

General Statement.

The last lesson showed the principle of love as supplementing the commandments of the moral law, and showed, too, how this principle applies itself to correct and extirpate such forms of evil as anger, lust, profanity, and other crimes. With this lesson another theme in this incomparable discourse is opened. We are shown how the law may be fulfilled in good deeds to our fellow-men, and in prayer to God. We are warned against the hypocritical display of our righteousness in our gifts to the needy and in our devotions with our heavenly Father. As an illustration of hypocrisy we see the Pharisee sounding a trumpet when about to give alms to the poor, that his good deeds may be known to the world; and standing in the market-place or the public street at the hour of prayer, so that men

may behold his worship. Such righteousness as this has the reward for which it seeks—the praise of men; but it has no reward from God, for it is not actuated by the fear of God. In contrast with such ostentation, the disciple of Christ is commanded to give alms and show mercy and make his good deeds private, not permitting his left hand to know the good deeds wrought by his right hand. He is bidden to offer his prayer in secret, pouring out his soul where only God can see, and lifting up a supplication which only God can hear. This is the giving and this the praying which is acceptable with God. As an example of prayer, we are taught "The Lord's Prayer," that model of simplicity, directness, and breadth which meets the needs of every soul.

Explanatory and Practical Notes.

Verses 1. Take heed. This verse is the text for this part of the discourse, and states the principle of which the succeeding verses contain the illustrations. **Alms.** Rev. Ver., "righteousness." This is the reading of the best manuscripts, and should be recognized as the true text. The word here means "religious conduct," inclusive of moral actions, good deeds, and worship. **Before men, to be seen.** The evil lies not in doing our good actions "before men," which may be necessary, but in doing them "to be seen." (1) *The moral element of every act lies in its motive.* **No reward of your Father.** There may be a reward in the praise of men for the deed done to be seen, but there is no reward from God. **Your Father which is in heaven.** The conception of God as our Father may be found in the Old Testament, but only in the Gospel is it made the center of the system of religion. (2) *Whether saint or sinner, you have a right to call God your Father, and to seek a Father's grace.*

2. Therefore. Because of this principle already stated, that God accepts, no righteousness which aims merely to please men. **When thou doest thine alms.** Alms are gifts and services to the poor, which our Lord presupposes his disciples will give. (3) *All men are brothers, since God is our Father, and we must give aid to our own kindred who need.* **Do not sound a trumpet.** There may have been some who actually made such a proclamation, ostensibly to gather the needy, but really to call attention to their own liberality. We were informed by the late A. O. Van Lennep that he often witnessed such events before the doors of the rich in Asia Minor. Dr. Ginsburg gives another meaning: that there were boxes in the temple shaped like trumpets, with open mouths, to receive gifts. Some shook the brazen trumpet when depositing their coin, in order to make it sound the louder. (4) *So at the present there are some who give only when their contributions are sounded forth abroad and reported in the newspapers.* **The synagogues.** Places of meeting for worship, where gifts for the poor were received. (5) *Not to those who worship God are the ones who give to their fellow-men.* **They have their reward.** They have what they seek, the praise of men, and they have that only.

3. When thou. Thou, the disciple of Christ, who was content to make himself of no reputation, that he might save men. **Doest alms.** Alms-giving does not demand an indiscriminate liberality to all applicants. There may sometimes be more righteousness in withholding than in giving. **Let not thy left hand know.** As an Oriental proverb says, "If thou doest any good, cast it into the sea; if the fish shall not know it, the Lord knows it."

4. That thy alms may be in secret. Literally, "in the hidden." This does not mean that we should refrain from doing good when others may hear of it, but that our motive should never be to attract notice from men. The precept is not against all public giving, for that is commended in the example of the early Church (Acts 4, 34, 35; 1 Cor. 16, 1, 2), but against the spirit of ostentation. **Thy Father which seeth in secret.** He knows the secret motive, both of the hypocrite and the true giver. **Himself shall reward thee.** He will reward as a father, not as a master who gives wages and no more. Rev. Ver., "shall recompense thee." The word in the original is not that used in verse 2. There it means wages for hire; here it means a gift of grace.

The reward comes in the peace of God, the consciousness of blessing others, and in the eternal recompense.

5. When thou prayest. That men would pray is assumed. **Prayer is not to consist in repeating the sermon on the Mount.**—*Schaff.* **Shalt not be as the hypocrites.** The word means, "those who pretend to be what they are not," especially those who profess a religion which they do not possess. **They love to pray standing.** The evil was not in the posture, nor the place, for prayer is an essential part of worship, and standing was the customary attitude of the Jews; but in the fact that the prayers were offered to attract notice from men. **Corners of the street.** The rabbis had prescribed eighteen stated prayers for every day, to be used at set times, wherever the worshiper chanced to be at that moment. **The Samaritan will fall on his face in the street or in the shop at the moment of the muezzin's call, and perform his devotions.** **They have their reward.** The reputation for piety, which they seek, rather than true worship.

6. Enter into thy closet. Rev. Ver., "thine inner chamber." Any retreat in which the soul may be alone with God is a closet. (6) *"Every man can build a chapel in his heart."*—*Jeremy Taylor.* **Pray to thy Father.** In our prayer we should remember that God is not a merciless judge, but a tender Father. Which is in secret. God is everywhere, yet unseen. Seest in secret. The great benefit of secret prayer lies in its freedom. We can tell to God alone what we cannot reveal to others; and only in secret can the heart be opened to the Lord. **Reward thee openly.** No earnest prayer is unavailing; for if not answered in our way it will be answered in a better way. (7) *The hour spent alone with God will have its results among men.*

7. Use not vain repetitions. Literally, "babble not." The Lord does not forbid the use of forms of prayer, nor of repetition in prayer, for he prayed thrice in Gethsemane, using the same words. But he warns us against the mistake of supposing that our prayers will have virtue because of their repetition. As the **heathendo.** Rev. Ver., "the Gentiles." Such were the repetitions of the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18, 26), such to the prayers addressed by Hindu votaries, and such the "aves" and "patenosters" of the Romish Church, whose power is supposed to dwell in the number of times they are repeated.

8. Your Father knoweth. We pray, not to inform God, but to relieve our own burdened hearts, and to bring ourselves into communion with the Highest. As Jerome says, "It is one thing to inform the ignorant, and another to beseech the Omniscient." We pray, not to make God willing to give, but to bring ourselves into condition to receive. (8) *What inexpressible comfort is in those words, "Your father knoweth!"*

9. After this manner. We may regard the Lord's prayer both as a form to be employed, and a model to be followed in our prayers. **Our Father.** Recognizing the tender relation between God and man, and the reverence, obedience and goodwill which should mark us as his children. **In heaven.** And hence divine and spiritual, coming to us from above, and possessing all power. **Hallowed be thy name.** The first petition of this pattern prayer, and the one which should be the honor and holiness of God's name among men. (9)