

Practicing Your Righteousness; Matthew 6:7-13

1. Practicing your righteousness.
 - a. Recognition is an intrinsic part of our need for acceptance.
 - i. We may think we don't need to be accepted, but we have that need.
 - ii. Some need acceptance from society, others from friends, and others from family (even if we are embarrassed by it).
 - iii. We want (or need) friends with whom we can be open and honest, who will accept us as we are and encourage us to follow Jesus.
 - iv. We go back to our childhood and remember how much we wanted our parents (or siblings) to tell us that we did a good job.
 - v. There is nothing wrong with recognition; it is the abuse of recognition
 - b. The problem with Recognition is that we can abuse or desire it more than we desire God.
2. When you...
 - a. Give.
 - i. In the first part of chapter 6, Jesus teaches the disciples how to give.
 - ii. He warns them about giving to be recognized and applauded by others.
 - iii. Matthew 6:1–4 “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. “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
 - iv. The Pharisees would tie alms to their outer garment and let them drag behind so they could not see who took them.
 - v. They would have trumpets ring out, signaling that it was time to give alms, and then they would walk down the streets.
 - vi. People in need would take the alms from the garments.
 - vii. The Pharisees desired to receive recognition more than the giving.
 - viii. Acts 20:35 “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”
 - b. Fast.
 - i. After teaching the disciples how to pray (our text), Jesus teaches them how to fast.
 - ii. Matthew 6:16–18 “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and 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.”
 - iii. The Pharisees would put on long faces; they would not wash or anoint their head.
 - iv. The people would then recognize that the Pharisees were fasting and give them praise and honor for being so pious.
 - c. The Pharisees wanted to be seen by the people as religious and godly more than they wanted to give, pray, or fast.
3. To be seen.

- a. Matthew 6:5–6 “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 they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
 - b. We often get caught up in this statement by Jesus, “pray to your Father who is in secret.”
 - i. The thrust of Jesus’ teaching comes from His statement, “that they may be seen by others;” this translates, “to shine before men.”
 - ii. Jesus is not teaching us to hide when we pray, give, or fast.
 - iii. Matthew 5:14–16 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
 - iv. “The common posture for Jewish prayer was standing with arms and face lifted to heaven with the eyes open. The issue is not the position of the body but the **exhibitionist attitude of the heart**” (emphasis mine).¹
 - v. Our purpose when we pray, fast, and give is to glorify God, not ourselves.
 - c. Being seen by others is inevitable.
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 “pray without ceasing,”
 - ii. Ephesians 6:17–18 “and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,”
 - iii. Colossians 4:2 “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
 - iv. If we have an attitude of prayer, we will be seen (by God and people).
 - v. If we have an exhibitionist attitude of the heart, we **want to** be seen (by people).
 - d. Jesus then moves from the visual, being seen by others, to the audible, being heard by others.
4. To be heard.
- a. Matthew 6:7–8 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”
 - b. We have all heard the phrase (or even said it), “They like the sound of their voice.”
 - i. We may know people who love to talk but don’t say anything, people who use big words to show off their incredible knowledge.
 - ii. “The word is found only here in Matthew and once in the sixth century. It has nothing to do with stammering. Its meaning seems to be “to babble,” schwatzen, Luther; plappern, to utter a lot of useless and superfluous words. “Like the Gentiles” is more than a reference to the custom of the pagans in their praying, for the Jews often prayed in the same way. The heathen tried to tire out their gods with such endless

¹ Robert James Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew*, vol. Volume 9, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 52. To be heard.

- prayers. Mere formulas were repeated over and over again; the Jews had such prayer formulas;... It is heathen folly to measure prayer by the yard.”²
- iii. The length of the prayer has no connection to whether God hears it or not.
 - iv. To name the names was to call on the gods in a specific order, invoking them to come and aid you.
 - v. Paul uses the idea of naming names when writing to the church in Ephesus in 1:20. He says Christ is “above every name that is named.”
 - vi. God wants us to go to Him with all our hearts.
 1. Philippians 4:6 “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”
 2. Romans 8:26 “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”
 3. 1 Chronicles 16:11 “Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!”
 4. 2 Chronicles 7:14 “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”
 5. Many more texts tell us God hears our prayers.
 6. He wants to answer us!
 - c. If we have an attitude of prayer, we will be heard (by God and people).
 - d. If we have an exhibitionist attitude of the heart, we **want to** be heard (by people).
5. Teach us to pray.
- a. We pray to be seen and heard by God.
 - b. 1 Peter 5:6–7 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”
 - c. Mark 11:24 “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”
 - d. Practice your righteousness in prayer.

² (R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 262.)