

Matthew 6 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 6:1-18 THE KING CONTRASTS THE LAWS OF HIS KINGDOM WITH THE CONDUCT OF OUTWARD RELIGIONISTS IN THE MATTERS OF ALMS AND PRAYER

Matthew 6:1. TAKE heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Our King sets men right as to Almsgiving. It is taken for granted that we give to the poor. How could we be in Christ's kingdom if we did not?

Alms may be given publicly, but not for the sake of publicity. It is important that we have a right aim; for if we obtain the result of a wrong aim, our success will be a failure. If we give to be seen, we shall be seen, and there will be an end of it: "Ye have no reward of your father which is in heaven": we lose the only reward worth having. But if we give to please our Father, we shall find our reward at his hands. To the matter of our intent and design we must "take heed"; for nobody goes right without carefully aiming to do so. Our giving of alms should be a holy duty, carefully performed, not for our own honor, but for God's pleasure. Let each reader ask himself, how much he has done, in the way the King prescribes.

Matthew 6:2. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto, They have their reward.

We must not copy the loud charity of certain vainglorious persons: their character is hypocritical, their manner is ostentatious, their aim is to be seen of men, their reward is in the present. That reward is a very poor one, and is soon over. To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy. "Glory of men" is a thing which can be bought: but honor from God is a very different thing. This is an advertising age, and too many are saying, "Behold my liberality!" Those who have Jesus for their King must wear his livery of humility, and not the scarlet trappings of a purse-proud generosity, which blows its own trumpet, not only in the streets, but even in the synagogues. We cannot expect two rewards for the same action: if we have it now we shall not have it hereafter. Unrewarded alms will alone count in the record of the last day.

Matthew 6:3, 4. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Seek secrecy for your good deeds. Do not even see your own virtue. Hide from yourself that which you yourself have done that is commendable; for the proud contemplation of your own generosity may tarnish all your alms.

Keep the thing so secret that even you yourself are hardly aware that you are doing anything at all praiseworthy. Let God be present, and you will have enough of an audience. He will reward you, reward you "openly", reward you as a Father rewards a child, reward you as one who saw what you did and knew that you did it wholly unto him.

Lord, help me, when I am doing good, to keep my left hand out of it, that I may have no sinister motive, and no desire to have a present reward of praise among my fellow-men.

Matthew 6:5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Prayer also is taken for granted. No man can be in the kingdom of heaven who does not pray.

Those around our Lord knew what he meant when he alluded to the hypocrites; for they had often been the proud sectary standing

in public places repeating his prayers, and very likely they had hitherto felt bound to hold such in repute for superior sanctity. By our Lord's words these hypocrites are unmasked, and made to seem what they really are. Our King was wonderfully plain-spoken, and called both things and persons by their right names. These religionists were not seekers of God, but seekers after popularity; men who twisted even devotion into a means for self aggrandizement. They chose places and times which would render their saying of prayers conspicuous. The synagogues and the corners of the streets suited them admirably; for their aim was "that they may be seen of men." They were seen. They had what they sought for. This was their reward, and the whole of it.

Lord, let me never be so profane as to pray to thee with the intent of getting praise for myself.

Matthew 6:6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Be alone; enter into a little room into which no other may intrude; keep out every interloper by shutting the door; and there, and then, with all thy heart pour out thy supplication. "Pray to thy Father": prayer is mainly to be addressed to God the Father; and always to God as our Father. Pray to thy Father who is there present, to thy Father who sees thee, and specially takes note of that which is evidently meant for him only, seeing it is done "in secret", where no eye can see but his own. If it be indeed to God that we pray, there can be no need for anyone else to be present; for it would hinder rather than help devotion to have a third person for witness of the heart's private intercourse with the Lord.

As the very soul of prayer lies in communion with God, we shall pray best when all our attention is confined to him; and we shall best reach our end of being accepted by him when we have no regard to the opinion of anyone else. Secret prayer is truly heard and openly answered in the Lord's own way and time. Our King reigns "in secret": there he sets up his court, and there will he welcome our approaches. We are not where God sees when we court publicity, and pray to obtain credit for our devotion.

Matthew 6:7, 8. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

To repeat a form of prayer a very large number of times has always seemed to the ignorantly religious to be a praiseworthy thing; but assuredly it is not so. It is a mere exercise of memory, and of the organs of noise-making: and it is absurd to imagine that such a parrot exercise can be pleasing to the living God. The Mahometans and Papists keep to this heathenish custom; but we must not imitate them.

God does not need us to pray for his information, for he "knoweth what things ye have need of"; nor to repeat the prayer over and over for his persuasion, for as our Father he is willing to bless us. Therefore let us not be superstitious and dream that there is virtue in "much speaking." In the multitude of words, even in prayer, there wanteth not sin.

Repetitions we may have, but not "vain repetitions." Counting beads, and reckoning the time occupied in devotion, are both idle things. Christians' prayers are measured by weight, and not by length. Many of the most prevailing prayers have been as short as they were strong.

Matthew 6:9. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Our Lord, having warned us against certain vices which had connected themselves with prayer as to its place and spirit, now gives us a model upon which to fashion our prayers. This delightful prayer is short, devout, and full of meaning. Its first three petitions are for God and his glory. Our chief prayers to God are to be for his glory. Do we thus begin with God in prayer? Does not the daily bread often come in before the kingdom?

We pray as children to a Father, and we pray as brothers, for we say, "Our Father." "Our Father" is a familiar name, but the words "which art in heaven" suggest the reverence due unto him. Our Father and yet in heaven: in heaven and yet our Father. May his name be treated reverently, and may all that is about him—his Word and his gospel—be regarded with the deepest awe! It is for us so to walk before the Lord in all lowliness, that all shall see that we reverence the character of the thrice-holy One. Then can we truly pray, "Hallowed be thy name", when we hallow it ourselves.

Matthew 6:10. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as It is in heaven.

Oh, that thou mayest reign over all hearts and lands! Men have thrown off their allegiance to our Father, God; and we pray with all our might that he may, by his almighty grace, subdue them to loyal obedience. We long for the coming of King Jesus; but meanwhile we cry to our Father, "Thy kingdom come." We desire for the supreme will to be done in earth, with a cheerful, constant, universal obedience like that of "heaven." We would have the Lord's will carried out, not only by the great physical forces which never fail to be obedient to God, but by lovingly active spirits; by men, once rebellious, but graciously renewed. Oh, Oh, that all who say this prayer may display on earth the holy alacrity of obedience which is seen in the happy, hearty, united, and unquestioning service of perfect saints and angels before the throng. Our heart's highest wish is for God's honor, dominion, and glory.

Matthew 6:11. Give us this day our daily bread.

We pray for providential supplies for ourselves and others — "Give us ."

We ask for our food as a gift — Give us." We request no more than bread, or food needful for us. Our petition concerns the day, and asks only for a daily supply; bread enough for this day. We ask not for bread which belongs to others, but only for that which is honestly our own, — "our daily bread. " It is the prayer of a lowly and contented mind, of one who is so sanctified that he waits upon God even about his daily food, and of one who lovingly links others with himself in his sympathy and prayer.

Give me, Lord, both the bread of heaven, and of earth: that which feeds my soul, and sustains my body. For all I look to thee, my Father.

Matthew 6:12. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

No prayer of mortal men could be complete without confession of sin.

Prayer which does not seek for pardon will fail, as the Pharisee's prayer did. Let proud men boast as they please, those who are in Christ's kingdom will always pray, "Forgive us our debts ." Our Lord knew that we should always have debts to own, and therefore would always need to cry, "Forgive! "This is the prayer of men whom the Judge has absolved because of their faith in the Great Sacrifice; for now to their Father they come for free forgiveness, as children. No man may pass a day without praying "Forgive"; and in his supplication he should not forget his fellow-sinners, but should pray "Forgive us." The writer ventures to pray, "Lord, forgive me, and my brother over yonder, who says he is perfect."

This pardon we can only obtain as we freely pass over the offenses of others against ourselves: "as we forgive our debtors. " This is a reasonable, nay, a blessed requirement, which it is a delight to fulfill. It would not be safe for God to forgive a man who will not forgive others.

Lord, I most heartily forgive all who may have done me wrong, I am lenient with those who are indebted to me; and now, with a hopeful heart, I pray thee forgive me, as surer, as I now forgive all who are in and sense my debtors.

Matthew 6:13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

In the course of providence, the Lord tests our graces and the sincerity of our profession; and for this purpose he does "leads us into temptation. " We entreat him not to try us too severely. Lord, let not my joys or my sorrows become temptations to me. As I would not run into temptation of myself, I pray thee, do not lead me where I must inevitably meet it.

But if I must be tried, Lord, deliver me from falling into evil, and specially preserve me from that evil one, who, above all, seeks my soul, to destroy it. Temptation or trial may be for my good, if I am delivered from evil.

Lord, do this for me, for I cannot preserve myself.

The prayer finishes with a doxology. That devotion which begins with prayer ends in praise. All rule, and might

and honor, belong to God; and to him let them for ever be ascribed. His is “the kingdom”, or the right to rule; “the power”, or the might to uphold his authority; and “the glory”, or the honor that comes out of his government. Our whole heart delights that the Lord is thus supreme and glorious; and therefore we say, “Amen.” How perfect is this model of prayer! So fit for man to pray, so suitable to be laid before the throng of the Majesty on High. Oh, that we may have grace to copy it all our days! Jesus, our King, will not refuse to present a prayer which is of his own drawing up and is directed to the Father whom he loves to glorify.

Matthew 6:14, 15. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses

This enforces Christian action by limiting the power of prayer according to our obedience to the command to forgive. If we would be forgiven, we must forgive: if we will not forgive, we cannot be forgiven. This yoke is easy; this burden is light. It may be a blessing to be wronged, since it affords us an opportunity of judging whether we are indeed the recipients of the pardon which comes from the throne of God. Very sweet is it to pass by other men’s offenses against ourselves; for thus we learn how sweet it is to the Lord to pardon us.

Matthew 6:16. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

Having dealt with prayer, our King now instructs us as to fasting. Fasting took a leading place in devotion under the Law, and it might profitably be more practiced even now under the Gospel. The Puritans called it “soul-fattening fasting”, and so many have found it. We must, by order of our King, avoid all attempt at display in connection with this form of devotion. Hypocrites went about with faces unwashed, and dolorous, that all might say, “See how rigidly those men are fasting. What good men they must be!” To look miserable in order to be thought holy- is a wretched piece of hypocrisy; and as it makes fasting into a trick to catch human admiration, it thereby destroys it as a means of grace. We cannot expect to get a reward both from the praise of our fellows and the pleasure of God.

We have our choice; and if we snatch at the minor reward, we lose the major. May it never be said of us, “They have their reward.”

Matthew 6:17, 18. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Use diligence to conceal what it would be foolish to parade. Leave off no outward act of personal cleanliness or adornment; “anoint thine head, and wash thy face.” If your fasting is unto God, keep it for him. Act in seasons of extraordinary devotion as you do at other times, that those with whom you come in contact may not know what special devotion you are practicing. You may fast, and that lasting may, be discovered; but let it be no intent of, yours that you should “appear unto men to fast.” Fast from vainglory, ambition, pride, and self-glorification. Fast in secret before the Seer of secrets. Secret fasting shall have an open reward from the Lord; but that which is done out of mere ostentation shall never be reckoned in the books of the Lord. Thus our King has taught us both how to give alms, how to pray, and how to fast; and he will now proceed to legislate for the concerns of daily life.

MATTHEW 6:19-34

THE KING GIVES COMMANDS AS TO THE CARES OF THIS LIFE

He would not have his servants seeking two objects, and serving two masters. He calls them away from anxieties about this life to a restful faith in God

Matthew 6:19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

Lay not out your life for gathering wealth: this would be degrading to you as servants of the heavenly kingdom. If you accumulate either money or raiment, your treasures will be liable to “moth and rust”; and of both you may be deprived by dishonest men. That earthly things decay, or are taken from us, is an excellent reason for not making them the great objects of our pursuit. Hoard not for thieves, gather not for corruption: accumulate for eternity, and send your treasures into the land whither you are going. To live for the sake of growing rich is a gilded death in life.

Matthew 6:20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal.

Let our desires and efforts go after heavenly things. These are not liable to any decay within themselves, nor can they be taken from us by force or fraud. Does not wisdom bid us seek such sure possessions? Out of our earthly possessions that which is used for God is laid up in heaven. What is given to the poor and to the Lord’s cause is deposited in the Bank of Eternity. To heaven we are going; let us send our treasures before us.

There they will be safe from decay, and robbery: but in no other place may we reckon them to be secure.

Lord, let me be rich towards thee. I had better send on to my treasury in heaven more of my substance than I have already sent. I will at once remember the Church and its Missions, orphans, aged saints, and poor brethren: these are thy treasury boxes, and I will bank my money there.

Matthew 6:21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

This is a grand moral motive for keeping our desires above groveling objects. The heart must and will go in the direction of that which we count precious. The whole man will be transformed into the likeness of that for which he lives. Where we place our treasures our thoughts will naturally fly. It will be wise to let all that we have act as magnets to draw us in the right direction. If our very best things are in heaven, our very best thoughts will fly in the same direction: but if our choicest possessions are of the earth, our heart will be earth-bound.

Matthew 6:22, 23. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.

The motive is the eye of the soul, and if it be clear, the whole character will be right; but if it be polluted, our whole being will become defiled. The eye of the understanding may also be here understood: if a man does not see things in a right light, he may live in sin and yet fancy that he is doing his duty. A man should live up to his light; but if that light is itself darkness, what a mistake his whole course will be! If our religion leads us to sin, it is worse than irreligion. If our faith is presumption, our zeal selfishness, our prayer formality, our hope a delusion, our experience infatuation, the darkness is so great that even our Lord holds up his hands in astonishment and says — “How great is that darkness!” Oh, for a single eye to God’s glory, a sincere consecration unto the Lord. This alone can fill my soul with light.

Matthew 6:24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Here our King forbids division of aim in life. We cannot have two master passions: if we could, it would be impossible to serve both; their interests would soon come into conflict, and we should be forced to choose between them. God and the world will never agree, and however much we may attempt it, we shall never be able to serve both. Our danger is that in trying to gain money, or in the pursuit of any other object, we should put it out of its place, and allow it to get the mastery of our mind. Gain and godliness cannot both be masters of our souls: we can serve two, but not “two masters.” You can live for this world, or live for the next; but to live equally for both is impossible. Where God reigns, the lust of gain must go.

Oh, to be so decided, that we may pursue one thing only! We would hate evil and love God, despise falsehood and hold to truth! We need to know how we are affected both to righteousness and sin; and when this is ascertained to our comfort, we must stand to the right with uncompromising firmness. Mammon is the direct opposite of God as much today as in past ages, and we must loathe its greed, its selfishness, its oppression, its pride; or we do not love God.

Matthew 6:25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment.'

"Therefore," in order that our one Master may be served, we must cease from serving self, and from the carking care which self-seeking involves.

Read the passage, "**Be not anxious for your life.**" Thought we may take; but anxious, carking care we must not know. Our most pressing bodily wants are not to engross our minds. Our life is more important than the food we eat, or the clothes we wear. God who gives us life will give us bread and raiment. We should much more care how we live than how we eat: the spiritual should go before the bodily, the eternal before the temporal. What we wear is of very small importance compared with what we are. Therefore let us give our chief care to that which is chief, yea, our sole thought to the one all-absorbing object of all true life, the glory of God.

Matthew 6:26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

The birds are fed by God; will he not feed us? They are free from the fret which comes of hoarding and trading; why should not we be? If God feeds the fowls of the air without sowing, or reaping, or storing, surely he will supply us when we trustfully use these means. For us to rely upon these means and forget our God would be folly indeed. Our King would have his subjects give their hearts to his love and service, and not worry themselves with groveling anxieties. It is well for us that we have these daily wants, because they lead us to our heavenly Father; but if we grow anxious, they are turned from their design and made into barriers to shut us out from the Lord. Oh, that we would be as good as the birds in trustfulness, since in dignity of nature we are so "much better than they"!

Matthew 6:27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

It is a small matter whether we are tall or short; and yet all the worry in the world could not make us an inch taller. Why, then, do we give way to care about things which we cannot alter? If fretting were of any use it would have some excuse; but as it does no good, let us cease from it.

Matthew 6:28, 29. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Clothes must not be made much of; for in our finest array, flowers far excel us. We must not be anxious about how we shall be clad; for the field lilies, not under the gardener's care, are as glorious as the most pompous of monarchs; and yet they enjoy life free from labor and thought. Lovely lilies, how ye rebuke our foolish nervousness! The array of lilies comes without fret: why do we kill ourselves with care about that which God gives to plants which cannot care?

My Lord, I would grow to thy praise as the lily cloth, and be content to be what thou cost make me, and wear what thou cost give me.

Matthew 6:30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith It is not merely that lilies grow, but that God himself clothes them with surpassing beauty,

These lilies, when growing, appear only as the grass, commonplace enough; but Solomon could not excel them when God has put them in their full array of cloth of gold. Will he not be sure to take care of us, who are precious in his sight? Why should we be so little trustful as to have a doubt upon that point? If that which is so very short lived is yet so bedecked of the Lord, depend upon it, he will guard immortal minds, and even the mortal bodies with which they are associated. "Little faith " is not a little fault; for it greatly wrongs the Lord, and sadly grieves the fretful mind. To think the Lord who clothes lilies will leave his own children naked is shameful. O little faith, learn better manners!

Matthew 6:31. Therefore take no thought, saying , What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? "Be not anxious " is the right interpretation. Think, that you may not have to be anxious. Do not for ever be following the worlds Trinity of cares.

The questions in this verse are taken out of the worldlings' catechism of distrust. The children of God may quietly work on from day to day, and cast all foreboding cares from them;

Matthew 6:32. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

We are to excel those who are aliens and foreigners: things which "Gentiles seek " are not good enough for the Israel of God. The men of the world seek after earthly things, and have no mind for anything beyond: we have a heavenly Father, and therefore we have higher aims and aspirations.

Moreover, as our Father knows all about our necessities, we need not be anxious; for he is quite sure to supply all our needs. Let the Gentiles hunt after their many carnal objects; but let the children of the Lord leave their temporal wants with the Lord of infinite grace, and then let them follow after the one thing needful.

Lord, enable me to be a non-anxious one. May I be so eager after heavenly things, that I altogether leave my earthly cares with thee!

Matthew 6:33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Seek God first, and the rest will follow in due course. As for "all these things ", you will not need to seek them; they will be thrown in as a matter of course. God who gives you heaven will not deny you your bread on the road thither. The kingdom of God, and the righteousness suitable to that kingdom—seek these first and foremost, and then all that you can possibly need shall be your portion. To promote the reign of Christ, and to practice righteousness, are but one object; and may that be the one aim of our lives!

Let us spend life on the one thing, and it will be well spent: as for the twenty secondary objects, they also will be ours if we pursue the one thing only.

Matthew 6:34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the clay is the evil thereof.

Understand the former verses as the argument to this "therefore. " Anxiety cannot help you (verse 27); it is quite useless, it would degrade you to the level of the heathen (verse 32); and there is no need for it (verse 33) — therefore do not forestall sorrow by being anxious as to the future. Our business is with today: we are only to ask bread day by day, and that only in sufficient abundance for the day's consumption. To import the possible sorrows of tomorrow into the thoughts of today is a superfluity of unbelief.

When the morrow brings sorrow, it will bring strength for that sorrow.

Today will require all the vigor we have to deal with its immediate evils; there can be no need to import cares from the future. To load today with trials not yet arrived, would be to overload it. Anxiety is evil, but anxiety about things which have not yet happened is altogether without excuse. "Cast foreboding cares away, God provideth for today." O my heart, what rest there is for thee if thou wilt give thyself up to thy Lord, and leave all thine own concerns with him! Mind thou thy Lord's business, and he will see to

thy business.