

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

XLV. The Sermon On The Mount: False And True Righteousness J. Christ's Righteous Practices In Contrast To Unrighteous Practices 2. Righteous Versus Unrighteous Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15)

I. Introduction

- A. Christ's great Sermon on the Mount provided valuable insight on God's true righteousness, what Israel's religious leaders greatly lacked as seen in their dead traditionalism.
- B. To illustrate the contrast between the unrighteous practices of the Pharisees with truly righteous practices, Jesus gave six illustrations, with the second illustration regarding the issue of prayer in Matthew 6:5-15. We study this passage for insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Righteous Versus Unrighteous Prayer, Matthew 6:5-15.

- A. Jesus critiqued the way that the Pharisees prayed, Matthew 6:5, 7:
 - 1. First, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for selfishly trying to impress others with their piety. They prayed "frequently but always in a public place – in the synagogue or on the street corner," seeking "to impress people with their piety," but "they got what they were praying for, the plaudits of people (Matt. 6:5)." (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 182-183)
 - 2. Second, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for "babbling like pagans" and feeling "that endless repetition endeared them to God," Ibid., p. 183; Matthew 6:7.
- B. Consequently, Jesus corrected these abuses of prayer in Matthew 6:6, 7a, 8:
 - 1. Regarding the abuse of trying to impress others, Jesus directed that we pray in secret, and God the Father Who sees in secret would openly reward such prayer, Matthew 6:6.
 - 2. Regarding the abuse of endless repetitions to impress God, Jesus directed that we not to use vain repetitions like the pagans, for God knows what we need before we ask things from Him, Matthew 6:7a, 8.
- C. To illustrate these points, Christ taught us in Matthew 6:9-15 how to pray, giving what today is called "The Lord's Prayer," and we view that prayer in applying the points Christ had made in Matthew 6:5-8 (as follows):
 - a. In contrast to exalting oneself, Jesus taught us to address God as "**Our** Father," that the one praying was just one believer of many other believers who had God as their spiritual Father (Matthew 6:9a).
 - b. In contrast to using prayer as a means of exalting oneself, Jesus taught us to address God the Father Who was "in heaven," Matthew 6:9b. God in heaven is the great King over the universe, and we believers are His lowly subjects down on the earth, so there is no room for us to exalt ourselves while addressing God!
 - c. In contrast to using prayer to exalt oneself, Jesus taught us to address God as holy, as separate from sin that plagues us in this life and tempts us to exalt ourselves, Matthew 6:9c.
 - d. In contrast to using prayer to exalt oneself, Jesus taught us to pray that God's kingdom might come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that we focus on the glory due to God, not to ourselves, v. 10.
 - e. In contrast to using vain repetitions to impress God to meet our material needs, Jesus taught us to ask God in one simple, short request for our daily food needs, Matthew 6:11.
 - f. In contrast to using prayer to exalt oneself, Jesus taught us to ask God to forgive us of our "obligations incurred," our "sins of omission and commission," Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Matthew 6:12.
 - g. In contrast to using prayer to exalt oneself, Jesus taught us to ask God to shield us from temptations to sin and from the Evil One, Satan, our spiritual Enemy who often tempts us to selfishness, Matthew 6:13a. Jesus later explained how important it was that we forgive the sins of others against us as the basis of God's forgiving our sins against Him, Matthew 6:14-15. Again, the emphasis is on avoiding selfishness and focusing on our responsibilities in treating others righteously.
 - h. Also, the conciseness of the topics addressed in the whole prayer avoids the abuse of endless repetitions!
 - i. [The sentence in Matthew 6:13b, "For thine is the kingdom . . . forever. Amen" does not appear in "early and important representatives of the Alexandrian . . . the Western . . . and the pre-Caesarean . . . types of text . . . as well as early patristic commentaries on the Lord's Prayer," so it is not part of the original text. (Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 1971, p. 16-17)]

Lesson: *Prayer should not exalt oneself, but God, and it should not try to manipulate God with long repetitions.*

Application: *In praying, may we be considerate of others and of God, and may we be simple and concise with God.*