

Authentic Christians

Lesson 19 – Matthew 6:1-18

1. The Anatomy of Hypocrisy

- Jesus moves from his statement of embracing God’s standard of righteousness (5:48) to the potential hazard of displaying kingdom righteousness for the praise of others (6:1-4).

“The question of whose approval we are seeking is thus raised in another form. Just as the beatitudes ask me if it’s God’s blessing I want, or some other approval, so the demands of righteousness, as presented by Jesus, can never legitimately be confused with forms of external piety: the righteousness in question pleases the Father and is rewarded by Him.” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 59)

- Observations on the entire passage (6:1-18):
 - 5:20-48 gives examples of the teaching of the Pharisees; 6:1-18 gives examples of the practice of the Pharisees ... a kingdom citizen’s righteousness was to exceed the Pharisees in both!
 - **FATHER** is used 8x in reference to Jehovah God.
 - **REWARD** is used 17x in the Gospels, 7x in this passage alone; refers to an entire payment along with a receipt verifying the satisfaction of the debt.
 - **HYPOCRITES** is found 18x in the Gospels, 3x here and 7x in Matt. 23:13-29; it’s an acting term for someone who puts on a mask and pretends to be someone they are not.
 - The contrast is obviously between the public (immediate) reward of men and the secret (... in some cases yet future but promised) reward of God.
- “Charitable deeds” is the word “righteousness” (*dikaïosunē*) of 5:48 ... “charitable deeds” (NKJV) was used by the NKJV translators to reflect the “almsgiving” of the KJV translators.
 - “Giving alms” is an old English expression for helping the poor financially (charity).
 - The wording is borrowed from vs. 2 where the Greek word is different than *dikaïosunē* (i.e. *eleemosynēn*); see 1 Jn. 2:29 for the same Greek construction as 6:1.
 - Vs. 1 is the introduction to vv. 2-18, meaning that the three illustrations that follow give specific warnings about impure motives that must not be mistaken for kingdom righteousness (giving, praying, fasting).

“Jesus is not so much dealing with a different kind of righteousness or with mere acts of righteousness as with the motives behind righteous living. To attempt to live in accord with the righteousness spelled out in the preceding verses but out of motives eager for men’s applause is to prostitute that righteousness. For this there will be no reward (see on 5:12) from the heavenly Father.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary)

“By Jesus’ time, the word ‘righteousness’ was tied closely to the word ‘alms’. Thus, when Jesus taught about ‘charitable deeds’ (or almsgiving; Matt. 6:2–4), prayer (Matt. 6:5–15), and fasting (Matt. 6:16–18), he prefaced his teachings by saying, ‘Beware of practicing your piety [literally, righteousness] before men in order to be seen by them’ (Matt. 6:1). In this way he taught that the giving of alms to the poor must not become a theatr-

ical display to win people's applause; the praise that comes from God is more important." (Nelson New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

- All the acts of righteousness mentioned here are not discouraged but they are assumed to be regularly practiced ... "when you ..."
- "Right hand" vs. "left hand" expression – this expression best illustrates the purity of motives expected of kingdom citizens.
 - Most people use this phrase as a criticism – a lack of coordination between departments in a business, a lack of communication between those in authority or in leadership.
 - Jesus used it in a positive sense – conceal your actions in such a way that one appendage of your body is ignorant of what the other appendage does.
- Three issues need to be resolved first:
 1. The Lord calls for concealment of one's righteous acts in 6:1, but in 5:13-16 He calls on the citizens of His kingdom to display their good works before others.
 - This verse also brings into question the public ministry enjoyed by the church today ... should there be men & women who are recognized for their "acts of goodness" in a public service, or better yet should anyone minister to others publicly?
 - The translation of the KJV and NKJV could be better ... CEV says "When you do your good deeds, don't try to show off!" ... "to be seen of them" is a purpose clause in Greek ("for the purpose of being" or "in order to" [*pros*] would be better.
 - The motive behind a person's acts of righteousness is in question here: 5:13-16 commands a God-glorifying motive, but here the motive is for selfish purposes.

"What our Lord forbids is therefore not publicity in performing good deeds, which is often necessary and therefore proper, but ostentatious publicity for the purpose of attracting attention and gaining applause. This obviously does not conflict with 5:16, where the object to be had in view is that God may be glorified, not ourselves." (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 126)

2. The display of good works before other people has its reward "in full" but those good works done in secret are rewarded (implied - "in full" or more fully) by the Father ... what does it mean to do your good works (giving, praying, fasting) "in secret"?
 - The root of the verb "to be seen" is *theomai*, from which our English word *theater* comes.
 - Acts done in "secret" are in opposition to those done in the "theater of life".
 - Jesus is not demanding that we hide, squelch or conceal our acts of righteousness per se, but he IS demanding that our acts of righteousness be purely motivated by the glory of God and not the praise of men.
 - The purity of an act of righteousness turns on the reward sought – men's praise or God's eternal and sublime reward.

"The Greek verb ["have their reward"] is a compound, signifying to have entirely, have the whole of, have in full. The idea is that in being gazed at and glorified by men they have all the reward they will ever obtain ..." (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 127)

3. Is this list of good works (giving, praying, fasting) an exhaustive one or just representative?
 - W. E. Vine believes that the example of giving reflects on a man's duties to his neighbor, the example of prayer reflects on a man's duties to God, and the example of fasting reflects on a man's duty to himself (discipline).
 - These three examples were popular and prominent ways in which the Pharisees practiced their righteous deeds.
 - Jesus is again contrasting the truth of God's kingdom with the accepted practice of the day.
 - The list is representative of other acts of righteousness, but also specific rebuttal of the Pharisee's way of doing things.
- The truth is fairly obvious – acts of righteousness motivated by the praise of others are acts of righteousness that have no eternal significance, and in fact are the practices of hypocrites who will be severely judged by God (See Matt. 23:13-23)

2. Application

- This verse brings up some interesting points of discussion:

Should we clap in a church service following a musical number?

- Our culture uses applause to indicate appreciation for a job well done or as an expression of gratitude for the influence of a particular performance.
- The focus of modern applause is almost invariably on the performer, not the meaning or purpose of the musical number.
- Whether an audience claps after a song or not, it doesn't necessarily reflect on the motivation of the one performing.
- In our ministry culture, clapping seems to encourage a "performance mentality" rather than a "ministry endeavor" ... clapping seems to glorify the creature rather than the Creator, and has a significant potential to deceive the performer.

Should we pass the offering plate for our gifts or put a box in the back of the auditorium?

- Offerings are a corporate activity done at the same time in the service - anonymity is preserved through the corporateness of the event.
 - Boxes at the back of a church auditorium remove the anonymity of giving and encourage the "grandstanding" referred to in the SOM.
- This section is a case study on the "fear of man" – the control others have on us through their approval or disapproval.

"Idolatrous fear of people occurs when desires become demands for the attention and provision of others; when our desires become more important than the glory of God."
(Welch, When People Are Big)