

Religious Activities that Receive No Reward

Sermon 14 in the Matthew Series

Matthew 6:1-8, 15-18

Verses 1-18 deal with personal matters of the heart before an all-knowing God.
Verses 19-34 consist of exhortations for us to “Seek first the Kingdom”.

I. Three Illustrations of Bad Motives in Religious Activities

A. Giving for the Wrong Reason 6:1-4

1. We give because God has told us to give. Freely ye have received – freely give!
2. We give because those who give will be blessed.
3. Prov. 11:24 (ESV) -- One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.
4. Our ultimate motivation must be to glorify God

B. Public Prayers are to be directed to God and not to Men 6:5-8

1. Public Prayers are Important
Prayer is a means of grace and part of a regulated worship service.
Prayer Meetings are also vital – but they are more informal than worship.
2. Public Prayer has its own Inherent Dangers
The danger is we pray to men and for show instead of to God.
3. Personal Secret Prayer is necessary if there is to be true Public Prayer.
4. Be careful with the words you use during prayer.
Vain repetition -- *bat-ta-lo-ge-o* = babbling
Many words = *po-lu-lo-gi-a* = over-speaking

A good contrast between Heathen prayer and Godly prayer is the example of the 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, and the prayer of Elijah.

C. Proper Fasting 6:16-18

A proper Biblical practice in both the Old Testament and the New. .

Fasting too can become a show.

Days of prayer and fasting (along with days of thanksgiving) may be called by a church for special occasions – but private fasting should be a private matter between the person and their God.

II. Theological and Practical Reasons Why We Must Pray.

Why should we pray? Why MUST we pray?

The answer is – Prayer is not for God’s benefit – but for ours.

Calvin says:

But if God knows what we need before we seek it, there might appear to be no benefit in prayer... The faithful do not pray to tell God what He does not know, or urge Him to His duties, or hurry Him on when He delays. Rather, they pray to alert themselves to seek Him, to exercise their faith by meditating upon His promises, unburdening their cares by lifting themselves into His bosom. Finally, they pray to testify that from Him alone, all good for themselves and for others is hoped for and asked. As for Himself, what He has determined to give of His own free will, and even before He is asked, He promises to give all the same, in response to our prayers. Keep hold of both points, then: our prayers are anticipated by Him in His freedom, yet what we ask we gain by prayer.” (Institutes Vol. 1, 204).

A. Prayer reminds us of our inability and powerlessness.

B. Prayer shows our absolute reliance upon Him.

C. Prayer shows our willingness to accept His will in our situation.

- Every prayer needs to have the attitude, "Not my will, but thine be done."
- That's the way Jesus. “the perfect man” prayed in the garden of Gethsemane.
- For ourselves, we don't know what is best in every situation.
- The fact is – sometimes we don’t even know how to pray – but God in His grace has that covered too – as His Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

4. Prayer reminds us of His love and care for us

Jesus said, "I go to MY FATHER and YOUR FATHER, to MY GOD and YOUR GOD." He also reminds us “The Father Himself loves you.”

5. We pray because He has commanded us to pray.