

Matthew 6:5-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-6/matthew-65-6/>

Jesus teaches that it is better to pray to your Father in secret and be rewarded by Him than it is to pray in a way to be seen by men and be thought holy by them.

There is no apparent parallel account of this teaching in the Gospels.

Jesus repeats the same pattern of reward from men vs. reward from God; being seen by men or acting in secrecy. This time, in regard to *when you pray*.

As was the case with giving to the poor, the issue is not the external act, but the motivation for doing it. It is a matter of **which** reward we want and **who** is our rewarder—*men* or *your Father* in heaven. Once again Jesus draws a contrast between performing our religious acts in public and in secret. Some people stand and *pray on the street corners so that they may be seen by men*, rather than praying *in secret* unto our *Father*. Once again, Jesus tells His disciples truth, offers them freedom, and allows them to practice self-governance as they seek *reward*.

Jesus says *you are not to be like the hypocrites* (actors and exaggerators) *for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners*. Their prayer motive was not to speak to God. Their motive was to be heard *by men* so they would be honored as being pious. Jesus personally vouches and teaches (*Truly I say to you*) that *they have their reward in full*. They want to be seen as pious, and they are. By men. And *their reward* is paid *in full* when men think them pious. So there is nothing for God to *reward* when they stand before Him to give an account for their deeds done while on earth (Hebrews 4:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Once again, Jesus is not teaching against seeking benefits or rewards any more than He is teaching against praying. What He is teaching is how to *pray* effectively (*to your Father who is in secret*) and how to get the better *reward* (from God instead of *men*).

Jesus tells His disciples that the way to the better *reward when they pray* is to *go into your inner room* (where no one sees you), *close your door* (where no one hears you or knows that you are there) *and then pray to your Father who is in secret*.

When we recall that Jesus is primarily speaking about motivation, the key issue is not the closing of the *door* or entering the *inner room* of the house. The key issue is praying to be in the presence of God rather than to be seen by other people. People can pray to God in the secret quiet of their heart anywhere and at any time. Likewise, people can pray publicly in an *inner room* with a door closed in such a way that people know they are praying. Jesus is not giving another external rule. He is giving an inner law to follow when we pray to our heavenly *Father*.

When we follow this law and *pray to our Father in secret*, He *sees what is done* and said *in secret*. He hears our *secret* prayers, and *sees* what we do when no humans are watching. Jesus tells us that He *will reward what is done in secret*. Jesus does not specify the nature of the

reward. It could relate to the prayer being answered, it could be applied in many other ways in this life, and it could relate to the next life. Since God is God, it can be all the above.

Jesus continues using the personal phrase *your Father* to describe God. We should speak with God the same way we speak with or ask for things from our earthly father. We should discuss matters and ask of our *Father* who is in heaven. An earthly father is, ideally, an authority who loves his children and seeks their best interest. Our *Father* in heaven is a perfect Father. He is our ultimate Authority. He loves us and seeks our best interest in a manner that is perfect. Just as an earthly father might dream that his children will some day grow up and become capable, then join the family business and succeed, our heavenly *Father* wants His children to grow up and learn to serve others in harmony with Him. He desires that they might join His “family business” and reign with Him in His kingdom.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonishes His disciples to trust God rather than self, or other men. He admonishes His disciples to choose a true perspective about life, based on faith in God’s revealed word, including His teaching. He also admonishes them to take actions based on faith in God, and their perspective about what is good, what is true, and what is actually in their best interest. The rest we should not worry about. For the most part, it either isn’t that important, or we can’t control it. But our *Father in heaven* can, and does care for all things. We should focus on the things God has given us to control, and strive to be faithful in those things.

Biblical Text

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.