

Proper Almsgiving and Prayer

Key Verse: “*Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*”

—**Matthew 6:1,**
New International Version

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 6:1-8

honoured by men.” (vs. 2) “Acts of righteousness” may include the giving of our time, talent, or financial means for various reasons. Such resources of ours might be given to those in need, to the brethren in general, or to the work of spreading forth the Gospel message.

The word “hypocrites” in the original Greek language referred to theater actors who wore a mask. Such actors were simply playing a “role,” and not showing their true inward self. On this occasion, Jesus warns against pretending to be holy by performing charitable acts to be

A PORTION OF JESUS’ SERMON on the mount contains lessons on proper giving and prayer. The Master emphasized the importance of having the proper motive, which is to seek to please God and not seek to be well thought of by others.

In our Key Verse, Jesus admonished his disciples not to do “acts of righteousness”—alms in the *King James Version*—in order to be purposely seen and admired by others. “Do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be

seen by others and thereby gain their approval. God is able to read the heart and will not bless almsgiving or other good deeds unless they are motivated by sincerity and devotion to him. (Jer. 17:10; Eph. 6:6-8) Our Heavenly Father appreciates our giving, not according to the amount given, but rather according to the spirit which prompts the giving.—Luke 21:1-4

Hypocrites noisily attract attention to themselves when giving time, talent, or money, and usually include how much they give of these things. Jesus denounced such conduct, stating, “They have their reward,” implying that whatever earthly reputation they obtain in the form of human praise, it will not benefit them eternally from God’s standpoint. If our giving is done in secret, avoiding gaining attention from it, then our motivation will remain pure. Paul urged, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”—Col. 3:23, *NIV*

Then Jesus emphasized the importance of sincerity when praying, saying, “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen of men.” “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.” (Matt. 6:5,6, *NIV*) Jesus’ personal prayers to his Heavenly Father were not given in public, but most often in seclusion. (Matt. 14:23; 26:36-44; Luke 6:12) Likewise, our personal prayers to God should not purposely be done in public to impress others of our devotion to God. Instead, such prayers should be done in private communication with the Father.

Jesus added, “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matt. 6:7, *NIV*) Our prayers should proceed from our heart and with active thought, not a mechanical reciting of the same phrases. By thus following the Master’s example and teachings, we will be enabled to give to others and to pray properly. ■