

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 “Doing the Right Thing for the Wrong Reason”

Intro. Parents, suppose your teenage child is especially nice and respectful to you. They clean up their room, they do what you ask without whining, and they offer to do extra chores around the house. But then, that evening you find out why they have been so nice and respectful. They ask to go to a late-night event with their friends, and they know that you normally would not permit them to go. They were doing the right thing all day, but they were doing it for selfish reasons.

The same thing can happen in our relationship with God. We may do the things that are Christian ought to do, but for the wrong reasons. I want to ask you a series of questions. Why do you attend church? Is it because you love God and want to worship Him, and learn how to be a better Christian? Or do you attend to please a family member, and things will be better at home? Or do you attend to be with your friends? Why do you give to the church? Is it because you love God and want to support His work, and meet needs? Or do you give to get a tax deduction, or even to impress others with the size of your donation?

Why should this matter concern you? The most serious issue is this? If you do righteous deeds for self-centered reasons, that may reveal that you have the same problems that Jesus talks about in this text of Scripture. It may reveal that you are a hypocrite. It may reveal that what you do is just an outward show, and not an expression of the inward faith. Another problem with selfish motivation is that it can rob you of an eternal reward for doing the right thing.

So this morning we are going to look into this text of Scripture and see what Jesus has to say about the issue of motivation. The first, let's lay the foundation for this subject by considering the fact that:

### I. WE SHOULD PRACTICE RIGHTEOUS DEEDS

In v.1 Christ mentions the practice of righteous deeds. I believe that's the way it should be translated.<sup>1</sup> James says that faith without works is dead, and a Christian certainly should do deeds of righteousness. In this text of Scripture Jesus mentions three that were commonly practiced among the Jews, and were commended by our Lord. I want you to look with me at these examples and see if you are practicing them. First of all:

A. Christ's Commends the Practice of Giving - Notice in v.2 that Christ does not say, “If you do a charitable deed” but “when you do a charitable deed.” Jesus assumed that God's people would give. Do you? By nature we are more interested in getting than in giving. But when we are born again with a new nature, we learn to give. Every Christian needs to learn the grace of giving. Giving is a Godlike activity.

But notice the particular kind of giving indicated here. Literally, it means, “whenever you practice (present tense) acts of mercy.” That is when you see someone in need, and from a merciful heart you give to meet that need. Giving to the poor is demanded by the laws of God (Ex. 23:10, etc.), the exhortations of the prophets (Jer. 22:16; etc.), and the teaching of Jesus (Mt.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated incorrectly “alms” in KJV, based on weak textual evidence for *eleemosune* in the Byzantine text.

7:12, etc.). Of course, the Jews gave tithes to support the priests and temple worship. But giving to the poor was considered the most praiseworthy.

At the close of the morning worship service on communion Sunday you have opportunity to give to our benevolence offering. How often do you give to that offering? You will have an opportunity to donate to our back-to-school outreach in August. Would you give to help families in need? Will you give to our world hunger offering in October? I hope you are a giver.

Secondly:

B. Christ's Commends the Practice of Prayer - In v.5 Jesus says, "And when you pray...." Here again, Jesus assumes that we will pray. It is one of the most important duties we have as believers. How can a person know the Lord and never talk to the Lord? Prayer is so important that in vv.9-13 Jesus taught us how to pray by giving an example of the kind of pray we should do.

Do you pray on a regular basis? Do you pray more than at meals, at church, and when you are in trouble? I can't emphasize enough the importance of prayer in the life of our church. We could see God save more souls, change more lives, and do greater things in our church if His people would pray with a right heart, and more often. Someone said, "A prayerless soul is a Christless soul." We ought to have more in our Wednesday and Friday prayer meetings.

Finally:

C. Jesus Commends the Practice of Fasting – In v.16 Jesus says, "When you fast...." Fasting is one form of self-denial. It is an experience whereby one denies himself something in the physical realm in order to achieve something in the spiritual realm. Fasting is a period of time when you detach yourself from earthly things and attach yourself unto God.

The only fast imposed by law on the Jews was that of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:31). There are, however, other notable Old Testament examples of fasting (Moses: Exodus 34:28), often as a means of expressing national repentance (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1). By the time of Jesus many Jews fasted twice a week each Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12).

The Lord Jesus fasted for 40 days prior to His confrontation with the devil (Matthew 4:2). The early church practiced fasting from time to time (Acts 13:2, 3; Acts 14:23). The apostle Paul commended fasting for certain situations (1 Cor. 7:5).

With the passing of the Day of Atonement, fasting is no longer an absolute requirement (Col. 2:14). Is fasting a practice for New Testament Christians? Yes, if it is on a strictly voluntary and private basis. However, most Christians today do not fast with any regularity. We Baptists enjoy eating too much! Some fast as part of a special spiritual emphasis, such as a revival. Fasting is appropriate in conjunction with an extended time of repentance and prayer. I think it is something serious Christians need to take another look at, at least occasionally.

There certainly are other righteous deeds we should practice. Many Christians practice daily Bible reading, weekly church attendance, and serving in one or more ministries of the church. How many of these righteous deeds do you practice? If you say you believe in Jesus, does your life show it?

So Christ commends righteous deeds. We should practice them. Now notice from our text my second main point:

## II. BEWARE OF IMPURE MOTIVES IN THE PRACTICE OF SUCH DEEDS

In v.1 Christ gives the general principle. He says, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable<sup>2</sup> [righteous] deeds before men, to be seen by them.” The original Greek indicates that we should not do our righteous needs *for the purpose of* being seen by others.<sup>3</sup> Here the issue is motivation. We should do righteous deeds, but we should not do them for the express purpose of being seen & praised by others. Furthermore, the word translated “seen” (*theaomai*) is the word from which we get our English word “theater.” Do you do religious deeds only when others are watching, as if you are performing on stage, hoping for applause? If so, your motivation is totally wrong.

At issue here is not that we should never do good works publicly. In 5:16 Christ *commanded* us to do our good works before men. The issue is motivation. If we are not careful, we will do our righteous deeds for the applause of men, rather than to please God.

This is especially the case of the hypocrite. Three times in this text of Scripture Jesus refers to the practices of the hypocrites of His day. Our English word comes from the Greek word, *hypocritai*, which originally was used to refer to a Greek play actor who would hold a mask in front of his face, and play the part of someone else. But there are some people who do religious deeds, but it is nothing more than a show. They do not do them out of love for God, or out of love for their fellow man, but because they love themselves. They love the praise and recognition that they get from doing these outward deeds. Such hypocrites demonstrate that you don't have to become a Christian on the inside to act like one on the outside.

In this text of Scripture Jesus gives three illustrations of religious hypocrites who do religious deeds from a selfish motivation. We need to make sure that we do not see ourselves in these examples. If we do, we need to question the reality and sincerity of our faith. Consider first of all:

A. An Example of a Wrong Motive in Giving - Jesus says in v.2, “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets....” What does Christ mean when He refers to “sound the trumpet?” It may have been their custom to go to a street in Jerusalem and blow a literal trumpet right before they gave to the poor. Although the alleged purpose was to call the poor and needy together to receive the gifts, it afforded a fine opportunity to let others see their good works. Or it could be symbolic language for the fact they did everything in their power to advertise their gifts. I can just imagine a wealthy man going out to the streets to find some poor beggars. Instead of just giving to meet a need, he sends someone ahead to announce that so and so is about to make a generous gift. He draws a crowd to the scene. When the rich man gives, his advance man leads the crowd in applause. Such “giving” is actually “buying” some recognition.<sup>4</sup> So whatever is the exact meaning, they wanted to call attention to their giving “that they may have glory from men.”

I had a deacon in my former church who was a big giver and he wanted others to know it. He often said, “He that tooteth not his own horn, the same shall not be tooted.” So he would

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<sup>2</sup> Translated incorrectly “alms” in KJV & NKJV, based on weak textual evidence for *eleemosune* in the Byzantine text.

<sup>3</sup> In the Greek text it is *pros* with the articular infinitive showing purpose.

<sup>4</sup> Some believe this could be a reference to the receptacles in the Court of Women in the Temple that were used to receive the offering for the poor. On top of the chest was a trumpet shaped receptacle: Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 196. However, Christ says this “sounding of the trumpet” is done in the synagogues & streets, so that seems to exclude this idea.

frequently tell people about his giving. He portrayed himself as a fine Christian, but when he lost a controversial vote in a church business meeting, he showed his true self.

Few in our churches today would be so blatant about seeking publicity regarding their own giving. But does it make a difference to you if people know how much are giving? You place your offering envelope up, or face down in the offering plate? Do you tend to give more when people know about your gift? If so, your motive in giving is not as pure as it should be.

Next, Jesus gives:

B. An Example of a Wrong Motive for Prayer - In v.5 Jesus says, “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets....” Perhaps they would arrive at the synagogue early and stand near the entrance praying as people arrive. Or they would go to the streets to pray. The word for “streets” is different from the word in v.2. In v.2 it means a narrow street or alley between buildings, which would be common in cities and towns of that time period. But here in v.5 it means a wide road. In that case they would stand praying along side the big busy streets, where more people would see them. They probably prayed with uplifted hands.

Why would they pray at such locations? Jesus could see right into their heart’s motivation. They were doing it to appear to be righteous, and receive commendation and praise for their piety.

Now Scripture nowhere condemns public prayer in a worship service, or before a public meeting or event. I think it is great for Christian students to gather at the flagpole for public prayer, as a witness to others. But what is condemned is prayer with the *motivation* of being seen and praised of men. He is condemning having your personal prayer time in the most public place, with the intention of being seen and honored by the people.

If you pray in public, but pray very little in private, then you need to examine your motivation.

C. An Example of a Wrong Motive for Fasting - In v.16 Jesus says, “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting....” If a person is fasting, how would anyone know it, except for those who eat with him each day? So they came up with a way to advertise that they were fasting. They would go around with a sad countenance. They would even disfigure their faces. They probably would go around groaning from hunger, making sure people knew what a great sacrifice they were making for the Lord. Why? They hoped that people would say of them, “Oh, how pious! What dedication!”

When I participated in the 10-day Daniel fast before our last Revival, I must admit that I was tempted to advertise what I was doing, and groan about being hungry, and seek sympathy for the fact that I was going without meat, desserts, and other desirable foods. But I sought to continue living as normally as possible. I didn’t want to see myself in v.16!

So I hope from these illustrations you have a clear picture of the kind of impure motives we should avoid. If you attend church, or pray, or give, or serve in the church motivated by a desire to be seen and applauded, then your motives are self-centered, rather than God-centered.

But in this text of Scripture Christ tells us how we can overcome this problem. So my next point is this:

### III. WE SHOULD GUARD & PROTECT OURSELVES FROM IMPURE MOTIVES

Once again, v.1 gives the general principles. As much as possible, we should not do our “righteous deeds before men.” If you can do them privately, anonymously, then it protects your motivation. Now let’s review how this would be done in each of the examples given by our Lord.

A. In Regard to Giving – Christ says in v.3, “But when *you* (emphatic) do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.” This is a combination of hyperbole and personification: one hand should keep it secret from the other when it reaches into the pocket for a sum of money to give. Not only are we not to give to receive praise from men, but we should also not do so to receive praise from ourselves! Don’t dwell on your own supposed goodness. Give, and then forget about it. So if you want to protect your motivation, then you should give without fanfare and publicity. Don’t go around bragging about how much you gave last year.

This teaching of Jesus is why we do not list the names of the top donors in our church. We rely upon tithes and offerings that are given out of gratitude, out of love for others, and in obedience to the Lord. I believe our church does quite well and are giving without such fanfare.

Must *all* giving be anonymous? Not necessarily. When the church members laid their money at the Apostles’ feet in Acts 4, it was not done in secret, for the generous giving of Barnabas was widely known in the church. I believe it is good for leaders to share their stewardship testimony, if your motive is to encourage others, and be a positive example. The difference, of course, was in the motive and manner in which it was done.

B. In Regard to Prayer - In v.6 Jesus says, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place....” “You” in v.6 is singular. The emphasis is upon private, personal prayer. No one should pray in public who does not pray in private. It is tragic that so few of us really spend time in private prayer on a regular basis.

Now as an aid to guard against selfish motivation, Jesus says “go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray....” The word translated “room” (*tameion*) or “closet” (KJV) means “a private chamber.” It could refer to the storage room in a house. There we can shut out the world and be alone with God. But He is not laying down an absolute requirement. The houses of many in the audience had only one room. The sense is this: if there be a private room, then use that for your private prayer. Do not try to make yourself conspicuous.

Jesus practiced what He preached. His public prayers were brief, often lasting no more than a moment. He often got up early go to a nearby mountain or remote place for His private prayers.

So do you have a prayer room, that special place where you pray? For some of you it may be a rug by your bed where you get alone with God. Others may use a business desk and get to work a little early when nobody’s there and just be with the Lord. We can pray in secret almost anywhere you can shut the world out and shut yourself in unto God. The main emphasis, however, is not even on the place of prayer but on the attitude of mind and heart.

C. In Regard to Fasting - Notice what Jesus taught about how we should fast. He said in vv.17-18, “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting....” We are not to call attention to ourselves. If you make yourself

look bad, it's because you want people to know that you are fasting. But God knows you are fasting. You don't need to put on a show for Him. You don't need to go around talking about it.

One implication from this is that the body is not an enemy to be abused. There is nothing wrong with making yourself look nice!

So if you want to guard against selfish motivation for doing religious & righteous deeds, Christ advises doing them secretly, without calling attention to yourself. But we need to be careful that we do not take this teaching too far. Jesus is telling us what we can & should do to protect our motivation, but He is not addressing what *others* should or should not do who witness your service to the Lord. After all, much of what we do for the Lord & others must be public. I believe it is certainly appropriate to express appreciation. I believe it is appropriate to give commendation, especially to someone who needs some encouragement. 1 Thess. 5:12-13 says, "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

#### IV. BY FAITH LET US SEEK THE BEST REWARD

The Lord uses the word "reward" 7 times in this text of Scripture. From the time we were children we learned that certain behaviors are rewarded. That's how we trained our dog, and that's how you train your children. Two of the top rewards for dog training are food and praise, in that order. So we are conditioned to seek rewards. But I want you to think about the two kinds of rewards that Christ talks about in this text of Scripture. First of all:

A. You Can Seek Temporary Praise from Men – In v.2 we see that some give publicly "that they may have glory from men." But notice what Jesus says about such giving, "Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." Jesus points out that one problem with the wrong kind of giving is that you give up any hope of a heavenly reward from your gift. People are still advertising their deeds of benevolence and in the process of doing so are depriving themselves of any real reward. The only reward you will get is the quickly passing earthly praise from men. When Jesus says "have" here, the Greek word (*apecho*) was commonly used on business receipts to mean "paid in full". So Jesus was saying that those who trumpet and parade their good works receive their reward the moment someone applauds them, and that's all the reward they will get. Some are frustrated because they don't even get much of that!

But I will show you how temporary earthly rewards really are. Does anyone remember who was the MVP of the 2002 World Series? Probably no one here knows. That was one of the greatest rewards the player could receive, but it doesn't take long before hardly anyone remembers, and hardly anyone cares.

Jesus makes it clear that if your motivation for giving, praying, fasting, & so forth is to receive praise from men, then that is all the reward you will get. But Jesus wants you to know about a better reward. So notice from our text:

B. You Should Seek an Eternal Reward from God - Jesus says in v.4 that if you do "your charitable deed may be in secret," "your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." The word translated "Himself" may be emphatic, and the word "openly" is not found in most ancient manuscripts. When we take least notice of our good deeds ourselves, God takes most notice of them. God's reward is far superior to man's reward, for it is greater and eternal.

So if you do the right thing for selfish reasons, then any earthly reward you receive is all you will get. But if you do the right thing as an expression of your love for God, then you shall receive an eternal reward. It does require faith to be motivated by the promise of an eternal reward, but we Christians live by faith, not by sight. That's the difference between the true Christian, and a hypocrite.

Conclusion: I have been a pastor for over 30 years now. Occasionally someone quit serving the Lord and I wonder why. God knows. At times I wonder if they quit because they did not receive enough recognition and appreciation for their service. If so, they were serving the church, not the Lord.

Why do you give? Why do you pray? Why do you serve in the church? Are you giving, praying, or serving for the right reasons? At times we have done the right thing for the wrong reason. Guard your heart from the wrong motivation.

One of the most important applications of this teaching on hypocrisy is this: Is your Christian faith real and genuine? Have you been acting & looking to others like a Christian, but deep in your heart you know you are not? I will not judge you on judgment day. The Deacon will not judge you on judgment day. Your parents will not judge you. You may fool us regarding your Christian profession with outward Christian practices. You may even fool yourself, but you can't fool God. He has eyes as flames of fire that penetrate right through outward appearances. Today, make sure you are a true Christian. Be real. Be genuine. When I ask you to bow your head in just a moment, ask God to reveal to you the true condition of your heart. If you have been acting like a Christian, instead of becoming a true Christian, repent of your sins and trust in Christ today!

Sources: H. Leo Eddleman, *The Teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1975); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 2, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1972); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. I (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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