

When Religion Becomes a Show

Matthew 6:1-18

August 20th, 2017

Intro –

Experience of finding out that an actor who played an honorable and noble character in a series of movies wasn't actually a very nice guy. I was shocked and disappointed . . . but I shouldn't have been surprised. He was just an actor playing a part in those movies. That wasn't real. He was pretending.

Jesus takes aim at religious acts that appear to be good but are done for self-centered reasons.

1. Big idea: Beware of doing “religious” things to be **noticed** by people. (6:1)
 - a. The word of caution indicates that we can drift in to this. I think most of us know this to be true by experience.
 - i. Our hearts are divided and we can often find ourselves doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, for selfish reasons.
 - ii. We bring someone a meal, not to meet a tangible need for them but to be seen as kind and thoughtful.
 - iii. We sing not to be a blessing and encouragement to people, but to be noticed as a good musician.
 - b. “Practice your righteousness” refers to good deeds that someone might do as part of their service to God.
 - i. It's not a negative term or positive term in itself – it's doesn't necessarily refer to hypocritical “self-righteous” acts or to acts that are intrinsically good. As we'll see, Jesus will take aim at the heart motivations behind the acts.
 - c. Motives matter.
 - i. 3 chief acts of Jewish piety – alms giving, prayer, fasting
 - ii. Not limited to these though
 1. Parenting – for your own glory or for the good of your children?
 2. Serving in the local church in any capacity, even behind the scenes.
 - iii. The question – for whose glory? My own or God's?
 1. Not parallel tracks that are both accomplished by a fork in the road in which one or the other is accomplished.
 - iv. Mark Dever – Bad motives make good actions hollow.
 - d. Solution is not to stop doing these things that are good. The solution is to examine our hearts and even take steps to maintain anonymity if needed.
 - i. Don't conclude that you should never do something unless your motives are absolutely good and pure.
 1. Do the right thing and then work on your motives.
2. Motives matter when **giving** to the poor (6:2-4)

- a. "When you give" – Jesus assumes giving
 - i. Morris – Jews took giving to the poor very seriously, and in each community there were officials who made weekly collections of goods or money for the poor. Gifts were obligatory; a man residing in a town for 30 days became liable for contributing.
 - ii. **Deuteronomy 15:11** "For the poor will never cease *to be* in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'
 - iii. **Proverbs 31:20** She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.
- b. For some religious people in Jesus' day giving had become a way of earning forgiveness.
 - i. Book of Tobit – "It is better to give to charity than to lay up gold. For charity will save a man from death; it will expiate any sin."
 - ii. Explains why the disciples were baffled when Jesus would later say that it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 19:23-25)
 - iii. But that idea wasn't Jesus' target on this day.
- c. They were drawing attention to their giving so they would be honored by men.
 - i. May have literally sounded a trumpet or it may be hyperbole emphasizing their attempts to make their giving known.
 - ii. They were hypocrites – word literally referred to actors as in a play – they acted out a part but it doesn't convey the truth about them –
 - iii. They gave in the most public places – in the synagogue and on the streets – in such a way to draw attention to their giving.
 - iv. They have their reward – They wanted honor from people. They got honor from people. Deal completed. They have been paid in full.
- d. It should not be this way among followers of Christ – they should not be motivated by recognition from others.
 - i. Still assumes care for the poor.
 - ii. Uses striking language of not even your left hand knowing what your right hand is doing.
 - 1. Hyperbolic language to emphasize the secrecy.
 - 2. ~~Reminds me of the idea of muscle memory though. You practice something so often and become so proficient that you don't even think about it. It just happens (shooting a basketball, knitting, shooting a bow)~~
- e. How will the Father reward us?

Correct understanding of rewards counteracts the unspoken belief by many believers that what they do with their lives after they are saved makes little or no difference in eternity.

Motivation by way of rewards is not a product of the fall but of God's original design for humanity. It would be inappropriate if it were our idea. But it isn't our idea, it is God's idea.

Illustration – 10 year old, father says "help me with this yard work and I'll pay you \$50 and take you to dinner tonight." Would it be right for the 10 year old to look forward to the \$50 and dinner? Yes. Would the father be displeased if they weren't? Yes. Would they suffer loss

if they declined the work? Yes, they would miss the reward and experience some disapproval. Would it be wrong for the 10 year old to come up with the idea? "You want me help?! Pay me \$50 and take me to McDonald's!" Yes, that would be wrong.

Reward shouldn't be our only motivator. We should be motivated by gratitude toward God, fear of God, and love for people. These motivations don't conflict.

The evil one can only appeal to our desire for these things because our Creator built that desire into us. This is how God designed us to be. God appeals to our human nature but never our sinful nature by holding rewards before us.

Full-filling our desires and seeking rewards are non anti-Christ but unconcern for God and our neighbors and the preoccupation with immediate gratification is.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 19:17** Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

When and how? Not stated.

The flaw of the prosperity gospel is it says those rewards come now and financially.

- i. The reward may be ***praise*** from God.
 1. **1 Corinthians 4:5** Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.
 - a. The very praise the other givers were wanting from men these will receive from God.
 - ii. The reward may be greater ***responsibility*** in the kingdom.
 1. **Luke 19:17-19** "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸ "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' ¹⁹ "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'
 - iii. The reward may be greater ***spiritual growth***.
 1. As giving breaks the hold of materialism
 2. As prayer reorients our hearts
 3. As fasting sharpens our affections and focus
 - iv. Whatever the rewards, they will be good because God is good and it is legitimate for them to act as an incentive.
3. Motives matter when ***praying*** to God (6:5-15)
 - a. Don't pray merely to be seen by people as "spiritual."
 - i. They want to be seen. They are seen. They got what they wanted.
 - ii. Intimacy with God? Not the goal. Answers to prayer? Not the goal. Opportunity to express gratefulness? Not the goal.

- iii. The goal in prayer is to come before the Father in thankfulness, praise, petition, confession. That can be done publicly and there are many examples of public prayers in scripture. The problem is when the public praying becomes a means to be seen by others.
 - b. Don't trust in repetition and length in your prayers.
 - i. Gentiles practice of using certain incantations and phrases as a magic formula to get their gods to do what they want.
 - ii. Why?
 - 1. God already knows what we need before we ask. We're not convincing Him of anything.
 - 2. We feel like we need to be like the child who says, "mom" 41 times because mom isn't listening. That's not the way it is with God.
 - iii. Next week we will look at this model prayer from Christ.
4. Motives matter when **fasting** from food (6:16-18)
- a. What is fasting?
 - i. Donald Whitney – a biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.
 - 1. Christian – many other religious groups teach and practice fasting, but that's not the focus here because the motives could be vastly different. Here we are talking about someone who has placed their faith in Christ for salvation.
 - 2. Voluntary – not "I forgot my lunch today, guess I'll fast" or forced in some other way
 - 3. Spiritual – not merely dieting
 - ii. (Whitney) In the Bible are examples of fasts that lasted one day or part of a day (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12), a one-night fast (Daniel 6:18-24); three-day fasts (Esther 4:16), seven-day fasts (1 Samuel 31:13); a fourteen-day fast (Acts 27:33-34), a twenty-one day fast (Daniel 10:3-13), forty-day fasts (Deuteronomy 9:9; Matthew 4:2), and fasts of unspecified length (Mathew 9:14; Luke 2:37).
 - iii. Fasts could be partial or complete (food and water), they could be private, congregational, or even national (congress proclaimed three national fasts early in our history and Lincoln called for fasts on 3 separate occasions), regular (Day of Atonement), or occasional.
 - iv. Fasting could be done to strengthen prayer (Ezra 8:23), to seek God's guidance (Judges 20), to express grief (1 Samuel 31:13), to seek deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3-4), to express repentance and desire to return to God (Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8), to humble oneself before God (Psalm 35:13)
 - v. Majority are OT. Only a couple instances of fasting in Acts. No where commanded for Christians.
 - b. Don't fast merely to be seen as fasting!
 - i. Go to lengths to keep it between yourself and the Lord.
5. Key ideas
- a. God fully sees our **motives**.

- i. **Hebrews 4:13** And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.
 - ii. **Hebrews 4:16** Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - iii. Jesus sees the hypocrisy, sees the false motives, lays them bare, and forgives.
 - 1. No need to hide. Hiding the true motives is part of the problem.
 - iv. Have you ever been loved by someone like this? Fully known and fully forgiven?
 - 1. Even a close marriage or close parent/child relationship has some areas where you are hesitant to expose your heart motives.
- b. Living for an audience of one is ***freeing***.
- i. Constantly thinking about how a certain act comes across to others is a form of bondage.
 - 1. What will they think about this? Did they notice what I did here? Why didn't anyone say thank you?

When Religion Becomes a Show

Matthew 6:1-18



1. Big idea: Beware of doing “religious” things to be ***noticed*** by people. (6:1)
-

2. Motives matter when ***giving*** to the poor (6:2-4)
-

Deuteronomy 15:11 "For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'

Proverbs 31:20 She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.

2. Motives matter when ***giving*** to the poor (6:2-4)
-

How will the Father reward us?

Proverbs 19:17 Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

2. Motives matter when giving to the poor (6:2-4)

How will the Father reward us?

The reward may be praise from God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

2. Motives matter when giving to the poor (6:2-4)

How will the Father reward us?

The reward may be greater responsibility in the kingdom.

Luke 19:17-19 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸ "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' ¹⁹ "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

2. Motives matter when giving to the poor (6:2-4)

How will the Father reward us?

The reward may be greater spiritual growth.

3. Motives matter when praying to God (6:5-15)

4. Motives matter when fasting from food (6:16-18)

(Donald Whitney) In the Bible are examples of fasts that lasted **one day** or part of a day (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12), a **one-night** fast (Daniel 6:18-24); **three-day** fasts (Esther 4:16), **seven-day** fasts (1 Samuel 31:13); a **fourteen-day** fast (Acts 27:33-34), a **twenty-one** day fast (Daniel 10:3-13), **forty-day** fasts (Deuteronomy 9:9; Matthew 4:2), and fasts of **unspecified length** (Mathew 9:14; Luke 2:37).

4. Motives matter when fasting from food (6:16-18)

Fasts could be **partial** or **complete** (food and water); they could be **private**, **congregational**, or even **national**; **regular** (Day of Atonement), or **occasional**.

4. Motives matter when fasting from food (6:16-18)

Fasting could be done to strengthen **prayer** (Ezra 8:23), to seek God's **guidance** (Judges 20), to express **grief** (1 Samuel 31:13), to seek **deliverance** or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3-4), to **express repentance** and desire to return to God (Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8), to **humble** oneself before God (Psalm 35:13)

5. Key ideas

a. God fully sees our motives.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

5. Key ideas

b. Living for an audience of one is freeing.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.