

Matthew 6:1-6;16-18

A Christian's Religion: Not Hypocritical But Real

Friday, April 1st, 2005

Introduction:

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ has given us instruction on the character, influence and righteousness of a Christian. We have seen that standards of the Kingdom could only be met in one who was a new creation, one who is humbled in the presence of God and changed by the inward workings of the Holy Spirit. In the passage of today's study, Christ lays down a general principle applied to our 'acts of righteousness' and then illustrates this principle with three examples.

"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." – Matt 6:1

Read Matt 6:1-6; 16-18.

A General Principle (v.1)

How is our righteousness to surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law? (recall Matt 5:20; cf. Matt 23:5)

- Matt 23:5 – *"Everything they do is done for men to see..."*
- we are not to carry out piety for the purpose of being seen by others (ultimately seeking their approval and praise)

Is there a contradiction between Christ's teaching in verse 1 and that which He taught in Matt 5:16?

- No contradiction: both express a choice... *pleasing GOD or pleasing SELF*
- 1) DIFFERENT problem: *"we are to 'show when tempted to hide' and 'hide when tempted to show'" – A.B. Bruce*
 - 5:16 – human cowardice
 - 6:1 – human vanity
- 2) SAME purpose: Glorify God
 - 5:16 – *"let light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"*
 - 6:1 – keep our acts of piety secret so → *give glory to God, not men*

In the following illustrations, Jesus builds on this teaching the undeniable and fundamental reality that our Father *"sees what is done in secret"* (v.4,6,18). Why should this awareness of God's presence be both sobering and comforting? (Luke 16:15; Gen 16:13, Psalm 139:1-10)

- God's PRESENCE - He sees our actions AND our motivation & heart
- SOBERING... if our actions are self-glorifying – should constrain what we think and do in secret
 - Luke 16:15 – *"You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts..."*
 - we can fool men into praising us but we cannot fool God; you will receive no reward from God
- COMFORTING... if our actions are for God's glory
 - He sees and will reward us (v.4,6,18)
 - Gen 16:13 – *"You are the God who sees me"* – Hagar acknowledges this reality after experiencing His comfort
 - Psalm 139:1-10 – *"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"* – the knowledge of God's present was a great comfort to David

"Throughout the whole of the day, everything I do, and say, and attempt, and think, and imagine, is going to be done under the eye of God. He is going to be with me; He sees everything; He knows everything. There is nothing I can do or attempt but God is fully aware of it all. 'Thou God seest me'". – Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p294-5

Three Illustrations (v.2-6; 16-18)

How do you think the reward we receive from others (v.2,5,16) differs from the reward the Father will give us (v.1,4,6,18; Matt 25:19-21; 31-40)?

- Reward from men: praise, recognition / acknowledgment, good reputation
 - temporary – lasts at most for a lifetime / satisfaction that does not last / high view of others toward us can change quickly
 - often immediate but no heavenly value
 - *no further reward* – *"...I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full"*
- Reward from the Father: holiness; satisfaction; eternal inheritance
 - eternal; may not be immediate
 - Matt 25:19-21 – *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* – the praise of our Father; share in our master's happiness
 - Matt 25:31-40 – receive our inheritance - the kingdom

v. 2-4: Giving to the needy

What does Jesus mean when he says, "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (v.3)? Why is this important? (v.2,4)

- we are to give discreetly
- the risk of becoming too conscious of our own 'acts of righteousness' – we are to keep no personal account for risk of pride
 - SELF-PRAISE (pride) equally dangerous as seeking the praise of men - we give ourselves glory rather than God
- why important?
 - God knows our hearts ("*sees what is done in secret*") → He will reward you (v.4)
 - if done in pride (before men *OR* before ourselves), will have received our reward in full (v.2) – we default our reward from God

v.5,6: Prayer

How are we to pray? (v.5,6) What does the posture of our prayer reveal about the condition of our heart? (see Luke 18:9-14)

- How? → pray in secret – "...*go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen*"
 - realize that God sees and hears our prayers... more on this in the next study
- Luke 18:9-14
 - Pharisee – "...*stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men...'*"
 - Tax Collector – "...*stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said: 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'*"
 - the tax collector went home justified before God – The Pharisee had received his reward in full (was heard and acknowledged men; the other man's prayer was of contrition and repentance – he was justified.

What is to be our attitude when we come into God's presence? (see Isaiah 66:2; cf. Matt 5:3,4)

- Isaiah 66:2 – "This is the one I esteem: *he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word*"
- Matt 5:3,4 – "Blessed are *the poor in spirit... those who mourn...*"
 - in God's presence, we see our spiritual bankruptcy and mourn over our sins

How might we fall into the wrong form of prayer in more subtle ways?

- Examples: eager for opportunity to pray publicly with self-glorification as our motive; over-conscious of how our prayers are received by others rather than by God; if our thoughts are on any other than God; treating God as a vending machine

v. 16-18: Fasting

In verse 16, Jesus assumes that Christian's will fast (though few of us do).

- Why should we fast? (Neh 9:1,2; Esther 4:16; 1 Cor 9:24-27; Isa 58:6-7)
- WHY? Self-denial for the purpose of... a peculiar need
 - 1) Neh 9:1,2 → penitence for past sin (seeking forgiveness)
 - 2) Esther 4:16 → prayer & fasting: expressing dependence on God for future mercy & guidance
 - 3) Isaiah 58:6-7 → deliberately doing without in order to share the meal / cost with others in need; refection of our hearts
 - 4) 1 Cor 9:24-27 → as a way of building discipline / self-control (MLJ disagrees that fasting serves this purpose)
 - REWARD – seen by the Father, rewarded by the Father
- How should we fast? (v.16-18; Zech 8:19; recall Isa 58:6-7)
 - do not call attention to the fact that you are fasting: do not look somber / disfigure your face. → to show men
 - do so in a manner: "that it will not be obvious to men ..." → keep up with our regular habits – oil your head; wash your face
 - Zech 8:19 – "*joyful and glad occasion*"
 - "*be concerned only about God and about pleasing Him. Be concerned only about His honour and His glory*" – MLJ, p.320

For Further Thought

- 1) Is it wrong to live in obedience for the goal of seeking a reward? (see Heb 12:2; Heb 11)
- 2) What about family prayer and other forms of corporate prayer? Is Christ condemning these practices?

Reflection and Application

In summary, we see that the hypocritical form of piety that Christ condemned is for show, motivated by pride and rewarded by men, while genuine and acceptable Christian piety is done in secret where only God sees, is motivated by humility and God's glory, and is rewarded by God. We can choose to gloss over the examples in today's study as blatant examples of hypocrisy committed by the Pharisees, or we can examine our hearts carefully in their light, and in the reality that we live and think in God's presence.

How should the reality that we live in the presence of God change the way you live today?