

LIVE BEFORE GOD

Matthew 6:1-18

Key Verse: 6:9b,10

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In this passage Jesus teaches his disciples how to live before God. Those who live before God are rewarded by God. Those who do not live before God become hypocrites. They gain no reward from God. Today let's learn from Jesus how to live before God.

First, be careful about hypocrisy (1).

Look at verse 1. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." "Acts of righteousness" are actions that should be undertaken purely for God's glory and pleasure. They should be done because it is right in God's sight to do them. In the context of this passage, they include giving to the needy, prayer and fasting. These were, and are, vital for Christians to practice. However, Jesus warns us to be careful about our inner motive in doing them. Why do we need this warning? It is because sinners have a hidden desire to show off and gain human recognition through "acts of righteousness." They look like servants of God, but they are actually enjoying people's praise. This is hypocrisy. It displeases God and he will certainly not reward it.

When we perform acts of righteousness, we must examine our hearts. If we seek the praise of men more than the glory of God, we are not right in the sight of God. We must repent and ask God's mercy to purify our hearts and motives. We must also examine the spirit of our Christian community. If we degenerate into a human honor society, God will not bless us. Jesus warns his disciples to be careful about hypocrisy. Jesus wants his disciples to glorify God and receive God's reward. In the rest of this passage Jesus teaches us how to do so.

Second, give in secret and God will reward you (2-4).

Look at verse 2. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." When hypocrites give to the needy, they advertise well and make sure that everyone knows what they have done. Men admire them for their philanthropy. Then they admire themselves. They become self-satisfied for a short time in this world. This is their full reward. They receive no credit from God $\frac{1}{2}$ in this life, or the next.

Look at verses 3-4. "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Let's notice that Jesus said, "When you give," assuming that his disciples will give to the needy. Jesus had taught them to do so (Mt 5:42). We must have a giving spirit rather than a stingy spirit, like Mr. Scrooge. How can we have a giving spirit? By realizing what Jesus has done for us. St. Paul said, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). When we know Jesus' great grace that he gave up his power and glory to come to this world as our Savior we are moved to be giving people. When we give for the glory of God, God rewards us.

Cornelius the centurion was devout and God-fearing. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. Then God rewarded him. God's angel said to him, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God" (Ac 10:4b). God sent his messenger Peter to Cornelius' house to deliver the gospel message. Upon hearing the gospel, Cornelius and his household believed. The Holy Spirit came upon them and they received salvation from sin and eternal life in the kingdom of God.

God blesses those who give to others for the glory of God. Bonn UBF just celebrated their 25th anniversary. Dr. Paul Koh attended and has testified that Bonn UBF is prosperous and exemplary in disciple-raising. God has blessed this ministry. One of their secrets is Dr. Peter Chang's giving spirit for the glory of God. Dr. Chang gave of his material goods, and his heart, to help one needy person. After eleven years of being served, this person suddenly disappeared. Humanly Dr. Chang seemed to suffer loss. But since his giving was to glorify God, God did not

overlook it. God blessed Bonn UBF abundantly. May God help all of us give to the needy, secretly and sacrificially, for the glory of God.

Third, the attitude of prayer to God (5-8).

Jesus turns from giving to prayer in verses 5-15. In verses 5-8, Jesus teaches his disciples the right attitude in prayer. Look at verse 5. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Hypocrites look like they are praying to God, but they are actually putting on a display for men to see. Their prayers are not directed vertically, to God, but horizontally, to other people. Sorry to say, but such people forfeit the blessing of genuine fellowship with God.

Look at verse 6. "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Jesus emphasizes that prayer is personal and intimate conversation with God. We have a great privilege of prayer to God. Jesus urges us to exercise this privilege in secret. At first, it may seem awkward to speak out loud in a room where we are alone with God. However, when we call out to God in faith, he hears our prayers. He makes himself known to us. We can make a personal relationship with God through prayer. Many young people go into their rooms, close the door, and spend time on the computer or with an ipod. They know how to enjoy virtual reality by themselves. They are just a step away from the life of prayer. The privilege of prayer is more real and powerful than virtual reality. Prayer is spending time alone with our Father God. God listens to us and answers our prayers. Answered prayer gives us great joy that we cannot find anywhere else.

Look at verses 7-8. "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Pagans pray to idols who are not real. Our Father God is living. Moreover, he is a concerned Father who watches over us moment by moment. He understands us and knows exactly what we need. Sometimes we don't know what we need; we only groan before God in a way that words cannot express. But God hears and understands our groans. He is happy when we turn to him for help in our time of need. Here we learn that prayer is the expression of our faith in God. We can have a right attitude of prayer when we have faith in God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Lord, grant us faith that prays.

Fourth, the contents of prayer to God (9-15).

In verses 9-13, Jesus tells us what to pray. Let's read these verses: "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." This short prayer contains all of our prayer topics. Let's think about six key points.

"Our Father in heaven." Jesus taught us to call God "Father." This was a revolutionary teaching. Until this time, no one would call God "Father." The Jews knew God as the Almighty Creator God; the God who called heaven and earth into existence by the power of his word, "Let there be light...an expanse...dry ground...vegetation...sun, moon and stars...fish...birds...animals...and man...and it was so." They believed this Creator God held each person's life in his hand. They knew God as the holy God. If they met the holy God in their sinful state, they would die immediately. They had such an awesome respect for God that they would not say his name, YHWH, but used code names to refer to him. But now Jesus was telling the disciples to call this God "Father." How could they do so? Jesus gave them the right. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...." Jesus offered his body and shed his blood at the cross to purchase for us the privilege to call God Father. Through Jesus' sacrifice our sins are forgiven and we are purified. We can stand before God as holy children of God. Through Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our souls and testifies with our spirit that we are God's children, and by him, we cry "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). Praise Jesus for giving us the right to call God "Father."½

"Hallowed be your name." Hallowed means to be sanctified and respected. Although we have a great privilege to come to God like children to our Father, we must remember who we are coming to. God is the Almighty Creator God. He is holy. He is the Judge of all mankind. It is right for his name to be exalted above every name, and for his name to be honored by all people. As we pray, "Hallowed be your name," we must also bring honor to his name by the way we live in this world. We must study hard in school and reveal God's wisdom by getting the best grades. We must excel in our performance at work so that fellow employees may see God's glory and honor him. Our homes must be set apart as holy to God. Our service to God in ministry must maintain the highest moral standard and reveal the Spirit of the living God.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Since the Fall of man, this world has been a battlefield between the Creator God and the devil. God sent Jesus, the Great King, to destroy the devil and restore God's rightful rule. When we accept Jesus as our Savior King, we are saved from the devil and become God's children. However, the battle is not over. It is going on in us and around us and throughout this world. Jesus calls us to live as soldiers of Christ who engage in this spiritual battle through prayer, and by proclaiming his word. In this way God's kingdom spreads. On Friday, eleven believers and two babies were baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May God's kingdom grow in their hearts. May God's kingdom advance in the campuses of North America until Jesus comes.

"Give us today our daily bread." As we have seen, the first three topics of the Lord's prayer focus on what God wants to do. The second three prayer topics are for our needs. Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread. Through prayer, we depend on God and realize that God is the giver of our daily bread. We are not slaves in a capitalistic system, but children of our Father God. God will supply all our needs. God does not want us to worry about tomorrow, but to trust him day by day. God does not want us to be greedy for gourmet food, but satisfied with bread. Let's depend on God in prayer for daily bread.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." As we need bread every day, we need forgiveness of sins every day. Here, the word "debt" has the same meaning as "sin." The bread problem is serious. But the sin problem is more serious than the bread problem. Therefore, we must ask God's forgiveness of sin; otherwise, we are still in sin. The way to ask God's forgiveness of sin is to repent of our own sins first, and next, forgive others who have sinned against us.

Historically, however, to forgive others' sin has been a most difficult problem for all men. We must forgive others who have sinned against us, not conditionally but unconditionally. Then we shall be called the children of God, and we shall be called forgiven sinners. Forgiving others is so important that Jesus emphasizes it again. Look at verses 14 and 15. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Here, "the evil one" is the devil. There are many who say, "I am not afraid of the devil." These days there is a strong impression that young women are not afraid of the devil at all. They think they can enjoy the devil for a while and dump him anytime. That is a great mistake. The devil's prank is a sugared poison of sin. No one can run away from the devil's prank or his pursuit. We must acknowledge that we are totally helpless, and we must pray earnestly that God may protect us from the devil. If we don't pray for this, soon we will become the prisoners of the devil.

Sixth, look lively and happy when you fast (16-18).

Look at verses 16-18. "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Fasting is done for the sake of humiliation through self-denial, for repentance, and for intensity in prayer. Fasting has a good purpose as spiritual discipline for Jesus' people. However, like giving and prayer, it must be done with a right motive, before God for his glory.

Today Jesus teaches us to live before God and to practice acts of righteousness for his glory. Furthermore, Jesus teaches us how to do so. We must build up a secret prayer life, calling God, "Father," every day. Then God fills our

hearts with his love. A genuine motivation to glorify God in all that we do grows in us. Therefore, as a fruit of this study, it is most important to improve our prayer to God.