

CHAPTER 2

HONEST PRAYER ACCORDING TO JESUS

A series of expository studies for
Serious Bible Students and Honest Inquirers on

HONEST PRAYER

from some of those Holy Scriptures
that have to do with
Sincere Prayer, Real Prayer,
Honest Prayer.

Only Honest Prayer is in accord with the Word of
God, which Sacred Writ is the sole determining Authority
as to what constitutes prayer in its Spiritual Substance.

The second in this series is

HONEST PRAYER ACCORDING TO JESUS

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Being an expository study of
Jesus' teaching in

Matthew 6:1-18

Wherein He sets the tone for fasts, prayers, and
works of mercy in His Kingdom as exhibiting above
all else a humble and self-effacing spirit.

PREFACE

Jesus taught prayer as of primary importance to His Kingdom's mission on earth, including its emphasis in eleven verses of our study text. He is teaching prayer as fundamental to His Kingdom's fulfillment among men here and now on earth. In The Sermon on the Mount— (Matthew 5, 6, and 7) the King's Manifesto of important designs and methods for Kingdom reality— Jesus will now in its midst show real, authentic, honest prayer—what it really is.

This Sermon's practicality is aimed primarily and essentially at producing His good words in His disciples and showing them as Light, a sort of Divine Illumination, in order to glorify God,

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

That *light* in our text is the righteousness (*alms* KJV) of *Matthew 6:1*,

Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 6:1ASV

Take heed that ye do not your alms [righteousness] before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 6:1 KJV

When shining Christ's Light, the danger of pride is present in us sinners, though we know the origin of good works is God. In *Matthew 6:1-18* Jesus amplifies that we must escape this danger of pride in His Kingdom. He would have all Christians filled with the Spirit, abiding in Himself, walking in spiritual and heavenly glory, doing the work of His Kingdom, even honoring God and Christ and His Holy Spirit, keeping and treasuring His Word fully and carefully, yet He knows of the likelihood of our becoming filled with

vain glory at the measure of His glory in us. Jesus knows with all the above list of really great virtues there exists that hideous monster of pride, which when left unchecked will destroy the value of even the greatest spiritual accomplishment.

This *righteousness* (*alms* KJV, *verse 1*) consists of *alms* of love, *prayer* of worship, and *fasts* of privation. Their interrelationship will be of note in our study.

MULTIPLE PREFATORY CONSIDERATIONS

Definitions

1. ***Alms*** (KJV), *righteousness* (ASV), δικαιοσυνην, only in our text at *v. 1*, *acts of righteousness* NIV; the *righteousness* of 5:16 and 5:20 (same Gk. wrd.); the maturity (*perfect* (KJV), τελειος “brought to completion; fully accomplished.”) of 5:48; the objective sought in 6:33 (same Gk. wrd.).

2. ***Alms*** (KJV), in *vs. 2, 3, & 4*, ελεημοσυνην, from Greek, “merciful,” meaning “mercy, pity, particularly in giving alms.” Used *Acts 3:2, 3; 10:2*. This means much more than giving money, but suggests the richest gifts of love, mercy, and caring concern for others, our love-deeds, acts of charity, deeds of mercy, certainly the support of the Gospel to the lost. It denotes the activities of Christian works in church, or universally of opportunity. Used by Jesus as the righteousness in life after true conversion in *Luke 12:33*, *Sell that ye have, and give alms*; that is in context, “Do not lay treasure up for oneself on earth, but give away the greatest treasure you possess, namely yourself in merciful love toward others.” In *Luke 12:33b-34*, *alms* denote the principal activity of a self-less life which is prioritized in others’ welfare and not in oneself. That is true almsgiving.

3. ***Pray***, προσευχομαι, “to pray,” is always used of prayer to God, to enter unhindered communion with God, to have spiritual relations with God, which involve much more than just making requests of Him, but certainly includes that.

4. **Fasts**, νηστεία, “eating no food,” but much more. This is the symbolic epitome of the daily life of suffering the loss of rights in order that the life may come into more vigorous relationship with God. At least in principle, it is nearly equivalent to Jesus’ decisive and conclusive requirement, *If any man will come after me, Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23.*

Reoccurring Words

1. **Reward**, ὄ:1 2, 5, 16, μισθος, “wages, hire, pay,” what is actually earned and what is due for the works performed. Used of Christians only in ὄ:1 when they have been guilty of theatrical motive in the Kingdom. Jesus assures them that no “wages for hire” ever come forth from their Father, especially when motive is wrong. It is also used particularly of those whose motive is to do their righteousness before others; and therefore are “paid” in turn with a similarly physical showy “wage” of recognition by others and not by God. This denotes man’s kind of earnings concept, “Do and get,” and not God’s gracious bestowal.

2. **Reward**, ὄ: 4, ὄ, 18, αποδίδωμι, “a giving back in turn, a recompense,” literally, “to give away from one’s self,” i.e. “to deliver over, bestow, render.” Used exclusively in the lesson text regarding Christians’ pure motives in ὄ: 4, ὄ, 18, this word expresses God’s returning, not what one has earned, but what is granted according to what one has sought when motives are correct. Namely, when one seeks God’s glory in fasting, praying, and deeds of mercy, then God bestows His glory on the one seeking His glory, a foretaste now and the precious golden lode in eternity. In this way Kingdom maturity begets Kingdom maturity.

3. **In secret**, ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ, “within the hidden or concealed place,” from the verb, κρυπτω, “to hide, conceal.” Repeated twice in each case of alms giving, praying, and fasting, ὄ: 4, ὄ, 18, suggesting an emphasis of an intimate, personal and a solely-for-His-glory kind of relationship of genuine Kingdom maturity and righteousness.

Outline of Matthew 6:1-18

HUMBLE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE KINGDOM, 6:1, CONSISTING OF:

I. THE ACTS OF CHARITY BY VIRTUE OF PRAYER—DEEDS OF MERCY, Matthew 6: 2-4

A. The Dangerous Negative of Charity, 6:2.

1. No Fanfare, *v. 2a*.

2. No “Glory of Man,” no glory to or from man, *v. 2b*.

3. **Results:** Only physical reward for physical glory, i.e. “The Glory of Man,” *v. 2c*.

B. The Glorious Positive of Charity, 6: 3-4.

1. No Self-attention Given, *vs. 3-4a*.

2. Only Spiritual reward from God, *v. 4b*.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF PRAYER AIDED BY FASTING—DYNAMISM IN THE SPIRIT, Matthew 6: 5-15

A. The Dangerous Negative of Prayer, 6:5.

B. The Glorious Positive of Prayer, 6:6-15.

1. Private Prayer, 6: 6.

2. Pointed Prayer, 6:7-8.

#1. Fresh prayer, *v. 7*.

#2. Foreknown prayer = Foreordained prayer, *v. 8*.

3. Patterned Prayer, 6: 9-13.

#1. Acknowledgement of God, *vs. 9-10*.

#2. Acknowledgement of Need, *vs. 11-13*.

[1] Our physical need, *v. 11*.

[2] Our spiritual need, *vs. 12-13*.

4. Pardoning Prayer, 6:14-15.

#1. Forgiving and being forgiven, *v. 14*.

#2. Unforgiving and unforgiven, *v. 15*.

III. ABSTINENCE IN ORDER TO PRAYER THROUGH FASTING—DENIAL OF SELF, Matthew 6:16-18

A. The Dangerous Negative of Fasting, 6:16.

B. The Glorious Positive of Fasting, 6: 17-18.

1. The Private Duty, *When ye fast, vs. 17-18a*.

2. The Powerful Reward, *v. 18*.

CHAPTER 2

HONEST PRAYER ACCORDING TO JESUS

¹*Take heed that ye do not your alms [righteousness]¹ before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. KJV*

[¹ Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven. ASV]

²*Therefore when thou doest thine alms, [merciful acts] 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 you, They have their reward.*

³*But when thou doest alms [merciful acts], let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:*

⁴*That thine alms [merciful acts] may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

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.*

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.*

⁷*But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

¹ The Gk. word translated *alms* in *v.1* (KJV) is different from the Gk. word translated *alms* in *vs. 2, 3 & 4*. The *v.1 alms* is δικαιοσυνην, meaning "piety, godliness, rectitude, virtue," used in the Sermon in *5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33*. The *vs. 2, 3 & 4 alms* word translates the Gk. word ελεημοσυνην, meaning "pity, compassion"; and in this context refers to the very particular "mercy-gifts" of disciples of the Kingdom ethic, i.e. deeds of mercy for the benefit of others or "good works"—the *light* that shines to the glory of God (*Matthew 5:16*). This distinction is quite important; therefore verse one's more easily understood translation in the American Standard Version should be and will be referenced throughout.

⁸Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

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

¹⁰Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread.

¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

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

¹⁴For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶Moreover 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.

¹⁷But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

¹⁸That 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. Matthew 6:1-18

Honest prayer is a supernatural and mysterious power through which God acts among men. God uses prayer somewhat as He uses His Word to perform His counsel, to fulfill His plan, and to complete His will among men. It was Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher of the nineteenth century, who said, "True prayer is the decrees of God in another form."² Though God needs nothing or no one for Himself or for His great works, still He has chosen to bless men through prayer, and to manifest Himself in relation to prayer, much as He does through His Word. God's eternal decrees are fulfilled through the prayers of His people.

² Charles Spurgeon, The Metropolitan Pulpit, V. & p. unknown.

God operates according to His Word, that is, He reveals His works ahead of time by declaring His Word concerning a certain thing first, or speaking His will about the matter at its commencement, and then doing what He has pronounced in that Word formerly declared. In the beginning, God said *Let there be light, and there was light*. God needed not to have said anything before bringing forth light, but He first spoke and then acted. God for His own reasons, some known to us and some not known to anyone, has chosen thus to operate in conjunction with His Word. He states it first, He then acts in accordance with what He has stated.

God works similarly with our prayers as with His own Word. Just as with His Word, honest prayers are first and foremost God-originated. He initiates honest prayers through the promptings of His Holy Spirit. In admonishing believers to pray, the beloved apostle wrote,

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. [Added emph.] ***Ephesians 6:18***

Real prayer is only by the spiritual power of God's Holy Spirit working within us, which causes us to pray. This *prayer in the Spirit* is not just words spoken to God from humans, but is a spiritual communication between God, The Holy Spirit, and God, The Father, through human agency. It is voiced, or itemized, spiritual communication. Though the humans involved in honest prayer are fully in control of their minds, affections, and wills, still they act only because led by the Holy Spirit. That is real prayer, that is spiritual prayer, that is honest prayer. Consequently, it could be said of this honest prayer: What God wills, in many instances, He will move some of us humans to pray concerning it before He acts.

It was because of this relative importance of honest prayer that Jesus emphasized it in His teaching ministry while on earth. Jesus' teaching centered upon the Kingdom of God because it is the

spiritual aspect of all life down here on earth. Since God has chosen to act among men through these honest prayers, and since Jesus' mission was/is to establish God's Kingdom in men's hearts on earth, He certainly saw/sees the need to direct men to pray these kinds of honest prayers. How else could God's *will be done in earth, as it is in heaven* as per the primary intention and design of His Kingdom? Therefore, in His most direct teaching, outlining His approach to fulfillment of that goal,³ He brought His hearers' attention to focus upon this kind of honest prayer. Jesus taught this kind of honest prayer to His disciples in His first and primary public declaration of the motives and intentions of His spiritual rule in men's hearts and lives on this earth; it is at the very heart of His great Sermon that revealed His Kingdom's Manifesto.

¹ Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 6:1 ASV

Jesus began this teaching on a rather broad note by including prayer in a rather extensive and general virtue, *righteousness*⁴ in *verse 1*. The Greek word which is rendered *alms* in the Authorized Version and *righteousness* in the American Standard Version is ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ, meaning "rectitude, virtue"; and being used in Christ's Sermon, it has the implication of a prevalent "piety" or "godliness" in defining the designs and intentions of His Kingdom among men. It is here a sweeping and comprehensive term for Kingdom conduct, indicating the prevailing component of all activities of the subjects of Christ's Kingdom. These activities would be the literal fulfillment of the Father's will being *done in earth, as it is in heaven*. This *righteousness* is what the Father wills to be done in earth; therefore these honest prayers are a vital component of the Kingdom of God because God has so chosen to work His *righteousness* on earth through the agency of honest prayer. Christ intends His

³ His Sermon on the Mount, *Matthew Chapters 5-7*

⁴ *Matthew 6:1*, American Standard Version, translated *alms* KJV. See fn. #1, p.1.

Kingdom's subjects to be the means of accomplishing God's will in earth, first through honest prayers which forecast and foreshadow His will, and secondly through the works of those praying these prophetic and declarative honest prayers.

With such critical and consequential effects from these honest prayers and their subsequent acts of righteousness, and with such an awesome, even wondrous, responsibility placed upon mere weak men, Jesus warned against any pridefulness or self-esteem in this Kingdom *righteousness*. In all virtue in His Kingdom—that is, in all deeds done which are meant to acknowledge, to promote, and to give obedience to, His will—there is to be no self-aggrandizement, no self-seeking, no vain glory, for oneself. Nothing done as an act of *righteousness*—whether in *alms* giving, or in *praying*, or in *fasting*—must ever have as its motive a display of oneself.

The essence of Jesus' meaning is,

Your acts of righteousness as Kingdom subjects should only display your Father in heaven. Do not perform your righteousness—living the Kingdom ideal in your fasts or prayers or alms—before other men in order to be seen of them: otherwise you have no rewarding recognition with your Father Who is in heaven.

—Jesus Christ, 35 AD

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Immediate Context: Mature Possessors of the Kingdom

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.
Matthew 5:48

Kingdom maturity is the goal of Jesus' imperative. *Matthew 5:48* points back to the activity of love that is the supreme righteousness of the Kingdom, *Matthew 5:38-47*, specifically loving others and even one's enemies. But *Matthew 5:48* also points forward to the following maturity of Kingdom *righteousness* (the lesson text), which consists of *alms*, *prayers*, and *fasts*. In our text

verses on these particulars of Kingdom righteousness, He hastens to warn of the subsequent dangers of pride even in fulfilling this most mature righteous Kingdom conduct. Jesus repeatedly qualifies our activities in Kingdom righteousness—*alms, prayers, fasts*—to become “*in secret*” works, in as much as is possible to give *alms* to others, to *pray* to God, and to *fast* in one’s own body, “*in secret*.”

The Broader Context: Humble Possessors of the Kingdom

The broader context is first, *Matthew 5:20* concerning the error of Pharisaical righteousness,

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness⁵ of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20

And second, the general pressing duty of all subjects of the Kingdom,

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

Matthew 6:33

In our text Jesus is laying out this actual righteousness which must exceed that of the Pharisees and for which we are to seek above all else. This actual or regeneration-infused righteousness is comprehensively addressed in *alms, prayers, and fasts*; these three in effect approximate all Kingdom righteousness. But these three when fulfilled bring with them in us fallen humans the seeds of pride.

⁵ Same Gk. word as *ó:1*, the scribes and Pharisees’ righteousness concerned actual righteousness in their lives as well as the imputed righteousness (justification) on their heavenly account, cp. *Romans 10:3 & Mark 12:38-40*.

⁶ Same Gk. word as *ó:1*, similarly as with pharisaical righteousness, the Kingdom righteousness sought is both actual righteousness (holiness) and imputed righteousness which is by faith alone. Righteousness is here meant in its most comprehensive meaning.

From its very outset, Christ's plan for His Kingdom in earth stressed the importance of an unassuming and humble attitude. Jesus' first words on His Kingdom's design and intention were made with reference to *the poor in spirit* as being *blessed* with possessions of the Kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:3

Poverty of spirit refers to brokenness, to lowliness, to humility. To be *poor in spirit* is to have a consciousness of one's emptiness and need. Those who take the place of beggars before God are the only ones appearing as *blessed* to God. They are those who have discovered the vanity of this world and all it offers. The *poor in Spirit* have already sensed their need of something, or really Someone, outside themselves. They have, as far as they are concerned, an utterly worthless view of themselves. Therefore, they are, at the same time and yet from that very poverty of spirit, able to see the King as Savior and able to lay hold of His offers to enter into His Kingdom via the *strait gate*. Indeed, it is just because they have found themselves to be in spiritual poverty that they have accepted the King's proposal to become His subjects through the King's redemption. Only in this way *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; only by becoming *poor in spirit* are any natural men brought into the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, because of the importance of this poverty of spirit, Jesus, the King, throughout His Sermon emphasized humility. Jesus had displayed humility's extensive sweep over all in His Kingdom. He required a self-effacing respect for the very law that condemns oneself (5:17-20). His subjects must humbly restrain anger toward all offenders against oneself (5:21-26), are to pluck out or cut off one's own body's vital parts (5:27-30), forego boastful oaths (5:33-37), and finally, must love one's enemies (5:38-47). In all these activities, humility has been commended by Jesus and arrogance condemned.

HONEST RIGHTEOUSNESS

Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven.
Matthew 6:1 ASV

Following His examples of poverty of spirit in *Chapter 5*, Jesus continued His emphasis upon this humility—this lowliness, this unpretentious attitude, this avoiding the limelight—by warning against doing one’s godly piety before men. Jesus applied this humility to three precise and closely related areas of Kingdom activity: almsgiving, praying, and fasting, any one of which would naturally and ordinarily lead to pride from God’s use of them in earth. In *verses 2-4* He speaks of almsgiving, in *verses 5-15* He deals with prayer, and in *verses 16-18* Jesus encourages fasts. Each is to be a Kingdom reality for subjects of His spiritual rule; and in each area of Kingdom service He promotes modesty and condemns pomposity. He warns of vain shows of one’s *righteousness* in those three most important areas of Kingdom allegiance. Notice that the priority is prayer. That is His main thrust, because while He acknowledges almsgiving and fasting with only three verses each, He spends eleven verses on prayer. The chief means to access humble Kingdom *righteousness* in humble service is honest prayers.

Interrelated Righteousness

These three Kingdom graces—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—are mutually related. They have connecting links one to the other. All *alms* (acts of mercy) must proceed from *prayer* if they are truly spiritual in origin, motive, fulfillment, and goal. Again, all *prayer* must stem from self-denial (*fasts*) if it is profitable, as being within the Kingdom ideal. *Fasts* are opportunities for abstinence. *Prayer* begins as an attitude that finds expression in address to God. *Alms* are the final actions taken to make real what was only felt and sought in *prayer*, and had been realized before only within oneself through *fasts*. *Fasting* prepares for *prayer*, *prayer* precedes *almsgiving*, and *alms* are expressions of *prayerfulness*, which find

reality in the outside world. Jesus relates the three in His Sermon just because of these interrelationships. An attendant possibility for these three areas of Kingdom righteousness is a threatening pridefulness that is to be excluded from all, if all is truly honest in their interrelated exercise.

Correlated Righteousness

In bringing these three works of righteousness (*fasts, prayers, alms*) together in His Sermon, Jesus meant to show the reciprocal relation between these three expressions of Kingdom spirituality. They three have a dependence each on the other in a sort of mutual yet particular correlation.

Fasts are in their very fulfillment a disinterest in self; *prayer* is man's supreme expression of interest in God; while *alms* are man's ultimate show of interest in others.

Fasts are denials of self, a loss of one's rights in order that one's life may come into more energetic relationship with God. *Prayer* resulting from such honest fasts inaugurates an unhindered communion with God by means of a direct relationship worked out or actively undertaken with God. Prayers that originate from this selflessness (*fasts*) cultivate true relations with God and direct contact with God, which infinite contact will result in *alms*. *Alms* therefrom become true spiritual service of sacrifice, become our love-deeds, acts of mercy, and honest *almsgiving* to others.

Fasts are the divine relationship in its inward expression toward self. *Prayers* are the divine relationship in its secret expression toward God. *Alms* are the divine relationship in its outward expression toward men.

Fasts originate from an innate denial of self. *Prayers* resulting therefrom are one's devotions to God. *Alms* will then result from and finalize such selfless devotion with a doing for others.

Honest *fasts* are solely a means of helping communion with Him. **Honest *prayers*** are offered only from a place of lowliness before Him. **Honest *alms*** are given only in the consciousness of His observation. These correlated honest virtues in *fasts*, *prayers*, and *alms*, are the main thrust of His teaching in our text.

An Inverted Order

Jesus deals with each one of these spiritual graces of Kingdom activity in turn, but in an inverted order. *Alms* is the ultimate Kingdom achievement and the last of these three disciple accomplishments; *prayer* precedes it; and *fasting* prepares for prayer. Instead of dealing first with *fasts*, then *prayer*, and then finally *alms*—acts of kindness—the actual chronological order of spiritual experience, Jesus reversed the order in His presentation. The teaching in *Matthew 6:1-18* moves backward from external manifestation of divine relationship (*doing alms*) to the internal sources of spiritual power (*prayer* preceded by *fasts*). The **proof** of relationship to God is doing *alms*.⁷ The **power** that creates the *almsgiving* is *prayer*. The **position** or condition that develops *prayer* and fashions real power in *prayer* is *fasting*. Jesus moved from the most obvious righteousness, *alms*, to the least obvious righteousness, *fasts*. Jesus dealt first with the greatest area prone to pridefulness, *alms* to others and always before others' scrutiny, then moved to *prayer*, then to *fasts*. This reversal of the experiential order of this Kingdom *righteousness* means to warn first of what is primarily most apt to produce the hated vainglory and haughtiness, namely *alms*. Christ's emphasis in this obvious reversal shows His own desire to prohibit self-esteem in His heart-ruling Kingdom on earth.

Honest Humility

In this reversal of the normal order, Jesus means for us to grasp the most important element in all Kingdom service, honest humility. Honest *fasts* are humble *fasts* shared only with one's

⁷ *Jms. 2:14-20; 1 Jn. 3:7*

heavenly Father. Honest prayers are humble prayers that are prayed alone to God without regard to others' hearing, without said privacy there is no real prayer.⁸ Honest alms are always only humble alms, void of any self-recognition. The area most susceptible to pridefulness is almsgiving, followed by prayer, lastly fasting. For that reason Jesus warned against pridefulness in alms first. Pride is easily indulged in what is unavoidably seen by others (*alms*), less in what is really "heard" spiritually only by God (*prayers*), and still less in what is only valuable because it is solitarily between one's God and oneself (*fasts*). *Fasts* alone mean nothing until met with the divine blessing of His presence. And even *prayers* are not fully discharging the Kingdom's code of love. But fasting, praying, and almsgiving altogether without regard to others' observations of them are the realization of an unabridged maturity in humble righteousness. Therefore, Jesus sought to emphasize humility in *fasts* and *prayers* and *alms*, and that this humility in all righteous deeds is the determinant that turns them into profitable Kingdom service. God makes use even today of man's righteousness, even as He does His Word, when humbly attained. Consequently, prayer, if it is to be acceptable to and approved by our heavenly Father, must be honest prayer, humble prayer. Jesus makes this honesty in prayer a priority in His teaching in our text verses; He warned against dishonesty in *prayer* just as He did in *alms* and *fasts*.

HONEST ALMS

²Therefore when thou doest thine alms, [merciful acts] ⁹ 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 you, They have their reward.

³But when thou doest alms [merciful acts], let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

⁸ Privacy in public assemblies or in a group prayer meeting is possible when the ones praying are in themselves "alone with God."

⁹ Vs. 2, 3 & 4 translate the Gk. word *ἔλεημοσύνην*, meaning "pity, compassion"; and in this context refers to the very particular "mercy-gifts" of disciples of the Kingdom ethic, i.e. deeds of mercy for the benefit of others.

*⁴That thine alms [merciful acts] may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.
Matthew 6:2-4*

Jesus teaches that even *alms*—mercy gifts to others—, if done for the observation of others, are unacceptable to God. To help guard against this practice, He warned His disciples not to do as the hypocrites did in His day, who, in a pretense for summoning those who were in need, blew a trumpet before giving out their gifts to needful men. Jesus would rather that we have no one observing what we do for others; and further, that we have no self-awareness of our good deeds, even to the point of not letting *thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*. We are not to have undo or excessive reflection even within ourselves about our *alms*—our love-deeds, mercy gifts to others. Our minds and hearts are such that even the area of our own selves is not secret enough to qualify as humble *alms*. Our wicked minds and hearts may dominate them with our own private variety of pridefulness. Only the truly secret *alms* will be rewarded *openly* by our heavenly Father because only they are honest *alms*.

HONEST FASTS

¹⁶Moreover 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.

¹⁷But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

¹⁸That 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. Matthew 6:16-18

Likewise, Jesus taught that *fasts* are not to be broadcast to others. As *alms*, they are to be done in secret. The face was not to show the ordeal of depriving one's body of its right to food. If one does show his fast, then that show is his only reward. But Jesus' honest spiritual *fasts* held in the true Kingdom spirit are to hide

themselves through a *washed face* and an *anointed head*, and *thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly*.

HONEST PRAYERS

Matthew 6:5-13

Honest Prayer is mostly private, purposely brief, forgiveness orientated, and particularly modeled. But not all prayer is such because there are those prayers that are innately dishonest.

Dishonest Prayers¹⁰

Jesus referred to dishonest prayer when He said,

⁵And 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.

Matthew 6:5

Like the Pharisees of old, we often seem to forget to Whom we pray. Many persons have told me that it was their habit to fall asleep during prayer. That may have been some kind of a supposed enchanted statement to God thought to have been prayer; but it definitely was not honest prayer. Too many of our prayers are as dishonest as were the prayers of the Pharisees. That is, they do not live up to the Bible or up to the God of the Bible. The prayers of the Pharisees were unreal; it was for show. It was untrue and dishonest to approach the true God as they did.

Mostly Private Honest Prayers

⁶But 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.

Matthew 6:6

Jesus spoke of the need for privacy in praying honest prayers. The hypocrites prayed standing in a pretentious and flaunting

¹⁰ Chapter 3 deals specifically with dishonest prayer versus honest prayer.

fashion in the worship center; and they failed at honest prayer because they made sure that they were at the crossroads or at the corner of the streets when time for prayer came. This was in order to be seen by other men. But Jesus would have us to experience the real and honest prayers that God uses to perform His will on earth. He said that we were to *shut the door* behind us as we enter in to our *closets*. In that scenario will our heavenly Father reward us *openly* with the fulfillment of His will and purpose on the earth through our honest prayers.

Purposely Brief Honest Prayer¹¹

⁷*But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

⁸*Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

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

¹⁰*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

¹¹*Give us this day our daily bread.*

¹²*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

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.*

Honest prayers get right to the point. They never seek for protracted opportunities, but are direct with God. Jesus said that repeating ourselves for any special effect upon our heavenly Father is futile. The heathen thought to influence their god by *calling upon the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us.*¹² Just as with those worshippers of Baal, who found that ...there

¹¹ This model of honest prayer from our Lord (*vs. 9-13*) is explained in some detail from Luke's account in Chapter 4, The Opportunity of Honest Prayer, (*Lk. 11:1-4*), pp.

¹² *I Kings 18:26*

was no voice, nor any that answered, even so, it shall be with our heavenly Father. God will not hear us if we think to influence him by our *much speaking*. *Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.* We do not inform God through our prayers, but He informs us through His Holy Spirit's leading us as we seek Him through honest prayer. Honest prayers acknowledge that reality, and thereby are blessed and used by God.

Jesus then gave what has become known as His Model Prayer in *verses 9-13*. When considered thoughtfully, it is an amazingly brief prayer. It deals succinctly with basic human needs, from the instinctive human need to worship God in acknowledging His Kingdom above all else (*vs. 9-10, 13b*), to physical food (*v. 11*), to man's inner need to forgiveness—toward others and toward self through confession to God—(*vs. 12, 14-15*), and finally to deliverance from the evil by which all of us in His Kingdom are surrounded on earth (*v. 13a*). Notice that honest prayers according to Jesus are to mention our human needs in precise and nearly terse prayer. God prefers that no added words be sought, but that complete honesty in praying requires specific requests be made, glory to God be acknowledged, and especially forgiveness toward others be apprehended, only through brief and to the point honest prayers.

Jesus in an especial way singled forgiveness out from all the rest of the considerations of prayer in His kingdom. By this Jesus made forgiveness the most important aspect of honest or true prayer, because it deals with the single most important feature of honest prayers from unholy men to the holy God, namely sin.

Forgiveness Oriented Honest Prayer¹³

¹⁴For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹³ Forgiveness of others and one's own forgiveness from God are more fully explained in Chapter 4, The Opportunity of Honest Prayer, Daily Spiritual Needs, pp.

¹⁵*But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Matthew 6:14-15

Jesus taught that if one attempts to address a need to God and does not, yea cannot, forgive those who are debtors to him, who are trespassers against him, who are guilty of sinning against him, then he himself has not been introduced to God's great work of forgiveness for his own sins against God. One thing is true of the honest, the real, the unique experience of forgiveness of one's own sins against the holy God through Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, that one outstanding and all-pervading truth of personal sin forgiven is this:

He who is forgiven exhibits, and is in possession of, an unassertive view of others' sins against himself, and even holds sins by other men against himself as the inevitable outcome of his being a sinner among other sinners in an environment of sin in this sinful world.

In comparison to the transgressions of God's holy law and the violations of His Holy Person, sins against other sinners are minuscule in contrast to those sins against God. When sinners sin against sinners, they are violating other sinners who are themselves guilty of the same kinds of violations of His holiness as are all perpetrators of sin.¹⁴ Jesus said in *verse 14* above that to one who has known experientially the divine forgiveness for his own sins, all the sins of others and their forgiveness seems anticlimactic and secondary and minor in comparison. It is not so hard a thing to forgive other men their sins against us when we have been forgiven by God for our own sins against His holiness. One who knows himself to be a sinner of the highest felt and sensible guilt, who has indeed gained forgiveness from the altogether holy God, can hardly fail to forgive other men's sins against himself.

¹⁴ *Romans 2:1, Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. RSV*

Particularly Modeled Honest Prayers: The Contagion of Love

In addition to that, there is the contagion of love received at the same time of one's forgiveness from God. Everyone receiving divine forgiveness in Jesus is permanently marked by that love and forgiveness. There is a change of disposition with all that word means. It is a change of qualities and traits and makeup and even nature. A recipient of God's forgiveness cannot be hard-hearted toward sinners, but now he has that same gracious and forgiving quality which addressed his own sin and guilt. That is why Jesus said,

¹⁴For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14-15

The truly forgiven person will truly forgive, while the truly unforgiving person has not been truly forgiven. Consequently, honest prayer or true prayer must deal with the sins of others against oneself with a forgiving disposition, else prayer is not heard by God at all. Nothing makes prayer so dishonest as this unforgiving spirit; nothing hinders honest prayer as does unforgiven sin—God's of ours and ours of others. When forgiveness is absent from one's routine with other men, then forgiveness is absent from one's experience with God. And when forgiveness is absent from one's experience with God, then honest prayer cannot be prayed even though words toward God are mouthed. And when honest prayer cannot be prayed, then one's prayer cannot be heard because iniquity is still resident in the heart. And if iniquity is still resident in the heart, then spiritual and eternal death still abides within the supposed supplicant to God. An unforgiving disposition retains sin, and sin renders honest prayer inconceivable.

Honest prayer is possible only through genuine guilelessness in one's approach to God. That is, real prayer must be free of deceit, fraud, and craftiness. Therefore, this honest prayer is not an easy phenomenon for us humans; it is sometimes difficult not to misstate, or even not to attempt to disguise, our real desires to

God. Yet it must be remembered that prayer may be artless and plain, yet can be successful because of spiritual purity in its design and strategy. One does not approach God as one would encounter some mere man whom one hopes to outwit or dupe through verbal maneuvers. There can be no tricks or plays on words in addressing God. But honest prayer is sincere, and speaks candidly to God Who knows all that is spoken before we speak it. When Jesus said, *Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him*, He had applied to honest prayer the thought of the psalmist,

²Thou understandest my thought afar off.

*⁴There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD
thou knowest it altogether. Psalms 139:2, 4*

Therefore, how much more must real prayer, honest prayer, be in accord with His preferences, especially as regards sin and His stringent scriptural stipulations which correlate sin and prayer. The Bible throughout indicates man's sin as hindering real or honest prayer. Scripture contains conditions, or even requisites, for unholy men praying to the holy God and for dishonest men praying to the honest God.

¹⁸If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

*¹⁹But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the
voice of my prayer. Psalms 66:18-19*

Honest prayer is first and foremost prayer that is free from the guile and guilt of sin. A supplicant with an honest heart deals with sin first before real, honest prayer can begin. Without mincing words, sin, any sin, all sin, is to be artlessly, guilelessly, honestly, confessed before man and God. Only then can honest prayer obtain those requests that we seek from Him, because only then, after sin is dealt with, can we know that He hears us. This kind of honest prayer is an especially rare prayer, in fact, so rare that many professing Christians are glaringly unfamiliar with prayer that is innately right and in accord with God's ways. Actually, only this kind of honest prayer is true prayer, and it only is *heard* by God.

¹⁴ *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:*

¹⁵ *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

I John 5:14-15

Honest Prayer and Personal Sin

First, no prayer is honest, or is *heard* in the sense of the psalmist's and John's meanings of prayer being acceptable and endorsed by God, except it be the approach to God that is honest in dealing with one's personal sin. Confession of personal sin obtains cleansing through Jesus' blood and is God's requirement for real prayer, *heard* prayer, honest prayer. His death secures forgiveness for, even the absolution and removal of, personal transgressions against God.

⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

I John 1:9

Honest prayer consists explicitly of honest confession of one's sin to the honest God. Honest prayer fuses verbal and spiritual entreaty about sin and its work of death. This death by sin is both a spiritual separation from God now as well as an eternal separation from God in the life to come. Any prayer that fails to deal first with personal sin and its inevitable outcome of death, according to God's irrevocable law of sin and death, is prayer not *heard*, not according to His will, not true prayer, not honest prayer. It is futile prayer because there is no dealing with sin, the end of which can only be death.

This unforgiven sin separates its guilty perpetrators from God and all good, both in this life's experience now and in eternity's ordeal later on. Jesus made this very clear in His Great Sermon when He taught His Kingdom ideal of honest prayer; honest prayer presupposes forgiveness toward others because of the forgiveness experienced from God.

Honest Prayer and Others

Earlier in His Sermon Jesus had dealt with being right with God and not being right with other men. He made it clear that any gift, such as a sacrifice or worship or prayer, was not to be presented to God while animosity or resentment remained between oneself and another Christian.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee:

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Matthew 5:23-24

Honest prayer is a gift of worship and sacrifice to God, and such a gift is not possible while a rift in love exists between members of Christ's body. One cannot approach God in honest prayer when the second table of the law is forgotten, even when the first table seems strictly obeyed. Rightness with God means rightness with man who is made in His image. That is, one cannot show love to God if one is void of love for other men. To harbor malice in the heart toward another while attempting prayer is not workable. Jesus says that honest prayer is not even to be attempted until all is made right with one's brother. Leave the prayer at the prayer altar and go get things right with your brother. Any thing that is inconsistent with our fraternal relations will be inconsistent with all divine relations; and all matters human, affect all matters Godward. Honest prayer is not possible for those who have interrupted relations with others. Affinity with God in prayer is not attainable if antipathy with other men exists. Dishonesty among other men interrupts honesty with God in prayer. The gift of honest prayer is withheld from us and from God while animosity with another person remains in one's heart and mind.

Honest Prayer and The Scriptures

The need to pray honest prayers requires of all men alike that they pray always in accord with reality. Any other prayer is dishonest prayer. Therefore, the Scriptures are the sole source for accuracy in

prayer, because they deal honestly with the realities of man's position before his God. It is this needed scriptural understanding of prayer that obliges men to study the Bible for gaining this precise and detailed wisdom in approaching God in prayer. Honest prayer is biblical and scriptural prayer, because it is in accord with God's ways. The Word of God has the determinant on "honest" prayer. It describes accurately the how's and how-not's of prayer.

Honest Prayer to the All-knowing God

¹*O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

²*Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off.*

³*Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.*

⁴*For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

⁵*Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

⁶*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*

Psalms 139:1-6

The psalmist and Jesus presented honest prayer as what prayer is essentially, fundamentally. The entire Bible and Jesus together present honest prayer as nothing more or less than just talking to God. The word "just" is used not in the sense of "merely," as if to denigrate or to underestimate the value of talking to God, but to emphasize the simple or plain substance of prayer. The term "honest prayer," therefore, is prayer in its essence; and this terminology is meant to highlight the honesty that conversation with Someone Who knows all and does all should involve. Honest prayer is personal conversation—albeit reverent, worshipful, and respectful talking—with God, as Jesus said,

⁶*But thou [in contrast with the public and for-show prayer of the hypocrites] 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.*

⁷*But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

⁸*Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

Matthew 6:6-8

How could anyone talk dishonestly with another Person about personal subjects, or relationships, or needs, or about anything, if he knows positively that Person, to whom he is speaking, knows all about the subjects, relationships, etc.? That fact of God's complete understanding of us and all about us and our lot, focuses our attention upon the need for "honest prayer."

That kind of honest awareness of God was the overriding element in the psalmist's prayer in *Psalms 139* quoted above. God does not hear with acceptance any deceitful or fraudulent entreaty, or any prayer—either in form or substance—which does not respect Him for Who He is; He requires honest prayers. We just do not reach God with any other kind of prayer.

According to the Scripture, honest prayer is plain and truthful talking that not only acknowledges the God Who knows and does all, but is plain and truthful talking which acknowledges His superior Person and marvelous graciousness in even considering our requests. That He even deals with insufficient and wicked men is an occasion for inordinate consideration and respect from us common men. God must be approached with the reverence and respect which the righteous and wise use of His knowledge and power warrants, as well as for His grace in hearing us. Reverence will be shown toward any dignitary of mankind when being approached for personal considerations. How much more must we show honest reverence toward God when approaching Him. If we are to engage in honest prayer we will acknowledge His limitless superiority to us men, and His immense condescension in the very least regard of our prayers. Any approach to God that lacks this

reverence is dishonesty personified in us by such praying; that is dishonest payer to the honest God. That is an admixture that just will not fuse with the Holy Spirit into acceptable discourse with God.

But do not misunderstand, God desires that we pray, but let us not be unmindful to Whom we come in prayer, and let us pray only honest prayers to the honest God. It is to this simple and uncomplicated end that these studies on honest prayer are dedicated. May we pray always in accord with the “uncomplicated” reality of how we appear to the God to Whom we pray; we must learn to pray in accord with God’s true perception of us.

To God’s all-seeing and all-knowing scrutiny, we humans are simple. The psalmist expressed this human trait in his honest prayer to the honest God in *Psalms 139*, *Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off.*¹⁵ Jesus said the same, *For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*¹⁶ But God has ordained honest prayer as the way to talk to Him, and to be considered by Him, though He knows us altogether.

He has allowed us base humans to pray uncomplicated prayers to the very complex, holy God. May we find solace in the fact that we can pray honest prayers to the honest God, and may we experience an ever increasing consolation through the discipline of praying these honest prayers to the honest God, a discipline that continually un.masks our true selves before God’s high throne. With every honest prayer, there is an unbarring of our true selves, that is a good exercise. *Fasts* initiate honest prayer, and *alms* resolve and conclude them. *Fasts* bring all our inmost selves openly before God and ourselves. *Alms* so initialized from such *fasts*-originated humility bring all the glory for their works to God. All honest prayer is from naked supplicants who uncover all in complete honesty before the all-seeing God. Amen.

¹⁵ *Psalms 139:2* ¹⁶ *Matthew 6:8*