

**The Gospel of Matthew  
Week Six  
Matthew 5:43 – 6:18**

**Day One**

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

v. 43 – It is natural and consistent with human nature to love those who are for you and hate those against you. Right now as I write, there is ethnic, tribal violence in Kenya due to the latest election. Those from the same tribe are standing with their own, while they harass and harm those of another tribe, their perceived enemies. That seems “normal” and is consistent with human tendencies and history.

v. 44 – Alas, Jesus reversed this and commanded that we do something totally counter-intuitive. We are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This is what the world expects of Christians because it is the one distinguishing characteristics that sets Christianity apart from every other movement.

**Do you have any “enemies”? If you do, do you love them? If not, why not? What can you do to align your heart with the commands of Jesus on this issue?**

v. 45 – If you love your enemies, you are a son of our Father in heaven. **Why?** Because that is what He does – He loves those who don't love Him. He cares for them by sending them food. He watches over them and protects them. Notice Jesus did not say that God was the Father of those who don't love Him. He is their Creator and God, and we share humanity with them, but we are not part of the same family, for God isn't their Father. He is only Father to those who have come into right relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

We are not, however, to misunderstand God's kindness toward those who hate Him and His people:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare (2 Peter 3:8-10).

God's care and provision are *not* based on His approval of all mankind and their behavior, but on His love for all mankind, as He desires them to repent and come to life in Christ.

## Day Two

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

v. 46 – Jesus reminded His listeners that God is watching their every action and will reward them accordingly. There is no reward for only loving those who love you. Even the “tax collectors” did that. Jesus chose one of the most hated occupations in Jewish culture so that His audience would get a clear picture – even the most immoral men you can imagine, your tax gatherers, love those who love them. If you want to go beyond their righteousness let alone that of the Pharisees, you must learn to love your enemies – that was Jesus’ message.

I can remember being in Japan a few years ago and feeling angry and agitated. The Lord helped me see that I was holding their Pearl Harbor attack on the United States against the Japanese, even though it had happened before I was born! They were no longer enemies of the U.S., but I was treating them as my enemies! I asked God to forgive me right then and there and asked Him to replace my hatred with His love. I have never been back to Japan, but would welcome the chance to do so.

### **Do you have any enemies whom you need to forgive and learn to love?**

v. 47 – Jesus expected His followers to model a behavior that set them apart from those around them, a behavior that God would reward and that would do “more” than anyone expected. I didn’t make up the word “more;” it’s in this verse. In modern marketing terms, Jesus taught that people encountering His disciples should have a “wow” experience. In some sense, we should take the breath away from those who have contact with us, something akin to what happened to the Queen of Sheba when she met with Solomon:

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed. She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the Lord

your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness" (1 Kings 10:1-9).

**When is the last time you took someone's breath away when they encountered you going the extra mile expressing and acting out your love for the unlovely? When is the last time a heathen princess praised your God for the reality of love and excellence that she saw in you and the people around you?**

v. 48 – This verse has caused some problems for interpreters, for some have believed that Jesus' words here indicated that sinless perfection on earth is possible and therefore a worthy goal and expectation. I am not a Greek expert but something isn't quite right in that particular interpretation and expectation. The word in question is translated to mean "mature" here, and I will let the Amplified Bible translation communicate the intent of the word in this case:

*"perfect [growing into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity]"*

**Are you growing in maturity where your spirituality is concerned? Are you closer to God and godliness this year than you were last year?**

### Day Three

6:1 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 1 – **Does this mean that you are to never do any good acts before others?**

Absolutely not! The message in the context here is motivation. If you do your good deeds to get the attention of others, then that is your reward. If you perform your good deeds to give God the glory, then that is a whole different story. **How can you be sure what your motives are?** Well, I would think your first motivation to do the good deed is the benefit that will accrue to the recipient. Then, you should be mindful as to whether or not people will thank God for what you have done. If, however, you don't get any public notice for your deed and you feel bad about it, or your feelings are hurt, then perhaps you did not have the right motive in the first place.

v. 2 – Note that Jesus said "when" you give to the needy not "if by chance." **How often and what do you give to those in need? What more can you do?** There were some in Jesus' day who were giving, announcing it with trumpets (another hyperbole), to garner

attention and praise. They were hypocrites because they were using the poor, for whom they had little regard, to build their own reputation.

This gave the listeners a practical illustration of what Jesus was talking about. I think, however, that we must be careful when we judge someone else's motives as to why they give. Only God knows their heart, so I think I should simply focus on my motives for giving and leave the judging of others to God. **Do you agree?**

v. 3 – This particular form of doing good – giving to the poor – needs to be done in a more secretive manner than other good deeds. I have found great joy in giving to a special need anonymously, while being close enough to the recipient to see their joy and how it translates into thanks to God. I think there may be times when your giving cannot be in secret, but then you must do a motive-check to see why you are giving. If there is even a chance that you are doing to feed your ego, then find another way to give that is more secretive and anonymous.

v. 4 – Jesus was trying to “position” the givers for maximum benefit. If all they wanted from their gift was the praise of men, they were settling for far less than could be theirs. If they gave to win God's favor, then they had gained something special indeed. God is watching what you give and why you give it. He will reward you:

He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done (Proverbs 19:17).

#### Day Four

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

v. 5 – This isn't the first reference to hypocrites that Jesus made. The word for hypocrite is a Greek word that comes from the theater. It referred to those who wore masks to convey their moods. Thus religious hypocrites were those who wore masks to perform before people. Jesus came to say that God desired truth and reality from people in order to give them grace. If they were pretending to already be something that they were not, then God could not help them.

Just like in giving, if people were praying to be noticed, then being noticed was their both their reward and the answer to their prayers. That would certainly be a goal far below what prayer was meant to achieve. **Prayers are offered for God to hear, not for men to observe! Do you want people to notice the spiritual things you do?** There is nothing wrong with doing spiritual things in public unless that is your purpose for doing them – public notice, that is.

Since God looks at the hearts of men and women, He is more concerned with inward things than people are. Plus, He is the only One who knows for sure what is going on in the heart. That is why I am less apt to judge people according to what I think is in their heart, for I cannot know for sure. I can only deal with my own heart, which I must do on a regular basis, and leave other's hearts for God to deal with.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the LORD." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either" (1 Samuel 16:6-8).

v. 6 – Jesus was not prohibiting open, public prayer. He was simply addressing the public displays of prayer that had become so prevalent among the Pharisees and leaders. He wanted the people to understand the most important aspect of giving and prayer and that was doing it for and unto God. He also wanted to position people to receive the maximum benefit from their spiritual disciplines. If public recognition was their only objective, then they were indeed spiritually anemic, for God could not reward them as He wanted to do. **Are you receiving the full benefit from your spiritual activities?** You can do this by doing whatever you do for God and Him alone.

v. 7 – Technique is not that important in prayer. An honest and open heart is. If a multitude of words aren't needed, then neither is shouting! I have often wondered why so many people believe that the volume of their voice adds anything to prayer. I am not against talking in a loud voice when there is urgency or when someone is pouring out their heart to God. Yet if someone yells every time they pray, then it seems to me to be a ritual that they expect will somehow increase the probability that God will hear and answer them. If a multitude of words don't help prayers be heard, then I doubt if shouting at God does either. I may be wrong. **What do you think?**

### Day Five

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread.

v. 8 – I may get in trouble with some for writing this, but I think we must be careful not to get into a "works mentality" where prayer is concerned. I have heard some say, "Nothing happens until we pray." I'm not sure that's true. **What do you think? Does God limit what He does to what His people pray?** Then I've heard some others declare that the problems in the nation or world are there because the church isn't praying like it should. Yet, in my opinion, there is more prayer being offered up now than at any time I can remember in my lifetime. **Is it that we aren't praying or is it that God isn't**

**doing what we ask, because God wants to do something else other than what we are trying to impose on Him?**

I try to make my prayers simple and “economical.” God does indeed know my needs and heart and I don’t have to repeat my petitions over and over to get His attention. I also don’t need to mention His name every third word: “Lord, I thank You, Lord, and I come before You, Lord, and I ask You, Lord, to do great things, Lord, in Your power, Lord.” When I talk to anyone else, I don’t say his or her name over and over in the conversation. I don’t need to do that with God either.

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord (Psalm 139:1-4).

v. 9 – I’ll probably stir up controversy with this next statement as well, but I don’t think the Lord meant for us to memorize this prayer and recite it to Him verbatim on a regular basis. Jesus said we should pray *like* this, not pray this *exactly*. The Lord’s prayer, as we know it today, is a pattern, not a law. When I was young, I recited this prayer and it meant very little to me. I know people who pray this prayer no matter what they need from God. They don’t believe their own words will be good enough to touch or reach God, so they pray this prayer. I have heard of soldiers praying this prayer in battle. If I am in battle, I want to pray, “Lord, help me! Protect me!” **Do you agree or disagree? What benefit is there in praying this prayer over and over again, word for word? Do you think that was what Jesus intended to happen?**

v. 10 – I had better be careful in this discussion, for I don’t have particularly deep or relevant insight into prayer. When I was a pastor, I preached a series on prayer and the people were more confused when I was done than when I started! I had them thinking about something that should flow naturally. It was kind of like dissecting a frog in biology class. You can take and display all the frog parts but you can put them back together again. You no longer have a frog but only the parts that make up a frog. That was how it was with my teaching on prayer. People had all the parts, but they couldn’t put them back together to make a whole.

v. 11 – It is good to be mindful that God is our source of provision, for health, money and food. It is good to ask and thank Him for them all. He is our Provider and He has a wonderful job. **Have you thanked Him lately for His many blessings and provision?**

### Day Six

12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' 14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

vs. 12-14 – Along with requests for provision, we should ask the Lord to forgive our sins. I am grateful to my Catholic upbringing, for confession was and is a part of my heritage. I am mindful that I must ask forgiveness of God for my sins and be specific when I ask. I try to do this several times a week.

Furthermore, I ask God to show me if there is anyone I need to forgive, for unforgiveness can easily creep unnoticed into daily affairs. It seems from this verse that there is a relationship between my forgiving others and God forgiving me. This is how most translators render this verse. I wish I knew a little more Greek, for this interpretation seems to put a condition on God's forgiveness. **What about someone who comes to the Lord, hasn't dealt with the unforgiveness in their own heart, yet asks God to forgive them? Does He?** I believe He does! He doesn't require that first they forgive everyone against whom they have aught before He forgives their sins.

To me, this seems like a flow or a process. I am forgiving and God is forgiving; we are both flowing in forgiveness. I should not block or hinder this process, and Jesus is directing us to pray that this doesn't happen. So I forgive because God has forgiven me and because I forgive, God keeps on forgiving me. **That's a nice flow to be in, don't you think?**

Jesus also directed us to pray that God would protect us from temptation and the evil one. I have often heard people address the devil directly and insult him. I have never done that. First of all, I don't talk to the world of darkness. I never opened a service by binding the devil and sending him away. I wasn't in church to talk about the devil but about God. Second, I have great respect and some fear of an opponent so powerful and intelligent. They are much too powerful and wily for me, so I would rather pray to God and rely on God's protection:

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them (Jude 8-10).

v. 15 – If someone refuses to forgive someone else and willfully continues in this decision, then I can see God shutting off the forgiveness that He gives. **Is there anyone whom you need to forgive, even if you have forgiven them in the past?**

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:13).

### Day Seven

16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

v. 16 – Jesus said “when you fast.” **When is the last time you fasted? How often do you do so? Do you fast or do the ever-popular Daniel fast, which releases you to eat everything but meat, poultry and fish?** I am not against a Daniel diet, but fasting is just that: not eating! I have heard people say, “I am fasting from TV and newspapers.” I’m not sure that is what Jesus had in mind when He said “when you fast.” You don’t have to put “oil on your face” if you don’t watch television. I think stepping away from TV every now and then is good. I just don’t think it’s fasting.

Jesus was not only establishing proper behavior in God’s kingdom, but proper motivation for the behavior. This is the third time He mentioned the possibility of doing things for public notice: prayer, giving, and now fasting. When the Pharisees did things for public show, it must have had a profound effect in the people’s minds. Jesus went out of His way to establish that God was more interested in heart matters and not external things. While there are times when you may pray, fast or give publicly, the motivation cannot be to get notice and respect. If that is the motivation, then the giver or pray-er has his or her reward in full.

vs. 17&18 – I have often said in my messages that God has a big book and a sharp pencil. He writes down everything you for others in His name and He never forgets. I always keep in mind the image of Mordecai and the king as a reminder of God and His ability to reward people for their good deeds.

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered. The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him. His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!' " "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended (Esther 6:1-10).

Not only did the king honor Mordecai, but he chose Haman, Mordecai's arch-enemy, to do the honoring. So God rewards good deeds and He often does it with a sense of humor!

**Are you discouraged in doing good?** Don't be. God sees and rewards in His own way and time. As we close this week's study, keep these words from Paul in mind:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:7-10).