

Matthew 6:8 Part 1
The Correct Understanding of Prayer Part 2
The Doctrine of Prayer Part 1

also I John 5:14-15, Matthew 26:36-39, John 5:30, James 4:13-16

We do have a supplemental study guide to go along with Matthew chapter 6 verses 5 to 15 if you have not gotten it. It is in the back, very important for this morning. This is an important chapter in Matthew. And it is an important chapter in our study together. We have made a couple of study series over the years concerning Prayer, and also concerning Satan's Only Weapon Against a Believer in Christ. That was made some twenty / twenty-five years ago. We have had requests over the years to redo that and update that study. That study is also found later in chapter 6, so we are planning on making a new series on Satan's Only Weapon, as we go through this chapter together.

But for today we are studying together about prayer. Remember in chapters 5, 6 and 7 is all one sermon by Jesus to the Jewish people concerning their religious approach to the things of God versus what the true spiritual approach is. In verses 1 through 18 it is The Correct Understanding of Doing Righteousness. In the Hebrew it is called **tzedakah** (tsedhāqāh), *righteousness*. The Jews believed in practicing their religion, practicing their acts of righteousness. And so Jesus is giving the correct understanding of doing one's righteousness or one's religion before God.

And we see that there are three pattern markers in verses 1 through 18. In verses 2 through 4 we see that Jesus said whenever you should do your acts of mercy on people, you should do it a certain way. In verses 5 through 15, whenever you should pray it should be done a certain way. In verses 16 through 18 whenever you should fast, that is going without eating for religious purposes, it should be done in a certain way.

Last time we took verses 2 through 4, whenever you perform your act of mercy on somebody. He said in verse 2 that **Whenever you should do your act of mercy do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites are doing in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they might be glorified by men. Truly I am saying to you they are receiving their reward.** These three principles are found throughout these three things. Jesus is pointing out that whenever you do your act of religion, secondly, do not do it as the hypocrites.

The word *hypocrite*, ὑποκρισις (hupokrisis) in Greek, is a theatrical term and it means *to respond according to the script*. So that when students learn to participate in drama they are learning their script, and they are learning to answer, and to act out according to the script. That is what a hypocrite is. And Jesus is saying that religious people are hypocrites. They go to church, or they read their Bibles or read their study material in order to act out like they are supposed to. How you are supposed to talk at church. Or how you are supposed to talk around Christians. Or what you are supposed to believe from the Bible. Or how you are supposed to fit in and act like the other Christians in the group. And so Jesus said, "Do not do your act of mercy like the hypocrites do because they want people to see them." They want recognition from other people for the good work that they do.

The third element in this, found in all three, is Jesus said, "They have their reward." You getting the praise from other people, that is your reward. You get nothing from God. No recognition. No reward in heaven. So He says, **When you do your act of mercy do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.** That is a hyperbole, exaggeration. **That your act of mercy might be in secret and your Father who sees in secret will repay you openly one day.**

And today we start a section on prayer. Actually we got into a little bit last time. We took the basics of the section. But we are going to get into more on prayer today, which I am very enthused about and you will see in a moment why. In verses 5 to 8 Jesus talked about the motive for prayer. In verses 9 to 15, the manner in which we are to pray. He says, **Whenever you pray, do not do it as the hypocrites. They love to stand on the street corners so they can be visible to people.** So Jesus said, here is the third concept, **They have their reward.** You have been recognized by people, honored by people, that is your reward. Nothing more. **Now whenever you pray, enter into a private room, and after having shut the door, pray to your Father Who is in secret. And your Father, the One who sees in secret, will repay you openly one day.**

Secondly, **Now while praying, you should not speak vain repetitions.** Religious people have a way of learning and memorizing prayers and repeating them over and over again, thinking that God is going to hear them by their much repetition. **You should not speak in vain repetitions as indeed the Gentiles do; for they presume that in much speaking they are going to be heard.**

Verse 8, **Therefore do not become like them,** and here is our emphasis for today, **for your Father knows of what things you have need of before you ask Him.** In other words, if I think that by my prayer I am giving God information that He does not have, or that He does not know, or that is a surprise to Him, then I am badly mistaken. God knows what I need of before I even have the need. God knows what I need even before I pray.

So here is the most oft asked question that I have had over the years concerning prayer: if God already knows what I need before I pray for it, then why do I need to pray? What is prayer for? Why do I need ask for it if He already knows?

So with that if you will open up your supplemental material to I John 5:14-15. Let me tell you this, and I want you to listen to my words this morning because I have condensed everything that we have taught about prayer over the years down to just a few important statements, and you really need to grab ahold of these statements and understand them. In I John 5:14-15 - only two verses - is a summary statement, a capsule if you will, a summary statement of all of the teaching on prayer in the Bible. In two verses. I John 5:14-15. You might be saying, "Now, how can you make that statement?"

I John was written some fifty-eight to sixty years after the public ministry of Jesus Christ. One of the last letters written in the New Testament. Almost sixty years after the public ministry of Christ. So John is not adding something new to the subject of prayer, he is summarizing all

the teachings that they have taught about Jesus, from Jesus, and about prayer over the years. He has summarized it in two verses.

And so in verse 14, here is what he says, **And this is the confidence which we have toward Him** (that is, *toward Christ*) **that if we should ask anything according to His Will, He is hearing us.** Three things. People express and say, "How can I have confidence that God is hearing my prayers? How can I have confidence that God is going to answer my prayers?" John said, "You can have confidence that God is answering every prayer that you pray" and the key is that you ask everything to be done according to His Will. Pretty simple.

Here is the third thing, if you pray according to His Will for His Will to be done, He is hearing us. Present tense, right now, as you pray, before you pray, He is already hearing, and He is already answering. That is the simple understanding of prayer. Difficult to understand because of what the teachings are here in America and in the Western world that has evolved over the years.

And let me just say to you that the reason why I am so enthused about this particular study and this study on prayer itself, is because on the doctrine and teaching of prayer, just this one issue, it highlights the two approaches to every doctrine and every issue in the Christian faith. There are two different kinds of teachings on every issue:

- (1) One is that God is in control of everything, and we are in surrender to Him.
- (2) The other teaching that is more popular and more prevalent in churches today is that - for instance prayer - prayer is the means by which you take control of your own life, and you use God's name to get what you want.

Two different teachings. Two different understandings. And those two teachings and those two understandings exhibit the two teachings and understandings about every major issue in the Bible. Some people will emphasize certain scriptures and avoid others in order to emphasize that you in your human sinful condition, you need to take control of your own life and make life happen the way you want it to. And you do it through prayer and you do it by using the Lord's name, "In Jesus' name I pray this." And they say in their teaching that God promises to answer every prayer if you use that formula. But that is not what John is saying here. And it is not what the rest of the teachings say as we take them in context.

John is saying that you can have confidence that God is answering every single prayer of yours if you ask everything to be done according to His Will, no matter what it is. And if you are confident in that, then He is hearing you. He has got it. He knows before you even asked, and He is hearing you.

Now the reason why this verse is so important, if you cannot get past this verse, then the second verse you cannot even get to until you get past the first. Because in James 1:6-8 James says, **If you ask anything from God ask in faith**, no doubting, no wavering, **because a double minded man is unstable in all of his ways and that person should not think that he is going to receive anything from the Lord.** So ask by faith. Ask by faith, believing. You ask God to

do things according to His Will, it is happening, it is going to happen, it is already happening. Believe by faith.

And if you say, "Well, I don't have confidence." Do you know what the one factor is? Back in history - and you go back, and you do research, back in history where did the teaching on prayer change to where it is human centered rather than God centered? It changed when somebody taught from out of the Scriptures that prayer is the means by which we express our submission to God and His Will, we ask for His will to be done. That is an expression of submission, of relinquishing what I want for what God wants. So people followed that principle. But then they found out that as they asked God for His Will to be done, is that things turned out pretty bad. There is an old saying that says, "Cheer up things could be worse. Well, sure enough, I cheered up and things got worse." You can pray for God's Will to be done and in the human and in the physical things get worse. There is where people tripped up, they said, "Wait a minute, I asked for God's Will to be done and it got worse. Things got worse. Things are not turning out the way I think it should." So that is where false teaching came in because somebody comes in and says, "Well, you know what your problem is? You need to take control of your situation, that is why it is coming out worse."

Remember the first hour in Ecclesiastes? Isaiah 45:7, **God creates the good and the evil.** Ecclesiastes chapter 7 where he says, "God brings in the good and adversity alongside of each other. God creates it that way." But in our society, in our positive thinking society where we are self-centered, that does not work. I want to think positive, and I want to make my life positive; and I want to make the earthly realm in which I live, and the human realm in which I function, I want it all to turn out [according to] what is going to make me happy. So I do not want to hear this, "God creates adversity." I do not believe in a God that creates adversity. I believe in a God of love, and He would never do that. You do not know how many times I have heard that. "A God of love will never make me go through difficult times." That is a God that our culture has made up. As we saw in the first hour Job says, **"Shall we not experience good and adversity from the same God?" And he did not sin against God.**

So there is where the change took place. After somebody said, "Okay, let us just pray things to be done according to God's will," and they said, "We will just leave it into His hands;" and sure enough they did, and things did not turn out very well in the human. They did not turn out the way they thought it should. So they said, "That teaching on prayer cannot be right. It must be that God wants us to take control and through prayer, by using Jesus' name, we make things happen the way we think it should happen. The way a God of love should do it."

But I am submitting to you this morning, from God's Word, **If we should ask anything according to His Will, He is hearing us.** And you can have confidence, no matter what it is, if you ask for the Lord's Will to be done He will always answer it. Always.

Look at verse 15, the second verse, **And if we know that He is hearing us.** You see, you have to get past the first principle in verse 14. If now you have confidence that He is hearing you when you pray and ask for His Will to be done, **Whatever we should ask.** Interesting, because John says here, "This covers everything. **Whatever we ask according to His will we know,** notice this, **we know that we have the requests which we have asked from**

Him. Notice the *we have*, present tense. I can pray right now for anything. **Whatever**, he says, **whatever you ask.** Ask for God's will to be done and when I raise up from prayer I have the answer to my prayer. Whatever is. Whatever is going on. Whatever God does. That is my answer.

And you see why I related before the problem why people cannot accept what the Bible says about prayer, is because people cannot accept God's answer when you leave it in His hands. "He is not answering the way I think a God of love should answer." So then somebody comes along, and puts some scriptures together, and presents a false teaching that says, "You need to be in control of your own life instead of trusting God with your life." And that is the most popular and prevalent teaching on prayer in America today. It has evolved from out of religious and Christian science that twenty-five to thirty years ago the Christian churches denounced as psychology and false teaching. Today it is embraced because it empowers the people to govern their own lives.

So here is the definition of prayer based on these two verses: prayer is the means by which we express our submission to the Lord and His Will. Through prayer I am relinquishing, I am letting go of my will and what I want, and I am placing everything in the control and the hands of the Lord. That is what prayer is.

See, because down here in this earthly life, as I come across various issues that are important to me that I have to pray about - something happens in my life, I need to pray about it. Why do I need to pray about it? It is because I am attached to that psychologically and emotionally and it has me all shaken up and I am worried and I am anxious and, "What is going to happen? I do not know. I have to pray about this thing." The only unstable element in that whole scenario is me. It affects me. Therefore I have to look to God for relief for me. When God says, "No," you find your relief by giving it up to God and letting Him work out His Will. You have to let go. You have to relinquish. You have to give up, and put it into His hands, and let Him work out what He wants to according to His Will. It is an act of surrender. It is an act of submission. Those words we do not like today.

Let me give you an example. You can look in your study guide, Matthew 26:36-39. Jesus taking the two sons of Zebedee and Peter and He goes to pray in the garden before He is crucified. This is a very, very difficult time for Christ. He is in human form; therefore He feels the stress and pressure of being about to suffer for the sins of the world. So He comes to this place called Gethsemane with His disciples and He says to them, "Sit here with Me and stay awake while I pray." Verse 37 says, **And Jesus began to be grieved and to be deeply distressed. So Jesus says to them, "My soul is very grieved, as far as unto death."** This is almost killing me in and of itself, He is saying. **"Remain here and stay awake with Me."** And of course, we know that they did not stay awake, they fell asleep. **And having gone a little forward, Jesus fell on His face, while praying, and saying, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."** The cup is the cup of suffering. **"Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."** Let Me not have to experience that suffering. He is not saying, "Keep me from dying on the cross for the sins of the world," He is talking about the human suffering part of it. **"If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I Myself will, but as You will, Father."** You see? There is the example right there. Jesus says, "Here is what I am

facing, Father, and if it is in Your Will for Me not to experience this suffering, then remove it from Me. Nevertheless, along with My request, let not My Will be done but let Your Will be done."

It is interesting because as we travel further in Matthew chapter 6 in our study on prayer we are going to come to a section, within a couple of verses, what is called The Lord's Prayer known in theological terms, which is actually the disciple's prayer, but it is called The Lord's Prayer in theology. And one of the requests that Jesus teaches us to pray is to pray, "**Father, let your kingdom come, let Your Will be done on earth as it has been decreed in heaven.**" That is what prayer is. God has already decreed in heaven what is going to happen here on the earth. And part of our prayer request is, "Father let Your Will be done; that you have already decreed in heaven, let it be done here on the earth." That is my act of submission. I am asking for His Will to be done, not mine.

And moving on in your study guide, in John 5:30 Jesus said, **I myself am not able to do one thing from Myself.** Is not that interesting? Jesus said that I cannot do anything independent, from myself. **According as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just.** Now, how can He say that? **Because I do not seek My Will, but the Will of the Father who has sent Me.** So even Jesus, who is God in the flesh, comes and says, "My focus is to stay one with the Father and stay with the Father's will, not My will."

In James chapter 4, the next set of verses, James warns us about how we are to go about our daily approach to life. James 4:13-16, listen to what he says, **Come now, you ones that are saying** - and here is you and me, we do this. I am sorry I have to include you in there, I am making confession for you, but do not lie to me, because I know you are just like me - **who say, "Today or tomorrow we should go into this city, we will spend there one year, and we will do business and we are going to make a profit."** We do that all the time. I could call you up first thing in the morning after you get up and I would say, "What are you going to do today?"

"Well, here's my plan," and you would just rattle it off.

Verse 14, **You who do not understand the things about tomorrow. For what is your life? For it is a vapor.** Oh, here we go again, talking about vapors. Your life is just a vapor. You are here and gone. That is it compared to eternity. Or as my mentor used to tell us, and I have told you often, that life is taking one step, slipping on a banana peel, and falling into a box. That is how quick it is. **For what is your life? For it is a vapor, which for a little time is appearing, and then afterwards is disappearing.** You are here and you are gone.

Instead you are to say, "If the Lord should will, and we will live" - see, we do not even know if we are going to live or not. I am making plans for tomorrow, I do not even know if I am going to be here not - **"If the Lord should will, and if we live, and we will do this or that;" but now you are boasting in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.** It is arrogant of me to say, "Here is what my life is going to do. Here is what I am going to do and here is how I am going to make my life to be." That is arrogant. That is being your own god. That is not submitting to the Lord as the Lord God.

Every human being, I am summarizing what we have already studied in all the Scriptures in our studies together, but even in the book of Ecclesiastes is that God has chosen a time in history for every human being to be born and to die. You cannot change your time of death. You can dictate how you live during that time span, if you want to eat bad food and experience physical health problems, but the day that God has chosen for you to die has already been determined. The day of your birth and the day of your death. We have all been born in a certain time in history for God's purposes.

First all, to find Him. The definition of a *sinner* in Isaiah 53:6, the definition of a *sinner* is **We have all gone astray, just like sheep. We have all gone our own way and God has laid on Christ the iniquity of us all.** See, it is not that we are bad people. Some people are just outwardly bad, evil people and we can say, "You know, I am a better person than that. I am not quite that bad, so I am not quite that bad of a person." *Sin*, the definition of *sin* is *going my own way*. That is what *sin* is. You can even be religious and be a good person about it, but you are still going your own way. You can join some of these false religions and learn to be a good person. I know some people who are in false religions that are seemingly better human beings than a lot of Christians that I know. But they are not saved. The ones in false religions are not saved. The others are saved, and they struggle with the flesh but the ones in the false religion they focus on disciplining their human and like Jesus said a few moments ago, **The hypocrites.** They learn how to be good people, but inwardly they are still sinners, and they do not have Christ. And when they face Him they will not be saved, because they do not have Christ.

You understand that the whole focus, and here are the two camps defined for you and for me. The true teaching of Scripture is that I go my own way, that is me being a sinner. When I receive Jesus Christ, and I personally use the word *surrender*, when you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior that is an act of surrender because you are asking Him to come in and take over. That is an act of surrender. The rest of my life is an expression of surrender, submission, relinquishing my own way because I am still tempted after receiving Christ to go my own way. That is my natural propensity as a human being is just to do things my way. But that is why I received Christ because I was going my own way, and I received Him to come in and to take over. But my human flesh, my sin nature still wants to do what it wants to do and to go its own way. And now I have Christ in me that is saying, "No, you are not going anywhere."

See, that is why a Christian is miserable because the human element with its sin nature still wants to do its own thing and Jesus Christ is living inside of me and He says, "No, you are not going anywhere. You have surrendered to Me, you said you are going to do it My way, so I am here to enforce that." So we have a struggle. Paul says that there is a struggle between the flesh and the spirit. A Christian can have a more miserable time here on earth than a nonbeliever. A nonbeliever has no struggle with God. Once I receive Christ I have a struggle. My human element still wants to do its own thing. See, that is why you have to receive Jesus Christ to come into you. It is not about taking communion. It is not about a religious exercise. It is literally experiencing a spiritual birth where Christ comes to live inside of you because He comes in to take over. That is what it is all about. I am now possessed by Christ. He owns me. He purchased me. I belong to Him. I have relinquished my life and I have said, "Lord, I was put here by You for a certain purpose in history and I have gone my own way and now I am

reversing that. I am making a decision to surrender to You for the designed purpose that you have me here for, for that to be worked out."

So when I come across the various circumstances and experiences of life, it is coming to the Lord in prayer and saying Lord, I am relinquishing what I want in this situation, and I am asking for Your will to be done. Now if God is God, then it is a done deal. It is no problem. It is just that people cannot handle what God's answers are.

Our culture has created a God and a Jesus that only wants positive blessings to happen in the life of every person, rather than both good and difficulty. Everything in life that I face has to do with submission and surrender to His will. Everything. Prayer is the means by which I communicate that expression of submission to His will. That is what prayer is. "Lord, let your will be done. Well, now wait a minute, as long as You are going to answer it this way." We always have to put our human element into it. Sometimes I would rather have someone come along and teach me from the Bible how to pray and make God do things my way but that is sin.

So if we are to express our submission to God's will through prayer, what about some of these teachings about using the Lord's name? That even Jesus Himself said, "If you pray anything in My name I will do it." That is a point-blank promise. Those are the Scriptures; those are the kinds of scriptures that the false teachers focus on without all the other verses that go along with prayer. They say, "See, Jesus said if you pray anything in His name He will do it."

Of course I come along, and I know what the answer already is. And I come along and say, "Okay, show me. Just pray anything in the name of Jesus and make it happen."

"Well, you have to do it by faith there, brother."

"No, no, it doesn't say *by faith*. Jesus said, 'If you pray anything in My name, I will do it.' There is no condition there. You are presenting it like it is a magic formula. As soon as you use Jesus' name it has to happen. Go ahead, show me."

"Well, you know, you are a doubter, and you are in the room, and you are really quenching the spirit."

"No, it does not say anything in there that this promise is void if you have doubt. It does not say that in Jesus' words. And you are telling me what those words represents, so show me."

You see, with false teachings, when they put control of your life back into your hands and it does not work out for you, they blame you it, not their teaching. "Well, you just have not exercised enough faith to make it happen. Is that how you want your life to turn out? Then pray for it but you have to have the faith, if you do not have the faith it is not going to happen anyway." So then all of the guilt is on you.

You can go down and buy books at the bookstore, how to have faith while you pray, so you can make it happen the way you want it to turn out. Your position, physical position. You

have to cry for ten minutes before you pray. All these things. "Well, I did that. Got on my knees and prayed, cried for ten minutes, and then I prayed."

"Well, was your crying moderate? or heavy? How many tears was it in ten minutes?"

It is insane. It is false teaching. The day and age in which we live Christianity, and the teaching of the Bible has been twisted on every subject and regurgitated back to the people in a very false way to make them back in control of their own life. When you receive Jesus Christ that is what you give up: going my own way, doing things my own way. And then somebody comes along and uses the Bible and says, "Oh, now that you received Jesus Christ, He is in your life to help you do it your way." No! That is false. That is the American way but is not the way of Jesus Christ in the Bible.

So next week we continue. What about those teachings by Jesus to pray in His name? How does that stack up to asking things to be done according to His will, by using His name? We will study that next week.

Let's close with prayer.