



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Matthew 6:1-8 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(Matthew 6:1) “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

The KJV translates “piety” as “alms,” while the NASB and the NIV translate the word as “righteousness.” When our motive is to express true love for God and others, then giving alms to help the needy and pious living before God are righteous acts. Jesus warned against the hypocrisy that comes from appearing to obey the letter of the Law of God, when our real motive is for others to see us and think that we truly love God and others, that we are truly righteous.

If our goal or motive is for our good deeds to receive the thanks of those we have helped or the praise and adoration of others, then we may have achieved our purpose. However, God will not reward us for lying from our heart in order to appear as someone we are not.

(Matthew 6:2) “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

Helping the needy by giving alms should demonstrate to God that from our hearts we want to love God and express our love for God by doing what God commands. In James 2:14-17, James told Christians to demonstrate their faith in Jesus by works that help the needy. In James 1:27, James wrote, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Hypocrites, like actors in a play who are playing a part, do their good deeds for the praise of others, not because they truly want to help orphans and widows in their distress. After they receive whatever they have sought in this world; for example, “the praise of others” (whether they actually receive it, or not), they will receive no further reward from God.

(Matthew 6:3) But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

The Bible sometimes uses body parts to teach spiritual truths. In Matthew 5:30, when Jesus said that if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off, He meant that we should stop doing something wrong immediately as though our right hand was cut off—that is how serious we need to take our practice of sin and refusal to repent. Continued, unrepentant rebellion against God has consequences. If we give alms or do something to help someone, no one as close as our left hand needs to know about it (unless we are required by law to report our charitable giving for tax purposes).

(Matthew 6:4) so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

The opposite of blowing a trumpet to call the poor and needy to you for others to see you help them to receive their praise, is helping others secretly. Jesus taught that we will be rewarded for the good we do. If we do good from our hearts in true love and obedience to God, God will reward us—if not in this life, then in the new world to come.

(Matthew 6:5) “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that

they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

Hypocrites want others to think they are what they are not. A hypocrite may want others to think he loves and serves God, when he actually loves himself and serves others for their adoration and approval. The hypocrite will receive only the reward he seeks (and may not even receive that from those who understand his motivation). The hypocrite will not receive any reward or answer from God in response to his prayers, because he is not really seeking to express his love for God or have a conversation with God.

(Matthew 6:6) But whenever 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.

Some people do this literally and will not pray in public. Jesus does not forbid public praying, but He does warn against praying in public if our intention is wrong (seeking to be seen and thought to be holy by others, for examples). If we seek our Father in heaven to talk to Him, to praise Him and thank Him, to show God how much we love Him and want to serve Him, to show God how much we truly need His help, then He will reward us by hearing our prayers no matter where we pray or when. Praying in public can teach others how to pray and encourage them to have their own conversations with God their Father. For

example, Jesus prayed for His disciples to hear so they could learn how to pray effectively. He also retired to the mountains in the evening to talk secretly and alone with His Father.

(Matthew 6:7) “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

Reciting the Lord’s Prayer can become for some the heaping up of empty phrases. They do not pray each word to God from their heart, but they seem to rush through the Lord’s Prayer as quickly as possible. The empty phrase can be a mantra, a new age chant, meaningless words, repeating the name of a Hindu god (knowingly or unknowingly), possibly even repetitiously repeating a verse from the Bible; such as, “Come, Lord Jesus” or “Our Lord, come” (see 1 Corinthians 16:22). The repetitious heaping up of empty phrases would be just as boring to God our Father as it would be if a child did this in the lap of their father or mother.

(Matthew 6:8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

God knows what we need even before we begin to pray, but God still wants us to pray and ask Him to meet our needs. Many times, God gives us what we need without our asking, but sometimes He will only give us certain things we need only if we ask Him. He wants to meet our needs;

He only waits for us to ask (just as a friend or parent may know what we need but wait until we ask them for help). Requesting the same thing repetitiously so that it becomes an empty phrase will not manipulate God into helping us.

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