

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray” II (Matt 6:5-8)

Introduction – In the Luke account of the Lord’s Prayer, the disciples specifically asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In this account, Jesus makes clear that He assumes His disciples will be praying. “When,” not “if” you pray, He says. Jesus Himself “*often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed* (Luke 5:16).” It was His pleasure to commune with the Father and pour out all of His requests. He invites us to implement this pleasure as His gift to us as well. Right motivation is key, for it drives out the false-motives Christ warns about in this passage.

Impressing Others (vv5-6) – The first false-motive Jesus rebukes is the self-serving motive of impressing others. He ties this to being a hypocrite, a play-actor, trying to look like someone you are not.

Public Praying – Notice that Jesus is not necessarily condemning praying in public, but praying in public in order to be seen. Jesus prayed in public (John 11:41) as did His disciples (Acts 1:14, 3:1). However, the modern church is guilty of using mass-media and Capitol steps prayer vigils to be seen by men. But one can be guilty even in praying in the synagogues (churches) if one’s motive is wrong.

One Additional Application In our Service – Are you praying when someone else is up here leading in prayer, or are you just looking like you are praying? One way to remind and encourage us to pray, and all pray, corporately, is to add a corporate ‘Amen’ at certain times throughout our prayer time.

The Great Balance – In order to curb the temptation to ‘showboat’ in your prayers, our lives should be filled with times of secret prayer (Col 4:2, 1 Thess 5:17). And in all prayers, our focus and direction should be to the Lord, in private or in public (and there are temptations in both). We must also watch out for the temptation to avoid praying in public for fear of being seen by men (Dan 6:10).

Note To Self: Pray For Rewards – God invites us to be motivated by rewards from praying. But we are warned to not be satisfied with carnal rewards. If we simply want a reputation as a great prayer-warrior, we will have our reward. What a sad and foolish (and common) thing to pursue – people impressed with you. But if we are seeking the Lord diligently, secretly, single-mindedly, and in faith, we do not have to confess our desire for the reward, answers to prayer, as an evil motivation. Remember, understood rightly, making our requests known to God is part and parcel to giving glory to His name (John 14:13).

Impressing God (v7) – Sometimes, like hypocrites, we can make our prayers lengthy to impress others. Sometimes we may, like the heathen, think we can manipulate God with just the right words, or repeating those words. We will not be heard for our many words.

Vain Repetition – Among the heathen there are prayer wheels, prayer beads, prayer journeys, and chanting mantras. Among the Christians there are “Hail Mary’s”, “Our Father’s” (and so just getting the words right isn’t the point) and the Prayer of Jabez. They are all the same. Vain and empty. But not all repetition is vain. Psalm 136 is a wonderful example and Psalm 119, where David says “*teach me Thy statutes*” seven times.

Battalgeo – is the word for ‘vain repetition’ and simply means babbling, or chattering. We must be careful with what we say before the Lord (Ecc 5:2).

‘Speaking in Tongues’ – With all due respect to our charismatic brothers and sisters, what is today called speaking in tongues is not the extraordinary gift of languages given to the first-century Church. This was the fulfillment of a prophecy of judgment upon unbelieving Israel when the Holy Spirit was to be poured out upon all nations (1 Cor 14:20-22, Is 28:11-12). What occurs today is much closer to this word, battalgeo. The problem with ‘tongue-speakers’ today is not that they speak in tongues, but that they do not.

“Therefore, do not be like them” (v8) – God does not hear our prayers because we have impressed others. Neither does He hear our prayers because of how long they are, how fancy our words are, how sentimental our hearts are, or how many times or how many people are praying. He hears our prayers because we are abiding in Him, beseeching Him, coming to Him in Jesus Name, humbling ourselves before Him that He may lift us up and glorify Himself. He hears our prayers because He loves His children.

“For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” – At first glance, this appears to throw cold water on any motivation to pray. But it makes perfect sense to Christ as he instructs us. Prayer is God’s appointed means, not to get information from us, but to bring blessing to us, honor and glory to Himself, and to cause us to constantly acknowledge our complete dependence upon Him for everything. Jesus is our example. He knew and He knew the Father knew, and yet He prayed. How much more should we?

Don’t Believe in Prayer! – Believe in God. It is not the manner of your words but the manner of your heart in which He is

interested. “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much* (James 5:16).” Nevertheless, a man whose heart is turned to God learns as He now instructs, “*pray in this manner...*”

Without Communion in Christ – you simply cannot approach the Father. Christ died for sinners. Have you been wearing a mask? Are you more concerned with what others think you are like? Are you more concerned with impressing God with your works and words? But He sees the mask, and He alone sees your heart. And He calls you now to come to Him and receive mercy and grace in the name of Jesus Christ. Then you may pray.

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