

*“And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)*

Jesus exhorts His disciple to love as God loves, as He who sends the rain on the just and the unjust. Remember—a disciple of Jesus does not hate, he makes peace; Jesus said that in the Beatitudes!

## The Sermon on the Mount —Piety and Personal Life

**Matthew 6:1-34**

*“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. . . . But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. . . . But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. . . . But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . . Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” (Matthew 6:1, 3-4, 6, 17-21, 31-34)*

**G**iving, praying, fasting, and finances—how does a disciple of Jesus translate these acts of piety into truly godly actions according to the will of God? The answers of Jesus are clear and go to the heart of the matter. This is the same approach He uses in filling up the law of Moses in the previous segment of the sermon.

Jesus introduces the presentation with an insightful warning: “Beware of practicing your piety before men to be seen by them.” The measure of reality of any given act is the motivation. When the motivation produces an act for God’s observation alone it is true piety.

**Giving.** The Pharisees deposited their shekels into the trumpet-shaped receptacles with a flourish, and the echoing sound would draw attention from all in the temple courtyard. That attention was their reward—a short-lived reward! Jesus teaches that giving should be anonymous even to the giver; the left hand is not to know what the right hand is doing. That's impossible, but it does convey the emphasis of giving for the glory of God alone and not glory for the giver. The real motivation of giving is demonstrated if only God knows. Of course, pure motivation can be in place even when giving is not anonymous. In either case, with right motivation, there will be reward for the giver from the Father, who sees in secret.

**Praying.** The Pharisees loved public prayer. They prayed in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen of men. That attention was their reward—a short-lived reward! Jesus again goes to the heart of the matter. Go into a private room, shut the door, and pray privately. Motivation again is tested by the private nature of the act, where its authenticity is tested. God responds openly to private prayer! Regular public prayer without regular private prayer resembles the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord gives a model prayer known as “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is not meant to be endlessly repeated—He warns about that—but it is a model. There is an introduction: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” There is a conclusion: “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” There are four requests that relate to the four areas in which we need help as a result of sin coming into the world: Help from God is needed to get along with Him, to get along with our environment, to get along with one another, and to get along with ourselves. Hence,

- Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.—*The Will of God*
- Give us this day our daily bread.—*The Environment*
- And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.—*Relationships*
- And do not lead us into temptation.—*Personal Practice*

All of our petitions fall into these categories of prayer. It is a model prayer!

**Fasting.** The Pharisees fasted for public recognition; their misshapen faces of misery asked for sympathy and adulation. That attention was their reward—a short-lived reward! Jesus approved of *appropriate* fasting, as in the case of John’s disciples upon John’s imprisonment. Fasting would be appropriate as well for His disciples in His coming absence. But fasting should never be for show. It is always for spiritual concentration, for mourning, for self discipline—never for show. It is private in nature, with normal public appearance, thus insuring the reality of the reason for fasting.

**Finances.** The use of money is a litmus test of true spirituality. Jesus is very direct—treasure is laid up either on earth or in heaven. A person either serves God or mammon, and both are jealous masters. Having stated this competition so clearly, Jesus addresses the resultant questions relating to life on the earth: the necessities of life, of food, shelter, and clothing. To the question “If I don’t take care of myself, who will?” Jesus gives an eloquent answer: “Your heavenly Father will.”

*“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” (Matthew 6:26-32)*

His promise is equally clear.

*“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” (Matthew 6:33-34)*