

The Practice of Righteousness

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Matthew 6:1
Preached on: Tuesday, August 6, 2024

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

We live in an age of marketing and self-promotion. Companies advertise, politicians seek votes. Some people all around the world aim their lives to be social media influencers with their videos and clever slogans. We live in a world that loves to put itself forward, and our question that we must ask in the church and as individual Christians is, does that reflect a Christian mind? Is that the way that Christians are to think? And if ever there was one in the world who had reason to put himself forward and to make himself known and famous, it was the Lord Jesus Christ. But he did nothing of the sort. He lived the first 30 years of his life in utter obscurity, working with his hands as a carpenter. Scripture says in Isaiah 53 that he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. In John 8 we read that he did not seek his own glory. Philippians 2:3 says that he did nothing from empty conceit. And so, immediately, we're struck by the difference between Christ and the world and that contrast frames our understanding as we move into Matthew 6. I invite you to turn there. On Sunday, we did an overview message of the entire chapter and now, today, we're just going to look at the theme verse of the first 18 verses, chapter 6, verse 1 which says,

1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Now, it's important to realize that this is a theme verse; this is the overarching theme of the first 18 verses of this chapter. Jesus in chapter 5 had dealt with the heart application of the law as it applies to horizontal relationships with lust and anger and divorce and retaliation, things like that. Now in chapter 6, he is pivoting to bring our attention to the way that we conduct ourselves in the presence of God, to the practice of righteousness, you might say, how is it that we live out our devotion to the God who saved us through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. So having dealt with horizontal righteousness in chapter 5, verses 21 through 48, now he is turning our attention to vertical righteousness in the way that we think about ourselves and the way that we live before others in light of the presence of God. And he uses different aspects of devotion to illustrate his point. His main point is what we saw in chapter 6, verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them." That is the main point, and that is the central theme of those first 18 verses, as we will see in a moment, but then he goes on and he gives different illustrations of what he means and

what he's talking about. So that in verses 2 through 4, he talks about the practice of giving and charity, and how that is to be practiced, in light of this principle not to do it in order to be seen by men. In verses 5 through 15, he talks about the matter of prayer, and he says, "Don't pray so that you can be seen by others." And then in verses 16 through 18 in fasting, he talks about fasting in a way so that it will not be seen by others. And so this is a critical point to our Lord.

Again, as is so often the case in the Sermon on the Mount, it is remarkably counter-cultural. It is contrary to everything that the world teaches us to think about ourselves and to do with ourselves, and you think about the way that people puff up their resumes and say things that exaggerate the truth about themselves, or there's so many personal illustrations that come to my mind. At the very first meeting that we ever had of Truth Community, which was not in this location, there was a man there who introduced himself and immediately tried to impress me by telling me that he was the son of a very famous pastor in the Cincinnati area. I didn't have the heart to tell him I was new to the area, I didn't have the heart to tell him, "I have no idea who you're talking about." That didn't seem appropriate in the time. But he went on to tell me that, "Yes, and in my last message that I preached, I led 23 souls to Christ," putting himself forward so that I would be impressed with him. Going decades back in my memory, long before I was ever in seminary, Nancy and I had just very recently been married, there was a woman in the church that we were attending. whose goal in life was to become the first female deacon of that local church, and she made no bones about that, putting herself forward, she wants to be recognized as somebody.

Well, beloved, how people reconcile that with the example of our Lord is obviously difficult, if not impossible, to do. Christ did not seek his own glory. He veiled his deity in human flesh, and the intrinsic glory that was his from before all of eternity was something that he was content to let be in the background, and only occasionally during his earthly ministry did it shine forth, as in the transfiguration and things like that. And so you and I, as we seek to be earnest disciples of Christ, we have to come to grips with these things and pay heed to the warning that Jesus gives us here in verse 1. Jesus is instructing his disciples. He is instructing those who have repented and followed him, those, as we read in verse 17 and 19 on Sunday, those who have repented for the kingdom of heaven is at hand and have taken up their cross to follow him, this is what life looks like for us. And the true Christian is one who, when he comes to understand and is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, is someone who's very content to be in the background, to be in the shadows, who doesn't have to have his name in lights in order to fulfill his duty before God. And so let's look at this verse and what Jesus is teaching us in chapter 6, verse 1, is that God rewards those who seek to please him with no regard to man or no regard for man. It's simply a matter of pleasing God based exclusively on what he has revealed in his word without regard to whether men see us or not, and this is very searching teaching from our Lord.

Let's look at the verse again, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." What I want to do tonight is break this message into two sections.

First section titled, check your motives. And the second section titled, choose your reward. Check your motives and choose your reward. With this verse, with this single simple verse, Christ has laid before us the opportunity to consider what kind of life we're going to live going forward from this day on, what it is that we're going to seek out of life. So in our first section here, check your motives, Christ immediately gives us the benefit of a warning. He cautions us with the word, "beware." This is a word that means to watch your heart, watch your steps. "There is danger right here in what I am describing to you," the Lord would say. "There is danger right at hand in light of everything that we've said, and so now it is time for you to recognize this danger and take action in your heart."

"Beware," he says, "of practicing your righteousness before other people," and this righteousness that he speaks of, practicing your righteousness, it's the lifestyle pattern of how you conduct those deeds that express your devotion to God, those deeds that you do in response to him, seeking him, deeds of giving, deeds of prayer, deeds of fasting. Jesus says you need to consider what it is that you're doing and why you're doing them in order that you would not lose the reward that would come with them and his warning is, do not do these things for the sake of man. Do not do these things in order to elevate yourself in the opinions of those around you. This is an arrow struck right at the heart of pride. It's as if an archer just sling back and took an arrow that pivoted right into the human heart with this and exposed those ugly motions of our heart that want people to like us, to praise us, to think well of us, all being a matter of the sinful nature of the human heart. The word that Jesus uses here when he says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people, before other men, in order to be seen by them." To be seen by them, in order to be seen by them, exposes the motive by which these things are done. The motivation, the reason, the desire, that he describes is something by which we are seen by others and congratulated for them.

Let me give you another example. You can go to hospitals, you can go to Christian ministries and find walls with plaques with the names of donors who have given different levels of support to the institution, plastered there for all to see. This is a violation of what Jesus is talking about, to put the deeds of giving on display for men to see and to, you know, and in part to congratulate them, I guess, to thank them and to give example to others. All of that is contrary to the Spirit of Christ and should be repudiated immediately. Those kinds of walls should be torn down in order not to violate the word of Christ and what he says here, to practice your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, that verb there, to be seen, it's the word from which we get our word, theater. People putting on a display. People acting a part that is not real in order to receive the applause of their chosen audience. And you can see this repeatedly either by the direct word or the theme that Jesus speaks on. So there in verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them." Now, notice the repetition of the theme or the exact language. Verse 2, "when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that," here's their motive, "that they may be praised by others." That they may be praised by others. Verse 5, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that," here's their

motive, "that they may be seen by others." And in verse 16, the exact same language, the exact same theme, you can see how Jesus is repeating illustrations to reinforce the summary statement that he has made here in verse 1. Verse 16, "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others."

How many times, let's put it this way, if Jesus warned us once not to do something, that would be more than sufficient instruction for us to say, "I'm not going to do that. I will stand apart from that. I will repent of my desires for that, and I will turn away from it." Well, how much more if he does it twice, if he does it three times? This is obviously a crucial matter in growing in godliness, in growing in the practice of righteousness, that we take this seriously and that we do not lay ourselves out and do things that appear righteous before men simply to get their applause. It's interesting, the word hypocrite that is there is the word that was used of stage actors in the day. They would put on a mask and they would act out a part in front of the audience as part of the theater stuff that they did in those days; they would put on a mask and hide their real identity and act in accordance with what the mask portrayed them to be. It wasn't real. It was acting. And that is the very word that Jesus uses to rebuke and to correct and to warn his disciples, "Don't be someone who puts on a mask and pretends to be somebody that you're not in order that others would see you and congratulate you."

Now, just to be really clear here, godly giving is a good thing. Godly praying is a good thing. Godly fasting is a good thing. Jesus is not criticizing the acts of giving. He's not criticizing prayer. That could not possibly be the case because he goes on and instructs us how to pray. He's not criticizing fasting. He's not criticizing the acts themselves, I should say. Rather, what he is doing is he is warning against the human corruption of those acts to turn what God intended to good into something evil that is designed to feed the pride of the human heart. And so this is very, very much a warning and so he rebukes those who want to appear godly before others, who perform outwardly godly things without a corresponding inner reality. Jesus does not want hypocrites. There will be no Academy Awards for spiritual pretenders in the kingdom of God. There will only be a sad warning and instruction for them to depart because Christ never knew them.

We all know men and women who do these things. You could multiply with probably even better examples than I've used here about things that you've noticed and seen from the past about this. One of the beauties about biblical preaching in a biblical local church is that people like that get exposed over time, and they don't want to be around because the preaching of the word of God exposes them. They react against it. They don't want to be a part of that because they don't want their mask torn off, which is what biblical preaching does. You and I are to be different, beloved. You and I are to set our aspirations and our thoughts higher and to examine ourselves and to check our motives. So Jesus has said, "Beware of doing these things in order to be seen by them."

Now, Jesus doesn't simply leave it at the negative warning. He goes on and gives us instruction to help us understand how we are to orient our thinking and our heart desires. Understand that throughout this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing our hearts.

He's addressing the desires and affections and priorities that shape who we really are as men and women in his kingdom, and so he's giving us instruction, and having called us to be his disciples, beloved, watch this, having called us to be his disciples, he is instructing us on how his disciples are to be. He is asserting his Lordship over our hearts and over our character and he says, "If you are to be in my kingdom, this is the kind of subject that you will be." We are not free to disregard this, to go on our own path, to pervert and to confiscate and to change into our own purposes the things that he gives us to walk before him, and so what he does here in the second section of our message for this evening, having told us to check our motives, now he tells you to choose your reward. To choose your reward and let's just look at the end of it there, at the end of verse 1, and then I'll show you how he points to future judgment later in the Sermon on the Mount. This is kind of giving us a preview of what the closing theme of the Sermon on the Mount will be.

Jesus says in verse 6, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." God rewards his disciples. God blesses his disciples in this life, and there will be rewards handed out at the judgment seat of Christ as we enter into eternity, and somehow we're given a capacity to enjoy eternity based on the way that we've lived our Christian lives here on earth and what Jesus is doing here is he's saying you need to think ahead, you need to think ahead about a coming reward before God, number one, and secondly, to choose the audience from whom you want your reward. Look ahead and realize, look at the future tense there, you will have no reward. He tells us, look to the future, look beyond, look past the immediate people around you and consider what's going to happen down the road after they've all been long gone and forgotten and he says, consider the person that you want to please, your Father who is in heaven, as opposed to these fickle men and women that are around you. And what this teaches us is something very, very crucial, very crucial for disciples of Christ to get alone with God, to spend some time seriously thinking about, especially you young people that are just on the brink and you're forming the affections and the habits that will shape the rest of your life, let me tell you, you are the ones most of all in this room that need to be thinking about these very things and deciding what kind of person you're going to aim your heart and life to be at. You have opportunities that those of us with gray hair and balding heads don't, you know, we don't have the opportunity to go back and change the prospects that we built our lives on if we did it wrongly. You have before you a great opportunity to do precisely that.

Now, Jesus speaks about future judgment in chapter 7 and tells us to look forward to, which I mean by that, to say to look forward to, not so much of the sense of anticipation, but to calculate into your worldview and your life approach that there is a judgment that is coming for you either as a disciple of Christ or as one who will be condemned to hell. In chapter 7, verse 1, Jesus says, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." Christ says in this Sermon on the Mount, you will be judged. He says, things will be measured out to you. And you go on, and in verse 21, he talks about, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," notice the

future tense again, he will enter the kingdom of heaven. "On that day," verse 22, "many will say to me..." Verse 23, "I will declare to them." All these things about the future being brought to bear in our minds, brought to bear on our hearts, so that we would contemplate the future, realize that there is a serious accounting that will take place for the way that we live our lives, and then bring that into the present, reach into the future, bring it back to the present so that it affects the way that we think and how we live going forward from this moment until the Lord calls us home.

And so we're to think about the future and to think about it in this context of the fact that there will be a reward of some kind handed out. What all of this means for all of us going forward, as I say, especially to you young people, you have to make a decision about what it is that you want out of life, what it is that you are aiming your life and the future of your eternal soul, what it is that you're aiming that for. Jesus, again, is speaking predominantly to his disciples here and there's a contrast that he lays out right there in verse 1. Look at it, chapter 6, verse 1, with me and basically, here's what you have to do. You have to choose between two things, as Jesus lays it out here in this text. You have to choose between the applause of men and the approval of God. You're choosing between the applause of men and the approval of God with how you handle these deeds of devotion, the giving, the praying, the fasting, everything that is associated with being a true Christian. You could talk about it in terms of why you evangelize, why you do different things, why you read Scripture. Just to repeat the example that I used on Sunday, you can see how much of a bad choice it is for supposed Christians to post on social media pictures of themselves having their devotions with their Bible open and the highlighter beside and a carefully staged picture designed to make themselves look godly before men. This is very bad. This is contrary to the whole spirit of being a disciple of Christ. And so Jesus says that you have to choose between the applause of men and the approval of God. It's mutually exclusive. You can't have it both ways.

And so look at what he says about the applause of men and what he says is that those deeds that are done to impress men have no lasting value. There is no reward from God in that when you use outwardly godly things to gain approval and appreciation and applause from the people around you. Jesus says this four times in these 18 verses. Chapter 6, verse 1 he says, "Beware," and I know I'm reading this verse multiple times. It's the theme verse. It's important for us to cement it in our thinking. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." Verse 2, he says, when he's talking about giving, they do it so that "they may be praised by others." He says, "Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." In other words, when men see them and they're praised for their generosity, that's their reward. That's what they wanted. "I want men to see and I want men to praise me and congratulate me." What Jesus is saying is when you do it that way and you get the praise, you've got what you wanted. There's nothing more to be had. Verse 5, "when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." You want other people to see you? They see you. There you go. Verse 16, same thing with fasting and making sure that you call attention to the fact that you're fasting, like the Christian leader who said that he fasted on

Tuesdays and Fridays and everybody in the nation knew it. Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, they've received their reward."

Now, there's a very interesting background to that concept of receiving the reward that Christ is speaking about here. In the first century, one writer explains it this way, this idea of receiving your reward he says, and I quote, "This is a technical expression regularly employed in drawing up a business receipt. When Jesus says they have received their reward, it is though they had already been given a receipt. They have absolutely nothing further to claim to reward." In other words, it's as though a receipt has been given, what you wanted has been given to you, paid in full. There's nothing else to come from the result of you having done these things. And what Jesus is saying, and this is frightening, this is very, very sobering teaching from our Lord here in this passage and you just realize how much we have to break out of the environment in which we live, have our minds renewed by the Scriptures, renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we think differently and we don't want what the world wants anymore because what Jesus is saying is in effect is this, when it comes to this praying, this giving, this fasting, what Jesus is saying, "You wanted the praise of men? You got it and that's as good as it's going to get for you on these things."

Now, listen, beloved. Remember what I said as we looked ahead, peeked ahead into the seventh chapter of Matthew, and we'll talk about this much more when we get there in a few weeks. There's a coming time where we're going to stand before Christ as believers at the judgment seat of Christ, and he is going to reward us for the way that we've lived. He'll reward us according to our obedience and the pattern of our life as believers, and he'll reward us accordingly. Now listen, listen to me carefully because I want it to go well for you at the judgment seat of Christ. I really do. That's why we talk about such things as this. If the predominant way that you have lived your Christian life is to have other people notice you and praise you and congratulate you on being such a good person, beloved, that is going to seem awfully, awfully empty at the judgment seat of Christ, to find that your reward has been squandered, the potential reward was squandered, and you spent the opportunity getting the praise of men whose opinions don't even matter and in the process, you forfeited the reward from God that he would have had for you otherwise in those things. When Jesus hands out rewards, there will be many who, in essence, hear him say, "Look, you already got yours." And you say, "But that's nothing now. It's so flimsy. There's nothing there. I don't even know where these people are." Precisely. Wasn't that so foolish of you to live your life for the opinions of men, to live in the fear of man, to put your light under a bushel or to display yourself so that ungodly people would think that you were something special? Isn't that all so empty now? Oh, my. Oh, my. Standing there in the presence of our Lord and him handing out rewards and basically saying, "You already got yours." I don't want that. Do you? I don't want that result.

There's a different reward to seek. As I said, it is counter-cultural. It will mortify the pride in your heart to think in this way, but it is the approval of God. Rather than the applause of man, we seek the approval of God and the liberating impact that this has on your heart from the bondage of pleasing men is really wonderful. And there will be a reward one way or the other, you could say, but we, Christ tells us, you seek the approval of God and

seek the reward that he gives in the future rather than the passing praise of men in the present. So that in verse 4, for example, where he's been talking about giving, he says, "when you give to the needy," verse 3, "don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Don't keep score. Don't keep count. Don't call attention to it. We'll look at this next on Sunday. "So that your giving may be in secret. And when you give like that, your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Verse 6, dealing with prayer, Jesus says, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." To pray in a manner where no one sees you. No one knows. No one's watching. No one's hearing. And what happens then? Verse 6, same thing as in verse 4, "your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Verse 18, same thing with fasting, "anoint your head, wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." In other words, there will come a time, there will be some measure of reward, I suppose, in this life with joy and sanctification and a knowledge of God that goes beyond the superficial things that people think they know when they're living for the sake of the applause of men, certainly at that judgment seat of Christ when he rewards us for a pattern of life praying, a pattern of life giving, a pattern of other matters of devotion.

You see, beloved, what Christ is telling you is to think about your life, think about your walk with God, think about the practice of righteousness with the supreme goal to seek the approval of God even if men don't notice anything about it and he premises this all on the omniscience of God. God sees the things that men don't. When you live this way, you're acknowledging your faith and your belief and confidence in what Scripture reveals about the nature and the attributes of God. "I know that God sees. I know that he knows all things. I know that even if I'm under my covers at night, he sees me there and knows what I'm thinking. And so, because I know that, I can practice these things knowing I have a divine audience of one, and that's enough for me. I want to please him, not the men around me." God sees the things that men do not. Scripture says he rewards the simplest things you do with an eye to his approval. Jesus said, whoever gives a cup of water to one of these disciples, he will not lose his reward. You see, God highly values the simple faith, the simple trusting faith that says, "I know he sees. He's commanded little things from me, and I delight to do these little things that nobody sees just because I know it pleases my heavenly Father." It's a radically impactful way to think about life.

And he rewards without fail. He's faithful. You can look at Psalm 26 and go back to the message that I preached on Psalm 26 many years ago. The omniscience of God and the faithfulness of God are powerful, motivating factors in the way that we live. Because God knows, I can be patient under adversity, knowing that he sees, he knows, and he understands. Because he's faithful, I can be confident in the outcome, because he will never abandon one of his disciples. He will not fail in any of his promises to his people. He knows my condition. He's faithful to me. This can only come out well in the end as a result. Two simple, so to speak, attributes of God that frame the entire way that you live and this is the kind of thing that Jesus is teaching here. God knows. God is omniscient. God sees. God is faithful. He keeps his promises. You can be confident in that and therefore patient in adversity. Patient in adversity, I say, because God rewards his faithful children without fail. And if, you know, we're seeking to pattern our life after faithfulness

and it seems like there's nothing but hardship that comes as a result, we can look past the immediate present to say, no, the faithfulness of God, the omniscience of God rules these outcomes, and therefore I can persevere and seek that city that is to come. All of these things, beloved, designed to teach us that God did not call you into his family so that you could put on a self-displaying show for men. He's called you to serve him with sincere devotion to him alone, and all of that is a stinging rebuke to the performance-based church, people that want everyone else to look at them. I could say more, but I think the point has been made. Stop while you're ahead.

And so you check your motives. Who is it that I'm trying to please here? And you choose your reward. I want to be rewarded eternally by God, not to get the fickle approval or the approval of fickle men who are going to change their mind next week anyway and as soon as you stop doing what they want you to do, they'll turn on you and expose their real selves. And so this is very searching on the practice of righteousness. Now, I want to spend the rest of the time, and it's not going to be much longer here, on some points of practical application. This is point number three, some practical application here. After Sunday's message, Dane and I received many good questions, and I just want to address some of these thoughts to help you work these things out in your mind and see them in the full biblical context to know how to think about these things. As has been evident in my interactions anyway with the people of this blessed congregation, in all of the interactions, there was this pulsating, sincere desire to follow Christ according to truth, and to do what is right, and what does Christ really want from me, and to help me understand that, and so I'm delighted to be able to do that. And so with these things about the practice of righteousness, beware of doing it before men to be seen by them, how are we to think about those times in family life or church life where, let's say, we're praying in front of other people? I have to think about that. I pray in front of a congregation every Sunday morning. I have to be mindful of that. Well, let me give you some perspective and three different little examples here that are just illustrative of a greater point.

Number one, what about parents praying with their children? And you're praying in front of your children and they're hearing what you're saying, is that a violation of what Jesus said about going into your room and praying to your Father who's in secret? Should we avoid praying with our children so that we aren't praying to be seen by others? Well, understand that everything that Jesus was addressing here in this text is about motivations and why you are doing something. And when parents are praying with their children, when a mother is praying with her toddlers and praying and they are learning from him or a father doing that, beloved, the motivation, in my judgment, is completely different. Christian parents have not only an obligation to honor the Lord's teaching in Matthew 6, they also have a biblical responsibility to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord so that part of raising your children in the faith is giving them opportunity to hear you pray and see you model prayer before them so that they themselves learn how to pray from the parent that the Lord has put in their lives. So yes, parents should pray with their children as they have opportunity. That's not a violation here of what Jesus says in Matthew 6, because the motivation is different. You're not trying to get, you know, maybe I'm making a few assumptions here, but you're not trying to get your children to say, "Man, mommy, you sure know how to pray." They may say

something like that, but that's not what you're doing. As a true Christian mother, you're praying for their souls. You're earnestly pleading with God to help them before they even know that they need to have help. You're praying in a manner that you want them to emulate and that they would grow in grace even as you have done. That is a completely different matter of wanting the superficial approval of men and women around you. The motivation is different, and therefore the analysis is different. You're passing the faith on to them, and in a cross-generational way, you're not trying to get them to think you're something special, not in sincerity.

Now, secondly, what about corporate prayer times in the church? We have a monthly prayer meeting on the third Thursday of each month. We have a monthly prayer time with the elders last Sunday of the month. We have weekly times of prayer on Sunday mornings before the service that are led by others. And in all of those times, it is the practice for people to pray verbally and out loud in a manner that makes certain that someone else is going to hear. What about that? Well, beloved, again, the motivation and the setting is different. And understand something really important, we don't make a big deal out of what I'm about to say, but those prayer times are sanctioned by the leadership of the church. They are set forth with the approval of the elders in the church, and it is part of our regular worship time, and when church leaders call for prayer and have established times of prayer, it is right, good, and godly for you to participate in those times and so, and the way that these are structured, it encourages verbal praying by anyone who attends and wants to pray. And so, beloved, the one who prays out loud at such times does so in support of what the elders have called to be done, they do so often to encourage the body of Christ as they are praying, and together, corporately, what we are doing is we are seeking the blessing of God for the glory of God to the edification of the people of God. That's the motivation in times like that, and so the motivation, again, is different. Now, I understand that there are times where people might come and put on some verbal fireworks in the prayer times and thinking, "Oh, I wonder if So-and-so is hearing this," or whatever. I get that. You know, our best obedience is mixed and tainted, but the general course of these things is to seek the blessing of God for the glory of God according to the appointed leadership of the church of God. That's different. And when the stated purpose is for people to pray out loud, you can pray out loud without feeling like you're violating Matthew 6.

The one other aspect that I would suggest for your consideration on those things is this, and it's a real temptation: your praying in these public settings should be somewhat commensurate with the way that you pray in private. So if you're a really eloquent, outspoken, verbal gymnast in the corporate prayer times, and you hardly ever pray in private at home, you might want to reconsider things. And so that if there is a simplicity and a directness in your prayers in private, "Father, I bring this person before you, and I pray that your grace would be upon them. I pray that you would strengthen them in body, soul, and spirit." And that somewhat is how you pray in the corporate prayer times, there's a consistency there. So if there's a big inconsistency in favor of being eloquent in prayer in front of others, when you're indifferent to prayer in private, that's a problem. So these are things where you get to check your motives.

Now thirdly, this was a question that was asked directly to me, a very good question from a very good brother. What about telling others that you're praying for them? What about telling others that you're praying for them? Are you not calling attention to yourself? Are you seeking approval from them? Well, we have to think in the fullness of the revelation of Scripture on these things and when we look at the life of Jesus and the pattern of the apostles, we see that they did that. Jesus told Peter, "Peter, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat, but I've prayed for you." He wasn't seeking Peter's approval, he was seeking to strengthen him and to help him. Paul, for example, in Philippians 1:9-11 and Colossians 1:9-12, he gave the specific content of his prayers to those churches, "And this I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and discernment." Ephesians 1, he spoke of these things about how he prayed for his people. So there's biblical precedent for that and so, you know, we don't want to...and let me back up and just make plain what I'm doing here, is that I would not want your conscience to be strangled by a false and limited view of the things that we see here in Matthew 6. There's a fullness of biblical revelation that we take into account.

And so, you know, maybe a screening question before those words come out of your mouth, "I'm praying for you," maybe a good screening question would be, before you say that, have I actually prayed for them? You know, you don't want to bear false witness about your prayer life. That couldn't possibly be good. But you know, if you've had a burden for someone during the week on your heart and you've prayed for them, you bring them aside and you say, "You know, I know you're going through a hard time. I just want you to know I'm praying for you." That's not to get their approval, that's to extend encouragement and strength to them. Again, the motivation is different. This is about loving one another, not seeking the approval of man. This is about saying, "I care for you and the trouble that you're going through. I know that you're going through heartache in your family. I know that you've been so sick and I just want you to know that that's a burden on my heart, and I've prayed to the God of heaven on your behalf that he would help you. And is there any other way that I can pray for you as I do that?" Do you see the difference? Do you see the difference about, and just to put it in the modern terms, do you see the difference between the Facebook post? The social media? The Instagram picture? Do you see the difference between that? That's all about you or them, whoever's doing it. And that earnest, humble, seeking someone out with a somewhat private conversation that says, "How are you doing? I'm praying for you." Of course there's a place for that in the body of Christ. This is one of the ways that we love one another.

Now, we'll go into all of these things about prayer in the future, in a few weeks, few times. It won't be a few weeks. Next couple of times. But in all of these things, beloved, and just focusing specifically on the matter of prayer in what we're talking about here, your prayer should be in the spirit that Jesus gives us in what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, and as you tell others, "I'm praying for you," as you gather in corporate prayer and you speak out in prayer, as the elders encourage you to do, as you're training your children in prayer, there should be animating the spirit of your prayer, certain spiritual virtues, certain spiritual attitudes that are reflected in the Lord's Prayer. Look at verse 9 with me, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our

daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Beloved, we'll come back to this, I hope, I trust, consider the spirit of what Jesus is teaching us about prayer here. I want to give you five points to close on. The spirit, and we'll review these because this is fundamental, the spirit of the prayer that Jesus teaches us, it starts with trust. Trusting God, our Father. "Dear Father, the one who loves me and brought me into your family. I trust you, and so I pray to you. My trust comes out of a faith that you have revealed yourself to be my Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Father who is in heaven." There's trust there. There's reverence. "Hallowed be your name. I ascribe glory to your majestic name, O God. I honor you. You are good. You are great. You are gracious. I revere your name." Trust and reverence. Submission. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Not my will, but thine be done." Trust, reverence, submission, dependence. "Give us this day our daily bread." And in addition to those four qualities of trust, reverence, submission, and dependence, repentance. "Forgive our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

You see, when you embrace this idea of practicing your righteousness before God with a consciousness of the presence of God, these are the spiritual virtues and attitudes that start to flow out of your heart under the instruction of our blessed Lord. "Lord, I trust you. I can see from your word that you are trustworthy. Lord, I revere you. I worship you in prayer. I submit to you. I depend upon you. God, God, I can't do anything about this person, this circumstance, this condition that I have. I'm at my wit's end. I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you. I depend upon you, Lord. I have nowhere else to go." And the spirit of repentance that is poor in spirit and mourns over sin.

Beloved, don't you see, don't you see that when the fullness of our Lord's teaching in Matthew 6 starts to come to bear on our souls, how different life is, how utterly distasteful to turn the practice of righteousness into something that we would use to seek the praise of men? Your mindset, what I would want my mindset to be is I don't have time for that nonsense. I don't have time. I don't care what men think. I'm too consumed with trusting God, with revering God, with submitting to him, depending upon him, and repenting of my many sins before him. The one who engulfs and immerses himself into the sea of that spirit of prayer before God will be safeguarded against these other things, against the sinful perversion of them, and will be led and sanctified by the Spirit until we come face-to-face with Christ at that glorious judgment seat yet to come.

Let's pray together.

Father, may we live in that spirit that does not call attention to self, but gives ourselves fully to you in these spiritual attitudes that our Lord taught us. Grant, Father, that each one under the sound of my voice would truly be in Christ through trust in his blood atonement for sinners at the cross and that having come to him, that being in him, Father, that as we grow in these virtues that we see in Matthew 6, that we would have power with you and be a blessing to men, seeking to be a blessing rather than to seek to receive praise from them. Father, it's a complete reversal of the way we're taught to live. May your Spirit help us to enter into the fullness of what all these things could mean as

we go forward. And Father, I just pray, especially for the young people in the room, shaping their lives and their virtues and their habits and priorities and affections of their heart. Father, may there be a great, strong work of your Holy Spirit upon each one of them to set their hearts in this direction, and to walk in this way until you call them home. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find more church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com teaching God's people God's word. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.