PRAYER

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray, positioning themselves conspicuously in the synagogues and on the corners of the main roads so that they will be observed by others. Truly I say to you, they are having their reward at that moment. But as for you, when you pray, go into your closet (storage chamber, storeroom), shut the door, so that you pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward."
Matthew 6:5-6

Chapter 5 taught mercy; chapter 6 teaches mainly faith. Chapter 5 taught the "what" of the Christian life; chapter 6 teaches the "how." It is important that persons not only do what is right but that they do it in the right way. Righteousness that is overly conscious of itself, love impressed with its sacrifice, mercy seeking attention, or purity done for show are all unrighteous. And Christian life that looks mainly to willpower for its resources and, for example, to the Lord's prayer, is doomed to frustration.
Brunner – Matthew, page 281

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Matthew 6:5

The Western tradition tends to insert *"to stand* or *"standing"* after the verb *"love" – "they love to stand and pray"* but we will forgo this tradition so that the emphasis is placed on what the hypocrites *love* which is to pray. *Standing* is what they do while engaging in what they love.

Jesus tells his disciples to avoid being like the hypocrites who do all they can to garner attention to themselves when they pray.

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.
Luke 11:43

and they love the places of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues.
Matthew 23:6

This idea of *"positioning themselves"* carries the idea of *taking a position* and continuing to *abide* in that position with the implication of gaining public attention.

The *"corner of the main roads"* means the *"corner of the wide streets"* implying their enjoyment of public attention.

Their desire then is to be observed and to be glorified by others.

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that <u>they may be praised by others</u>. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward."
Matthew 6:2

Righteousness can be harmful. Luther often insisted that our righteousness is more dangerous than our sin. For "righteousness" can serve the most self-centered of all human desires: self-glorification.
Brunner – Matthew, page 282

In the sense of the idea of hypocrisy as *"acting"*, the words of Jesus could be read like this:

"Watch out that you do not do your righteousness in front of other people in order to be theater to them."

Theatrical righteousness is a righteousness concerned to do *dramatically noticeable good.* By this, Jesus is repelled and this is why he calls these types of people *"performers."*

These people pretend to be pious but aren't really interested in God. Rather, they are interested in their own reputation for piety.

But as for you, when you pray, go into your closet (storage chamber, storeroom), shut the door, so that you pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward."
Matthew 6:6

Jesus tells his followers that in contrast to the theatrical prayers of the Pharisees, their prayers are to be done in an *"inner room"* of a house where one can't be seen. The idea of the storage room is suggested here since it is a room that no one would enter unless depositing or withdrawing something stored.

This room would allow privacy and the wording of *"shut the door"* adds emphasis to the privacy.

Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by.
Isaiah 26:20

Here Isaiah speaks of escaping the wrath of the Lord, but the idea is helpful. A better example would be seen in the following.

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. <u>So he went and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the LORD</u>.
2 Kings 4:32-33

In this case the prayer is made in private with the expressed purpose of raising the dead, but the point and goal for the disciples regarding prayer is the same: *pray to the Father in secret.*

to your Father who is in secret
your Father, who sees in secret,

Matthew may have adjusted the wording of the first sentence above in order to give it cadence with the second sentence.

This formula of *"your Father who sees in secret will reward"* is verbatim in all three sections of *almsgiving, payer,* and *fasting.*

so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward.
Matthew 6:4

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.
Matthew 6:18

Is Jesus condemning the practice of public prayer? That's impossible, since Jesus Himself took part in services at the synagogue and temple. He shows us though how we are to regard our public worship: We are not gathered here to impress one another. We are here, "in secret," to stand together before our Father. This is our inner room, and we call on the God who sees in secret to hear us.
Leithart – Jesus as Israel, page 153

Prayer (even if offered in the context of public worship or of a prayer gathering) is to be directed to God in secret and not to be made a public spectacle to display the "righteousness" of the one who prays. A true reward for prayer will come only when prayer is God oriented, genuine, and not for display – only when prayer is directed to God and not to others.
Hagner – Matthew, page 142