

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7

A Christian's Religion – 6:1-18 (Part 2)

As mentioned last time, these classes have covered the Christian's *character*^{Matthew 5:1-12}, the Christian's *influence*^{Matthew 5:13-16} and the Christian's *moral righteousness*^{Matthew 5:17-48}. The previous study also covered the first half of the topic of the Christian's *religion*, by presenting an introduction to *religious righteousness* and then contrasting the hypocrite's and Christian's perspective on giving and prayer.

In this lesson, Jesus completes His teaching on *religious righteousness* by adding to the previous passages on prayer and concluding with a discussion on fasting. In addition, this section of Scripture tells of Jesus' continuing exhortation for the Christian to be different from the religious hypocrites.

A FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN PRAYER

In the previously reviewed verses on prayer^{v.5-8}, Jesus presented the widely divergent methods of praying by the Pharisees (hypocritical), pagan (mechanical) and the Christian (sincere and thoughtful). He also reminded Christians of the omniscience of God, so the expression of truth is vital in prayer.

Jesus then offered the following prayer to Christians that is often referred to as the LORD's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

6:9 Jesus used the phrase “**how you should pray**” instead of “what you should pray” to emphasize the prayer He offered could not only be repeated, but also be used as a model of prayer principles. Not only is each principle of great importance, but also the order in which they are presented is crucial. With this in mind, Jesus started the prayer with a direct statement to the “**hallowed**” (*hagiazō*: sanctified) name of God, who is the Christian's^{1 Peter 1:17} (and the obedient Jew's^{Jeremiah 3:19}) Heavenly “**Father**”. With this beautiful start, the remainder of prayer should be a relaxed conversation with a loving Dad.

Right from the beginning, Jesus underscored the personal nature of a Christian's prayer: “**Our Father...**”. His use of “**Our**” also points out that this is a public prayer, in contrast to the secret private prayers^{v.6}.

6:10 Jesus continued the focus on God by noting the preeminence of His kingdom (*basileia*: royal dominion) and His will (His good, pleasing and perfect will^{Romans 12:2}). The prayer petitions for His kingdom to “**come**” (referring to growth and consummation) and His will to be “**done**” (*ginomai*: be performed) on earth (*gē*: man's domain), just as it is in heaven (applies to all three issues: holiness, kingdom and will). The answer to this prayer has already been prophesied to be fulfilled in the Millennium^{Revelation 19:11-20:6}.

Even though the fulfillment of this portion of the prayer is going to happen, because of the prophecy, Jesus wants His followers to be part of the process by praying for it to happen, because this shows an

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affinity with God and His will. An OT example of this same principle is found when Daniel prayed for the Jews to return to Jerusalem ^{Daniel 9:1-19}, even when he already knew it would occur ^{Jeremiah 25:4-12, 29:10-11}.

6:11 When a Christian asks God to provide ^{Proverbs 30:7-8}, they are simply admitting total dependence on Him. Keep in mind that "bread" not only has a physical meaning, but is also a spiritual symbol: Jesus ^{John 6:48}.

6:12 All people (including Christians) need His forgiveness (*aphiēmi*: from *apo*: from & *hiemi*: to send away) for their "debts" (*opheilēma*: an offense that obliges an atonement). Jesus also makes sure believers understand the critical need to reflect the recognition of their thankfulness by forgiving their "debtors".

6:13 Christians should ask for God's help to stay away from temptation ^{James 1:13-15} and to be delivered (*rhuomai*: to forcefully draw out of danger) from the evil (*ponēros*: moral or spiritual evil) one (Satan).

Prayer outline: A personal beginning, with the correct frame of mind/focus: "Our Father..."
Acknowledge God's concerns as paramount: "your name", "your kingdom", "your will"
Rejoice that God cares for all concerns/needs: "give us", "forgive us", "lead us"
(Note that these petitions cover all needs: material, spiritual and moral.)

6:14-15 Because of its great importance, Jesus reiterated ^{v.12} Christian forgiveness of sins (*paraptōma*: intended fault) against them, just as He forgives their sins ^{Mark 11:25-26, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13}.

The heart of this principle: How can a Christian expect to be forgiven of their egregious sins against a holy, righteous God, if they are unwilling to forgive the relatively minor sins against them ^{Matthew 18:21-35}.

Suggested Prayer Outline **ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication**

FASTING (6:16-18)

God pronounced the primary guidelines for genuine fasting in the OT through the prophet Isaiah ^{Isaiah 58}. Generally, fasting is a voluntary & sacrificial self-denial of something: food, work, entertainment, etc.

HYPOCRITICAL FASTING

6:16 During Jesus' time, when the hypocrites (Pharisees) fasted, they made sure their faces were disfigured (literally: "render their faces unrecognizable") so others would notice (completing their reward ^{v.2,5}).

CHRISTIAN FASTING

6:17-18 When a Christian fasts, he must "put oil on [his] head and wash [his] face" (*prosōpon*: countenance), in order to ensure that what he is doing is not obvious to those around him (i.e., it is done in secret ^{v.6}). Fasting is a form of personal/private worship, so it should only be known by God the Father ^{Zechariah 7:5}, who will grant a reward ^{v.4,6} for sincerity. (See the earlier discussion of rewards ^{v.4}.)

Sincere fasting will produce: humility/joy before God ^{Zechariah 8:19}, spiritual cleansing ^{Leviticus 16:29-31}, self-control through self-discipline ^{Numbers 29:7}, a sharing of blessings from deliberate denial ^{Isaiah 58:6-7}.

Christianity: Religion that flows out of a Relationship.

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