**Prayer: Part 1 No Acting; No Babbling**

**Matthew 6:5–15**

**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.**

**I. Review**

Kingdom Citizenry: Beatitudes > expression as salt/ light > true righteousness > temptation/warning

**II. Temptation/ Warning:**

The demand for genuine perfection loses itself in the lesser goal of external piety; the goal of pleasing the Father is traded for its pygmy cousin, the goal of pleasing men. It almost seems as if the greater the demand for holiness, the greater the opportunity for hypocrisy. This is why I suspect that the danger is potentially most serious among religious leaders. -D. A. Carson[[1]](#footnote-1)

But Jesus’ words here *are* absolute. Jesus is saying, “Anyone who does a good deed so as to be seen and appreciated by others will lose his or her reward, no matter how ‘good’ and beneficial the deed is. Absolutely no exceptions!” It is possible for a believer to take a leper’s ulcerated limb in his hands and caress it and gently speak words of comfort and have no reward from God. It is possible to pray for your enemies and have no reward. It is possible to preach like an angel and have no reward. Why? Because it is possible to do all these things for the recognition of men and not of God.

I find this terrifying, for it means that my life, which is ostensibly given to God, can in the end count for nothing. -R. Kent Hughes[[2]](#footnote-2)

**III. Wrong Way to Pray Version One: Hypocrisy:**

**“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites....”**

**Hypocrisy-**

The OT word *chaneph* signifies chiefly “impious” and gives *hypocrisy* the basic significance of godlessness or wickedness. The Greek *hupokrisis* denotes “an actor’s response” and brings the meaning of deliberately acting a part. The Greek word *anupokritos* is the opposite of *hypocritical*, and it signifies “sincere” or “genuine” (Rom. 12:9; 1 Tim. 1:5; James 3:17, etc.). Thus hypocrisy may be summed up as an insincere acting the part of godliness, as a cloak for the practice of wickedness.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees-**

The acceptable clichés, the appropriate sentiments, the sonorous tones,

the well-pitched fervency, all become tools to win approval,

and perhaps to compete with the chap who led in prayer last week...

Moreover, at times of public fasts, and perhaps at the time of the daily afternoon temple sacrifice, the trumpets would blow as a sign that prayer should be offered. Right where he was, in the street, a man would turn and face the temple to offer his prayer. This opportunity for a little ostentatious piety was really quite gratifying. -D. A. Carson[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Q: Why not dispense with displays of public piety?**

I believe that not one prayer in a hundred of those that fill our churches on a Sunday morning is actually made to Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are made to men or to the praying one himself, and that includes the prayers of preachers as well as those of the members of the congregation. –James Boice[[5]](#footnote-5)

*On the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a given city or rural district. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader ceases, the president in a discourse admonishes and urges the imitation of these good things. Next we all rise together and send up prayers*.

*When we cease from our prayer, bread is presented and wine and water. The president in the same manner sends up prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people sing out their assent, saying the “Amen.” A distribution and participation of the elements for which thanks have been given is made to each person, and to those who are not present they are sent by the deacons*.

*Those who have means and are willing, each according to his own choice, gives what he wills, and what is collected is deposited with the president. He provides for the orphans and widows, those who are in need on account of sickness or some other cause, those who are in bonds, strangers who are sojourning, and in a word he becomes the protector of all who are in need*.

*We all make our assembly in common on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God changed the darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified him on the day before Saturn’s day, and on the day after (which is the day of the Sun) he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught these things, which we have offered for your consideration*.

—Justin Martyr, First Apology, 67[[6]](#footnote-6)

**The Paradox of closeness with God and temptation toward hypocrisy:**

A telling photograph of sin is that of someone on his knees in prayer pouring his soul out to God in worship, only to have the prayer dissolve into preoccupation with self so that he is really worshiping himself. Sadly, innumerable prayers, public and private, never rise beyond self. -R. Kent Hughes [[7]](#footnote-7)

**Application:**

The best example in this matter of praying is Jesus himself. Although he prayed much in public, he prayed far more in private; the evangelist Luke takes special pains to demonstrate this (see Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:41f.). Although he sometimes prayed with pithy brevity, he also gave himself to long, nighttime vigils. And he taught his followers to address God as their Father, assuring them at the same time that this heavenly Father not only knows the needs of his children before they ask him, yet also encourages those children to ask, in confidence and trust. –D. A. Carson[[8]](#footnote-8)

**IV. Wrong Way to Pray Version Two: Babbling**

**“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do,**

**“empty phrases”**- † **βατταλογέω** This occurs only at Mt. 6:7 in the sense of “to babble.” The non-Christian, and non-Jew, thinks that by heaping up the names of God, of which he does not know the true and relevant one, he can include the deity which will grant his request, and that he can weary God—this includes Jews too—by constant repetition.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Q: is this a call to brevity in prayer? Can it be reconciled with persistence?**

**Ecclesiastes 5:2** Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

**Luke 18:1** And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.. ...**7**And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?

In the particular example before us, if we absolutize Matthew 6:7f., the logical conclusion is that followers of Jesus must never pray at length, and seldom if ever ask for anything since God knows their needs anyway. If instead we absolutize Luke 18:1–8, we will reason that if we are serious with God we will not only pray at length, but we may expect the blessings we receive to be proportionate to our loquacity. However, if we listen to *both* passages with a little more sensitivity, we discover that Matthew 6:7f. is really not concerned with the length of prayers, but with the attitude of heart which thinks it is heard for its many words. Likewise, we find that Luke 18:1–8 is less concerned with mere length of prayers than with overcoming the quitting tendency among certain of Christ’s followers. These Christians, finding themselves under pressure, are often in danger of throwing in the towel. But they must not give up. –D. A. Carson[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Prayer to the Father who knows our needs-**

For He knoweth,” saith He, “what things ye have need of.” And if He know, one may say, what we have need of, wherefore must we pray? Not to instruct Him, but to prevail with Him; to be made intimate with Him, by continuance in supplication; to be humbled; to be reminded of thy sins. -John Chrysostom[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Application: What to do?**

1. Acknowledge temptation.
2. Acknowledge presence of Holy God is far greater.

He is everywhere. “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men.” Why? “Else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven.” He sees it all. He knows your heart; other people do not. You can deceive them, and you can persuade them that you are quite selfless; but God knows your heart… I sometimes feel that there is no better way of living, and trying to live, the holy and sanctified life than just to be constantly reminding ourselves of that. When we wake up in the morning we should immediately remind ourselves and recollect that we are in the presence of God. It is not a bad thing to say to ourselves before we go any further: “Throughout the whole of this day, everything I do, and say, and attempt, and think, and imagine, is going to be done under the eye of God. He is going to be with me; He sees everything; He knows everything. There is nothing I can do or attempt but God is fully aware of it all. ‘Thou God seest me.’ ” It would revolutionize our lives if we always did that. –Martin Lloyd-Jones[[12]](#footnote-12)

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