

Matthew 6:1-8

Verse 1

Jesus has labored the point throughout His sermon on the mount that God looks at the intent and the motive of the heart and He continues with that truth in this verse and the upcoming verses on giving, prayer, and fasting. We are to be obedient in all our actions to please God, not to be noticed by men and receive their praise. The very same act that God commands can be performed by different people, but the motive determines if it is pleasing to God or not.

Verses 2-4

The act of giving to the poor is a sacrifice that is to be worship toward God. Sacrifice involved worship. This act of worship is to be done in as private of manner as possible as it us unto God. However, the Pharisees were not interesting in private giving, but rather made a scene with their giving as they were using it as an opportunity for self-righteousness to receive praise and reverence from others. The act of giving when done with the wrong motive is not pleasing to God.

Jesus calls the Pharisees and those who give with these motive and intent hypocrites. The Greek word used for hypocrites is *hypocrites/hypocritai*. This word was used in antiquity to describe actors in a play who would often wear masks. They were not actually the characters they were portraying, but rather pretending. This is the case of the Pharisees who were playing the part of a follower of God who was engaging in righteous acts with sincere motives, but under the mask was a child of the devil. The “reward” they were receiving was accolades of men, but the judgment they would receive was from God. Jesus intensely indicts the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in [Matthew 23](#).

The one who has sincere motives and follows the command of the Lord will not make their giving about themselves, but rather will give as worship to God. The omniscient God knows all things and the giving that is done in secret will be rewarded by God which is far more substantial than the praise of men.

Verses on God’s omniscience:

- [\(Job 37:16\)](#) For He looks to the ends of the earth; He sees everything under the heavens.
- [\(Heb 4:13\)](#) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must answer.
- [\(Proverbs 15:3\)](#) The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good.
- [\(Matthew 6:18\)](#) so that your fasting will not be noticed by people but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Verses 5-6

In [Luke 11:1](#) we are told that the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. The disciples could have asked Him to teach them anything and the thing they wanted to be taught was how to pray. This is a request and a prayer that be in the lips of every Christian.

In verse 5, Jesus starts His teaching on how to pray by showing them how not to pray. His first instruction on how to pray in this sermon is to not pray like the hypocrites (the actors in a play, mask wears, pretenders). Like their giving, the hypocrites would pray to be seen and acknowledged by men. They would stand in the busiest places including the street corners and the synagogues and pray to be seen and praised by men for their self-righteousness. There is tremendous severity in flippantly and hypocritically saying prayers to the eternal Holy God for one’s own glory rather than to the glory of God! It is a dangerous thing to make a mockery of the privilege of praying to the Lord God omnipotent. Imagine the thought of pagans who are children of the devil when in times of need in their lives offer a selfish prayer to the God they are hostile to and at war with treating Him a genie in a bottle for their own desires. This idolatry and irreverence to God which brings about consequence and storing up of wrath against that Day.

Prayer is an intimate thing between a person and God which is why we are instructed to get alone and in private to pray just as Jesus did so often. Jesus went away to pray in private before He called His disciples, walked on the water, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. Prayer to the Father was of great importance to Jesus while on this earth and prayer is vital in the life of a Christian.

Verse 7

Jesus again continues teaching on prayer by instruction on how not to pray. Prayer is not to be a rote utterance of repetitive thoughtless words that are only from the mouth and not in sincerity with thought from the heart. It is not wrong to repeat a prayer like the Lord's prayer, but that too could turn into vain repetition of words if it not meditated on and sincerely prayed. God does not prohibit repetition of words, but rather vain repetition of words. Prayers do not have to be long to be affected, but long prayers are not prohibited if done appropriately as Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve (**Luke 6:12**). Let us not say prayers, but rather pray prayers.

- **Matthew 23:14** [^a]Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

Verse 8

God is omniscient and knows everything we need before we pray. He knew what we would pray and need before the world was. There is nothing new you are going to tell God in prayer. You are not letting Him in on a secret He didn't know, etc. Understanding this essential truth should facilitate more honest, sincere prayer with less hypocrisy and acting. We must not be like hypocrites and remove our actor masks before we pray.

- **Psalm 139:1-4** O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*. ²You know [^a]when I sit down and [^b]when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. ³You [^c]scrutinize my [^d]path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. ⁴[^e]Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.

Does prayer change God's mind? No. God's decrees are perfect and have been declared from the beginning (**Isaiah 46:9-10**). God is unchanging (**Numbers 23:19. James 1:17**). What could we tell God in prayer that He didn't already know or offer counsel to Him for a better plan in our current situation to make God realize He made a mistake and change His mind? Who has known the mind of the Lord of who has been His counselor (**Romans 11:34**).

Does prayer change things? Yes. Prayer changes things including us. Prayer changes us and conforms us to the will of God. Prayer is not for Him, but rather for us. God uses our prayers as instrumental causes to bring about His eternal decrees. He uses our prayers as a means to accomplish His ends which He has decreed. God commands us to pray and pray without ceasing (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**).

- "Our prayers are included among God's providential plan for the destiny of the world." -R.C Sproul

Prayer is vital and essential in the life of a Christian. Being able to come before the throne of the Living God in prayer is an incomprehensible privilege that should never be taken flippantly or irreverently. When we pray, we must always remember to whom we are speaking to and then in return remember who we are. When we do these things, the prayer of the heart, with more and more frequency, will in reverence, trust, and worship cry out "not my will, but yours be done."

