

"Theatrical Righteous"

Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

1. Prevailing prayers are not measured by their length, frequency, or human eloquence; but by their fervency and honesty.
2. Since the God who answers all prayers knows all our needs before we ask, vain repetition and elaborate explanations are useless.
3. Earnest prayers of righteous people, however, put themselves in such communion with God as to make them fit to receive. (See McGarvey).

IV. AGAINST WRONG MOTIVES IN FASTING (6:16-18)

- A. *"Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast."* (16)
 1. Fasting is not wrong when done as an aid to self abasement and mastery in subduing the physical to the spiritual, as an aid to meditation and prayer, or as an aid to inward peace.
 2. It is wrong however to fast to attract human praise.
- B. *"But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father who seeth in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall recompense thee."* (17,18)
 1. When fasting privately, the Christian must maintain ordinary appearance to avoid hollow formality and pride.
 2. Stated fasts, commanded by religious organizations, are not taught in the N.T. But such rituals are identified with the apostasy. (1 Tim. 4:1-3.)
 3. Self-denial, expressed in fasting, is between the disciple and God, not men.

CONCLUSION

- I. The dangers of wrong motives: (1) Poisons the fount of life; (2) poisons the stream of life; (3) makes God's reward impossible.
- II. The cure for wrong motives: (1) Let God's love & Christ come in and rule; (2) cultivate the true motive, which *"vaunteth not itself...seeketh not its own."* (1 Cor 13:4,5). This gives real meaning to worship, service, life.

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INTRODUCTION

- I. Having set forth the righteousness required by the New Testament, as against that of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus now warns of a real danger lurking in the path of our doing those things He requires.
 - A. It is not the danger of idleness.
 - B. It is not the danger of merely not doing.
 - C. Nor is He warning against public discipleship, prayer, etc.
- II. The Lord condemns all ostentation in the doing of our righteousness: *"Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."* (6:1)
 - A. *"Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men."* (NEB)
 - B. Jesus is warning against a wrong motive for doing what God requires in all our obligations: Righteousness on parade.
 - C. There is a subtle temptation facing all who would follow Jesus, and he would save us from yielding to the desire to parade our piety before men with a desire to obtain their approval rather than God's.
- III. Jesus teaches that we should let our lights shine through the doing of good works (5:14-16), so this is not an appeal for absolute secrecy.
 - A. However, privacy, when possible, is usually best in matters that look toward our needy brother and are summed up in the word "almsgiving." (6:2-4).
 - B. The motive can also be tested best by privacy in the doing of those obligations which relate to God, summed up in the word "praying." (6:5-15)
 - C. Ostentation is also forbidden in those obligations that look toward ourselves, summed up in the word "fasting." (6:16-18)

DISCUSSION

- I. AGAINST WRONG MOTIVES IN GIVING AND HELPING (6:2-4).
 - A. **Sound not a trumpet:** *"When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you,*

they have received their reward." (2)

1. Jesus does not say, "If," but, "When thou doest alms," assuming that every true disciple does help other people.
2. Is our supreme motive in this (a) to supply the want of the needy? (b) For God's approval? Or, (c) To win human favor and praise?
3. Jesus doesn't say the hypocrites literally sounded a trumpet to call attention to their deeds; but the expression has doubtless given rise to the modern expression of ostentation, "He blows his own horn."
4. The desire to "put on a show" must not become the reason for doing our "works of mercy," if we desire the reward of God for doing them.

B. Left hand, right hand: *"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."* (3)

1. This is a striking, unforgettable expression, given to guide us in almsgiving, but it may be misapplied. Jesus taught a lesson by publishing what the poor widow gave (Mark 12:41-44; cf. Acts 4:36,37; etc.).
2. This statement is evidently made **for reflective emphasis**, as a guideline to help maintain the desired privacy and purity of motive more so than as a literal rule.
3. Whether we are laying up treasure in heaven by our giving is determined by our motive in giving, not by winning human applause.

C. That God may recompense: *"That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee."* (4)

1. Secret giving (a) encourages and helps insure a pure motive, (b) respects the privacy, esteem, and honor of the recipient, (c) establishes a basis of true friendship, and (d) honors the teaching of Jesus. --Coffman.
2. It is not wrong for men to see us giving, but it is wrong to give to be seen of men. Jesus does not forbid publicity, but the spirit which does it for publicity.

II. AGAINST WRONG MOTIVES IN PRAYING (6:5-15)

A. Not as the hypocrites: *"And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have received their reward."* (5)

1. Prayer, of all religious duties, should be free from ostentation.

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2. Jesus teaches against "show" in prayer in three ways: (a) In choosing a place; (b) In using "vain" repetitions; and (c) in making long prayers: "much speaking", for the sake of being "long-winded."
3. "Street-corner situations" **might** include a private prayer before a congregation, on a radio program, or before a meal in a cafe. Let us not "stand and pray" anywhere "to be seen of men." Like those who give primarily for human praise, such prayers are condemned by Jesus as being mere pretense--a false posture.

B. Pray in secret: *"But thou when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret shall recompense thee."* (6)

1. Although this forbids all ostentation, it does not prohibit public prayers for the edification and comfort of others and for the worship of God. (1 Kings 8:22; Acts 12:12; 2:42).
2. Concerning private prayers, however, it should be literally applied: Shut men out, and God in: Close your door when you pray.
3. Sincere private prayers, by righteous people, without noise or show, will be rewarded according to the will of God.

C. Vain repetitions: *"And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."* (7)

1. According to Jesus, the Gentile method of prayer of much vain speaking was pure formality--to impress men.
2. Cardinal Cushing rambled for 17 1/2 minutes at John Kennedy's inaugural.
3. Aimee Simple McPherson "prayed" 31 minutes and 10 seconds at the 1932 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Will Rogers, who immediately followed her, remarked, "Well, I didn't know anybody could think up that much to impress the Lord in favor of a Democrat.--Coffman, p.76.
4. This doesn't always require a literal closet, and it doesn't forbid persistence, long prayers, or repeated petitions (Matt. 26:44; Luke 6:18:1-8); but it does require earnestness, simplicity, and humility.

D. Your Father knows: *"Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before you ask him."* (8)

The Sermon on the Mount - Lesson 17