

John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 6

by John Wesley

John Wesley's sermon emphasizes the importance of purity of intention in our spiritual practices, including giving, prayer, and fasting, while warning against the distractions of material wealth and anxiety.

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-21, Matthew 6:24-27, Matthew 6:30-34

Topics: "Trust in God", "Pure Intentions"

Description

John Wesley emphasizes the significance of pure intentions in our actions, as outlined in Matthew 6. He explains that true holiness stems from the right motives behind giving, praying, and fasting, warning against the hypocrisy of seeking public admiration. Wesley highlights that our focus should be on God and His kingdom rather than worldly concerns, encouraging believers to trust in God's provision. He stresses that anxiety is unnecessary for those who serve God, as He knows our needs. Ultimately, Wesley calls for a heart aligned with God's righteousness, assuring that those who seek Him will find fulfillment.

Transcript

VI. 1. In the foregoing chapter our Lord particularly described the nature of inward holiness. In this he describes that purity of intention without which none of our outward actions are holy. This chapter contains four parts, 1. The right intention and manner of giving alms, verse 1-4. 2. The right intention, manner, form, and prerequisites of prayer, verse 5-15. 3. The right intention, and manner of fasting, verse 16-18. 4. The necessity of a pure intention in all things, unmixed either with the desire of riches, or worldly care, and fear of want, verse 19-34. This verse is a general caution against vain glory, in any of our good works: All these are here summed up together, in the comprehensive word righteousness. This general caution our Lord applies in the sequel to the three principal branches of it, relating to our neighbour, verse 2-4: to God, verse 5,6: and to ourselves, verse 16-18. To be seen - Barely the being seen, while we are doing any of these things, is a circumstance purely indifferent. But the doing them with this view, to be seen and admired, this is what our Lord condemns.

Verse 2. As the hypocrites do - Many of the scribes and Pharisees did this, under a pretence of calling the poor together. They have their reward - All they will have; for they shall have none from God.

Verse 3. Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth - A proverbial expression for doing a thing secretly. Do it as secretly as is consistent, 1. With the doing it at all. 2. With the doing it in the most effectual manner.

Verse 5. The synagogues - These were properly the places where the people assembled for public prayer, and hearing the Scriptures read and expounded. They were in every city from the time of the Babylonish captivity, and had service in them thrice a day on three days in the week. In every synagogue was a council of grave and wise persons, over whom was a president, called the ruler of the synagogue. But the word here, as well as in many other texts, signifies any place of public concourse.

Verse 6. Enter into thy closet - That is, do it with as much secrecy as thou canst.

Verse 7. Use not vain repetitions - To repeat any words without meaning them, is certainly a vain repetition. Therefore we should be extremely careful in all our prayers to mean what we say; and to say only what we mean from the bottom of our hearts. The vain and heathenish repetitions which we are here warned against, are most dangerous, and yet very common; which is a principal cause why so many, who still profess religion, are a disgrace to it. Indeed all the words in the world are not equivalent to one holy desire. And the very best prayers are but vain repetitions, if they are not the language of the heart.

Verse 8. Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of - We do not pray to inform God of our wants. Omniscient as he is, he cannot be informed of any thing which he knew not before: and he is always willing to relieve them. The chief thing wanting is, a fit disposition on our part to receive his grace and blessing. Consequently, one great office of prayer is, to produce such a disposition in us: to exercise our dependence on God; to increase our desire of the things we ask for; to us so sensible of our wants, that we may never cease wrestling till we have prevailed for the blessing.

Verse 9. Thus therefore pray ye - He who best knew what we ought to pray for, and how we ought to pray, what matter of desire, what manner of address would most please himself, would best become us, has here dictated to us a most perfect and universal form of prayer, comprehending all our real wants, expressing all our lawful desires; a complete directory and full exercise of all our devotions. Thus - For these things; sometimes in these words, at least in this manner, short, close, full. This prayer consists of three parts, the preface, the petitions, and the conclusion. The preface, Our Father, who art in heaven, lays a general foundation for prayer, comprising what we must first know of God, before we can pray in confidence of being heard. It likewise points out to us our that faith, humility, love, of God and man, with which we are to approach God in prayer. Chapter Overview

I. Our Father - Who art good and gracious to all, our Creator, our Preserver; the Father of our Lord, and of us in him, thy children by adoption and grace: not my Father only, who now cry unto thee, but the Father of the universe, of angels and men: who art in heaven - Beholding all things, both in heaven and earth; knowing every creature, and all the works of every creature, and every possible event from everlasting to everlasting: the almighty Lord and Ruler of all, superintending and disposing all things; in heaven - Eminently there, but not there alone, seeing thou fillest heaven and earth.

II. 1. Hallowed be thy name - Mayest thou, O Father, be truly known by all intelligent beings, and with affections suitable to that knowledge: mayest thou be duly honoured, loved, feared, by all in heaven and earth, by all angels and all men. 2. Thy kingdom come - May thy kingdom of grace come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth: may all mankind, receiving thee, O Christ, for their king, truly believing in thy name, be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy; with holiness and happiness, till they are removed hence into thy kingdom of glory, to reign with thee for ever and ever. 3.

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven - May all the inhabitants of the earth do thy will as willingly as the holy angels: may these do it continually even as they, without any interruption of their willing service;

yea, and perfectly as they: mayest thou, O Spirit of grace, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make them perfect in every good work to do thy will, and work in them all that is well pleasing in thy sight. 4. Give us - O Father (for we claim nothing of right, but only of thy free mercy) this day - (for we take no thought for the morrow) our daily bread - All things needful for our souls and bodies: not only the meat that perisheth, but the sacramental bread, and thy grace, the food which endureth to everlasting life. 5.

And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors - Give us, O Lord, redemption in thy blood, even the forgiveness of sins: as thou enablest us freely and fully to forgive every man, so do thou forgive all our trespasses. 6. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil -Whenever we are tempted, O thou that helpst our infirmities, suffer us not to enter into temptation; to be overcome or suffer loss thereby; but make a way for us to escape, so that we may be more than conquerors, through thy love, over sin and all the consequences of it.

Now the principal desire of a Christian's heart being the glory of God, (ver. 9, 10,) Matthew 6:9,10 and all he wants for himself or his brethren being the daily bread of soul and body, (or the support of life, animal and spiritual,) pardon of sin, and deliverance from the power of it and of the devil, (ver. 11, 12, 13,) Matthew 6:11,12,13 there is nothing beside that a Christian can wish for; therefore this prayer comprehends all his desires. Eternal life is the certain consequence, or rather completion of holiness.

III. For thine is the kingdom - The sovereign right of all things that are or ever were created: The power - the executive power, whereby thou governest all things in thy everlasting kingdom: And the glory - The praise due from every creature, for thy power, and all thy wondrous works, and the mightiness of thy kingdom, which endureth through all ages, even for ever and ever. It is observable, that though the doxology, as well as the petitions of this prayer, is threefold, and is directed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost distinctly, yet is the whole fully applicable both to every person, and to the ever - blessed and undivided trinity. Luke 11:2.

Verse 14. Mark 11:25.

Verse 16. When ye fast? - Our Lord does not enjoin either fasting, alms-deeds, or prayer: all these being duties which were before fully established in the Church of God. Disfigure - By the dust and ashes which they put upon their heads, as was usual at the times of solemn humiliation.

Verse 17. Anoint thy head - So the Jews frequently did. Dress thyself as usual.

Verse 19. Lay not up for yourselves - Our Lord here makes a transition from religious to common actions, and warns us of another snare, the love of money, as inconsistent with purity of intention as the love of praise. Where rust and moth consume - Where all things are perishable and transient. He may likewise have a farther view in these words, even to guard us against making any thing on earth our treasure. For then a thing properly becomes our treasure, when we set our affections upon it. Luke 12:33.

Verse 21. Luke 11:34.

Verse 22. The eye is the lamp of the body - And what the eye is to the body, the intention is to the soul. We may observe with what exact propriety our Lord places purity of intention between worldly desires and worldly cares, either of which directly tend to destroy. If thine eye be single - Singly fixed on God and heaven, thy whole soul will be full of holiness and happiness. If thine eye be evil - Not single, aiming at any thing else.

Verse 24. Mammon - Riches, money; any thing loved or sought, without reference to God. Luke 16:13.

Verse 25. And if you serve God, you need be careful for nothing. Therefore take not thought - That is, be not anxiously careful. Beware of worldly cares; for these are as inconsistent with the true service of God as worldly desires. Is not the life more than meat? - And if God give the greater gift, will he deny the smaller? Luke 12:22.

Verse 27. And which of you - If you are ever so careful, can even add a moment to your own life thereby? This seems to be far the most easy and natural sense of the words.

Verse 29. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these -Not in garments of so pure a white. The eastern monarchs were often clothed in white robes.

Verse 30. The grass of the field - is a general expression, including both herbs and flowers. Into the still - This is the natural sense of the passage. For it can hardly be supposed that grass or flowers should be thrown into the oven the day after they were cut down. Neither is it the custom in the hottest countries, where they dry fastest, to heat ovens with them. If God so clothe - The word properly implies, the putting on a complete dress, that surrounds the body on all sides; and beautifully expresses that external membrane, which (like the skin in a human body) at once adorns the tender fabric of the vegetable, and guards it from the injuries of the weather. Every microscope in which a flower is viewed gives a lively comment on this text.

Verse 31. Therefore take not thought - How kind are these precepts! The substance of which is only this, Do thyself no harm! Let us not be so ungrateful to him, nor so injurious to ourselves, as to harass and oppress our minds with that burden of anxiety, which he has so graciously taken off. Every verse speaks at once to the understanding, and to the heart. We will not therefore indulge these unnecessary, these useless, these mischievous cares. We will not borrow the anxieties and distresses of the morrow, to aggravate those of the present day. Rather we will cheerfully repose ourselves on that heavenly Father, who knows we have need of these things; who has given us the life, which is more than meat, and the body, which is more than raiment. And thus instructed in the philosophy of our heavenly Master, we will learn a lesson of faith and cheer. fulness from every bird of the air, and every flower of the field.

Verse 33. Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness - Singly aim at this, that God, reigning in your heart, may fill it with the righteousness above described. And indeed whosoever seeks this first, will soon come to seek this only.

Verse 34. The morrow shall take thought for itself - That is, be careful for the morrow when it comes. The evil thereof - Speaking after the manner of men. But all trouble is, upon the whole, a real good. It is good physic which God dispenses daily to his children, according to the need and the strength of each.

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