

How God Feels
Matthew 6:5-8

October 20, 2019

5 And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The title is *How God Feels*, actually I cannot tell you how God feels. We cannot read God's mind or evaluate divine emotions. We simply do not know how God feels. What we do know is that God is a god of love. God desires to maintain a relationship with humanity and God has expectations of human beings. We know that from a perspective of human action there are some things that are pleasing to God and there are some things that God does not like. But how God might actually feel, we can only imagine.

The content of Matthew chapter 6 is early in the ministry of Jesus. He is baptized in chapter 3, faces temptation in chapter 4, gives the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5, and in chapter 6 he continues on with lessons. There are three disciplines that he brings up. This is a foundation, building blocks, for Jesus' teaching ministry. Jesus teaches his followers to do three things: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Righteousness is demonstrated through these three things. So, it is assumed that Jesus' followers will do these. In order to teach the discipline of righteous action Jesus has to address the contrast between righteousness and hypocrisy. The hypocrites display piety for show in order to win attention for themselves. In reality they only pretend to be pious. They are more concerned with honor for themselves than for God.

Today's Scripture is a lesson on prayer. Adult males were expected to pray daily on a regular basis. Prayers were held in private and prayers were held in public - in the temples and on the streets. What Jesus protests is showy, pompous, or verbose prayers. He warns the disciples (and he warns us today through the Scripture) do not be like the hypocrites. Do not perform acts of righteous in order to be seen by others. Righteousness is not to be practiced for attention. Righteousness is to be in communion with God. Jesus rejects flamboyant prayer because it is aimed at human favor. The hypocrites called attention to themselves when they made a public display of their prayers. What Jesus calls for is authentic prayer. Jesus teaches a fundamental principle, a contrast between public action and private action, a contrast between action that is seen by people vs. action that is only seen by God. So, what Jesus is in essence teaching is sincerity. Your prayers need to be sincere and intimate. At stake is not the question of private or public forms of righteousness but sincerity, letting the Holy Spirit guide your life as opposed to doing whatever is popular.

God is no stranger to us. We are God's children. So, go to a private place to pray, away from public attention, where your prayer will be personal and sincere. You are to pray on your own, one on one, with God. Your prayer is you being in conversation with God. The principle that Jesus teaches is a principle that Jesus practices. He went off to be alone in prayer sometimes for a long time, even all night long. All worship is to be God centered. It is a real event where the worshiper is in communion with God. The same is true with almsgiving. It is not the act itself that is condemned; it is the motive that is condemned. Giving to the needy is not to be done to impress a human audience. The same is true with speaking in tongues which is done for show to

impress humans and manipulate others into thinking one has a special spiritual gift. God knows who you are and what you need. It is not a matter of trying to impress; it is a matter of being in communion with God.

When I was thinking about going into ministry I paid attention to the prayers of the ministers. I thought these guys are really good. The theological, high education language, sounds rich and good. I studied them for the sophisticated effect and to make sure I was politically correct. But then one day a young college student lead the youth group in prayer. She prayed like this "Dear God, you are so awesome, we just love you so much..." Her prayer was like no other prayer I have ever heard. Her prayer was from the heart. I decided that is going to be my model for prayer,

Now back to the title *How God Feels*. The loneliest time of my life was 1977 when I was overseas for Christmas. It was my only Christmas away from home. I missed dearly my mother, father, and brothers. What I cherished the most, more than anything, were the letters from home. Well, that Christmas my brother Jesse sent me a fruitcake. Personally I don't like fruitcake. But, I loved that gift! It was so thoughtful I will never forget it. We were out on maneuvers in the middle of nowhere when mail call came. I wasn't expecting anything and I got this box in the mail. I opened it up and it was a fruitcake. What a wonderful surprise! Everybody wanted some. It was fantastic! What was so great was the thoughtfulness, the love and care that went into it.

Now imagine how God feels if our attitudes are complacent. Imagine how God feels if we worship only when we feel like it. Imagine how God feels if there is nothing thoughtful or meaningful in our worship or in our hearts. Imagine how God feels if we pray only when we want something or read the Bible only when it's convenient for us. It is a parent and child relationship. We owe your devotion to the one who creates life and sustains life. We owe your love to the one who loves us.