

# BIBLE MAGAZINE



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## BIBLE MAGAZINE

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# Sermon on the Mount: Establishing the Principles of the Kingdom

Matthew 5:1-7:29

Part 10

*James R. Gray*

## His Relating Righteousness to Religious Acts (6:1-18) continued

### a. PRAYER (6:6-15)

The second illustration of the principle in verse one, is that of prayer. Jesus assumes his disciples would pray, as they would give alms (v 2). Jesus uses the same pattern as in verses 2-4, and will use it again concerning fasting (16-18). This pattern consists of the action (giving alms, prayer, fasting); the warning “do not do”; the hypocritical action; the reason or purpose; the truism; and the correct action.

In this illustration the action is “when you pray” (6:5). The warning is do not do as the hypocrites do. The hypocritical action is praying in a show-offish manner. The word standing (*histemi*) is in the perfect tenses denoting an extended period of

time.<sup>1</sup> Standing was the common position of prayer in the synagogues by one who led in prayer. It suggests standing and praying a long prayer, and implies the enjoyment of public attention in doing so. It is the source of great satisfaction for they “love” to do it. The purpose is “that they may have the glory from men.” This is a very real problem with us all. It is easy to pray in clichés, fervency, and sentiments that are expected, and to use them as tools for approval when praying before people. We pray with the aim of speaking to the audience, instead of our Father. Sometimes our prayers are in a cold, long, formal, liturgical way that does well to reach the ceiling. Thus, the truism: “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” The corrected action has the same emphasis as giving, that is, privacy. Prayer is personal communication with God, even in a public setting.

The purpose of what Jesus is teaching is not to do away with public prayers. He is condemning hypocrisy, not public prayer. This is clearly seen in the fact the Scriptures record public prayer among his disciples after the sermon is completed (Matt. 18:19-20, Acts 1:24; 3:1; 4:24).

Interestingly, in this section, Jesus goes beyond the pattern established, and inserts additional instruction. Some indicate the insert breaks the smooth sequence of the three parallel sections (6:2-4; 5-6; 16-18). Hagner says this section “would hardly be missed if it were omitted from the present context.”<sup>2</sup> This is not true of Luke’s version of the prayer, for it is given in a different variation, including time and place (Luke 11:1-4). However, does that mean that Jesus did not give this prayer on the occasion, with Matthew simply inserting it into the sermon? Not necessarily, for two reasons: *First*, as Carson notes: “Unless one is prepared to say that one or the other is made up, the reasonable explanation is that Jesus taught this sort of prayer often during his itinerant ministry and that Matthew records one occasion and Luke

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1 Guelich, SERMON ON THE MOUNT, 281.

2 Hagner, MATTHEW, 1:145.

another.”<sup>3</sup> *Second*, Luke’s record of time and location comes after the giving of the sermon (Luke 6:17-49; Luke 11:1-4). Thereby recording a different time when the prayer was given, and omitting it from his record of the sermon. Luke’s intent was to present a shorter version of the sermon, and he knew of another occasion the prayer was given, thus omitting it from his presentation of the Sermon.

The additional material of Matthew begins with the same formula: “when you pray” (6:7). There are two clear-cut

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sections to the additional material. *First*, He warns against another practice that the Gentiles (heathen) do in prayer, which the disciples should not do—pray repetitiously. The Greek word for vain repetitions is *battalogoio*, a rare word meaning to stammer, babble, and chatter uselessly. It is “much talk without content, repeating the same thing

over and over again, [and] useless speaking without distinct expression of purpose....”<sup>4</sup> We have examples of this in 1 Kings 8:26, Acts 19:34. Many of the Eastern religions do this today. This is not necessarily a condemnation of all repetition, since Christ Himself on occasion prayed three times, “saying the same words again” (Matt. 26:44). Rather, it is the babbling and the emptiness of the words that is condemned. It is the idea that “they think they will be heard for their many words” (6:7), is a phrase of explanation that God needs to be alerted to their needs. Clearly the text indicates what they think is not actually true. Mere repetitions of words or formulas do not work. Pagan prayer many times relies on length and repetition for effectiveness.

3 Carson, Matthew, 168.

4 Spiros Zodhiates, THE COMPLETE WORD STUDY DICTIONARY: NEW TESTAMENT, (AMB, Chattanooga, TN. 1992), 329.

“It is heathen folly to measure prayer by the yard,” comments Lenski.<sup>5</sup>

He warns, “Therefore do not be like them.” It is an aorist imperative, again prohibiting the disciples to be like the hypocrites. They are not to make the same mistake in prayer. “For” states an additional reason: “your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” This is a clear statement of God’s omniscience. Prayer is not for the purpose of informing God, but communing and communicating with God. It is a clear statement of confidence. We are confident that He knows and that He hears. We do not have to wake Him up by our prayers. However, we do need to be cautious here and not to go to the extreme of avoiding prayer, thinking God knows and will answer. Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 18:1, and Paul in Philippians 1:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. We are to be men and women of prayer.

*Second*, He gives a sample prayer. This is commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer,” however, it is not really an accurate description. As English points out, “This is not the Lord’s Prayer; He never offered this prayer. He could not, for He had no sins to be forgiven.”<sup>6</sup> The true “Lord’s Prayer” is found in John 17:1-26, for it is a prayer Jesus prayed for His own. Here in Matthew is the Model or Disciples’ Prayer. Jesus gives it as a model of how to pray—neither too long, ostentatious, nor unnecessarily repetitious. One of the sad things is, some have turned it into a repetitious prayer, repeating it in every service. It was never meant to be. He says, “In this manner, therefore, pray.” The word translated “in this manner” is the Greek word *houtos*, meaning “like this,” not “pray this prayer.” It clearly denotes that this is a model or guide, rather than a set prayer to be repeated.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Lenski, MATTHEW, 263.

6 E. Schuyler English, STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1938), 53.

7 C.R. Stam asks two valid questions in this regard. “Our Lord first uttered this prayer to His disciples, but have you ever read of there repeating it? If He meant it to be repeated, should we not have at least one example in

There are three reasons we should not make this prayer in repetition:

- The language does not support it.
- The context does not support it, for it is in the context against repetition as the Gentiles do.
- It violates the principle of progressive revelation. Clearly Jesus Himself gave new and additional instruction about prayer in John 16:23, 24 indicating that prayer is to be asked in His name. There is no such request in this prayer.

The prayer is “neither personal nor liturgical,”<sup>8</sup> however it is dispensational in its nature. There are six requests in this prayer; all of them have a link with the promised earthly kingdom. Three are appeals for the kingdom to come; the last three requests are to be given in the light of the coming Kingdom. While many scholars do not use the word dispensational, they do seem to uphold the eschatological (end-time) theme of the prayer. Davies and Allison (non-dispensationalists) observe, “...the eschatological interpretation gives the text a pleasing thematic unity, and the objections raised against that interpretation are far from decisive.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the prayer is educational in nature. There are basic elements that we can learn about praying and prayer in general. Whereas, the dispensational aspect deals with vertical truth (truth for a particular time or dispensation), there is also horizontal truth (truth that is universal or interdispensational) that can be learned.

to be continued

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Scripture of their having done so?”, SERMON ON THE MOUNT, 87.

8 Guelich, 284.

9 Davies and Allison, 594.

# THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

## PART 2

In our last study of God's Attributes, we saw what we can call **God's Natural Attributes**. These are attributes that are God's alone. They are the very nature of God that God alone can possess and cannot be shared with man. They include Omniscience, Immutability, Omnipresence, and Omnipotence. There is another class of attributes that God shares with His creation. We can call these **God's Governing Attributes**. These are attributes in relation to God's rule over His creation, and shares with His creation. Man is made in the image of God and has a reflection of these attributes in his life. These attributes include sovereign will, holiness, justice, truth, and love. Sometimes these attributes are called moral attributes, or communicable attributes.

### SOVEREIGN WILL

God is absolutely sovereign; there can be no question of that. God's sovereignty is related to His omnipotence. However, there is a difference. "His sovereignty can be shared with us, but his omnipotence cannot" observes Bray.<sup>1</sup> Sovereignty expresses His character in the rule of His universe. He is the "*only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*" (1 Tim. 6:15 cf. Psa. 103:19). His sovereign will is exercised in His creation. The exercise of His will cannot be hindered or stopped (Dan. 4:25). He works "*all things after the counsel of His own will*" (Eph. 1:11 cf. Isa. 46:10).

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1 Gerald Bray, THE DOCTRINE OF GOD, IVP, Downers Grove, 218.

God's sovereign will is manifested and active in His creation. He shared His sovereign will with man in creation. Man was created in the image of God, and He gave man sovereignty over the earth (Gen. 1:26-27). He continues His sovereign will over the affairs of man through the course of human history. Paul reminds us that "there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). Daniel shows two ways the sovereign will works in history. First, God is active in the circumstances of his day (Daniel 4). He declares; "*the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will*" (Dan. 4:25). Second, God foretells His sovereign will through prophecy. In Daniel 2 he uses Daniel to foretell four great world powers, which came about by His sovereign will. God's sovereign will has a plan which He controls. The grand purpose of His plan is the salvation of man, and the restoration of this world. The ultimate purpose of His plan is for the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:4-6).

## HOLINESS

Holiness is the chief attribute of God. All God's moral attributes spring from and work in harmony with His holiness. Charles Ryrie catches the essence of holiness defining it as "the absence of evil and the presence of positive right."<sup>2</sup> It is perfect moral and spiritual essence. It is positive, absolute, and essential purity. God is perfectly pure, sinless, and righteous in His very character and essence. The holiness of God is unique, God alone is holy. "*Holy, Holy, Holy*" cries out the heavenly host of God (Isaiah 6:4; Revelation 4:8). "*There is none holy as the Lord: for there are none beside thee*" (1 Samuel 2:2). Baxter says God's holiness "is altogether beyond our most penetrating or sensitized comprehension, for there is nothing else which can compare with it."<sup>3</sup> "*For Thou only art holy*" declares Revelation 15:4.

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2 Charles Ryrie, BASIC THEOLOGY, Victor Press, Wheaton, 31.

3 J. Sidlow Baxter, MAJESTY: THE GOD YOU SHOULD KNOW, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, 103.

Two vital truths are seen by the holiness of God. First, is the great gulf between man and God (Isaiah 59:2). God's character is negative sin and positive purity and righteousness; our character is positive sin and negative righteousness (Romans 3:10-23). In His sight even our goodness and righteousness are as filthy rags, stained with sin (Isaiah 64:6). Second, it reveals the need for atonement. The holiness of God insists upon and demands atonement for sin. In our natural condition or character we cannot have fellowship with God (Hebrews 12:4). We can come into God's presence only if we have positive righteousness. We can only gain positive righteousness through a gift. We cannot earn it; we can only receive it. We can only gain it by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. At the moment of salvation we are forgiven (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). He exchanges our negative righteousness (sin) for His positive righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). This transaction is based upon the work at Calvary. Now we have access unto the Holy God for God sees the righteousness/holiness of Christ in us (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 10:19-20). He has established a penalty on sin (Romans 6:23).

**It is vital to understand that one attribute cannot negate another attribute, but must work in harmony with all the attributes**

## JUSTICE

God is just! This attribute is directly related to God's holiness. Justice is the execution of God's holiness in His creation. Justice is "the transitive holiness of God, in virtue of which His treatment of His creatures conforms to the purity of his nature—righteousness demanding from all moral beings conformity to the moral perfection of God, and justice

visiting nonconformity to that perfection with penal loss or suffering.”<sup>4</sup> Tozer reminds us that justice is the way God is, nothing more.<sup>5</sup> This execution of justice can be either negative or positive. God is just in all his actions in conformity to His holiness. Thus, God is just in giving salvation and making us righteous. Righteousness is the manifestation of God’s legislative holiness. Thus, He is the just and the justifier of those who believe (Romans 3:26). He is just to forgive (1 John 1:9). Justice is also judicial holiness by which He exacts penalties from the guilty and sinner who will not conform to His holiness.<sup>6</sup>

God is never arbitrary in His justice. His judgments are perfect (Psalms 89:14; 145:17), fair (2 Chronicles 19:17), without respect of person (Romans 2:11), and according to truth (Romans 2:16). He has established a penalty on sin (Romans 6:23). Justice demands that disobedience be punished (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). God is just. He will punish either the sin (as he did on Calvary) or the sinner. Upon the cross God transferred our guilt and sin on Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24), satisfying His justice. He is just and the justifier.

## TRUTH

God is truth. There are two vital elements to truth: accuracy and reliability—anything less is not truth. “Truth includes the ideas of veracity, faithfulness, and consistency.”<sup>7</sup> He is the ultimate truth. Truth is his character. Ryrie points out that God as truth is “consistent with Himself, that He is all that He should be, that He has revealed Himself as He really is, and that He and His revelation are completely reliable.”<sup>8</sup>

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4 Augustus Hopkins Strong, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, Judson Press, Philadelphia, 290.

5 A.W. Tozer, THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY, Harper, San Francisco, 87.

6 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE, Volume 1, Crossway, Wheaton, 72. The terms legislative holiness and judicial holiness are his.

7 Ryrie, 44.

8 Ibid, 44.

God is true (1 John 5:20; Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16), for He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). He is truthful in all his actions and works (Psalm 33:4; Daniel 4:37). He cannot deny His Word and is faithful to perform His Word (1 Corinthians 1:9; Hebrews 10:23; Isaiah 25:1).

## LOVE

“*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). The love of God is an important concept, yet one of the most misused and misunderstood concepts in the Bible. This verse is used to support these concepts. Some use this verse to show God’s unconditional acceptance of all men and provide universal salvation to all, regardless of their sinful condition. A God of love would not condemn people to Hell. They say such conduct is unloving therefore God cannot do such a thing. However, it is vital to understand that one attribute cannot negate another attribute, but must work in harmony with all His other attributes. Thus, love cannot negate or counteract God’s holiness, justice, sovereign will, or truth. All these attributes must work in harmony and consistently with one another. Their concept of God as love negates the others. It cannot be so!

Others say “Love is God.” However, the article is in the Greek text and could be translated “The God is love.” This makes the statement irreversible. It cannot be translated nor understood as “Love is God.” The Greek article being absent before the word love, and being before the word God, the text clearly refers to God’s character or essence. Thus, God is love, but love is not God.

To define love is difficult, especially the love of God. Webster best captures it as “unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another.”<sup>9</sup> Love is the attribute in God which motivated Him to communicate Himself to others, and provide for their benefit. There are three identifiable elements in the love of God.

- Goodness. This is an aspect of love that which bestows

9 Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition, 737.

blessings to His creation without regard to spiritual condition (1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 145:9).

- Mercy. This is an aspect of love that bestows compassion on the needy (Ephesians 2:4; James 5:11).
- Grace. This is an aspect of love that is demonstrated to one apart from any merit on the part of its object. It is essentially the means by which love is bestowed. God is under no obligation to bestow anything upon His creation, or to anyone. To do so is an act of grace. Grace is giving what one does not merit or deserve. This is especially true in salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The greatest act of love is seen in His gifts. Love is both broad and narrow. It is broad in that it is displayed to all the world (John 3:16; Romans 4:6, 8). It is narrow in the fact that it personally benefits those who receive His love by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; 4:7).

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