

## The Proper Attitude in Prayer # 13

Matthew 6: 5-8

Tonight we have come to the portion of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus begins to address prayer. The act of praying is literally *imploring God to move on our behalf*. It is described as *words of worship or entreaty that are offered to the Lord*.

Prayer is something that we are all familiar with, but I wonder if we are familiar enough with prayer, or is it possible that we have become too familiar with prayer. I believe there are instances in our lives where both are true. Many times prayer has become so familiar that we aren't earnest enough in it, and then there are times when we feel so inadequate and unlearned in prayer. Whatever the circumstance, I am certain that we all could improve in regard to our prayer life. The late Dr. Adrian Rogers was quoted with these thoughts on prayer. "*The greatest problem we face is not unanswered prayer but unoffered prayer.*" "*Tragically, many of our prayers are so vague that if God were to answer them, we wouldn't even know it.*"

As you study the life of Christ, it is quickly evident that He was committed to prayer. He enjoyed an unhindered fellowship with the Father and was in continual communication with Him through prayer. In our text Jesus addresses various **attitudes** of prayer; two of which are unacceptable and one will be heard and answered. Let's take a few moments to consider: [The Proper Attitude in Prayer](#).

**I. Prayers of Vanity (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.* Jesus begins by addressing the prayers offered by hypocrites. These are *empty pretenders, actors, stage players*. Notice:

**A. The Recognition Desired** – These were often guilty of *praying while standing in the synagogues or in the corners of the street, that they may be seen of men*. Jesus had witnessed those who loved to offer prayers in public places. They wanted to ensure that others would see them as they prayed and hear the words they offered. These were not interested in getting in touch with the Lord or even having their prayers answered; they simply desired the recognition of men. There was no depth or substance to their prayers. They were only offered for show and recognition.

- This is not a condemnation of public prayer. Jesus is not teaching that we should never pray audibly in the presence of others. I have been helped many times by hearing the public prayers of someone. Public prayer can be an effective witness for the Lord. When offered from

a pure heart, in the proper manner, we can display our faith before others as we pray. The difference lies within the motive. If we are offering a public prayer in sincerity, God will hear that prayer. If it is offered to receive the recognition and praise of men, it is nothing more than words uttered from our lips.

**B. The Reward Displayed** – *Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.* Jesus reveals a profound truth regarding prayers offered simply for recognition and public praise. If that is what one desires, they may receive it, but that is all the benefit their prayer will produce. Words may have been spoken in the prayer that portrayed a desire for God to move in their lives or conveyed a burden for someone else, but the desire or burden was polluted by the lust for praise and recognition.

- In essence, those prayers never reached the throne of God. What little recognition men offered would be the only recognition they received. There is power in prayer. It is the means by which we make our requests made known to God. I had much rather God hear my prayer and respond to them than for men to hear them alone. We need the approval and response of God much more than that of men.

**C. The Rebuke Conveyed** – *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are:* As with many instances before, Jesus offers a solemn warning. We are not to be guilty of praying as the hypocrites do. There must be a difference in us and those of the world. Prayer is often mentioned in a casual, uninterested way. Many politicians offer a simple prayer as they close out a speech: May God bless America. This is often an example of hypocritical prayer. It is not offered from a sincere heart with a genuine desire for God to do anything, but rather said because they feel it is expected and will be well received.

- God's people need to understand and exercise the privilege of prayer. We need to come boldly before the throne of grace and make our petitions known. This is not done so that men might think we are holy, but to intercede for the needs of our day! We need to maintain a positive witness among the world, but there are far greater needs than what men think of us. I am not concerned with what men think, but rather what God knows! We need to get in touch with God and plead for the souls of humanity and the perils that plague our modern society.

### **I. Prayers of Vanity** (5)

**II. Prayers of Monotony** (7) – Here Jesus addressed the repetitive prayers of the heathen.

**A. Their Practice** (7a) – *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do:* The heathen referred to the Gentiles, pagans who knew nothing of genuine worship of Jehovah. They were known for praying before idols and offering prayers of a repetitive and vain nature. The phrase, *vain repetitions*, has the idea of “*to stammer, to repeat the same things over and over, to use many idle words.*” There was no thought or desire in their prayers, just familiar words repeated over and over again.

- Here again Jesus is not condemning repetitive requests. He prayed the same prayer three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is nothing wrong in asking God for the same things time and again. The focus is the attitude of our prayers. Many times we pray out of obligation, and if we aren't careful we will recite the same familiar things with no real desire or zeal in our prayers. Prayer needs to flow from the heart, and if there is no burden or desire, then we will likely resort to those familiar words we have recited many times before.

**B. Their Perception** (7b) – *for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.* The motive for the heathen is the same as the hypocrite. They thought they would be perceived as spiritual and committed if their prayers were long and drawn out. They felt as if men would be impressed with their ability to pray.

- I have no problem with taking as much time as necessary to pray, but we have all heard those prayers that appeared to be longer than the message the preacher preached. I am more interested in the spirit in which one prays than the length of their prayer. I have heard some short and pointed prayers that I knew God had heard. I have heard some go on and on and wondered if the Lord heard a word of it. Once again we just need to ensure that our motives are pure and we are praying in the right spirit. Are we seeking to talk with the Lord or impress those who are listening to our prayer? That will make a significant difference.

### **I. Prayers of Vanity** (5)

### **II. Prayers of Monotony** (7)

**III. Prayers of Sincerity** (6, 8) – We considered the two types of prayer that are unacceptable and in these verses Jesus speaks of the attitude of prayer God desires. Consider:

**A. The Instruction** (6a) – *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.* We need to consider a couple of things here.

**1. The Place of Prayer** – The hypocrites prayed openly for the praise of men, but Jesus instructs us to pray within our closet. Now, we all know that we can pray anywhere and at any time. In fact, we are to be in a continual state of prayer. That is the wonderful thing about prayer; it isn't reserved for special times and occasions.

- However, there is a great truth that we need to consider. Jesus encouraged that we have a specific place in which to pray, a prayer closet. That speaks of a *storage room*; but it also can refer to an *inner chamber or a secret room*. The point is we need a place where we are comfortable and able to pray. It may be in a particular room in the house, the basement, out in the garage, or at the barn. It really doesn't matter where it is, as long as we have a place to pray and seek the Lord. We all need that quiet place of prayer and meditation unto the Lord.

**2. The Privacy in Prayer** – *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.* We automatically think of the closet as being a place of seclusion and privacy, but Jesus instructs us to close the door when we enter our closet. I love the picture that our Lord presents here. We have entered our closet and we have closed the door, shutting the world and its cares and distractions outside. This is the place of unhindered, undistracted meditation and prayer. There is no one else around watching or listening; it is just you and God.

- As we have discussed, there is nothing wrong with public prayer, but we all need that quiet time alone with God in prayer. If you don't have a closet in which to pray, I hope that you will find that place and make frequent use of it.

**B. The Confirmation (6b)** – *and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* The hypocrites and heathen had already received their reward, the recognition and praise of men, but those who seek God in prayer, privately and from a pure heart, will be rewarded openly. That is not why we pray, but we can rest assured that God will hear and answer our prayers when we humble ourselves and come before Him in the proper attitude.

- There are surely rewards and answered prayers received in this life, but I honestly believe that the greatest rewards will be reserved for heaven. No doubt we have been surrounded by those who served the Lord in obscurity, with the world hardly noticing them or their service unto the Lord. Some of these were great prayer warriors. The church and her work need the prayers of God's people, and I am certain that there have been saints who have touched heaven for the good of the church. This world, and even those with whom they worshipped, may have never known, but God has kept a record. One day they will receive their reward. You may feel as if you have little to contribute to the work of the Lord, but the greatest thing you can do is stand faithful in prayer.

**C. The Motivation (8)** – *Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.* If you need any motivation to pray, this should motivate anyone. Our heavenly Father knows every need we have, even before we ask. He is well aware of our every need and has the resources to supply them according to His good grace and blessed will. All we need to do is come before Him and make our requests known.

- We miss out on many blessings and much needed help because we do not ask. *Jam.4:2 – Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.* *Mat.7:7-8 – Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: [8] For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* God knows what we need; He is waiting for us to sense those needs and bring them before Him.

I don't know about you, but I have been challenged in my prayer life. There is something within the nature of man that desires praise. If we aren't careful we will seek to pray in a way that pleases men rather than making our requests known to God. No doubt we have all been guilty of praying repetitive, thoughtless prayers. We need to sense the urgency and necessity of prayer and be earnest and sincere when we pray. Our God is not limited and He is not bankrupt. Our every need He can supply.

If you are facing needs or difficulties in life, bring them unto the Lord. He already knows and He is waiting to hear from you. If you have never accepted Christ as your Savior, He stands ready to save you today. Whatever the need is, I would bring it unto the Lord.