God is concerned about our purpose—motive—in what we do
 2. Purpose—**οπως**—is addressed several times in Sermon on Mount
 - Good purpose in **5:16**—let your light shine—so that your Father will be glorified
 - Good purpose in **5:45**—pray for enemies—so you may be children of your Father
 - Bad purpose in **6:2**—hypocrites give—so they will be seen by men
 - Good purpose in **6:4**—left hand not knowing—so giving will be secret
 - Bad purpose in **6:5**—hypocrites pray—so that they will be seen
 - Bad purpose in **6:16**—hypocrites disfigure faces—so that they will be seen to fast
 - Good purpose in **6:18**—wash face and oil head—so that nobody will know
- f. Summary—pretentious behavior
1. Hypocrites do it all for show—for personal attentions
 2. Prayer not directed to God but men—we need to be careful how we lead corporate prayer!
 3. Using God to talk about/before men; not talking to God about men
 4. **Example: the Pharisee and the Publican—Lk 18:9-14**

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

4. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full—v5

- a. Verily = certainly—this is an established fact!
- b. Paid in full—the debt is cancelled—nothing more is owed—just as with almsgiving
- c. Human praise is all they will get

5. But you, when you pray—v6

- a. Not same phrase as in verse 5
- b. 2 differences
 1. *But* –not ‘and’—adversative emphasizes that Jesus’ disciples are to be different
 2. Pronoun *you*—is **singular** not plural
 - a. Personalizes this for each disciple
 - b. Underscores personal responsibility of each person to Go for their prayer life

6. Go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret—v6

- a. Inner room = **ταμειον**
 1. Storage room/chamber; secret place; inner chamber
 2. The storeroom—where treasure is kept
 3. The hidden place—nobody knows but God
 - ° **Lk 12:24**—what you speak in darkness will come to light; what is said in the closet will be proclaimed from rooftops
 4. This can be a physical place—or an emotional/psychological place

Note: many people around the world do not have the luxury of a ‘secret’ place!
- b. Close the door
 1. Intention is two-fold
 - a. Not being seen
 - b. Being alone and undisturbed with God
 - c. This kind of prayer is between the one person and God
- c. This does not forbid public prayer

- Daniel did it to glorify God—not self—**Dan 6:10**
- Early church joined together regularly in prayer
 1. As they awaited God’s direction and empowerment—**Acts 1:4, 14**
 2. Met at set times—**Acts 3:1**
 3. Powerful collective prayer—**Acts 4:24-31**

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “ ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

- d. Place is not important
 - Jesus told Samaritan woman this—not Jerusalem or on this mountain—**Jn 4:21-24**
- e. The Father is ‘in secret’ [KJV/NASB] or ‘unseen’ [NIV]
 1. He is Spirit—so He is unseen
 2. But He is also ‘in secret’—in the secret place—waiting for us to meet Him there!
 3. Jesus went to secret places alone to meet the Father
 - **Lk 5:15-16**—he often slipped away to the wilderness to pray
 - **Mk 1:35**—early in the morning, away from all others
 - **John 17**—intercessory prayer
 4. God sometimes wants to share secret things with us—that He shares with nobody else!

7. And your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you—v6

- a. Play on words—God is in secret—God sees the secret things
- b. Only God knows the secret things

1. Not just those things done in secret
2. But also the secret motives behind those actions
- c. The reward—is like that for almsgiving in secret
 1. The issue—will he reward us openly?
 2. Two possibilities
 - a. He will see those things done in secret, and then reward us openly/obviously
 - b. He will see those things done, and then in secret reward us with the obvious reward

8. And when you are praying—v7

- a. Plural participle—when you are the praying ones
- b. Verses 7-8 say two things
 1. How **not** to pray (again)—vain repetition
 2. Why pray at all—in order to communicate with God

9. Do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do—v7

- a. Vain repetition = βατταλογεω = babble—stammer [unique usage in Bible]
 1. Possibly derived from Battus—king of Cyrene—who supposedly stuttered
 2. Possibly from another Battus—author of tedious and wordy poems
- b. Pagans tried to manipulate gods
 1. With invocations and exact verbal formulas
 2. They had to get God’s attention
 - **Elijah’s criticism—I Kgs 18:27**—maybe their god is asleep
 3. They bargained with gods—*quid pro quo*—get something in return for something
- c. **Example of pagan praying**
 - **Prophets of Baal shouting and cutting themselves—I Kgs 18:28**
- d. This does not forbid repetitive prayers
 1. **Jesus prayed three times** in Gethsemane to avoid the cross—**Mk 14; Mt 26**

2. **Paul prayed three times** to be delivered from the thorn—**II Cor 12:7**

10. For they suppose that they will be heard for their many words—v7

- a. One purpose of prayer—God ‘hearing’ us
 1. Some people say it is simply for God to ‘hear’ us
 - a. Problem: God *does* hear everything already
 - b. Problem: don’t fall into pagan trap of trying to induce God by set formulas
 - c. Problem: is God really *deaf* to pagan prayers—even seemingly meaningless ones?
 2. What this really means
 - a. God listening to us with the intention of fulfilling our request
 - b. Based on our communicating sincerely and effectively with Him
 - c. When we pray according to His will—to accomplish His purpose

I Jn 5:14-15—This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.
 - d. When we avoid asking for the wrong motives

Jas 4:3—You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.
 - e. Another way of saying this—God ‘gives heed’ to our prayers
 3. Two things required for God to give heed
 - a. Pray according to His will
 - b. Present our needs to Him
 4. Presenting our needs to God in prayer
 - a. God already knows this—see **6:32**—our Father already knows all our needs
 - b. But we do not always know what we need—we may just know the symptoms
 - c. God already knows *how* to meet our need—and when He plans to do it
 - d. Through prayer—He gives us the confidence He will answer/meet the need
 - e. His answer will always do two things

1. What is best for us—regardless of what we think right now
2. Accomplish His purpose—not just for us—but His overall purpose
- f. Prayer helps us understand how our needs fit into His overall plan

Eph 1:11-12 —*Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

5. Sincerity—not loquaciousness—is the key
 - a. Our words should be well-chosen and not speaking just to speak
 - b. **Ecclesiastes 5:2-3**

Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

6. Also remember—more often we need to listen rather than talk

11. So do not be like them—v8

- a. **ομοιω** = to be *made* like—to be in the very fashion of something else—introduces simile
- b. See later in sermon—**Mt 7:24, 26**
 - Those who hear and obey are (made) like the wise man
 - Those who hear and do not obey are (made) like the foolish man
- c. Implication—be the opposite—be like children of your Father [next verse—refers to Father]

12. For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him

- a. Connected with later promise in this sermon—that the Father can/will provide all we need
 - Don't be like the Gentiles in worrying—He already knows your needs—6:32
- b. Assumptions
 1. That we trust and depend on the Father
 2. That we are humble enough to ask Him for what we need
- c. Ask for what we **need** and not just what we want—but what we 'ought' to have

V. APPLICATION

A. NOT ALL PRAYING IS GOOD

1. Some types set bad examples for others—seeking recognition and vain repetition
2. Some types do not glorify God—but self
3. Some types do not talk to God—but to/for men

B. PURPOSES OF PRAYER

1. Communion with the Father
2. Communication with the Father

C. BENEFITS OF PRIVATE PRAYER

1. Single-minded focus on God
2. Single-minded focus of God on you—personal and private audience with God
3. No distractions
 - Can focus our thoughts
 - Can listen more carefully
4. God reveals Himself most fully and intimately—sometimes even secretly

D. HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

1. Indirect means
 - Through the Bible
 - Through the body
 - Through the witness of another person
 - Through nature
2. But only one direct way—through prayer

E. PRAYER ENGAGES THE WHOLE TRINITY

To the Father—by the power of the Holy Spirit—in the name of Jesus [who intercedes]

F. WE EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN PRIVATE PRAYER

Ps 16:11—You will make known to me the path of light; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

G. IN PRIVATE PRAYER—WE PROVE TO GOD THAT WE LOVE HIM

1. By giving ourselves singly to Him

2. By not telling others about it—not for show—just for Him
3. By allowing Him to entrust His secrets with us

Ps 25:14—*The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant.*

H. PRIVATE PRAYER IS BASED ON PURE FAITH

1. When we are alone—do we really believe God is listening?
2. We are talking to God who is *unseen*

Heb 11:1—faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

3. In corporate prayer—others affirm His presence—but in private—it is just God and I!!!

I. THE REWARD OF PRAYER

1. God's presence NOW
2. God promises to answer prayer
3. God works through prayer to grow us to perfection for present and future service

J. BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU PRAY FOR!

1. God might allow you to get it—even if it is not His will for you
2. Remember Israel's prayers for a king—God relented—to their ultimate ruin!
3. Don't assume everything we have/are—is God's perfect will for us!
4. It might just be our human self-fulfilling prophecies!

K. WHY PRAY IF GOD ALREADY KNOWS OUR NEED

1. So we will realize our real need—as God informs us—not vice versa
2. Prayer keeps us humble before Almighty God—realizing our dependence on Him
3. Obedience—not logic/reason—is God's goal for us
4. Prayer makes a difference—He allow us to participate with Him in changing things
5. God acts in response to prayer—He *may* choose not to act until we pray