

Righteous Giving

Jed N. Snyder Matthew 6:1-4

To teach the truth that Christ taught concerning the proper motive and method of giving so that my people may enjoy the blessing of God in this important area of their lives.

Introduction:

If you hear someone say, "yesterday I went to widow so and so's house and carried her some vegetables from my garden", or you hear someone say "I gave a faith promise of x number of \$'s last year", or if you see a name inscribed on a plaque saying that a room was decorated in memory or some dear loved one by so and so, then you can likely assume that those individuals already have all the reward that they will get from their benevolent acts.

Christ focuses our attention somewhat differently in this passage of Matthew chapter six than He had in chapter five. John MacArthur's summary is helpful to get the flow and context of what Jesus is saying.

“Matthew 5:21-48 focuses on the teaching of the law, on what men believe, and 6:1-18 focuses on the practice of the law, what men do. The first section emphasizes inner moral righteousness giving six representative illustrations regarding murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love. This second section emphasizes outward formal righteousness giving three representative illustrations of religious activity. The first has to do with giving, our religion as it acts toward others (vv.2-4); the second with praying, our religion as it acts toward God (vv. 5-15); and the third with fasting, our religion as it acts in relation to ourselves (vv. 16-18).” John MacArthur, *Matthew* p. 351.

I. The Principle Stated v. 1

Do not practice your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. Positively stated we are to perform our righteousness before the Father to be noticed and rewarded by Him. This is not in conflict with 5:16 where we are told to "let your light shine before men that they may see your good works" because there the motivation is "and glorify your Father who is in heaven".

Jesus is speaking against any practices that appear to be devout expressions of love for God and man, but really are done in order to receive praise by our fellow men. The principle has to do with guarding against hypocrisy. MacArthur tells of an eastern mystic who would cover himself with ashes as a sign of humility and regularly sit in a prominent place in his city. When tourists would ask to take his picture, he would rearrange his ashes so as to produce the best picture of his humility and destitution. Much danger exists in religious activity simply being the rearranging of our religious ashes in an apparent humility and devotion. These practices are hypocrisy pure and simple, a pretense of the true practice of these very needful acts. Hypocrites abound in life as they did in Scriptures where life is portrayed as it really is with all its warts and crassness.

Cain was the first hypocrite to offer to God an unacceptable sacrifice (Genesis 4:5-8). Absalom vowed allegiance to his father hypocritically (2 Samuel 15:7-10). Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus with a kiss of hypocrisy and Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give all the proceeds of their sale to the Lord when in reality they held part back and lied about it (Acts 5:1-10).

Hypocrisy is condemned throughout Scriptures. Examples: Amos 5:21-24 (read); Mark 7:6-7; Luke 12:1(leaven); Matthew 23:27(whitewashed tombs); Luke 11:44 (concealed tombs); Matthew 13:25(weeds amid the wheat); Matthew 7:15(wolves in sheep's clothing).

"Be careful" means to "be on guard" or "pay attention to".

"To be seen" is from "theaoma"- "to be noticed". We get the English word "theater" from this word.

Thus Jesus is concerned with "theatrical righteousness". He wants true righteousness in all areas and gives these three illustrations as indicative of the rest: alms, fasting, and prayer.

III. The Principle Elaborated v. 2-4

A. The duty of giving alms practiced hypocritically

Note: Alms are expected. Alms (eleemosune) means any act of mercy or pity and especially the giving of money, food, clothing and similar to the poor. In English we have the term eleemosynary. In the right spirit it is a duty we are expected to perform out of love for God and our neighbor.

Hypocrites from "hupokrites" was a word for an actor who wore a mask and portrayed in an exaggerated way the role that was being dramatized. Thus it means "any pretense."

MacArthur: "One of Satan's most common and effective ways of undermining the power of the church is through hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, therefore, is a great peril to the church and it comes in two forms. The first is that of nonbelievers masquerading as Christians. The second is that of true believers who are sinful but pretend to be spiritual. The warning Jesus gives here applies to both groups."

Augustine said, "The love of honor is the deadly bane of true piety. Other vices bring forth evil works but this brings forth good works in an evil way." Hypocrisy is so dangerous because it is so deceptive. It uses things that are basically good for purposes that are basically evil. "Hypocrisy" he goes on to say, "is the homage that vice pays to virtue."

B. The duty of righteous giving rewarded

Secret giving of alms in two ways:

- a. From the eyes of the public

b. From one's own contemplation (do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing)

The secrecy taught here was not that no one would know what was done, but that the things would be done in such a manner as to not be motivated by others knowing about them.

F.F. Bruce says about good works, "We are to show when tempted to hide and hide when tempted to show."

God knows all and rewards that which is done in a manner to please him. Hebrews 4:12-13; Matthew 25:34-36.

III. The Principle Applied

Several principles apply to giving in general, not just to alms:

1. Giving from the heart is investing with God. Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6
2. Genuine giving is sacrificial. See 2 Samuel 24:24 where David refused to give to God that which cost him nothing and Mark 12:41-44 where the widow gave more in proportion than did the 'big' givers.
3. Giving does not relate to wealth. He who is faithful in small things will be faithful in much. Luke 16:10
4. Material giving relates to spiritual blessing. Luke 16:11-12
5. Giving is to be personally determined. 2 Corinthians 9:7; 2 Corinthians 8:1-2; Philippians 4:15-18
6. We are to give in response to need, being careful not to help the indolent for they are to learn to work. 2 Thessalonians 3:10
7. Giving points to love, not law. 1 Corinthians 13:3