

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7

A Christian's Religion – 6:1-18 (Part 1)

Jesus began His mountainside instruction by portraying in the beatitudes the essential elements of the *character* of a Christian ^{Matthew 5:1-12}. He followed with His metaphors of salt and light to indicate the positive *influence* genuine believers will exert for good if they exhibit this character ^{Matthew 5:13-16}.

Jesus then began His description of Christian *righteousness* by detailing how the moral righteousness of a Christian must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. This is accomplished when believers accept the full implications of God's law without avoiding anything or setting any artificial limits ^{Matthew 5:17-48}.

In this lesson, Jesus continues teaching on righteousness as He changes focus from *moral* righteousness to *religious* righteousness by explaining 3 key aspects of the Christian's *religion*: giving, praying, fasting. Jesus persisted, in this section of Scripture, to contrast Christian and worldly behavior and to exhort His followers to be different from the world (both the religious hypocrites and the irreligious pagans).

Throughout this study, Jesus not only contrasts the reasons for actions, but also the resulting rewards.

ACTS OF RELIGIOUS RIGHTEOUSNESS: MOTIVE IS EVERYTHING (6:1)

6:1 Practicing “**acts of righteousness**” (giving ^{v.2-4}, praying ^{v.5-15}, fasting ^{v.16-18}) to be noticed will not result in any heavenly reward (*misthos*: wages). This statement seems to contradict an earlier command by Jesus to “**let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds**” ^{Matthew 5:16}. The reasons they are not in opposition is a matter of the attitude of one's heart and the purpose for the act.

Note: All of the three upcoming sections start with “when” ^{v.2,5,16} and not “if”, implying a requirement.

GENEROSITY (6:2-4)

HYPOCRITICAL GIVING

6:2 Hypocrites (*hupokritēs*: devoid of sincerity and genuineness) give (*eleēmosunē*: act of generosity, mercy) to the needy in order to get men's honor (*doxazō*: glorification). These types of actions result in the receiving (*apechō*: to receive a sum in full) of only an earthly reward ^{Matthew 6:5,16}.

Jesus directly addressed the actions of the Pharisees by referring to “**trumpets**” and “**synagogues**”.

CHRISTIAN GIVING

6:3-4 The point Jesus was emphasizing by stating a person should “**not let [the] left hand know what [the] right hand** (*dexios*: the strong, active hand) **is doing**” was that dwelling on an act (self-consciousness) can easily lead to self-righteousness, because of our fallen nature. Meeting the needs of others by

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giving (to individuals, to the church, to parachurch organizations, etc.) should be done with as little thought as possible (“in secret”), and the reward will be from God ^{Matthew 6:6,18}. These actions become habits by genuine Christians who understand their service is always rendered to God ^{Colossians 3:23-24}.

Generosity is required, but not enough, as the Lord is always concerned with the motivation of the heart.

There are three motivational factors for doing anything for someone else: (1) seeking the praise of man, (2) quiet self-aggrandizement or (3) desiring the approval of God.

What is the nature of God's reward? Perhaps they are the Christian's inheritance ^{Colossians 3:24} or the crowns promised to certain believers ^{1 Corinthians 9:24-25, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4} or are they (in all or in part) simply the righteous satisfaction of doing something Jesus would do? ^{Acts 20:35}
In addition to rewards, every obedient act of a Christian is a growth step in a maturing faith ^{Luke 11:28}.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION WITH GOD (6:5-15)

CONTRASTING HYPOCRITICAL AND CHRISTIAN PRAYERS

6:5-6 When Christians pray, Jesus said “do not be like the hypocrites” who love to pray where they can be seen (*phainō*: to shine) by men ^{Luke 18:9-14}. The Pharisees did not really love to pray, but they loved to be “seen by men”, and it was the notoriety they gained and the pride they took in these actions that comprised their reward. When offering private prayers, saints should do it so only God knows (whether behind a closed door [*tameion*: an inner room] ^{2 Kings 4:32-33} or just silently) and He will grant a reward.

Another aspect of praying in a private place is that the Christian has less opportunity to be distracted.

These instructions apply to private prayer and do not imply that public prayer cannot be righteous.

Jesus' criticism was not with the Pharisees standing to pray, but with where and why they were standing.

Pharisaical (or hypocritical) prayer still exists today, because self-righteousness and carnality are common in the leadership and congregations of many churches across America.

CONTRASTING PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN PRAYERS

6:7-8 Also when praying, do not babble (*battologeō*: to speak foolishly or use meaningless words) as the pagans (*ethnikos*: Gentiles, heathens) do, by emphasizing quantity instead of quality. Instead, Jesus teaches saints to stay simple and direct ^{Ecclesiastes 5:2}, God already knows your heart and mind anyway.

Hypocrisy is a misuse of the purpose of prayer, by diverting it from the glory of God to the glory of self.

Verbosity is a misuse of the nature of prayer, by degrading it from personally approaching God to a mere recitation of empty words.

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