



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Why Do You Do What You Do? (Part 1)

Matthew 6:1-4

1. Dangers Awaiting Religious Activity (verse 1) 2. Giving to the Poor (verses 2-4)

As we begin a new section of the Sermon on the Mount, it would be good for us this morning to look back to what we have gone through thus far in this sermon. In the first 16 verses of this sermon, Jesus describes the citizens of the kingdom. He told us what they are like. He told us that such people are blessed. From verse 17-48, Jesus puts forth the righteousness that He requires to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is nothing less than perfect righteousness. Beginning here in verse 1 of chapter 6, Jesus will explain what practical righteousness looks like.

As we finished chapter 5, you may be overwhelmed with the depth of the purity to which God calls us to live. He calls us to have a thorough righteousness in our heart: in our attitudes, our thoughts, our speech, and our conduct. As we begin chapter 6, it will be more of the same. Jesus will continue to press us to righteousness, which goes far beyond a mere letter of the law obedience. The righteousness to which Jesus will press us will be deeply internal and of the heart. Jesus isn't satisfied merely with mere external religiosity. He wants every bit of us to be wholly devoted to Him. He calls us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength -- the very depths of our being.

The difference between chapter 5 and chapter 6 is that Jesus' instruction will begin to be more and more practical. In the first 18 verses of chapter 6, Jesus will address our religious life (giving, praying, and fasting). In the last 16 verses of chapter 6, Jesus will address our regular life (money, food, drink, clothing). In the first 12 verses of chapter 7, Jesus will address our fundamental attitudes toward others and toward God.

Matthew 6:1-18

(1) Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (2) When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (3) But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (4) that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (5) And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (6) But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (7) And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. (9) Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. (10) Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us this day our daily bread. (12) And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13) And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." (14) or if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (16) And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites [do,] for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (17) But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face (18) so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

In these 18 verses, there are some common themes, which are repeated often. The first step in good Bible study is to be a good detective. When a detective arrives on the scene of the crime, he doesn't look at the evidence and trust his intuition. He doesn't trust his hunches. Rather, he trusts the evidence that he finds. Similarly, in Bible study, we need to be good detectives, searching for and finding the clues to help us in understanding and interpreting the passage before us. Often it is the repeated things that give us a clue to understanding the meaning of a passage of Scripture. This is how the Bible works. Those things that are most important are repeated often. Those things that are less important aren't repeated too much.

In these 18 verses, there are some things that are repeated, that demand our attention. Here is a partial list of some of these repeated themes.

1. The phrase "when you" is used three times (verses 2, 5, 16). Jesus speaks of our giving, praying, and fasting.
2. "Hypocrites" are mentioned as poor examples (verses 2, 5, 16).
3. "Rewards" are mentioned (verses 1, 2, 5, 16).
4. These "rewards" come from men (verses 1, 2, 5, 16).
5. These "rewards" from men are "rewards in full" (verses 2, 5, 16).

6. Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" three times (verses 2, 5, 16).
7. Being noticed or seen or honored by others is repeated (verses 1, 2, 5, 16).
8. God is said to "repay" properly motivated activities (verses 4, 6, 18).
9. God can see those who practice in secret (verses 4, 6, 18).
10. God is described as our "Father" (verses 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 18).

Each of these themes all get back to one question. It is the question that I would like to ask of us today. My message this morning is entitled, "Why do you do what you do?" Jesus is interested in the "why" question. In your religious activities, are you being a hypocrite? Are you doing these things to be seen by others. Are you seeking to be rewarded by men? Or are you seeking to be rewarded by God?

In each of these religious activities which Jesus raises, He doesn't deny that you should do them. He says, "When therefore you give alms ..." (6:2). He says, "When you pray ..." (6:5). He says, "When you fast ..." (6:16). Rather, Jesus assumes that you will practice each of these things.

Jesus assumes that you will give alms. Some of your translations say, "alms (KJV), merciful deeds (MKJV), charitable deeds (NKJV), give to the needy (NIV), give to the poor (NASBU)." Put all of these translations together to get the idea of what Jesus is speaking about. He is speaking about giving of your resources to the poor. It isn't speaking about giving to the church or the synagogue (though, as we learned last week, it may be applied to this).

Jesus assumes that you will pray. Praying is the simple act of a communication to God, in praise, confession, supplication, thanksgiving, singing, meditation, crying, listening, or in waiting. Praying is that activity of the heart that communes with God.

Jesus assumes that you will fast. Fasting is the act of voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Dieting is not fasting. Fasting often comes as a result of particularly troubling circumstances. Jesus assumes that you will give alms, that you will pray, that you will fast.

But listen, church family, there is great danger in practicing these things. Look at the very first word of verse 1: "Beware." Right from the outset of this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us to be careful, take heed, beware. We know this word best when speaking of ferocious animals. When we approach someone's house and see the sign that says, "Beware of Dog," we stop. We think about our surroundings. We look for the dog. We look for the danger. We proceed with caution. When Jesus says, "Beware," He implies that we ought to proceed with caution. This is because there is great danger in these religious activities.

We generally don't think this. We think that the only thing harmful about giving to others is the financial loss that you experience in your giving. We think that the only thing harmful about prayer is the time you lose in praying, when you could be doing, other, more productive things. We think that the only thing harmful about fasting is the pain we will feel from our stomach. Jesus touches upon none of these dangers. The dangers that Jesus touches upon are summarized nicely in the first verse.

1. Dangers Awaiting Religious Activity (verse 1)

This verse forms a summary of sorts of the first 18 verses. Many of these common themes we noticed in the first 18 verses are resident in this first verse.

Danger #1: Hypocrisy

Look at how verse 1 begins, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." Thought the word, "hypocrites" doesn't appear here, the concept is present. Who is a hypocrite, but the one who puts on a show for others to behold? In fact, the word used here, "to be noticed by them" is the word, *qeaomai* (theaomai), from which we get the word, "theatre." The concept here describes the one who does something in order to perform for somebody else. As I prepared my sermon this week, I ran across several preachers, who described this danger using these words, "when religion becomes theatre."

In the ancient Greek world, the actor upon a stage could be referred to as a hypocrite, not in a bad sense, but in the sense that the actor pretends to be someone else. If you simply replace the word, "hypocrite" in our passage this morning, with the word, "actor," you will get the sense of how the word was used in the ancient world. "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the **actors** do in the synagogues" (verse 2). "When you pray, you are not to be as the **actors**; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues" (verse 5). "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the **actors** do" (verse 16).

I remember years ago seeing a television commercial for some drug. The man said, "I am not a doctor, but I play one on T. V." He then continued to give medical advice to the listening audience (to buy aspirin or Tylenol, or something like that." This is what the hypocrite says, "I am not a Christian, but I play one on Sunday."

A hypocrite is a pious pretender. A hypocrite is one who simulates goodness, to be seen by others. This is the implication of Jesus in verse 1: pretending righteousness, so as to be seen by others, that others might think you to be righteous.

The danger surrounds us, especially for us who regularly attend church. Each week we come back here to be with others.

- When things haven't been going well at home this week with your marriage relationship, you can often come on Sunday worshipping right next to your spouse with a smile on your face, acting like everything is fine.
- When some particular sin has plagued you this week, whether it is slothfulness, pornography, anxiety, anger, deceit, slander, malice, pride, or anything else. You suppress it and come to church, acting like a righteous man, and speak of the Bible, like it has been your treasure this week.

When you do these types of things, your children will learn to be actors.

We are like the moon. A curious thing about the moon is that in its rotation around the earth each month, it rotates only once on its axis, so that the same side always faces the earth. When we come to church (or gather with believers, or talk to others on the phone), we bring only one side of us to the table. Yet, there is a dark side, which we will never let anybody see.

The church has a great reputation in the world for being hypocritical. I remember golfing one time with a gentleman, who commented upon his lack of church attendance. He said, "Yeah, I don't go to church, because the church is filled with hypocrites." Such is the reputation of the church in the world. They see us as hypocrites. They hear us put forth all of these platitudes of righteous living, which we never quite live up to. They call us hypocrites. Look at the way that you live!

You know the solution to such a problem? Let me give you a few suggestions...

(1) Don't be an actor. Don't pretend to be a super-spiritual person, when you are not. It turns off the world. It turns off other Christians. It turns off God.

(2) When you sin, lift high the grace and mercy that is found in Christ. Confess your sin to Jesus and claim His righteousness for yourself. When others see you sin (or you sin against another individual), repent from your sin and confess it to them and give praise to God, that you have found forgiveness at the cross of Christ. Tell others that we gather for worship at Rock Valley Bible Church, not because we are perfect people, who live up to what God requires, but rather, because we, of all people, have found our sins to be lifted off our back by Jesus and what He did 2000 years ago on Calvary.

(3) Pray to God for your sanctification. We don't believe that we have the ability within us to be righteous. Otherwise such prayers as, "may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men," 1 Thess. 3:11, make no sense. We believe that God is the one who gives holy desires. He saves us and He sanctifies us.

Danger #2. Visibility

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." We have already touched upon this aspect a little bit. Jesus is simply warning us not to be the one who practices our righteousness so that others might see us and think us to be righteous. The construction of the Greek in this verse sets forth a clear purpose for one's actions: that others might see. (This is identical to verse 28, looking upon a woman, with the intent of lusting for her).

A clear purpose here is in mind. Jesus is describing the one ...

- ... who gives money to a cause, only if he will be listed on a plaque some place or a newsletter somewhere describing the amount he gave.
- ... who gives something away, and tells everybody what he gave.
- ... who prays to God with one eye open so as to look around and see who it is that is watching them pray.
- ... who goes to church, because of who will see him there.
- ... who wants to be an elder or a deacon in the church, because of the prestige that it will bring in the minds of others.
- ... who likes to sit on the front stage in the church, so that others might see him worship.
- ... who proudly displays his Bible knowledge with others.

I read a story this week concerning King Louis XIV of France. One Sunday, he and his attendants arrived at the chapel for the regular church service, but the place was empty. The only person there was Francois Fenlon, the court preacher. The King asked, "What does this mean?" The preacher replied, "I had published that you would not come to church today, in order that your Majesty might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king."

Realize, however, that there can be a reaction to this. The pendulum can swing to the other extreme. We might become so sensitive to playing the hypocrite before others that we fail to act righteously before them.

For instance, I remember my days of working in the computer field. Whenever I ate lunch with my co-workers, I was faced with a dilemma each time before I ate my lunch. Would I pray or would I not pray? Would I bow my head and close my eyes and pray or not? My dilemma came because of my already established habit of praying before I eat. Yet, so as not to parade it before men, I had this choice to make. What would I do? As I reflect upon my decision, perhaps I over-reacted. For the most part, I simply used to pause before I ate and prayed silently to God in my mind, rather than making a religious show about it. It wasn't because I was ashamed in any way to pray before others (especially non-Christians). Many times, I had opportunities to speak of God and share the gospel at lunch-time with my co-workers. I simply chose to deviate from my habit of praying before I ate so as not to parade my righteousness before men. Perhaps I was a hypocrite in reverse. Perhaps I didn't understand verse 16 in chapter 5, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

We need to realize that Jesus isn't saying in verse 1 that we ought not to practice our righteousness before men. Rather, we ought not to do this so that we might be seen by them, and thought to be so righteous. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sensed this tension when he said, "the

Christian at one and the same time is to be attracting attention to himself, and yet not attracting attention to himself" (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 2, p. 13).

Perhaps this is the best gauge: "If you do it in private, do it in public. ... If you do it in public, do it in private." We are salt to the world. We are light to the world. We will be seen. We simply need to be real! Perhaps when you go home today, you can ask your spouse, whether you are hypocritical in anything. They live with you and can discern best to see if your life at home and your life at church is consistent with your life at home. Are you real? Or do you act?

Danger #3. Respectability

Jesus says that if you are an actor like this, you will have no reward with God. Look at the last phrase in verse 1, "otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." In other words, anything that God may have given you, as a reward for your righteousness, will be forfeited.

The simple reason for this is that others have already given you your reward. When hypocrites give and are recognized by others as giving, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" (6:2). When hypocrites pray and others recognize them as holy, praying people, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" (6:5). When hypocrites fast in such a way as to be recognized as fasting in the presence of others, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" (6:16).

Such hypocrites seek their reward from men. And they obtain their reward from men. Perhaps you have sought your own glory in these things, rather than His glory. If so, you have received your reward, which is the glory and recognition that you wanted. Such workers of empty performance, receive exactly what they seek after: the applause and praise of men, which is all such deeds of "righteousness" are worth.

Far better is it to seek your reward from your heavenly Father. You do this by practicing your righteousness, not for other men to see, but for God to receive the glory. Again, isn't that the thrust of 5:16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"?

Jesus continues by giving three religious activities as examples of the dangers spoken of in verse 1. Let's look at the first example. It is found in verse 2-4.

2. Giving to the Poor (verses 2-4)

"When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (verses 2-4).

In the time of Jesus, giving to the poor was of high priority, and necessarily so. There was no social security. There was no welfare. Life expectancy was low, which produced many widows. Many lived in poverty.

The synagogues took it upon themselves to supply the needs of the poor. From time to time special collections were taken up for the poor among them. It was probably then that the trumpet sounded to announce the collection (and distribution) of funds for the poor. The same trumpet would summon people to come to the synagogue. To those who could give to give, it would signal the commencement of giving, and to those who were needy, it would signal an opportunity to receive. Eventually, however, it became a way in which these Pharisees could tell everybody that they were giving to the poor. What may have begun as a practical use of signaling the collections for the poor, degenerated into an opportunity to call attention to one's righteousness.

Down through the ages, people have always dreamed up ways of attracting attention to their own generosity.

- Like the guy, who was going to give a dollar to the church, but does so in pennies, so that all around can hear the clinging and clanking of the money as it is dropped in the collection box. Such a man has pleased others, not God.

- I remember watching a pastor one time. There were some missionaries at a church, and they took up an offering. When the offering plate came to him, this man leaned over, so that he might take his wallet out of his pocket. He pulled out his wallet and opened it up at face level (for all to see). Then he proceeded to take some money out and drop it in the offering plate. It made me sick to behold such a sight.

- Remember the story about Ananias and Sapphira? The story is told in Acts 5, about how they were caught up in the generosity of others in the church. They saw a man named Joseph, sell some land and give the proceeds to the apostles to distribute to the poor (Acts 4:36-37). Likewise, they sold some land, but chose to give only a portion of the proceeds to the apostles to distribute. Now, their problem wasn't that they only gave a portion. It was that they pretended to give all, while keeping some. They were hypocrites. Peter said to Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:3-4). Ananias died on the spot. His wife, Sapphira, encountered the same fate by being hypocritical as well (Acts 5:10). They were trying to put themselves forth before others as generous people -- selling property and giving it all to the church. God hates hypocrisy.

- This is the case of the Pharisees and blowing the trumpets. "Do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men." Their purpose in blowing the trumpet was to bring praise to themselves.

Jesus instructs us not to attract attention of others. He says, "let your alms be in secret and your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (verse 4). In other words, don't make a show of your generosity. Don't make a show of your giving and helping others. Do it in secret and trust that, "your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (verse 4).

We know that God sees the secret things. The Bible tells us that the "eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). We know that "no creature is hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13), including the "thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). "The LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts" (1 Chron. 28:9). We know that God will make everything right. He will reward you in your giving.

Your reward may come to you here upon earth. "Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Prov. 3:9-10). "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more" (Prov. 11:24a). Or, your reward may come to you in glory. Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25 speak of rewards given after a life well-done.

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we work hard at allowing you to give to the church in such a way that your giving is not seen by men. This is why we have an offering box in the back. Give as the Lord prompts you to give. Give as unto Him, and let Him reward you. There is nothing wrong with the passing of an offering plate. Don't ever think that we are doing it the right way because we don't pass a plate, but have an offering box instead. It simply is a way for us to help give to the Lord, without seeking the approval of men. If you find yourself in a place when an offering plate is passed, don't watch the plate to see if and what others are giving.

Furthermore, we also don't mention money and giving very much. Not because it isn't important, (because it is quite important). It is an indicator of your faith. We shall see in a few weeks that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). It shows where your treasure lies (upon the earth, or in heaven with God). That is why Jesus commended the widow who gave out of her poverty, two small copper coins (Mark 12:41-44). She gave "all she had to live on" and showed great faith. There may be some among us who are quite wealthy and can give greatly to others, without much stretching of our faith. There may be others among us who are struggling financially and to give a little is a great test of your faith.

But Jesus goes further than simply the avoidance of attracting the attention of others.

Jesus instructs us not to attract attention of ourselves. Jesus says that you ought to give to others in such a way that you don't even draw attention to yourself. Don't even think of how you are giving!

This is the point of verse 3, "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Jesus is obviously speaking hyperbole: Your hands have no intelligence. They cannot reason in what the other is doing. But the point is this. When you give, don't make a big deal of it -- not just before others, but before yourself as well. Don't dwell on what you gave to others.

This is the error of the Pharisee who stood in the temple praying, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people. ... I pay tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12). The Pharisee was in error (not because he gave), but because he continued to remind himself how much he had given. His left hand knew everything that his right hand had given. He dwelt upon how much he had given. The error that Jesus is addressing, here in Matthew 6, is not in giving. Jesus expects us to give ("when you give ... when you pray ... when you fast"). The error is in your own reflecting upon your righteousness in your giving.

So, let me ask you, Do you enjoy thinking about all of the things that you have done for others? Do you like to say to yourself, "You know, we have given many things to the Johnson family over the years, haven't we? We have had them over for dinner on several occasions. We have given them a boatload of children's clothes. We even gave their children a scooter for their children to play with. Oh, year, I even remember when we gave them some of our furniture we were getting rid of. Boy, aren't we generous?" Jesus is instructing us to give and dwell upon it no longer.

At the end of the year, when you are doing your taxes, do you enjoy reflecting upon how much you have given to various not-for-profit institutions (the church, other ministries, social institutions)? Wow, look at this! We've given over 10% of our income this year! In fact, we have given 12% of our income. Aren't we good! We have tithed! God must be pleased with us!

Don't seek to reward yourself in your giving. Give in such a way that God will reward you in your giving and helping of others. Give so that God will be the only one who even be able to reward you. Jesus was once invited to house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees to eat bread. He said, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:12-14). Later in His ministry, Jesus told of the reward given to such people, who cared for the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison (Matt. 25:35-40).

If people happen to see you being generous to others by giving something to them or if people happen to see you help others (physically, financially, whatever) or if people hear of some good that you did for others, don't fret that you have lost your reward. You don't need to hide your giving. Simply give to others in such a way that God might receive the glory (Matt. 5:16).

As I have thought about this, it has really impressed me that two people can do the exact same thing. Both of them give to help someone in need. Both of them give in exactly the same way (or amount). Both of them may be seen doing so, or not. In this case, God may be entirely pleased with one act of righteousness, and entirely displeased with the other act of righteousness, because of what is happening in the heart of the one giving to another. This is because your internal heart motivation matters to God. One may think himself to be righteous in his heart. The other may thinking in his heart, "Soli Deo Gloria," ("To God alone be the glory).

Your internal heart motivation matters to God. It matters why you do what you do. So, I ask you, "Why do you do what you do?" Are you motivated by the eyes of others seeing your righteousness? Or are you motivated only by the eyes of your heavenly Father? I would like for you to bow your head and examine yourself. I have a few questions that I would like to ask you. As you hear each of these questions, deal honestly with God. Confess any sin that comes to mind and trust in Jesus' sacrifice for sins.

- Do you do good things in order to impress others or God alone?
- Do you like coming to church, but have little or no desire and practice of reading the Bible and praying personally and privately at home?
- When others confess their struggle with personal bible reading or prayer, do you feel smug and proud of how consistent you are in your own devotional time before the Lord?
- Do you feel proud of what you've given to the church or to other charities or to others?
- Do you like to create the impression that you are better than you really are?
- Are you truthful in your acts and word, or do you exaggerate to be seen as more righteous?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 23, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.