

7. The Pharisees' Pattern of Prayer or Christ's Pattern of Prayer

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees were very self-righteous. They had many rules about the way they were to do almost everything in their lives. They worked hard to get other people to follow their rules. Yet, at the same time, they did not follow their own rules. Christ often confronted them for their hypocrisy. In addition to all of their rules, their self-righteous attitude also affected the way they prayed. Today, we will see how their attitudes affected their prayer life.

In Luke 18:9-14, Christ gives us a parable about the prayer life of the Pharisees. Those verses say, "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" In these verses, we learn several very important lessons about the Pharisees.

First, we see they trusted that they were righteous in and of themselves. We see that they did not trust the Lord. They had rejected God and were depending on their own efforts. As a result, they had reached the conclusion that they were righteous, because they chose to measure their religious activities rather than examining their hearts. In fact, they even boasted about their religious activities.

Second, we see that they despised others. Here, we see that in addition to rejecting God, they also chose to reject people. In fact, they chose to despise people. The word that is used here means *to treat with contempt*. The Pharisees treated any that were not a part of their group with contempt and felt that they were the only people who deserved respect from others.

Third, we see that the Pharisee prayed with himself. Since the Pharisee rejected God, the only person to whom he could pray was himself. As we read his prayer, we will see that he was really praising himself. He wanted everyone who heard him to think that he was very good and very religious. He was religious, but he totally lacked any relationship with God.

Fourth, we see that the Pharisee praised himself for his self-righteous attitudes. The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like other people and then went on to list the sins of others. Here, we see that the Pharisee revealed the attitudes of his heart. He forgot that 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'" This Pharisee did not know that his heart was deceitful and desperately wicked.

Fifth, we see that the Pharisee focused on the sins of others. The Pharisee listed some of the sins

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he said other people were committing. He particularly chose to focus on the sins of the tax collector. He had no understanding of a verse like 2 Corinthians 10:12, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” This Pharisee tried to list all of what he felt were his good points and all of the things that he felt were the bad things in others.

Sixth, we see that the Pharisee focused on his own good works. As the Pharisee prayed, he talked about all of the things he did. This shows us that he was depending completely on his own efforts. He talked about his fasting and how he gave tithes. Here, we see that religious people depend on what they are doing through their own efforts. They do not depend on what Christ has done for them. As a result, their religion is based on their own works. Hebrews 4:10 tells us that if we want to enter into the rest of God, we must cease from depending on our own works. That verse says, “For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”

Seventh, we see that the Pharisee did not receive forgiveness of sins. Since there was no attitude of repentance on the part of the Pharisee, it was impossible for him to have his sins forgiven. In fact, he did not even recognize that he was a sinner that needed to have his sins forgiven.

In contrast, we see the prayer of Christ in Luke 11:1-4, where we read: “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’ So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.’” In this prayer, we see that Christ showed us the kind of prayer that God hears and answers.

First, Christ prayed to the Father. If we want God to hear and answer our prayers, we must make the choice to pray to Him. We come to Him with our prayers of thanksgiving and with our requests. He is always ready to listen to us when we come to Him as His children.

Second, Christ focused on the character of the Father. In this prayer, we see that Christ focused on the fact that the name of the Father is holy. As we pray, we are to recognize that we are coming to One who is holy and without sin. He is the Holy One who in turn makes us holy.

Third, Christ focused on the work of the Father. Christ prayed that the kingdom of the Father would come. As we pray for the work of God in the lives of the people of this world, we want to pray that God will complete His work in their lives. This includes both their salvation and their growth to spiritual maturity.

Fourth, Christ prayed for the will of God. Many times, people pray and ask God to do their will and give them what they want. In contrast, Christ shows us that we are to pray for God to work His will, not focus on our desires. The will of the Father is already being done in heaven, so we

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are to pray that He will give us His strength to carry out his will on this earth.

Fifth, we see that Christ tells us to pray for our daily needs. Here, we see that we are to learn to pray that the Lord will supply our needs day-by-day. When Israel was in the wilderness, they had to gather the manna they needed for food each morning. In the same way, the Father wants us to come to Him with our needs each day. We can expect Him to supply our needs, as we trust Him, instead of trying to depend on ourselves.

Sixth, Christ told us to pray for forgiveness of sins. When Christ died on the cross, He paid the penalty for our sins. At the moment we repented and placed our trust in Christ, our sin – past, present, and future - was forgiven. However, we continue to commit sins day-by-day. As a result, 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When we repented, our sin was forgiven and we became the children of God. That is an eternal relationship. However, when we sin, we confess our sins so that we maintain our fellowship with the Father and do not allow unconfessed sin to hinder that fellowship.

Seventh, Christ told us to pray that we would have victory over temptation. We all face the temptation to sin every day. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 tells us, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” Here, we see that we are not to depend on our own strength for victory over temptation. Instead, we are to pray that God will give us His strength to have victory over temptation. As we ask for His strength, He will give us victory.

The Pharisees did not see God answer their prayers, because they did not know the Father and did not pray to Him. Christ wants us to help developing Christians learn how to pray to the Father, so they will learn what and how to pray. As developing Christians learn to follow the example of Christ in their prayers, they will see the Father work in their lives and through their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show others, by your example, how to pray as Christ prayed.