

Sermon on the Mount Study Guide - Session 3 of 4

Matthew 6:1-34

How Not To Be Religious (Matt 6:1-18)

My curriculum uses the above title for the first 18 verses of Matthew chapter 6, and it begins this study session with the following quotes.

“Not conforming to the world is a familiar New Testament concept. But it is not so well known that Jesus also called us not to conform to the religious establishment. He saw (and foresaw) the worldliness of the nominal church and commanded the Christian community to be distinct from it in life and practice.”

“In Matthew 5 Jesus taught us that our righteousness must be greater than that of the Pharisees (because they obeyed the letter of the law, while our obedience must include our heart) and greater also than that of the pagans (because they love each other, while our love must include our enemies as well). Now in Matthew 6 Jesus draws the same two contrasts regarding our religion. He says that we should not be hypocritical like the Pharisees and not mechanical like the pagans.”

Read Matthew 6:1-18

In verse 1 Jesus commands us “not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.” Yet in 5:16 he said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds.” Is there a contradiction here? Explain.

What was wrong with the way hypocrites prayed in Jesus’ day (v. 5)? Why and how is our praying to be different (v. 6)?

The Lord's Prayer is introduced in verses 9-13 as a model for prayer (this is how you should pray). It does not say that a person needs to pray the exact words, but to use this model. How does it differ from the prayers of the Pharisees and maybe even our own prayers?

If God cannot tempt us and trials are beneficial (James 1:2, 13), then what is the meaning of verse 13?

James 1:2-4, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:13-15, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

In verse 16 Jesus assumes Christians will fast (although few of us do). Why and how should we fast (vv. 16-18)?

What God Thinks of My Ambitions (Matthew 6:19-34)

"Everyone is ambitious to be or to do something. Childhood ambitions tend to follow certain stereotypes—to be an athlete, astronaut, or movie star. Adults have their own narrow stereotypes too—to be wealthy, famous, or powerful."

(Personal Reflection: Share your childhood dreams. What did you want to be when you grew up? Why and how did this ambition change? What power has the spell of materialism held over you? How has it been hard to break?)

“Will Christian faith make a difference as you set your ambitions? In this passage Jesus helps us to choose well. He points out the folly of the wrong way and the wisdom of the right. Then he invites us to compare them and decide for ourselves.”

Read Matthew 6:19-34

According to Jesus, what are the most important things in life?

Does this mean that we cannot have personal property, savings accounts, or insurance policies? Explain.

Jesus says it is impossible to serve two masters—God and money. How does money replace God as our master?

How will the crucial choices we make in verses 19-24 affect our ability to live free from worry (v. 25)?

If God promises to feed and clothe his children, then why are many of them ill-clad and undernourished (see Matthew 25:31-45)?

Why and how are our ambitions to be different from those of non-Christians (vv. 32-34)?