

Matthew 6:8 Part 3
The Correct Understanding of Prayer Part 4
The Doctrine of Prayer Part 3

also I John 5:14-15; James 5:16; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:17-21; Romans 8:26-27

Alright, we are continuing in Matthew chapter 6. We have a new supplement study guide for today in the back in case you have not picked it up. It will be titled I John 5:14-15 and James 5:16.

We are continuing on the subject of prayer. Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 are all one sermon by Jesus. It is theologically called The Sermon on the Mount or The Sermon on the Mountain. Matthew is written to the Jews, to the Hebrew people. And the theme of this three chapter message is the correct understanding of the teachings of God about the various religious subjects which the Jews are participating in.

In verses 1 through 18 of chapter 6 we have The Correct Understanding of Doing Righteousness. For the Jewish person that would be the correct understanding of living out your religious practices. There are three sections:

Verses 2 through 4 concerning acts of mercy or help for people

Verses 5 to 15 about prayer

Verses 16 through 18 concerning fasting, which is going without food for religious purposes.

Each one of these sections are practiced by the Jews. And Jesus is telling them that religious practice is not enough. As a matter fact, religious practice is self-centered not God-centered.

In verses 1 through 4 concerning acts of mercy or help to other people, He presents the three characteristics or principles that are in each one of these subjects:

(1) Number one, **Do not be like the hypocrites.** The word *hypocrite*, **ὑποκρισις** (hupokrisis), is the word for *actor*. Somebody who responds according to the script. Jesus is saying religious people are like hypocrites, they are actors. You go and you learn the script. How you are supposed to talk, what you are supposed to say, how you are supposed to act. Many people do that today with Christianity in church. You go and you learn the language, and learn what to believe, and learn how to talk, and learn how to act when you are at church. This is called a *hypocrite*, **ὑποκρισις** (hupokrisis).

(2) Jesus said, **Do not be like the hypocrites who are doing their acts of mercy,** secondly, the motive is, **to be seen by men.** To be honored by people. Recognized by people.

(3) And thirdly, Jesus says, **They have their reward already.** When you get recognized and honored by people for what you do, there is no reward with God, because we

received our reward from people. Jesus said that your acts of mercy, He presented a hyperbole, **Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.**

Whatever you do, do it in secret before God. This is between you and God if you are going to help somebody. If God has laid on your heart to help somebody it is for the help of Christ through us to them. It is not for people to recognize how good we are or the good thing that we have done.

The second area that we are in, in verses 5 to 15 is about prayer. And again the three elements that he presented about acts of mercy are true for prayer. **Do not be like the hypocrites.** Secondly, **They like to pray on the street corners in order to make themselves visible to people and to be seen by people.** And thirdly, **They have their reward.** They are honored and recognized by people. But Jesus said, "That is not what prayer is for."

He says, first of all, prayer should be private, in secret, in your private room between you and God who sees in secret and who ministers in secret. Secondly, your prayer should not be vain repetitions, repeating prayers over and over again, as if to say, "God will hear us because of our much talking."

So in chapter 6 verse 8 Jesus said, **Do not be like them in your prayer life, because your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you even ask.** That opens up the question *then what is prayer for?* Why do we even need to pray if God already knows what we need before we even ask for it? And so we have been off, in the last couple weeks, on a little adventure that we are going to finish up this morning as to what the Bible teaches about prayer.

But I also have to say to you that with this subject on prayer - it is a perfect topic to use to share with you that there is a false teaching and a true teaching about every major issue of Christianity. The false teaching is to take Scripture and turn it to make it man-centered. The most popular teaching in America today and in books that you buy at the bookstore is how to use prayer as a formula for you to use to get life to work out the way you want it to. That is not what the Bible teaches. People isolate a few pieces of Scripture and turn it to say prayer can empower you to govern and control your own life. That the Holy Spirit is available to you for you to tap in and use a certain formula to make God's Spirit work. That is not what the Bible teaches.

There are three areas that we have talked about so far. We are in our third. But we started out with I John 5:14-15, which is the central teaching on prayer in the whole Bible. Why? Because I John 5 was written around fifty-eight to sixty years after the public ministry of Jesus Christ. And John is summarizing, around 90 A.D., he is summarizing for the Christian church what prayer is all about. He is putting it in summary form and he says concerning the meaning of prayer, **And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we should ask anything according to His will, He is** (present tense), **He is hearing us.** The second most common question - the first most common question about prayer is, why do we need to pray if He already knows what we need? But the second most common question is, how do I have confidence that God hears my prayer? Here John says you can have confidence that God is hearing you if you ask things to be done according to His will. Pretty simple. **And if we know**

that He is hearing us, whatever we should ask, this is anything, we know that we have (again, present tense), **we have the requests which we have asked from Him.**

Here is the meaning of prayer. And I have given it to you in my own words in a summary form to encapsulate what John is saying and what the Scripture is saying about prayer. Prayer is the means by which we express our submission to the Lord and His will. That is what prayer is for. Prayer is the means by which we express our submission to the Lord and His will.

You see, no matter what the situation is, or whatever the topic is, whatever I am praying about - and that is what the text says, **Whatever we should ask.** If we ask things to be done according to His will we have His answer. Because whatever is, is His will. By praying that about anything or anybody or any situation, when I pray that I am actually submitting to God. "Lord, here is the situation." Emotionally, psychologically, physically, maybe even spiritually, I am all in turmoil over a certain circumstance or situation and I have to pray for this. Usually our prayer is, "You have to really take care of this situation because it is upsetting me. So since it is the problem, fix it, so that I do not have to be upset." What God is saying is, "I do not need to fix the problem." What you need to do is lift up the situation to the Lord, and say, "Lord, you take care of it. Let your will be done." What then happens is, I let go of it and I am now lined up with Him when I submit it to His will. "Whatever, Lord, however You want to handle it. Let it be done according to Your will."

Now here is where the problem has come in. Since the early church that is the teaching on prayer in the Bible. The problem is - and it began to creep in way back in Paul's day but, of course, in our culture it has just blossomed and spread. About the false teaching on prayer, we pray, "Lord, let your will be done," and the Bible says we have - presently, right now, before you even stop praying - you already have the answer. His will is being done. Yeah, the problem is I cannot accept that. There is something - "Lord, I pray for your will to be done," and then things get worse!

I heard from somebody this week that talked about people that they fellowship with and they are talking about trials and sufferings of a Christian. And some woman in the group said, "I do not believe in that. I do not believe God is going to make us, or allow us to suffer. A God of love would not do that." The human element. No pain. No suffering. A God of love is going to make me suffering free. No hardships. No difficulties. Because a God of love would not allow that to happen. So when we pray, "Lord, let it be done according to Your will." And as I have shared with you in the past, you know the old saying, "Cheer up things could be worse. Sure enough, I cheered up and things got worse." So when things get worse we say, "Well, prayer did not work."

So somebody comes along and says, "Well the key here is not pray for the Lord's will to be done because obviously your prayer did not get answered because things got worse. What you need to do is take control. God wants you to pray in Jesus' name and take control and make the situation turn out better," from a human perspective, better. And so all the false teachings began to creep into the church until now where the false teaching is the most popular because it gives control to people to make situations turn out the way we think are best. But that is not the

teaching of Scripture. The teaching of Scripture is that whether the situation we evaluate it as good or bad, it is the Lord.

We studied from the book of Genesis how the servant of Isaac came to find a wife for Isaac. And he was out at the well watching the women come with their water jars and filling up their jars with water and one of them stood out to the servant. And he said, "God has sent me to tell you and choose you for the wife of my servant Isaac." So he goes with her back home and she tells her parents what Isaac's servant just told her out at the well. And so Laban, her father, said, "**We cannot speak whether this thing is good or bad because it is the Lord.**" (Genesis 24:50) We cannot use human evaluations as to whether something is good or bad. If something is bad to my human evaluation that does not mean it is bad in the eyes of God.

Job said in the midst of his suffering, **Shall we not receive good and adversity from the hand of God?** (Job 2:10) Everybody else was having trouble with the with the troubles of Job, except for Job.

Isaiah 45:7, one of the most troubling verses in the Bible for Christians. Isaiah 45:7 where God is speaking and He says, "**Have not I created good and adversity?**" He claims it. But adversity to us in our culture does not set well. So somebody has to come along to give us power to change those circumstances and they say it is through prayer. But James says, "No, it is for submission," an acknowledgment that God can do whatever He wants, anyway He wants, and it is for His purposes. It is not good, it is not bad, it is the Lord.

We saw in Matthew 26:39 Jesus praying in the garden before He was crucified. Where He says, **Father, if it be Your will let this cup pass from Me**, that would be the cup of suffering, **nevertheless, not My will, but let Yours be done.** Perfect example. Submission. Prayer is the means by which we express our submission to the will of God.

James 4:13-16, James says, **Who do you think you are in your arrogance saying, "Tomorrow we are going to go into a certain city, spend a year there, we are going to make a profit, then come home."** He says, **Who do you think you are? You are just but a vapor, a mist. Instead you should be saying, "If the Lord wills and we live, we are going to go and conduct business."** But it is whatever the Lord's will is. We are going to set out doing it this way but the Lord's will could be different. So even James says your whole approach to life, and how you talk, and how you view life, and how you plan life, ought to be in submission to the will of God.

So that is the meaning of prayer, last week we studied motivation. Many people isolate four verses: John 14:13; John 15:7; John 15:16; John 16:23. All of them where Jesus taught that if you pray anything in My name I will do it. Anything. So there is where the false teaching on prayer gets its traction.

But as we studied last week, in the Middle East when you went in someone's name their name represented their character and attributes. So if you go in someone's name, you are representing them and who they are and their character and attributes. When you go in someone's name you are representing their authority and purpose.

Just like you and I, if we work for a company, a service company, and we wore the service company shirt that had the service company name on it, and we went to a certain house that we were sent to to service something, we would be going representing the company's name and the purpose for the company - there to fix and service their appliance. So when Jesus said, "Pray in My name," that is not a magic formula that you insert into prayer to make things happen. And I proved it to you because we read those Scriptures last week and if you read them closely there is no condition. It does not say, "Pray in my name and have faith." It says, "Anything you ask in My name I will do it," that is a promise. So how is it you prayed, "Lord, I want a new car in my driveway by the time I get home, in Jesus' name," and you get home and there is no new car in the driveway?

And so the teachers of this false teaching say, "Well, the reason why it did not work is because of your lack of faith." There is no condition there. It is supposedly presented as [with] the power of Jesus name you can make anything happen. Well, if His name is that powerful, all you have to do is use it. It does not work because that is a false use of praying in Jesus' name.

To pray in Jesus' name means you are going in His authority and for His purposes in the situation. The same as John said to pray according to God's will. I am here for the Lord's purposes for it to be done by Him and for Him, in Jesus' name may something be done. Not in my name or my purposes.

In James 4:3 we saw that James said, **You do not have because you do not ask in prayer, and when you do ask in prayer you do not receive because you pray wrongly.** You pray for the answer to be according to your human pleasures, desires. So it just cancels out that whole approach to the Gospel of John - to pray in Jesus' name to have our own desires fulfilled, it cancels.

Also Psalm 37:4 which is a very popular verse for many Christians. It says, **Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.** So the false teachers say, "You go and delight yourself in the Lord: worship, and oh Lord, I love you, and by the way I need a new car." Just kind of slip that in there because if you delight in Him, you slip it in there, He will answer as long as you are delighting in Him. The problem is in the Hebrew text the text is saying **Find your pleasure in the Lord and He will give you the requests of your pleasure.** Meaning, "I just want it to happen in my life that pleases you Lord," and the Lord says, "I will answer that prayer." It is a complete twisting of Scriptures to satisfy myself and the way I want life to turn out. When in reality prayer is communication to God, submitting to Him because He designed everything. He is in charge of everything. He is working everything out according to His will. I am the one that is out of sync. I am the one that has to get right with Him.

Now just for a few moments if you open up the James 5:16. We have seen the meaning of prayer. We seen the motivation for prayer, it should be for the Lord's purposes and for His authority. But now were studying the method of prayer. Here is another biggie.

And if you are looking on your study guide we have also included the King James text translation along with the literal translation, because most of us have learned this verse and most

people quote it according to the King James. James 5:16, **Be confessing therefore your trespasses to one another, and be praying on behalf of one another, so that you might be healed;** listen to the literal translation, **the energized prayer of a righteous man is much strength.** We have learned it as, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man available much." Whatever all that means. But let me break it down for you looking at the literal translation.

The energized petition - not just prayer in general, the Greek text presents it as a petition - **the energized petition of a righteous man.** The petition, in the Greek text it is the prayer or petition that is been energized, not the righteous man. It is the energized petition of a righteous man.

Secondly, the term *energized* is a present participle but it is the passive voice, which means the energizing is coming from an outside force. So, the petition being energized by an outside force of a righteous man is very strong.

What does all that mean? It is not the man, it is an outside force outside of the man. There is a spiritual force energizing that man's prayer that has much strength to it. The method of prayer does not originate with human beings, it originates with God.

Very quickly look at these verses. Ephesians 6:18 about the armor of God. By putting on the armor of God it should be done **through all prayer and petition, praying in every opportunity in the Spirit, and watching for the same thing, in all perseverance and petition.** So it is praying in the Spirit. See, it is the Spirit of God that energizes prayer.

Look at Jude 1:17-21. This is where Jude was ministering about people coming into your fellowship in the last days. **Now you yourselves, beloved, remember the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you that in the last time there will be mockers going according to their own desires of ungodliness. These are the ones separating themselves,** they are not part of the body of Christ they like to be separate, **they are natural, ψυχικός (psuchikos)** means that they go by the natural human function, **not having the Spirit of God.** They are not born again, they are not believers, they are not saved. **But you yourselves, beloved, while building up yourselves in your most holy faith, while praying in the Holy Spirit.** Interesting. **Guard yourselves in the love of God, while you are expectantly waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.**

Be praying in the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:18 pray in the Spirit.

In Romans 8:26-27. Romans chapter 8 lists all the benefits and blessings that God's Spirit provides for us and one of them is prayer. Listen to this. When you break this down it is pretty fascinating. **Likewise also the Spirit is helping with our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray according as it is necessary, but the Spirit Himself is interceding on behalf.** The Holy Spirit is interceding to God for me, **with unspoken groaning.** Read verse 34 to go with this before we come back to it. Romans 8:34 it says, **Who is condemning? It is not Christ because He has died, rather He has raised from the dead. He**

is also is at the right of God, who also is interceding on our behalf. Put that together with Romans 8:26, they are both in the same chapter.

What Paul is saying is, catch this now, cause in concept you have to catch this, is the Holy Spirit is interceding to God for me twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, all the time, from here. In heaven at the right hand of the throne of God Jesus is my High Priest, He is interceding to the Father for me twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Do you think we are covered? Back in verse 26, **the Spirit himself is interceding on behalf of us with unspoken groanings.** What *unspoken groanings* mean in the Greek is *it is not anything voiced or verbal*. Some people use this text to say, "Well it is talking about praying in the spirit and praying using tongues." No, it is not talking anything audible. It is talking about in the spirit realm where the Holy Spirit is, He is interceding for us all the time.

Look at verse 27, **And the One searching the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit,** the Spirit is interceding for us, God knows the mind of the Spirit **because He is interceding according to God on behalf of saints.** The Holy Spirit is praying according to God's mind and God's design. This is going on between the Holy Spirit and God in heaven and the Holy Spirit is praying according to God's purposes and God's design. Now you might say, "Well then, we do not need to pray." Well, you are probably right.

This is the great privilege of prayer, is that while I am in my circumstances here the Holy Spirit is praying, interceding on my behalf. But because I have a relationship a living relationship with Christ, the Holy Spirit inspires - that is just what we were talking about: praying in the Spirit under the influence of God's Spirit, the inspiration of God's Spirit. I am praying. I get to participate. Because the prayer that God hears is the prayer that comes from the Holy Spirit, not from human beings. And when God's Spirit dwells in me because I have received Christ and I have His Spirit in me, the Holy Spirit in me is constantly interceding to the Father on my behalf all the time. And is interceding and praying according to God's design and plan. But because I have a relationship with the living God, the Creator of the universe, the Holy Spirit moves through me in prayer, and I get to participate in the expression under the influence of the Holy Spirit. I get to express to God my submission to His will and plan.

It is kind of like, and we used to do this when we were younger; there were two of us there and we are talking to somebody. And I have no idea what my friend is talking about and he is trying to explain to somebody else, and I just say, "Whatever he says." Whatever he says that goes for me too. That is what we are involved in here. "Father, the Holy Spirit is praying for Your will to be done in my life and it is being done. I am the one out of sync. I am the one that is out of whack. Lord, yeah, I want Your will to be done. I want to lineup and trust You and be at one with You in the circumstance and let everything else happen." It does not matter what happens.

In II Corinthians chapter 12 Paul said he prayed three times that his health issue would be cleared up. And he said his health issue was because of a messenger of Satan that was come to beat his body up. Have ever felt beaten up? A messenger of Satan was sent to buffet me. And Paul prayed three times, "Lord, remove this thorn from me." And God's answer, **"My grace is sufficient for you.** I don't have to remove the thorn Paul." God says, "My grace is sufficient for

anything." Humanly it might be a hardship for you. But God's grace is able to sustain anybody through anything. Any adversity that God plans and designs He has the power to sustain in it.

Interesting because in case you did not notice, verses 26 and 27 of Romans chapter 8. This is why Romans 8:28 the very next verse is so important. In Romans 8:28 it says, **For God works all things for the good to those that love him and are called according to his purpose.** How can He do that? How can He guarantee it? It is because the Holy Spirit is constantly praying for all things to be done according to the will of God. So God answers that prayer. It does not say, "all things are good," it says, "God works all things for the good."

And again the word for *good* - and there are different words in the Greek that have to do with various [kinds of] goodness: **καλός** (kalos) is the goodness of man; **ἀγαθός** (agathos) is the goodness of God. **ἀγαθός** (agathos) is the word used in Romans 8:28. All things work together for the spiritual good to those that love Him. So I might be going through a rough time right now, adversity, hardship, difficulty, but God is using that for my spiritual good. So that I can experience His faithfulness sustaining me and I can have that experience of learning how to trust Him. That is what it is all about. And the people that want to get rid of all the difficulties and hardships of life are missing that personal experience of spiritual growth and they spend the rest of their lives learning how to tap into the Holy Spirit and control their circumstances to make it turn out the way they want it to. That is totally missing and totally the opposite of what the Bible teaches.

So we know the meaning of prayer, it is the means by which we express our submission to the Lord and His will. "Lord, let your will be done. I give it to you. Let your will be done." The motive? So the Lord's name, His character, His attributes, His purposes will be represented in all that I pray for. And the method of prayer is the Spirit of God. And this is the difficult part, is that many people religiously practice praying. And in reality God's not hearing the prayer because we have instituted it ourselves, we have forced it. We made it our prayer and here I'm praying to God.

I heard somebody say this week, "Oh! prayer is so important to me."

"Really? How?"

"Well, through prayer I release all of my anxieties. I think of all the things in me that are bothering me, and troubling me, and I breathe in through prayer and I breathe them out."

That is what I mean about false teaching on prayer. No, that is not prayer, that is called *psychology*. You might as well practice yoga, it does the same thing. We are talking here - prayer is a personal relationship with Christ. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit I am expressing my submission to Him and to His will so that His purposes and His name would be glorified.

So people would ask me, "Then when should I pray?" Pray whenever you are inspired to pray. It is the only prayer that the God hears, is the prayer that His Spirit prays, not what I pray. I found in the past that when I plan certain times, "Well, I am going to get up every morning at 6

o'clock and I am going to pray." Very forced. Of course, it does not last long. Things interrupt. Other things come up. Your schedule gets mixed up. See, prayer is just communication with God.

It's like being married and say, "I will meet you at 6 o'clock, see how you are doing, and then I will see you the next day at 6 o'clock." No, there is communication all the time. I find I am always talking with the Lord. I am always being challenged by my situations and circumstances to submit them to Him, submit myself to Him for His will to be done, constantly, all day long. And receiving the grace from Him that sustains me through everything because it is His will, He will give me the grace to go through it. And because of it I will experience Him in His fullness, and I will learn how to trust Him.

Now, that is the teaching of prayer in the Bible. Different than what you are going to read in some of the self-help books that are sold in the Western culture here in America. But for those people it is just looking for control of their own lives, rather than looking to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Our submission to Him is our confession to Him that He is not only the Creator but He is the Lord over everything and every everybody. And everything happens perfectly in His timing and for His purposes.

Next week, we get into the actual study of what we know theologically as The Lord's Prayer, which is next up in Matthew chapter 6. It is not really The Lord's Prayer. The disciples asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray." So we are going to study that prayer and what Jesus meant by presenting that prayer. Is it vain repetition? Some people repeat The Lord's Prayer over and over again. Some churches do it every Sunday. Just what Jesus said not to do, not to use vain repetitions. It actually outlined the very principle of a good healthy prayer life of expressing our submission to the will of God. We will get into the study of that next week.

Let's close with prayer.