



Matthew chapter 6 is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount address. It would be more accurate to refer to this address as "Sermons (pl.) on the Mount since it consists of several subjects, teachings or themes. It took place at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry on a hillside near the sea of Galilee. Its purpose was to accomplish three things 1) reveal Jesus as the new Moses and Messiah, 2) confirm the Law as still binding, 3) to rescue the truth of God's Word from those interpretations, practices and views which were patently false yet extremely popular among the people of God (in His day).

(t) Righteous practice

(1) = We must careful to make sure that the practice of "our righteousness" (i.e. the putting into action the righteous state we have received thru faith in/covenant relationship w/Christ) is not "before other people" or "to be seen by them". IOW: Our goal is to please "our Father who is in heaven" not to impress the people of this earth. Jesus' decision to tackle this subject (and the particular areas discussed in the remaining verses) was (no doubt) due to the fact that many w/in the covenant community were missing this vital distinction. This was especially true in relation to the Pharisees. They wanted to appear godly to others rather than truly be godly before God (Mat 23:5). This (then) is what is meant by "practicing our righteousness before men". Such practice will not work in our favor now or come judgment day (i.e. we will gain "no reward"). In contrast, when we *do* practice our righteousness in the right way (in order to please God), we *do* gain that which works in our present and eternal favor. IOW: We "lay up treasures in heaven" versus "treasures on earth" (**19-21 – "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"**) = To whom we give the "treasure" of our righteous practice to, reveals also to whom our heart/love/loyalty truly belongs – the God of "heaven" or people of "earth". Hence why the Puritans were fond of saying that for the person who genuinely loved God, death was not a change of company-only place.

(g) How this preaches the gospel = Jesus' teaching on righteous practice directly coincides w/that of the Apostle John who views our righteous practice as not only the means by which we maintain our place as children of our heavenly Father but also our covenant relationship w/Christ unto eternal life. IOW: Such teaching provides yet another example of the maintain portion in the biblical gospel of gain and maintain (1Jo 3:6-10 – "abides in Him" = maintains their covenant relationship w/Christ). Given our current theological culture, it is important to emphasize (before moving on) that nowhere in this address does Jesus stand against the practice of righteousness itself. Only (again) when it is done in the wrong way; when it is self-serving – or for appearances. This the Apostle John says will plague people in the latter days (i.e. the pursuit of godly appearance but not godly power – 2Ti 3:1-5). Additionally, it is important to recognize that though given the perfect opportunity, Jesus *never* mentions (nor even hints at) the possibility of individuals failing in their practice of righteousness due to merit-based motives (i.e. attempting thru such practice to earn salvation/righteous state before God). The silence sb a deafening reminder of how far-removed and completely foreign this issue was to Jesus and the writers of the NT in their defense against gospel heresy (or in their use of such terms as "works of the law")¹. The remaining verses (2-34) instruct us (then) as to what practicing our righteousness in the right way looks like in 4 important areas²:

(i) 1. Giving to the needy: tell others only when necessary.³

(2-4) = Providing for the needs of our poor/needy does not show up first on this list arbitrarily. It is one of the most important acts of righteousness we as believers are called to practice (e.g. Mat 25:31-46 = giving to the needy makes up 66% of the criteria used to distinguish between the sheep and the goats). As already stated however, there is a right way and a wrong way to carry it out. "Hypocrite(s)" are what we become when we do it the wrong way or for the wrong reasons. That term (btw) was first used in re: to actors. It means, one who pretends to be someone he is not for the purpose of convincing others. And those whose giving to the needy must be made known publicly, are guilty of that very thing. As such, they are practicing their righteousness for all the wrong reasons. They are (iow) doing it for "the praise of others" versus the praise of God. Does that mean others can never know what we do to help the poor/needy? No. But it should only be made known when/if necessary - otherwise we have "received our reward" (i.e. God is again, not giving us credit for it now – or come judgment day). This then is what Jesus means by not letting "your left hand know what your right hand is doing" or doing it "in secret". We are to not only make sure that this righteous practice is a part of our lives (e.g. budgeting for the needy), but also that it is shared only w/those who need to know⁴.

(a) Who needs to know about our giving to the poor/needy = 1) The elders in the church since under the NC, giving to the needy/poor is to be distributed primarily by the elders (i.e. they now carry this area of oversight: the distribution of resources to the needy, Act 4:34-35, 6:1-3). It is also the best way to ensure equity and avoid abuse (2Co 8:12-15, 16-23); 2) Those we (like Jesus) are attempting to point to God (or encourage to be more faithful to God) thru our own practice of righteousness in this way (1Pe 2:12; 2Co 8:24, 9:11-14 – notice here also the mention of this ministry being administered thru the leaders of the church -v11, "thru us will produce thanksgiving to God").

(g) How this preaches the gospel = Providing for the needs of the poor/needy in the covenant community is actually one of the ways we demonstrate love to Christ – our gospel (marriage covenant) spouse (Mat 25:40).

(i) 1.2. Prayer: It's not enough to have the right motives, you must also be the right person and possess the right words.

(5-8) = What we do in prayer also cannot possess wrong motives (i.e. we cannot be "hypocrites" doing it to be "seen by others") otherwise, we will (again) have no "reward" w/God – which in this case refers most specifically to Him answering our prayers. That being said, to pray "in secret" (or the statements regarding going into our "room" or shutting our "door") are (as before) not prohibitions against others seeing us pray. Jesus again becomes our opposing example (Mat 15:32-36). Why He did it however was (again) not to elicit praise from people (or so that they would view Him as more holy). And that is the point: don't use this very important way of practicing your righteousness before God as a means to make yourself look better/more holy to others. If however, we are going to truly be right (or righteous) in our practice of prayer, it must start w/us being those who can legitimately call God "Our Father" (Notice, that's the way our prayers are to begin, 9a – "Our Father..."); which means we must be the right people – i.e. those in a covenant/saving relationship w/His Son (i.e. Jesus).

(g) How this preaches the gospel = If reaffirms the gospel truth that no one can approach God unless they come in relationship w/His divinely appointed Mediator and Son (Jesus Christ). This is consistent also w/how we initially approach God for forgiveness/salvation. We do not speak to God, it is instead Christ (thru the waters of baptism) that speaks for us (1Pe 3:21 w/Rom 6:4).

¹ How often today, we are told that people attempting to earn their salvation thru righteous acts was the main issue then (and now).

² Before jumping into the particulars of each of the 4 areas, it is important to note that 3 out of the 4 begin w/the word, "when" (2, 5, 16) implying that these are not to be viewed as optional but something Jesus expects us to be doing. So much so that it is not a matter of "if" but "when".

³ In Scripture, the "needy" are those who have no ability to provide enough for themselves or those under their care. As such, it does not include those who can – but refuse to work, work enough or to exhaust all other avenues (including savings, retirement or physical family members). Additionally, the Bible views our primary responsibility in this regard to exist primarily w/the church, not those outside (1Th 4:11-12; 2Th 3:6-15; 1Ti 5:1-16).

⁴ That Jesus is not forbidding any persons from knowing when we give is demonstrated by the fact that Jesus's own giving was done in front of thousands of people (e.g. Mat 14:13-21). The reason however, was not to earn the praise of men, but to encourage the praise of God for His provision (e.g. Mat 15:29-31 – notice the end result is praise to God – not Jesus; see also Luk 8:36-37, 17:14-15). Hence the reason for Jesus' frequent reminders to being able to manifest (or do) only what the Father is doing (Joh 5:19).

Additionally, if our praying is to be considered righteous practice God accepts, it must also possess the right words. Not in terms of size – that is the point of verse 7 (“Do not heap up empty phrases”). Only unbelievers (what is meant by the term “Gentiles” w/b so stupid as to think that God can be coerced or moved to action (i.e. our prayers “w/b heard”) simply b/c we piled up “many words” (or as the Pentecostals and Roman Catholics do, repeat the same words, over and over; e.g. saying “Jesus or Lord-God every other word; praying the Rosary 20x). Since God already knows what we need “before we ask Him” (verse 8)– and He cannot be worn down by excessive babbling (which means this is not the point of Jesus words in Luk 18 either), the (right) words God is looking for is in relation to kind or content. IOW: it is what we say (not how many times we say it) that matters. It is also the order in which we say it. Hence why Jesus says “Pray then *like this*” (i.e. according to this order and content). What (then) are the kind of things/content – and in what order, does Jesus call us to conduct this prayer? 1) A commitment to see God’s reputation (i.e. His “Name”) be treated as holy and His kingdom advanced on earth thru my full obedience to His commands (i.e. not my will but His “will be done”) (9-10), 2) Asking for those things we need each day to be fully obedient/faithful to Him and maintain our covenant status until we get home to heaven: 2.1.) earthly provision (i.e. our “daily bread”) (11), 2.2.) moral pardon (12), 2.3.) spiritual protection (13).

(g) How this preaches the gospel = LBS! This includes our request for forgiveness (14-15) = God will not continue to extend His forgiveness/salvation to us if we do not continue to submit to Him in obedience – which includes, our forgiveness of others - i.e. that we are seeking that those who have wronged us be just/serve justice so as to have the possibility of mercy extended to them (Num 14:19-23; Rom 3:24-26 – even the word for forgiveness, used by Paul [“justified”] demonstrates that w/in its DNA lies the essential of justice).

(a) How often should we be praying this prayer? = Given Jesus’ use of the word “daily” as part of its content, it is clear that He expected us to be practicing this every day at the beginning of our day. This is how the Reformers understood it and instructed their people.

(i) 1.3. Fasting⁵: Is an exercise in self-control not improvement on our public-image.

(16-18) = According to Jesus’ teaching (here), the purpose of fasting is not so that we can post “before and after” pictures on social media. Such actions are (instead) the same motives that cause Him to (once again) call people “hypocrites”. IOW: those in Jesus’ day displaying a “gloomy look” or “disfigure(ing) their faces” during their time of fasting were no different in principal from many people dieting today. Both are attempting to use such fasting/dieting to improve how others view them (i.e. to again, “be seen by others”). The purpose (however) God has prescribed for fasting (i.e. the reason that results in “reward”), is much more private (or “secret”). It is for the purpose of gaining self-control. Given our culture of encouraged gluttony (e.g. YOLO, pop-psychology’s message: “To deny yourself anything you desire is dangerous”), this particular righteous practice becomes all the more important – especially for those struggling to lift even the “light weights” of sexual purity (e.g. masturbation/pornography). To improve one’s perspective on the value of (regular) fasting to combat the temptations and struggles of this life, one only need consider that this is the *only* activity specifically prescribed in the Bible for the purpose of gaining greater self-control. It w/b therefore safe to say that a person’s overall self-control is commensurate to their ability to say “no” to food (Phi 3:1-9 = Those who are not “straining forward” in obedience are those whose “god is their belly” – i.e. they lack self-control versus “becoming like [Christ] in His death – Rom 6:1-12 w/8:1-5 = becoming like Christ in His death means victory over the desires of the flesh) In this light consider again Jesus’ successful 40 (plus) day wilderness fast - what does that tell us about His self-control in all areas?

(g) How this preaches the gospel = According to Paul, self-control is one of the gospel’s main components (Act 24:25).

(a) What fasting looked like in biblical times (and could today) = In biblical times, people generally ate one main meal in the evening. The time therefore from waking until that latter meal was considered their regular daily fast. As a matter of fact, the Scripture even goes as far as to view as unwise the idea of feasting (i.e. eating meals) before then (e.g. Ecc 10:16-17; consider also Luk 18:12 – “fast twice on the Sabbath” = regular fast plus the forgoing of the evening meal) The only time we see exceptions to this is when individuals have been working all night (e.g. Joh 21:3-13) or it is a special occasion (e.g. wedding, Mar 2:18-19 = Jesus’ response confirms rather than denies the daily fast His disciples normally followed).⁶ Christian families, are you fasting as a means to building self-control?⁷

(i) 1.4. Money: generosity is the key to serving God and removing financial anxiety.

(22-24) = The first couple of verses can make this righteous practice a little difficult to discern. However, it sb pretty clear by verse (24) that the issue is that of money. What should also be clear is the fact that there is a way in which we handle our money that can make us guilty of idolatry (i.e. serving the “master” of money rather than God). It is (then) in the midst of the previous (murky) verses that we find both the way this happens – and to how to prevent it. It is a question of whether “your eye is healthy” or “your eye is bad”. Both are ancient figures of speech which refer to two types of people: the person who is generous w/his money (giving to others a great abundance), the other who is stingy (giving very little and having a hard time w/it) (Pro 22:9, 23:6-7 – “who is stingy” = Literally, who has an evil eye). According to Jesus, a person’s disposition in this respect (generous or stingy) directly reveals what they are “devoted to” or who they “serve” (i.e. it expresses a “whole body” focus of either “light” or “darkness”). So then, to avoid being condemned as one whose god is money, we must be generous to others w/our money. That (iow) is how we practice our righteousness in the right way in this particular area. We are happy to spend large amounts of the money we make on others. And that b/c again – this is one of the ways we maintain/demonstrate our faithfulness to God (i.e. that we “serve God”). Hence why (then) Jesus spends the rest of the chapter comforting those who may be “anxious” about adopting this financial philosophy (25-33 – “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you” = be faithful to build God’s kingdom thru the generosity of your money to others and God will see to it that you have all the money you need to take care of yourself/family, 34 = When we live generously w/others, God promises to provide what is “sufficient for [each] day and its troubles”) (Pro 11:23-24, 19:17, 28:8).

(g) How this preaches the gospel = As already implied, God gives us money (not only to provide for our needs, but also to invest in others – including those we are sharing the gospel w/. Money therefore is tb viewed as an essential tool in successful preaching of the gospel (Luk 16:1-12 = Everybody -including those who have “little” sb faithful to spend money on others for the sake of the gospel. Notice also that the next verse [v13] is the same as Mat 6:24).

(a) How we make sure we have the money to fulfill this righteous practice = As was mentioned w/the first on this list (giving to the needy), each of us should have a line item in our budget for these very things. In other words, we need to be setting aside money that will be used specifically for giving to others as part of our duty in caring for *and* advancing God’s kingdom.

⁵ Fasting in the Bible refers to going w/o food. It is not primarily concerned w/what a person drinks, nor whether the digestive process has been re-ignited thru such drinking. (e.g. Mat 4:2 w/Luk 4:2).

⁶ “During the zenith period of Grecian and Roman civilization monogamy was not as firmly established as the rule that a health-loving man should content himself with one meal a day, and never eat till he had leisure to digest, i.e., not till the day’s work was wholly done. For more than a thousand years the one meal plan was the established rule among the civilized nations inhabiting the coast-lands of the Mediterranean. The evening repast—call it supper or dinner—was a kind of domestic festival, the reward of the day’s toil, an enjoyment which rich and poor refrained from marring by premature gratifications of their appetites. The one-meal system was [indeed] the rule in two countries [Greece and Rome] that could raise armies of men every one of whom would have made his fortune as a modern athlete—men who marched for days under a load of iron (besides clothes and provisions) that would stagger a modern porter. The Romans of the Republican age broke their fast with a biscuit and a fig or two, and took their principle meal in the cool of the evening. Among the many things that have been offered as an explanation for their physical, mental and moral decline has been their sensuous indulgence in food which came with power and riches.” – Dr. Herbert Shelton (*The Hygienic System: Orthotrophy*); “The Romans believed it was healthier to eat only one meal a day. They were obsessed with digestion and eating more than one meal was considered a form of gluttony. Breakfast as we know it didn’t exist for large parts of history. The Romans didn’t really eat it. As a matter of fact, breakfast was generally frowned upon. This thinking impacted on the way people ate for a very long time.” – Dr. Caroline Yeldham (“Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner: Have We Always Eaten Them?”). In regard to the evening meal being our reward consider (Pro 16:26).

⁷ The health benefits to OMAD/IF (btw) may be just as good as its moral benefits See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UKZAwKcP8>