

## RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY--DESCRIPTION & OVERTHROW

**Intro:** Human beings are a strange lot. We hear high moral injunctions from the word of God, and then, catching a small glimpse of the genuine beauty of perfect holiness we purpose to live it...only to mess it up by dreaming about how others would hold us in high esteem if we were like that! It is so easy to turn God's demand for inward purity into external piety. The desire to please the Father can be traded effortlessly for its pygmy cousin, pleasing and receiving the praise of men.

In the 6th chapter of Matthew Jesus deals with this problem. In chapter 5 the emphasis is on doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. In chapter 6 the emphasis is on doing the right things for the wrong reasons! In chapter 5 Jesus says, "Be perfect..."; but in chapter 6 he says, "Be careful..."

### GOD WANTS US TO BE TRANSPARENTLY SINCERE!

*"Take heed"--"Hold you mind toward this."*

*"Alms" here should better be translated "deeds of righteousness".*

*All performances calculated to solicit the adulation, approbation, or applause of men are nothing more than rank hypocrisy! (hypocrites--to judge under, to reply, to play act, pretender)*

*Those who play religion will receive no more reward than the praise they get from men! That is their reward!*

*God can see our good. We do not have to display our acts of righteousness publicly for him to see and know. God will reward those who truly do right for righteousness' sake and that before the whole world!*

### WE MUST LEARN HOW TO AVOID HYPOCRISY!

*Almsgiving, v. 2*

Jesus assumes that righteous men will help the needy. Jas. 1:27 "Sounding the trumpet"--perhaps calling for an urgent contribution. We have our own derivative idea—"toot your own horn".

Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing! A striking hyperbole! An overwhelming metaphor! How could I do something with one part of the my body and the rest of the body not know!?! This is a figure to simply say, "Let your giving be so quiet and private that you could do it with part of your own body not knowing you have done it, not to mention others!

Does this mean we sin when we mention to others that we have helped someone, or if our giving should be seen by others? Cf. Barnabas (Ac. 4:36-37) No! What Jesus is seeking to ensure is that our motives are pure. If hypocrisy is a problem, the only solution is to give our alms where no one can know. If we wonder what others will think, if we congratulate ourselves for our

generosity, perhaps we ought to make doubly sure that others will not know!

*Praying, v. 5*

“When you pray” assumes that disciples will be praying people! Praying in the street corners (Public); praying long prayers (meaningless repetition)

The solution: Prayer in inner room (closet). Does this mean one cannot pray publicly? No. The teaching is, if hypocrisy is a problem, pray where you know no one will see!

The second point Jesus makes has to do with meaningless repetition and length of prayer. It showed not so much a desire to impress others as ignorance of God.

*Fasting, v. 16*

Jesus assumed that his disciples would fast from time to time.

Fasting was a manifestation of humiliation, concentration, lamentation. It is taught in the NT to grow out of true spiritual need and in connection with prayer! Cf. Ac. 13:1-2

Pharisees neglected appearance to make it obvious to others that they fasted. Thus others would say, "Look at how pious the Pharisees are!"

Jesus' solution: Care for yourself in a way that makes it appear you are not fasting! This rids the temptation to do it to impress others!

### COULD WE PASS JESUS' HYPOCRISY TEST?

*What about my giving? Do I give to truly please the Lord? To be a vehicle of love to the destitute? Do I give privately hoping others will soon hear of it and congratulate my holiness? Would I give less if I knew no one would know of my deeds?*

*What about my praying? Do I pray more frequently and more fervently when alone with God than I do in public? Is my public praying an overflow of my private praying? When I pray publicly, what am I thinking about? Am I so busy scrambling to find expression pleasing to my fellow worshippers that I am not really concentrating on God and scarcely aware of His presence?*

*What about my fasting? Would I be quick to tell others of the lengthy periods of prayer in my life? Would I give hints by speech or dress or manner that I was doing something unusual?*

**Conclusion:** All that Jesus says here applies to every act of righteousness. Be pious! But do so for one reason only: To please God in heaven and to be rewarded by Him. If you detect in your own person just a trace of desire for human approval, make sure you conceal even more your deeds in order to prevent the display that would rob you of your reward.

All that we do will be rewarded by God. It is that motivation that moves us to

**come to God! Heb. 11:6**

**Sermon prepared by Johnny Felker in June, 1991.**

**“Blessed are the merciful...” :->**