

Counterfeit Christianity - Prayer

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Date: 30 September 2015

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

- [0 : 0 0] Well, would you turn with me this evening to the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 6. Continuing our study in the Sermon on the Mount, in this second section.
- Matthew chapter 6, and if we read from verse 5, and I'm reading from the authorised version, and you'll know why as I read it.
- So from verse 5, And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are. For they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.
- Assuredly, I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet. And when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret. And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
- But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking, or speaking a lot.
- [1 : 1 8] Be ye not ye therefore like unto them? For your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask him. After this manner, therefore pray ye. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.
- Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.
- For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
- And so on. And so next to Psalm 23 and John 3.16. The words of this passage are among the most well-known words in the Bible.
- Because just as we read in Matthew's Gospel, it contains our pattern for prayer, which we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. And when we think about it, I'm sure that many of us knew the Lord's Prayer, and we knew how to recite it.
- [2 : 4 2] Maybe even off by heart. And maybe we even knew it before we were old enough to read it in the Bible. Before we were even old enough to find where it was in the Bible.
- We could say it off-pat. And from a young age, whether at home or in school, we used to recite this passage. And they've, in a sense, they've been woven into the fabric of our being from a very young age.
- Which isn't a bad thing. It's a good thing to have God's Word written on our heart, even when we're still strangers to grace and to God. And reading this commentary, J.C. Ryle, he mentions the familiarity we have with this passage.
- Where he says, perhaps no part of Scripture is so well known as this. Its words are familiar wherever Christianity is found.
- Thousands, he says, and tens of thousands who never saw a Bible or heard the pure Gospel are acquainted with the Lord's Prayer. And that's so true.

- [3 : 49] Because if we were to ask many of the people in our communities and throughout our island who were in school and who grew up here and who went to school here.
- And maybe even in other districts and maybe on the mainland. I'm sure that most people here and who grew up here to some extent could recite the Lord's Prayer.
- But, says Ryle, happy would it be for the world if this prayer was as well known in the Spirit as it is in the letter.
- If they didn't only know it in their head, but they knew it in their heart. And Ryle, he goes on to say, no part of Scripture is so full as it contains everything by which the most advanced saint can design.
- And yet at the same time it's so simple that it's the first prayer we learn to offer up when we are little. And it's a wonderful passage.
- [4 : 47] But as we saw last week when we resumed our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we saw that the context to the Lord's Prayer and the context to this chapter wasn't about teaching our children how to pray.
- It was about challenging the practical living of the scribes and the Pharisees. Because as we saw last week in verses 1 to 18 of this chapter, Jesus is challenging the scribes and the Pharisees on the problem of counterfeit Christianity.
- Counterfeit Christianity. And Jesus is challenging their Christianity in three ways. In relation to giving, in relation to praying, and then in relation to fasting.
- Giving, praying, and fasting. And he's challenging them because these three acts of giving, praying, and fasting, they all come under the banner of doing righteousness or righteous living.
- And Jesus was accusing the scribes and Pharisees of being counterfeit. They were hypocrites. And Jesus says, being a hypocrite is not the behaviour of someone who is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.
- [6 : 00] And so when Jesus is teaching us against the perils of counterfeit Christianity, he's saying to us, don't be like the hypocrites. Don't be like the hypocrites and practice your religious righteousness before others.
- Don't seek the glory of others. Don't seek to be praised by people. Don't look to man for your approval. Don't do your giving or your praying or your fasting so that others can see you.
- And so that others can see how righteous you are and how religious you are. Don't be like the hypocrite, he says. And it's a strong indictment. Because as we said last week, he's saying, don't be like the actor on the stage.
- And practice your religious righteousness before the audience of this world. Don't make your Christianity a scene in a movie where everyone is looking at you and focusing upon you.
- Don't make your Christianity a performance before others and an act to be seen by others. And Jesus stresses this to us in order that we see the reward of those who act like the hypocrite.
- [7 : 10] Because he says, their reward, it's the glory of man. It's the glory of man. The hypocrite receives what they desire. They desire the glory of men, therefore they receive the glory of men.
- They didn't seek the glory of God, therefore their reward isn't the glory of God. And Jesus highlights these acts of righteousness, of giving and praying, and fasting.
- And he repeatedly uses phrases in this passage between verses 1 to 18. And he's trying to drive home the point. That's why he keeps repeating these phrases.

Because he says in verse 2 when he talks about giving, he says, When you do your giving or your charitable deeds, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have the glory of men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have the reward. And then when he talks about prayer, he says, When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.

[8 : 17] Assuredly, I say to you, they have the reward. And then verse 16 when he talks about fasting. When you fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, and they appear unto men to fast.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. And Jesus, he repeats all these phrases to drive the point home, in order that we understand what he's talking about.

And what he's talking about is that he's presenting to us this contrast. The contrast between man's reward and God's remedy. Man's reward and God's remedy.

And that's how he preaches, you could say. That's how he sets out his sermon in this section. He presents man's reward and God's remedy. And so this evening we're looking at the second aspect of counterfeit Christianity.

In which Jesus challenges the scribes and the Pharisees. And he challenges them about praying. And so Jesus tells us first of all about man's reward.

[9 : 25] Man's reward. If we read again at verse 5, he says, When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are. For they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the street corners.

That they may be seen of men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your closet. And when you shut the door, pray to your Father which is in secret.

And your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly. But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

And what we notice in these verses about Jesus' indictment against counterfeit Christianity. Is that he highlights that we're not to imitate two groups of people.

We're not only to avoid being like the hypocrites, which he mentions in verse 5. But we're also to avoid being like the heathen, which he mentions in verse 7.

[10 : 24] And Jesus draws our attention to these two groups. Because their folly is that they sought the praise of others. Because Jesus says that the hypocrite, he longed to be seen by others.

He longed to be seen whether it was praying in the synagogue or on the street corners. He wanted to be seen. And then Jesus says that the heathen, they longed to be heard. They longed to be heard using all their vain repetitions and their many words in prayer.

And so the warning which Jesus issues here about praying is, Don't be like the hypocrites who want to be seen. And don't be like the heathen who want to be heard.

Don't be like the hypocrites who want to be seen. And don't be like the heathen who want to be heard. Because the hypocrites, says Jesus, They love to be seen.

They love to be noticed by others. They love being observed by those in the synagogue. Because the synagogue, it was not only a place of worship where people gathered every week.

[11 : 31] It was also the centre of the community. It was the centre of community life. Everything revolved around the synagogue. It was the place where God was worshipped.

But it was the place where God's people gathered and sought to honour and glorify God. And to pray standing in the synagogue. It was to take up a very public position and posture.

But so was standing on the busy street corner. Longing to be watched by others in their act of public prayer. Because the Pharisees, they would stand on this corner.

The junction where two streets would meet. And they would stand there. And of course it's a very public place. And you'd be noticed by everyone.

But just to make sure that they were seen. The Pharisees, they would stand on their podium. And in which everyone could see them then. Because they're above and they're elevated.

[12 : 29] And their desire only then is to win the approval of people. Their desire was to receive gratification and praise of others. So that others will think highly of them.

And consider how righteous and how holy they are. And that their prayer life is something to be aspired to. But in reality, Jesus says that their actions were in fact stealing.

They're stealing the worship and the glory and the honour that is due to God alone. Because for these hypocrites, they were just portraying themselves as actors on the stage.

Pretending to communicate with God. But their prayers were going nowhere. Their prayers were so self-centred and inward looking. That their true intention was not to exalt God.

But to exalt themselves above everyone else. And again, Jesus affirms that the Pharisees will receive what they have desired. He says, assuredly I say to you, they have their reward.

[13 : 34] They have their reward. But when we look at this indictment from Jesus with regards to prayer. He not only warns us about the hypocrite who wanted to be seen.

He also warns us about the heathen who want to be heard. And Jesus is clear. He says in verse 7. When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.

For they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. And it's interesting that Jesus mentions the heathen. Because in each case in this passage.

Whether Jesus is talking about giving or praying or fasting. Jesus is saying, don't be like the hypocrites. But here when Jesus mentions prayer. He also highlights a method of prayer that the heathen used.

And the heathen, they weren't like the Pharisees. Simply because they weren't Jewish. They were Gentiles. The heathen were those from foreign lands and foreign nations.

[14 : 39] Who worshipped foreign gods and bowed down to idols. And the heathen, they were known and they were defined by their prayer style. When they went to their high places.

And they went to worship at all their shrines. Because they would often spend hours in prayer. Repeating the same words over and over and over again.

Like, it would be like this incantation. This magic spell. That when it's repeated and repeated. That it would somehow attack their god to move and answer their prayer.

And you know, the same is true today. Because when we consider the religions of Islam and Buddhism. They have this huge emphasis upon prayer.

Where they have to pray to Allah five times a day at a certain time. They're all given a timetable. In which they have to make their prayer known to Allah.

[15 : 41] And also the Buddhists. They have to fall down before Buddha. In order to have a better life in the next world. But Jesus says, it's all vain repetitions.

Literally he's saying, it's all babble. It's all gibberish. It's all nonsense. Because they're not actually speaking to anyone. Their idols are dumb idols, he's saying.

And that's what we were reading about in 1 Kings 18. With Elijah on the top of Mount Carmel. That great competition between the Lord and Baal.

That false idol that so many worshipped. And we read there that both sides of the divide, they were there. And they set up their altar. And they prepared their bull to offer to their god as a burnt offering.

And the competition, it was simple. The god who answers by fire. Let him be God. And Elijah knowing that Baal would never answer. He let the 450 prophets go first.

[16 : 47] And we're told that from 9 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon. The prophets of Baal, they cried. And they repeated the same vain words.

O Baal, hear us. O Baal, hear us. O Baal, hear us. And you can almost imagine it's like this chorus of people saying this repeated like a spell.

And they cried louder and louder. And they were screaming, it says. They were cutting themselves. They were letting their own blood drip onto the offering. All in the hope that Baal would answer them.

But we were told there was no voice. No one answered. No one paid attention. And that's what Jesus is teaching us here.

He says, They think that they'll be heard for their many words. But their prayers prove to be empty. And so if we pray like the heathen, there will be no voice.

[17 : 53] No one will answer. No one will pay attention. Therefore, says Jesus in verse 8, Don't be like them. Don't be like them.

Because our praying is not about being seen by others. Our praying is not about being heard by others. Our praying, says Jesus, is to be seen by our Father in heaven.

And to be heard by our Father in heaven. Which brings us, secondly, to consider God's remedy to counterfeit Christianity. We've considered the structure that Jesus is using.

Man's reward. But Jesus also presents God's remedy in relation to pray. God's remedy. And he says, So we'll read again in verse 5.

He says, When you pray, you're not to be as the hypocrites are, for they love to stand in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be seen of men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

[18 : 54] Here's the remedy. But you, when you pray, enter your closet, and when you shut the door, pray to your Father, which is in secret, that your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly.

Then here's another man's reward. But when you pray, use not be in repetitions, as the heathen do, for they seek, they think that they'll be heard from their much speaking. Then the remedy.

Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask him. And so even as we saw last week, when Jesus was addressing the issue of giving, we saw that the remedy which Jesus highlights was to contrast the follower of Jesus and the hypocrite.

But in this section, on praying, Jesus makes two contrasts, as we've seen, because he makes the contrast between the follower of Jesus with the hypocrite and the heathen.

And again, just like he was in regard to the issue of giving, Jesus is very direct, straight to the point, because he says in verse 6, when you, when you pray, when you pray, you the follower of Jesus, you, when you do these things, when you pray, you are to live in complete contrast to the hypocrite and to the heathen.

[20 : 22] But Jesus is not only personal and direct in what he's saying when he says you, when you pray. Jesus, he's also clear. He's clear that these acts of righteousness, although they're condemned because of the way the hypocrite and the heathen just paraded themselves about, he says that this must be part of our lives.

Prayer must be part of our Christianity. Prayer must be part and partial of who we are as Christians and citizens of the kingdom of heaven, which is why Jesus says, when you pray.

It's not a case of if you pray, but when you pray, which seems straightforward, that if we are Christians, then we ought to pray, where prayer is to be part and partial of our Christian life.

And as one theologian once put it, as air is the breath of life, so prayer is the breath of faith. As air is the breath of life, so prayer is the breath of faith.

And that's what Jesus is teaching us, that as Christians, we ought to be prayerful. And as Christians, we ought to be full of prayer. We ought to be exercised in prayer, praying about everything.

[21 : 47] Praying about everything that we come into contact with. All the time. Praying about every situation that we're faced with. Full of prayer. And you know, I love the way Matthew Henry described the essence of prayer and its essential nature.

He said, the Bible is like a letter that God has sent to us. And prayer is like a letter that we send to Him. The Bible is a letter God sent to us.

Prayer is a letter that we send to Him. And of course, it's only right and proper that we respond to God's letter by sending our own back to Him.

So as Christians, we ought to pray. We ought to pray. But as Jesus addresses the hypocrites and their love of being seen by others in the synagogue and on the street corner, He emphasizes private prayer when He says in verse 6, when you pray, enter into your closet and when you've shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly.

And in these words, Jesus teaches us where to pray. Because He says, go into your room. The word literally means the inner room, a place of silence and privacy, away from the stage and the street of the watchful eye of others.

[23 : 20] And Jesus says, close them out. close the door, close out all the noise and all the distractions and pray to your Father in secret.

And what Jesus is reminding us is that prayer is a private exercise. It's a private thing between you and God. It's not to be a performance or a show but a private relationship between you and your Heavenly Father.

and it's so important to our growth as Christians to find a quiet moment in the day to come before your Father and pray.

It doesn't have to be for hours as we shall see shortly but it should happen. And I know it's not easy with family life and with work and with so many other pressures and life just hurtling on before us.

All these things that we face in a day but Jesus is encouraging us as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven to come aside and be alone with the Lord and pray.

[24 : 31] And of course prayer isn't just to be confined to our quiet times. We can pray anytime. We can pray anywhere. We can pray at work. We can pray at home. We can pray in the car.

We can pray on the bus. Wherever we are. Wherever it is. We can pray. We can pray anywhere. But on the other hand by emphasising privacy in prayer Jesus he isn't forbidding public prayer.

Just because the Pharisees made a show of themselves doesn't mean that public prayer was this condemned practice. Rather what Jesus was getting at is that when we pray we should remember who we're praying to.

Because the essence of prayer is not public style but private communication. Not public style but private communication. We're not to have one eye on God and one eye on the audience.

One eye on those who are around us. so that they'll be impressed with our prayers. Because that only indicates that our real audience is not God but those in front of us.

[25 : 38] And thinking about who our audience is when we pray and maybe this is directed more towards the men in our congregation. But thinking about our audience the word audience its root is from the word audio.

And it means those in the hearing. And what Jesus is asking us is who is the audience when we pray. Of course those in public prayer are going to hear.

But who do we want to hear us when we pray. Who are we praying to when we pray. Is it man or is it God. And it's a searching question.

As one commentator said the devil enjoys hearing a prayer that is addressed to an audience. But what the psalmist confessed in Psalm 116 I love the Lord because my voice and my prayers he did hear.

While I live I will call on him who bowed to me his ear. And my friend it's God's ear that we should want. And it's God's ear that we should desire.

[26 : 48] But I just want to say and I state the obvious when I say it. Prayer is not easy. It's not easy. We all struggle with it. We all find it difficult.

We have an enemy that doesn't want us to pray. And we have a sinful heart that often keeps us from praying. And it doesn't matter who we are we all struggle with prayer.

One of the hardest things I'm being honest with you one of the hardest things I find about being a minister and having to preach every week is that it's the responsibility to pray.

Sometimes it's the most daunting part of the service standing to pray. But I'm being reminded here that prayer is not about the head it's about the heart.

It's all about the heart. It's not a show. It's not an opportunity to be critiqued in our prayers by others or have them give you a score out of ten.

[27 : 50] Prayer and even the prayer meeting it's all about God's children coming to their father and seeking help and encouragement from him.

Prayer is not about the head. It's about pouring out our heart before God. But Jesus he doesn't even finish there. He not only makes the contrast between the follower of Jesus with the hypocrite he also he goes on to make the contrast between the follower of Jesus and the heathen.

And he says in verse 7 When you pray do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking therefore do not be like unto them for your father knows what things you have need of before you ask him.

after this manner therefore pray our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name. And when we read these verses is it not the case that the repeated emphasis which Jesus is giving here is that our prayer is to our heavenly father.

Jesus says in verse 6 when you pray go to your closet close the door pray to your father in secret because your father who sees in secret he shall reward you openly.

[29 : 08] And then he says in verse 8 Be not therefore like unto them for your father knows what things you have need of before you ask him. After this manner pray our father which art in heaven.

And the emphasis upon praying it's to God the father. We're to pray to God the father. We're to pray to our father. And we're to remember that God is our father.

and that even when we sin when we fall into sin when we fall into temptation he's not only our judge he's our father. And we're to come to him as children.

Come to him as little children. As those who have been adopted into the family of God. Is that not what Paul meant when he said in Romans 8 you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear.

but you received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba father. And this is the beautiful thing about prayer.

[30 : 12] We are able to come to our father in heaven and pour out our heart. Yes we have to have a right view of who God is. We have to view that he is king he is sovereign he is holy he is just and there needs to be reverence in prayer there needs to be worship there needs to be praise there needs to be adoration but there also needs to be a relationship there needs to be a relationship where we know God as our father and that we are his children and in relation to that I just want to say that some people have the view that when we pray we ought to address each member of the trinity individually in which we pray to God the father we pray to God the son we pray to God the holy spirit however I am reluctant to follow that train of thought simply because that's not what we are taught here because Jesus when he teaches he says after this manner therefore pray our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name

Jesus God the son teaches us that prayer should be directed to our father in heaven in which we pray to God the father in the name of God the son through the enabling of God the holy spirit and this emphasis it isn't confined just to this passage of scripture because in Luke's account of this prayer in Luke 11 the teaching of Jesus was prompted by the request of the disciples when they said Lord teach us to pray therefore we ought to view this prayer as a model guide a pattern for prayer on how to pray as disciples in our daily walk with the Lord but I don't want to go into the detail of this prayer of the Lord's prayer this evening I don't want to go into it because we'll eventually come to it at some point in the future we'll come to it in our study of the catechism and then we'll look at it very very closely section by section phrase by phrase but I want us to just view this prayer in relation to what Jesus is saying about the heathen because when Jesus condemns the prayers of the heathen he describes them as repetitious and drawn out but in the Lord's prayer

Jesus teaches us about the language of prayer and the length of prayer for when Jesus gives us a framework for prayer he highlights this sort of language we ought to use in prayer because in these expressions we see adoration our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name we see submission to the will of God thy kingdom come thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven we see petitions for daily needs daily things that we need give us this day our daily bread we're reminded that we need to confess our sin forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and Jesus stresses this to us again where he says in verse 14 if you forgive men their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you but if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your father forgive your trespasses and then Jesus he also closes by teaching us that we should pray that we be kept that we be kept kept from evil and kept in everything that we do and that we would place it all into his hands he says lead us not into temptation deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever amen so unlike the heathen who are condemned by Jesus for their babbling and their vain repetitions

Jesus he gives to us this organized structure for prayer in which specific areas for prayer are touched on and what I want us to take from this is that we should give thought to prayer we should give thought to it even when we're praying privately we should consider what to pray for consider who to pray for think about the different areas for prayer such as personal needs family needs family needs our community needs our church needs our international church needs we should have structure to our prayer because it isn't a shopping list in which we ask God for this and that and bless this and bless that the structure Jesus wants us to have and what he shows us here is that our prayers they ought to have praise they ought to have thanksgiving they ought to have confession they ought to have requests and petitions but not only that we should be specific in prayer whether we're talking about needs or people or our own sin we should be specific and not generalise prayer

Jesus tells us in verse 8 that our heavenly father he already knows our needs before we ask him therefore if God is our father we ought to come to him as children with an open and an honest heart and seek his help and his guidance my friend we should give thought to our prayers and think about what we ought to pray for and who to pray for in order that our prayers don't become vain babblings and repetitious before the Lord which is why Jesus not only addresses the issue of language in prayer he also addresses the length of prayer of course Jesus is not forbidding long prayers because on occasion he himself spent the night in prayer and on another occasion Jesus taught his disciples that we ought to pray always and not grow weary however when

[36 : 46] Jesus exhorts us not to act like the heathen who use vain repetitions this incantation of the magic spell of repeating yourself all the time Jesus he says that the heathen think that God will answer them with their long prayers but what's evident about the Lord's prayer apart from what is said is its length because it's only six sentences long made up of 65 words it's not long and Jesus endorses it as a prayer that our heavenly father will hear and what Jesus is getting at is that it's not the quantity of our prayers that's important longer doesn't mean more impressive longer doesn't mean more spiritual it's not the quantity it's the quality quality not in the sense of eloquence and fluency but quality in the heart where there is openness in the heart where there is warmth in the heart where there is fervency in the heart that's the kind of prayer that the

Lord is looking for that's the kind of prayer which Elijah offered when he called down fire from heaven upon that burnt offering his prayer wasn't long it was short it was focused and it was from the heart it was from his heart and I believe that that's what Jesus is teaching us that the way that's the way our prayers ought to be short and focused and from the heart yes by all means if we're given liberty in prayer pray if we're given liberty pray I always remember remember when I first started following you all know the late elder who was in Stornoway Cicero he always emphasized well when I first started following he said now short spiritual prayers and that was an emphasis he had because your mind wanders in prayer so he said short spiritual prayers prayer and it's something that

I've taken to heart and I hope passing it on to you that you will too short and focused and from the heart I was also reading recently one of Spurgeon's books called Only a Prayer Meeting and in that book Spurgeon discusses the structure and formats of prayer meetings and he emphasizes the importance of the prayer meeting and that it's the responsibility of all the members of the congregation to be there they should be in the prayer meeting that's where they should be it's their responsibility to be in the prayer meeting praying for their congregation but when Spurgeon addressed the issue of prayer length this is what he said as a general rule meetings in which no prayer exceeds ten minutes and the most are under five will exhibit the most fervor and life in fact length is a death blow to earnestness and brevity an assistant to zeal you can take what you want from Spurgeon but I believe that that's what

I am helped hence my heart doth joy exceedingly down to the end of the psalm to god's
praise God chose ordered forever forever resting here lord for f dizzy he heard the voice
of my Let it show us And prayers did regard The Lord's my strength And shield my heart
About what Him did we lie And I am velvet hence my heart

[illegible]