

# Authentic Christians

Lesson 20 – Matthew 6:2-4

## 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)*

- 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)

*“To ‘do’ this righteousness, was an old and well-understood expression. Thus, ‘Blessed is he that doeth righteousness at all times’ (Ps 106:3). It refers to the actings of righteousness in the life—the outgoings of the gracious nature—of which our Lord afterwards said to His disciples, ‘Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples’ (Jn 15:8). (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible)*

- The “charitable deeds” or “acts of righteousness” are those actions which display the righteousness of God’s kingdom – those ways in which we minister the grace of God in a fallen world and affirm our allegiance to Jehovah (i.e. the outworking of the gifts of the Spirit in our lives).

*Since all of our righteous acts are to be done for God’s glory (the point) and are to influence others to do the same, how do you know if your hidden “righteous act” or secret “ministry of grace” is glorifying God and not glorifying self?*

- 1 Peter 4:7-11 divides our “ministry of grace” into 2 essential categories (vv. 10-11): speaking or public/serving or private.
- It’s easier to determine the motive behind self-serving PUBLIC ministry than PRIVATE ministry – to be seen and praised by others invariably becomes obvious.
- In private (secret) ministry, the objective is not so obvious – it’s easy to hide.
- **MINNICK MAXIM**: If we pursue private ministry void of the due diligence and the same spirit of excellence that we would a public ministry, then we are guilty of a self-glorifying objective and not glory of the God who sees in secret. (Mark Minnick is the Senior Pastor of Mt. Calvary Baptist in Greenville, SC)

*“... the ultimate choice is the choice between pleasing self and pleasing God, and that is where the subtlety of this matter comes in. Ultimately our only reason for pleasing men around us is that we may please ourselves. Our real desire is not to please others as*

*such; we want to please them because we know that, if we do, they will think better of us ... That is where the insidious character of sin is seen. What appears to be so selfless may be just a very subtle form of selfishness.”* (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 293)

- Jesus gives three very piercing illustrations of how *“the goal of pleasing the Father is traded for its pygmy cousin, the goal of pleasing men.”* (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 59)

## 2. **Three Illustrations of Religious Hypocrisy**

- We will only have time to deal with one today, but each of the illustrations will demand similar questioning in order to make relevant applications – next time we want to get into Jesus’ teaching on prayer.
- **Charitable Financial Gifts**
  - Giving to the poor has always been the mark of the true follower of God: Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 14:21, 14:31, 19:17, 22:9, & 28:27; Acts 9:36 & 10:1-2.

*“The poor in the Roman Empire survived by crowding into small apartments, taking advantage of free water available in fountains all over any town, and receiving a subsistence allowance of grain from the government ... The lower classes almost certainly suffered from various kinds of dietary problems. Beggars are rarely mentioned in the literature, perhaps because philanthropy, either individual or corporate, was not part of the Greco-Roman social conscience ... Not even among non-Christian Jews is there clear evidence of organized charity before the destruction of the temple in B.C. 70, despite many prophetic cries for justice to the poor and the high value placed on almsgiving. The Talmud describes the collection and distribution of money and food for the poor, but the practice may have started in imitation of the Christians ... In general the Greeks and Romans felt no responsibility or sympathy for the poor. In the second century B.C. Polybius summed up the Roman attitude toward charity: “No Roman willingly gives anything to anyone.” The poverty of poor people was considered to be the will of the gods or the result of their own folly ... The suffering among this class of people went largely unrecorded but was none the less real.* (Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, pg. 191)

- The blowing of trumpets before a charitable offering is surprising to us – surprising to us and confusing to interpreters down through the years too:
  - Some believe it actually refers to the blaring of horns immediately prior to a person placing their offering in a receptacle, or perhaps sounding a trumpet to call the poor (beggars) to a place of distribution ... however, there’s no written Jewish source to confirm this and many recent commentators believe this interpretation stems from the writings of early Christian commentators who only assumed this. (Calvin)
  - Edersheim believes it refers to the “horn-shaped collection boxes” outside the Temple that were made that way in order to discourage pilfering ... however, the text clearly refers to an “action” on behalf of the one giving and not an “object”.

*“There seems to be no trace of any such custom on the part of almsgivers, so that the expression must be taken as a figurative one for making a display. It is just possible that the figure may have been suggested by the “trumpets” of the temple treasury — thirteen trumpet-shaped chests to receive the contributions of worshippers.” (Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, 1:42-43)*

- Some believe the phrase “sound a trumpet before you” is a metaphor like “tooting your own horn” ... however, only a few commentators have mentioned this possibility. (Broadus)
- The best interpretation seems to be from Buchler: public fasts were announced with trumpet fanfare and these public fasts were often accompanied by public prayers for rain – in order to insure the efficacy of such fasts and prayers, almsgiving was done at the same time. (Journal of Theological Studies, 10:266-270 [1909])
- The passage starts by giving us the hypocritical practices of Jesus’ day followed by the divine remedy: giving to the poor (almsgiving or acts of mercy) should be done without ostentation or the purpose of gaining the praise of others.

*Is this directive applicable only to the charity we exercise to the less fortunate or does it also apply to the weekly offering taken in a church service? (If we desire to help the poor ... which very little of our weekly offering does ... doesn’t this kind of charity often happen outside the weekly offering anyway?)*

*How much of our weekly giving should go toward a ministry to the poor?*

- The secrecy of the gift is expressed in “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” ... some see this passage as implying that we must give without personal satisfaction, and that we must pursue the eternal rewards of God in the place of our own personal benefit.

*In an effort to match our practice with Jesus’ directive, should we keep track of our charitable giving? Should CLBC? Should we claim our charitable giving as a deduction on our annual personal tax returns? Is the requirement to be “secret” about our giving an absolute requirement?*

- The reward of God for properly motivated “acts of righteousness” MAY or MAY NOT be during our lifetime, but may need to wait until the resurrection. (See Lk. 14:12-14)

*“‘Openly’(KJV), here and in vv. 6, 18, is a late gloss designed to complete the antithetical parallelism with ‘secretly’ or ‘in secret.’ Jesus does not discuss the locale and nature of the reward ...” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, pg. 164)*

*“We are not told when or how the recompense will be given, and may understand that it will be both in time and in eternity, both in character and in felicity.” (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 127)*

*Is the pursuit of God's eternal rewards a self-serving pursuit? (Implications: is it biblically proper for a person to be motivated by a desire for heaven and/or is it biblically proper for a person to be motivated by a fear of hell, especially when discussing salvation? Should the Christian be motivated to accumulate "rewards" from God rather than be motivated by obedience to God?)*

*Should we care how others judge our giving? Do we bear some responsibility for the way others perceive our acts of righteousness ... even though we may be doing so with the purest of motives? Should we accommodate the scruples of others?*

- The teaching of vv. 4, 6, and 18 hinges on how "secret" we believe we must be and how motivating the reward of the Father should be to us.

### 3. Points of Application

- We must individually and personally be considerate of the poor, if for no other reason to keep our heart tender and compassionate.
- Hypocrisy knows no boundaries – a corrupt heart can turn even the most compassionate gesture into a means of self-centered glory.
- Kingdom living demands some pretty intense evaluation of our motives and some pretty bold convictions about how we will live before an increasingly corrupt world. (See Col. 1:13)