

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PRAYER

TEXT: *Matthew 6:5-7 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

INTRO.: A. The question we are addressing today is “**PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PRAYER**”. In other words what does the Bible have to say about prayer in general and more specifically regarding these two areas? In our text Jesus condemns the public prayers of the religious “hypocrites” of His day who prayed publicly to impress others. But does that mean that all public praying is wrong?

B. What about prayer meetings where groups or individuals pray aloud? What about leaders in the church praying in public. What about pastoral prayers? In my own ministry in later years I did away with the formal “Pastoral Prayer” in services due to personal convictions. This does not mean that I never prayed in public, but I got convicted that sometimes I was praying to impress the hearers in the congregation rather than sincerely to the Lord alone.

I. PRIVATE PRAYER:

A. Encouraged Throughout the Bible:

1. The great leaders and others prayed privately to the Lord, most often when they were completely alone.
2. Usually it was Moses, Elijah, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, etc. and God alone.
 - a. Of course the subject of their prayers were either about themselves and their need for God’s direction or for those they were leading.
 - b. **Moses** interceded in behalf of **a wayward nation**, **Elijah** pled for **his people**, and **David** prayed in the Psalms **for his people, himself and against his enemies** (imprecatory prayers), **Solomon** prayed when the Temple was complete **to praise The Lord**, **The Prophets** prayed for **God’s protection and provision for Israel**.
 - c. **Daniel** prayed several times a day.

Dan 6:10 *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

- d. In the N.T. **Jesus** often separated Himself from His disciples to go **pray alone**.
- e. We do not read much about Apostolic prayers, although **Philip** prayed for **his persecutors**, **Paul** prayed for **the churches** and admonished others to **pray for friends who were sick**, etc., **James** urged folks to request prayer **for themselves when they were sick**, **John** told us **NOT TO PRAY** for **those who commit the sin unto death!** **Peter** prayed alone and God answered him with a vision of a great sheet lowered from heaven to teach him **not to discriminate against Gentiles**.

NOTE: As far as I can find in the Bible there were little or no public prayer meetings as we practice today. That is **not to say** that there were NO public prayer meetings. The passage in **Acts 2:41:42** speaks of what could be interpreted as public prayer meetings in the early church. (?)

B. The Preponderance of Biblical Evidence Favors Private Praying:

II. PUBLIC PRAYER:

A. O. T. Examples:

1. The O.T. Priestly Class were intercessors in that they offered sacrifices in behalf of others.
2. The people in Israel apparently had special times for daily prayers, but whether these

were collective or corporate prayers as individuals or prayer gatherings as in the time of Jesus is not stated.

Luke 1:10 *And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.*

- a. We really don't know if these folks were praying *aloud or silently* or *individually or collectively*.
- b. Incense in the Tabernacle and Temple represented prayer.

B. N.T. Examples:

1. Here are other passages of Scripture that are often used to speak of public prayers:

1 Tim 2:8 *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*

Acts 12:12 *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying .*

Acts 1:13-14 *And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

2. Were these folks praying together aloud or silently and privately?

NOTE: There is an old adage that speaks to this issue about public prayer: *"Long in private, short in public; short in private, long in public!"*

- a. Often praying in public is directed to others rather than to the Lord.
 - b. This is exactly what Jesus rebuked in our text passage.
 - c. Prayer is not about eloquence, but about sincerity.
3. Were these folks praying aloud together or one at a time?
 4. Jesus used a parable about two men who were apparently praying aloud in the temple in **Luke 18:10-14** – Jesus rebuked the Pharisee but not the publican.

ILLUS.: In one well known preacher's church down south all the men gather at the altar to pray aloud and it sounds like the Tower of Babel. In another southern church where I have preached a number of times the men gather before a service and all pray aloud at the same time. It is confusing.

1 Cor 14:15 *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

1 Cor 14:40 *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

5. It is very difficult when praying in public to be completely at ease in confessing our sins and weaknesses & I believe that before we ask anything of the Lord we should begin with confession.

NOTE: Each day in the Tabernacle and Temple those on duty stopped by the Laver to wash their hands and feet to rid themselves of the past day's defilement. As N.T. priests we should stop at the laver of God's throne and confess our sins.

6. It is more difficult when praying in public to be humble because we know others are listening.
 - a. Private or closet prayer is more likely to be honest and open than public prayer.
 - b. Sincerity and honesty should be foremost in our prayer life.

CONCL.: Public prayer should be God-honoring, selfless, and based in a true desire to speak to God and not to men. If we can pray publicly without violating these principles, we do well to pray publicly. If, however, our conscience forbids it, there is nothing less effective about a prayer offered in secret.

