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Matthew 6:1-18

Seek God's Glory, Not Your Glory

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I'm always heartbroken to talk to someone who professes to be a Christian but refuses to be a part of a church. When I ask them why, they usually point to past scars where they felt hurt and betrayed by the church, often involving examples of *hypocrisy*. I don't know how many times I have heard someone tell me that they "love God but want nothing to do with the church, because they're all a bunch of hypocrites."

Hypocrisy is naturally *repulsive* to us, isn't it? And it is especially heartbreaking and distressing when it is revealed in a church leader, such as a pastor. I'm sure we're all familiar with stories of well-known, famous, often *gifted* pastors and preachers who have *fallen* publicly. Just in the past couple of years, we have seen several well-known pastors and Christian, with growing ministries and thriving churches, who have been exposed as living a *double-life*, being involved in gross immorality, scandalous affairs, or even robbing money from the church. Often times, when we use the word *hypocrite*, we refer to someone *speaking one way* but then acting *in the completely opposite way*; saying the "right things" but doing the *wrong things*. This is a very real danger and sign of hypocrisy. But there is also another, *far more subtle* form of hypocrisy: the danger of looking righteous and godly on the outside - perhaps both *saying and doing* the right things - but *for the wrong reasons*. It is possible to *appear* holy and righteous on the outside, but to be serving *not God* through our actions, *but ourselves*. If we do the right things *for the wrong reason* - *for the purpose of our own glory, seeking the praise and admiration of others* - then we may appear righteous and holy on the outside, but are full of wickedness within. Such hypocrisy is what Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for: being "*white washed tombs*" that look clean on the outside, but within are filled with "*dead men's bones*." This is a very real temptation for all of us, and a *very grave threat and danger, both to our own souls and to the others*.

This is what **Matt. 6:1-18** warns us against. Jesus warns us against *practicing righteousness* for the purpose of being "*seen by others*," and exhorts us to instead practice our righteousness *for the glory and pleasure of God, that we might be seen by Him*. Jesus gives this exhortation in **v.1**, and then fleshes out the principle with 3 examples in **vv.2-18**, using the

examples of **giving, praying, and fasting**, which were seen as the pillars of Jewish piety and religious practice. Each of these examples contrasts what the *wrong motivation* looks like, and what the *right motivation* looks like. And then, right at the center of the passage, Christ gives us the *model prayer* - and by doing so, teaches us the **key** to having the right heart and motivation that he's calling for here. So let's look at each of these points today:

I. Do Not Do the Right Things for the *Wrong Reason*: Our Own Glory and Pride

Jesus begins and frames this entire section with the *base exhortation* of **verse 1**: “*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*” In order to understand this passage, we have to understand what Jesus is saying *in this verse*. Is he forbidding doing any righteous deeds in front of other people, or in public, whatsoever, so as to forbid public prayer or acts of generosity, for example? **No**; if he were, that would be in contradiction to what he taught in the last chapter. After all, in **chapter 5:16** he said, “*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” And as we saw last week, **chapter 5:17-48** deals with many visible forms of righteousness that obedience to God demands of us. Obeying the Lord will involve being righteous in public, visible ways at times; this is inevitable. What is Jesus saying in verse 1, then? He is forbidding us from practicing righteousness “*in order to be seen by*” others. He isn't necessarily dealing with location or visibility; he's dealing with *the motives of our heart* that drive our actions. He is warning us against **the motive of pride**; he is forbidding practicing **self-righteousness**, warning us to beware of doing “good things” that appear godly and holy, but are actually just platforms for seeking the *praise of others*, to elevate our own name and seek our own glory. And the sobering warning is, that if this is our motive, then *we will not receive any “reward from our Father in heaven.”*

Verses 2-18 flesh out this command with three examples: he shows **negative** and **positive** examples in the acts of **giving, praying, and fasting**. In each example, we see the same pattern: he tells us how *not* to do it, and the accompanying *warning*; and then, he gives us a *positive example* of how we *should* practice righteousness for the *right reasons*, and gives a *promise of assurance* for the reward we receive from God. For now, let's take a look at the *negative examples*:

A. Giving

First, he addresses the issue of *giving* in **v.2**: “*Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.*” It is unclear whether or pharisees and other “*hypocrites*” actually sounded trumpets, or whether Jesus is speaking in hyperbole or exaggerated metaphor. *Either way*, the point is clear: they had *some way* of making their giving of money to the poor a very *public, visible act*, so that everyone else was sure to know what they were doing. They were not giving *out of compassionate love* to the needy, nor out of *reverent worship and loving obedience* to God. They were being driven *by pride and self-righteousness*; they were only concerned about *themselves*. It is indeed possible for us to give *generously, even sacrificially*, and yet do so for *completely selfish, wicked* reasons. We can appear to do so humbly and generously on the outside, while secretly doing so *in order for others to think well of us and applaud our generosity*. We might fool others; we might even fool ourselves - but we *will not fool God!* The hypocrites sought the praise of man - and they found it! As Jesus says, “*Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*” But what an empty, temporary reward the fickle praise of man is.

We must *gravely beware* giving - money, or anything else - *so that other people will think well of us*. Often times, it is *inevitable* that at least *someone else* will know about our giving. If you give something to someone, usually, they’re going to know about it! If you’re tithing to the church, your name has to go on the check! At the very least, the person handling the money has to know how much you give in order to hand back a contribution statement for tax purposes. We even see examples of the apostles keeping track of who gave what in the book of Acts. This is inevitable at times, and this passage is not forbidding that anyone else know about. But we *must take great care* that we **never give** for the purposes of being seen, admired, or praised by others! If this is our temptation, we should *strive to do it in secret, so that no one knows about it*. We should examine our hearts before we give and ask ourselves: *if no one at the church, or anyone else for that matter, were to know whether or not I gave this tithe or donation, would I still give it?* Or before we give to someone in need, we should ask ourselves: *Am I willing to give this gift anonymously?* If the answer is **no**, then we’re giving for the wrong reasons.

B. Praying

Next, Jesus gives the example of **prayer** in **v.5**: “*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.*” Again, Jesus is not forbidding *public, corporate prayer*. He often prayed out loud before others, and we’re exhorted and commanded to do the same throughout the New Testament. But we must *beware* praying publicly for the purpose of *other people thinking that we are holy, godly, and pious*. In the Christian community and at church, we place great value on *godliness* and *spirituality*; church leaders are often respected and honored. Therefore, there can often be a *great temptation* to want to be seen by others, especially at church, as being a *godly and spiritual person*. And public prayer is perhaps abused for this purpose more often than any other “religious” act. It is *far too easy* to *appear* spiritual, godly, even humble, when praying publicly, when really *we’re not speaking to God and leading others before the throne of God corporately*, but are instead *praying in such a way to impress our hearers*. Maybe we feel compelled to put on an act and appear more prayerful, faithful, and spiritual than we really are. Maybe we’re driven by fear, and don’t want others around us to know just how spiritually dry our lives have become.

A good *test* we should all give ourselves is to compare the amount of praying we do in *private* versus *in public*. It should **never be the case that we pray more publicly than we do privately**; if that is the case, you probably shouldn’t be praying in front of others, for you *might be praying for the wrong reasons*. If you spend more time praying in front of other people, that might be a good indicator that your *motive* in prayer is to be *heard and thought well of by other people*, rather than God.

And again, the same warning is repeated: “*Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*” If this is our motive, then we might indeed be heard by other people and impress them with our fake piety, *but we will not be heard by or impress God*.

C. Fasting

Finally, we see the example of **fasting** in **v.16**: “*And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.*” **Fasting** simply refers to the practice of choosing to *abstain from food*, either partially or fully, for a period of time. We see many examples of fasting, both in the Old and New Testament, and they are often linked with extended times of *prayer*; seeking the will of God, or expressing morning or repentance. By the time of Christ, the Pharisees began practicing *regular, weekly*

fasting, typically twice a week, and did so in *public, noticeable ways*. They made it clear that they were fasting, effectively boasting in a physical way that they were “*humbly*” practicing *self-denial*; they wanted everyone to know what they were doing, not because they were *seeking the Lord and trusting him*, but because they wanted the *appearance of holiness*, to be respected as spiritual leaders in the synagogue. And again, the same warning is repeated: “*Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*”

This might seem strange to us, to think of people intentionally going about as “*gloomy*” or “*disfiguring their faces*” so that everyone knows their fasting. And yet, such practices are *alive and well* today. Roman Catholics, along with many Protestant traditions and churches, even many evangelicals, regularly practice Lent every year. Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday**, which, in fact, is less than two weeks away. On Ash Wednesday, they put *ashes* on their foreheads as a visible sign to everyone that they are participating in the month-long fast of Lent. Now, I’m sure there are people who participate for good reasons; but it is worth recognizing that the practice cuts right against what Jesus says here: the whole point is that when we fast, *we should go out of our way to make sure no one knows about it!* Now, there might be legitimate reasons why you have to tell someone; after all, it’s pretty hard to hide your fasting from your spouse! But we should ***never seek to fast*** simply out of public obligation or so that we appear holy, pious, and disciplined before others.

And so we need to apply same principle to *everything we do!* We should do ***nothing*** for the praise and admiration of others! There are so many temptations and opportunities to do good and righteous things for the sinful reasons of *pride, self-righteousness, and the fear and praise of men*, aren’t there? Maybe we’re tempted to *read our bibles, memorize scripture, or attain lots of knowledge* simply so that we appear knowledgeable and spiritual before others; simply so that we can say that quote at prayer meeting or appear as gifted bible teachers. Maybe the reward you’re tempted to seek is for other people to say, “Oh, she knows her bible so well!” or “He’s such a gifted Bible teacher!” The temptation is great; let us take great care to guard our hearts against such motivations!

If we catch ourselves posting our good deeds on Facebook and Twitter, or boasting about them to others at church, we need to immediately halt and examine our hearts; we must probe our own hearts and honestly ask ourselves: *am I doing this good thing simply because I want*

others to think well of me? Is the reward I'm seeking the praise of men? Am I trying to rob God of His glory and seek to build my own name, my own kingdom, seeking my own glory?

Let us take great care that we **do not practice our righteousness before others in order to be seen by them**. But, we should still indeed practice righteousness! But we must keep a close watch on our hearts to make sure we're doing so *for the right reasons*.

Which brings us to point 2:

II. Do the Right Things for the *Right Reason*: God's Glory and His approval

I said it earlier, but it's worth repeating again: *Christ is not forbidding public acts of righteousness, but is speaking about the motives of our hearts*. Each of these examples he gives assumes that we will still do them. After all, he begins each section, "*Thus, when you give...*"; "*And when you pray,*" "*And when you fast...*" The point is, we must do so for the right reasons; we must seek *the right reward*. We are to seek *God's glory and desire to be seen and approved of by Him*. For the believer, it shouldn't matter whether or not we're exalted in the eyes of other people; our desire should be to hear on that day, "*Well done, my good and faithful servant!*" (**Matt. 25:21**). We should strive to please God and glorify Him, not ourselves.

A. Giving

When we give, he says, "*do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.*" we should strive to make sure that *we don't impress ourselves with our giving*; I think that's what Jesus's metaphor means here. When we give, we should not be impressed with ourselves, nor seek to impress others, but essentially *forget about it*. We should simply give out of our *love for God and love for each other!* In fact, if you want to check the barometer of your heart in this area, intentionally give a purely anonymous gift every once in a while, so that no one else knows about it but God. And rejoice in knowing that He is pleased with such an act given unto Him.

B. Prayer

Likewise, when we pray, he says "*go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.*" Each of us should carve out private time where we pray to the Lord in secret; where it has nothing to do with being seen or known about by others, but is simply a time spent with the Lord as part of our relationship to Him! This is absolutely essential to the spiritual life and faith of any believer! We must work hard to cultivate a *private life of prayer*, motivated

by our love for God and faith that He *loves us and draws us close to Himself in Christ, by His grace!*

C. Fasting

Finally, we see the same in **fasting**: “*But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret.*” It is still a good, God-glorifying thing for us to fast; but we should see it as part of our *secret prayer life*, of seeking the Lord and expressing **absolute dependence on His Word, love, and gracious providence** over and above our earthly needs. Instead of fasting for others to see us, we do so *in the context of our relationship with God, seeking His face and resting on Him by faith!*

And in all of these examples, the **promise of the reward is the same**: “*And your Father who sees in secret will reward you*” (vv. 4, 6, 18). The Lord knows our hearts; the Lord sees what we do in secret. Therefore, let us do all things, whether in public, or in private, *because we know that He is watching!* Not because we’re afraid he will pounce; but because *we know that He will be quick to reward us with Heavenly blessings for such righteous motives!* For our motive is to seek His glory and be found *acceptable and pleasing in His sight!* And let me clear here: *our motive is not so that we will do enough good works or righteous deeds in order to impress God or earn our own righteousness or salvation;* no, that is impossible! But we are found acceptable and pleasing in God’s sight *when we come to Him by grace through in Jesus Christ!* When we practice our righteousness before God’s face by *faith in Christ*, seeing our acts as *offerings of love and worship in light of His free salvation and grace*, then we know with certainty that *He accepts such offerings* and is pleased with us *in Christ Jesus!* What a beautiful and wondrous assurance, to know that our Lord is with us and sees us, even in secret, and will surely reward us for seeking Him above all!

III. Our Prayer Life Reveals our Heart and the Reward we Seek

But there’s one more section, one more example, nestled in between the examples of prayer and fasting: *another section on prayer.*

There are actually *four examples* of right and wrong ways to practice righteousness in this passage; the fourth is a *second example of how to pray*. **Verses 7-15** tackle the *heart* of prayer, which in turn reveals *our heart*, and the *reward we’re truly seeking*: it reveals whether or not we are seeking **God’s glory and will**, or **our own glory and will**. This lies at the heart of the passage, showing us that our private prayer life, and the content of such prayer, perhaps gives us

the greatest glimpse into our own hearts, our relationship with God, and the *reward* that we seek: whether or not we're seeking the treasure of this world and the admiration of others, or whether we're seeking the *reward of heaven*, GOd himself, His glory, to do His will and be accepted by Him through faith, and to have a genuine relationship with Him.

Verses 7-8 give us another negative example of prayer, but this time, not of trying to impress others, but of trying to *impress, persuade, even manipulate* God in our prayers by "heaping up empty phrases as the Gentiles do," thinking that "*they will be heard for their many words.*" God is no genie in the bottle; we cannot impress him with our words, actions, or thoughts. INstead, Christ calls us to *humbly trust* in GOd. We pray by knowing Him as our Father who *loves us, who knows what we need before we ask*, or even when we don't know *what* to ask or how to pray, and *promises to care for us in all things*. The right motivation for prayer is born out of a *relationship with God as our Father; it is the relationship of love and true faith!*

Christ then gives a *model* of what the content of our prayers should be like in **vv. 9-13**. ; This is not meant to be something we have to repeat word for word, or that every prayer must contain a parallel for every line and category; but the categories give us guidelines that *shape* our prayers; they shape not only the *things we pray for*, but also *our heart and motive in prayer*. These verses are *rich and profound; we could easily have another sermon just on these!*

But we can summary the prayer in *two halves*: The *first three petitions* direct us to pray for **God's glory and for His will to be done**. The second half leads us to pray for our **physical, spiritual, and moral needs** - but only after seeing that they come *underneath GOd's glory and will!*

This prayer teaches us to **focus on God's glory** - and when this is our prayer, and the attitude of our hearts, we are free to *perform acts of righteousness* for the *right reason*. When thoughts of ourselves come underneath the glory and will of GOd, we are able to have a *right perspective* - not being driven by pride or hypocrisy, but out of a right relationship with God. IN fact, whether or not our great prayer is GOd's glory and will reveals the content of our hearts and the reward that we're truly seeking.

After all, one such petition is that *God forgive us from our sin!* But it's conditional: "*as we also have forgiven*" others. Is our forgiveness and salvation then based on our actions? On our forgiveness? **No**. But if we're truly forgiven, we will *truly forgive others*, which is the meaning **vv.14-15**. We're forgiven by **grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ**

alone! But if we truly believe in the gospel, *we have new hearts! And true faith bears fruit.* The heart of the believer **trusts GOD, seeks His glory, desires to obey Him,** just as this prayer teaches us. The heart of this prayer must be ours, as believers. ***Therefore, let us bear the fruit of faith in the gospel by seeking the reward of God Himself, His glory, and eternal salvation and forgiveness because of His grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ!***

If you're not a believer this morning, there is **good news:** you don't have to clean yourself up, or even *pretend like you have it all together;* you don't have to impress anyone else, not even God. In fact, we can't! All we have to do *is trust and rest in His grace!* Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised in our place, so that if we trust in Him, we can come to God and know Him as *our Father!* Ask Him to forgive you because of Christ, *and He will!* If you have any questions about this, or if you do believe and are interested in becoming a Christian or church member, I would love to speak with you, either now, or after the service. Let us pray.