

The Motive Behind Righteous Living

Matthew 6:1–6, 16-18

Central Truth: Jesus promises eternal rewards to those who seek to please God with their religious devotion rather than merely impressing those around them. In Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 Jesus addresses the issue of how to act in such a way that God rewards one's religious activities of giving, prayer, and fasting. The disciples' motives are key. In verse 1 Jesus warns that God will not reward some of us because of the way we carried out our religious duties. Jesus addresses giving, charitable giving, praying and fasting as religious activities and teaches that God rewards our charitable giving, praying, and fasting when it's a private, personal matter between ourselves and God, as opposed to a public display to win the praise of others.

ENGAGE: I know I speak for most of us when I say, "How grateful I am for the music ministry God has blessed us with here at Calvary Bible Church under Pastor Rick. The choir, the orchestra, the special music--what a blessing each Sunday to join together with hundreds of others and lift our voices in praise to God.

Now, for you who come from a smaller church background, as I have, you may find yourself being impressed as well just by the size of some churches. **It's part of our human nature that many of us tend to be impressed by outward appearances.**

Now for any of you that would prefer that we not grow any larger... recently **a church member** sent me a list of ways we could reduce the size of our church. This list is called: – **HOW TO STOP THOSE ANNOYING PROBLEMS OF CHURCH GROWTH. Here are the suggestions**

For pastors they suggest: Begin every message with the phrase, "**You know what's wrong with you people?**"

Another suggestion: Have a church business meeting every Sunday morning and open up the floor by asking, "**So does anybody have a beef?**"

Since our auditorium slopes downward to the platform, **give every kid under twelve a handful of marbles before the service.**

Give our ushers the ability to "gong" anyone singing special music.

Establish an outdoor welcome center tent a few feet from a septic tank.

Revise our membership application forms to include a place for people to include their weight.

In order to feel relevant, say, "**You know,**" or, "**Dude,**" 15 times from the pulpit each Sunday.

Have our organist, **Scott, play hockey cheers** at pivotal moments of the sermon.

From Don, our treasurer, comes this suggestion: **Charge tolls for the use of restrooms.**

Finally: before the offertory hymn, have **Pastor Rick** scream, "**Show me the money!**"

While we laugh at these humorous suggestions about "how to stop those annoying problems of church growth, we do well as a church in which we see God having blessed us in so many ways to remember: **God is not impressed this morning simply by the size of the congregations**

gathered here or anyplace else around the world today. **God is not impressed by our outward appearance.**

This morning, as each morning God looks at our hearts. This morning **God calls you and me to examine our inward motivation for why we do what we do**. God asks us this morning: Who are you trying to impress? Are you doing your religious activities to make an impression on people? Or, are you seeking God's "Well done!" for what you do?

FOCUS: This morning God reminds you and me: **Appearances can be deceiving**. This is true in the righteous acts we perform as well. People who appear to be very righteous in the eyes of others may not be in God's eyes. In the passage of Scripture we will consider today Jesus warns: **Our acts of service and ministry must spring from a pure motive if it is to be rewarded by God. How can you and I make sure we display the right motive behind righteous living?**

SET THE STAGE biblically: As we continue our series on the Sermon on the Mount remember what Jesus does in this Sermon. Jesus' central point is that our righteousness must be more than the mere outward righteousness demonstrated by the religious experts in the law and Pharisees. If our Christianity only amounts to external conformity to God's revealed will, we will not be part of heaven. Jesus tells us: *"Unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20 NET). Jesus teaches us **we must have more than an outward religious shine if we expect to enter heaven.**

Now the Pharisees were the major league religious people of their day. For them, religion consisted of rules and regulations, responsibilities and duties. But the heart of the problem for many of them was that **their religion had no heart**. Jesus says, "If you are going to have a relationship that meets with God's approval we must deal with our heart issues." Our focus must be on pleasing God, which means we recognize, and with God's enablement, deal with the heart issues of our sin. **Our focus must be on pleasing God, rather than merely impressing people.**

Jesus begins in Matthew 5 by giving us the Beatitudes, which are **the attitudes that characterize people who enter the kingdom of heaven**. God has called you and me to be Beatitude people; people who are salt and light in a dark world. **God wants to use you to have a preserving influence on those around you**. God wants your life and testimony to be an attracting influence that draws people to the Lord. **Our faith must be based on a relationship with God through Christ, rather than rules**. As we enter deeper into a relationship with God, we grow in our understanding of what God desires for us. **God loves you and me too much to allow us to focus merely on outward appearances**. God wants us to look like Him. God's goal for you and me is Christlikeness. ***Now to help us understand His goal for us, **Jesus gives us six case studies**—murder and anger, adultery and lust, divorce and selfishness, oaths and deceit, retaliation and rights, hate and love. **In all these cases, Jesus set forth principles that flow from inner righteousness**. Principles that flow from an internal conformity to the revealed will of God.

PREVIEW: God gave you and me a new heart when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. This change in heart produces a change in the outward "religious duties" we do that are in harmony with God's will (cf. Matt 6:1). Over the next several weeks as we complete the sermon on the Mount we're going to see that Jesus teaches us how being a Christian is to work out in the details of three primary areas of everyday life. This week and next we'll consider **how our Christianity is to work out in the details of our public religious life (Matt 6:1-18)**. Then we'll note how

the details of our Christian life are to work out in our personal interior life (what goes on inside us) [cf. Matt 6:19-34]. Finally, we'll consider how our Christian life is to work out in our relationship with others (Matt 7:1-12).

Now this morning (as we consider how our Christianity works out in our public religious life) Jesus warns: God will not reward some people because of the way they carry out our religious duties. Let's listen as Jesus teaches us how we to carry out our religious duties (such as our charitable giving, our prayer and our fasting).

ANNOUNCE the passage: Turn with me in your Bibles for the Scripture reading to the book of Matthew chapter 6, verses 1-4. [Read Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18.] (p. 853)

Here in Matthew 6:1 Jesus states the principle that governs the next eighteen verses. "Be careful," or "take heed" Jesus says, "Not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven" (cf Matt 6:1 NET). Now if you have a KJV or NKJV (which is the translation of the Bibles in our Pews) you'll note in v. 1 it refers to "alms" (KJV) or "charitable deeds" (NKJV). While the word "charitable deeds" [ἑλεημοσύνη (*eleēmosynē*)] is used in the Greek text in vv. 2-4, here in v. 1 there is much better manuscript evidence for the word "righteousness" [δικαιοσύνη (*dikaïosynē*)]. [Cf. *A Handbook on the Gospel Of Matthew* by Newman and Stine on Matt 6:1.]

Here righteousness refers to the external activities we do to be more like our heavenly Father (cf. Matt 5:48). Jesus knows our public religious life is crucial for our spirituality. Yet He warns us to be careful that we don't become focused on merely trying to impress those around us, rather than on truly serving God.

So here in v. 1 Jesus states the central truth of this teaching here in vv. 1-18 on how being a Christian works out in the details of our public religious life. The central truth Jesus teaches us is this: Be careful not to do your religious duties, i.e., your righteousness, as a way to try to impress people. Do your religious duties because of a desire to please God. Otherwise you will have no reward from God.

Transition: Charitable giving, prayer, and fasting were for Judaism the three most important expressions of one's religious devotion to God. **The principle Jesus states is this: Don't practice your religious duties ["your righteousness"] before people in order to be seen by them.**

Don't practice your religious duties before people in order to be seen by them. Jesus warns you and me to avoid becoming like the Pharisees who performed their religious duties to make a good impression on the people around them. Jesus warns God will not reward some of us because of the way we carry out our religious duties. To practice our religious duties merely to be seen by people indicates our religious is a sham, there's no substance to it. As a result one day we will find ourselves shut out of God's kingdom.

Trans: Jesus applies this warning to the three areas that Judaism considered the most important for showing that you were a good religious person: (1) **Helping the needy** in vv. 2-4; **prayer** in vv. 5-15; and finally to **fasting** in vv. 16-18. **Helping the needy, prayer, and fasting are three ways we can demonstrate devotion to God.** These acts of worship—giving, praying, and fasting—serve as indicators of the reality of our religion. However, if we perform these merely to make an impression on others, our religion is a sham.

APPL: So as you take meals to help someone in need or you do other charitable acts, or service to the Lord and others, Jesus' point is: "Guard the motivation of why you do these good deeds." **Our religion is not to be a performance; it is to be a living demonstration of faithfulness to Jesus Christ.**

****The danger Jesus warns us against here is substituting form for substance.** Jesus cautions us not to perform these **activities to appear righteous before others, rather than seeking to please God.**

Transition: Wait a minute. Does this mean that all of our giving, praying, and fasting must be done in secret, trying to keep it from the knowledge of others???

If so, **what about Matt. 5:16?** There Jesus tells you and me: "Let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16 NET).

Do we have a contradiction here? NOTE AGAIN Matthew 6:1. Jesus does not say, "Do not perform righteous acts before people." Rather Jesus warns, "Do not perform righteous acts to be seen by people." Jesus is not opposed to having people know about the actions of His followers. Such things cannot always be kept secret or confidential. Jesus' concern is that **recognition not be our motivation for our charitable giving.** Jesus deals here with our MOTIVATION for WHY we do what is right. If we do what is right with the purpose of being noticed by others, Jesus says we have the wrong motivation. Jesus does not want you or me to do righteous acts for unrighteous reasons.

Our motivation must be God's glory, not our own. Jesus says, "Let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds **and give honor to your Father in heaven**" (Matt 5:16 NET). **Make sure your motivation is God's glory, not your own.**

APPL: Jesus deals again here in Matthew 6 then with the attitude of our heart. At the same time we have to be careful **about judging others motives. We don't see the heart.**

In **1 Cor 4:3-5** the apostle Paul addresses this tendency we have to judge one another's motives. Apparently the motives of Paul in ministering to the Corinthians had been questioned. Listen to Paul's response

SLIDE: "So for me, it is a minor matter that I am judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ^{4:4} For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord. ^{4:5} So then, do not judge anything before the time. Wait until the Lord comes. **He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. Then each will receive recognition from God**" (1 Cor 4:3-5 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

Transition: Now **what can we do to maintain the right motive in our devotion to God? Jesus gives three instructions to help us maintain the right motive in our public religious life:** First, Jesus says:

Don't trumpet your own devotion to God for the sake of being praised by people. See Matthew 6:2, 5, 16.

Jesus warns: Guard your motivation as you serve the Lord. Let's make sure our devotion to the Lord is done **for the Lord** and not just to build ourselves up in the eyes of those around us.

Historical background: In Jesus' day public fasts were proclaimed by the sounding of trumpets. At such times prayers for rain were recited in the streets and it was widely thought that [charitable giving] insured the [effectiveness and value] of the fasts and prayers. But these occasions afforded golden opportunities for drawing attention to one's giving. [D. A. Carson, EBC: Matthew, 164; cf., b *Sanhedrin* 35a; P. *Tannith* 2:6; *Leviticus* R 34:14.]

Now three times in Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus warns us to not trumpet our own devotion to God for the sake of being praised by people. Jesus' response to this attitude is: **Don't expect to be rewarded by God the Father for your acts of charity, if you are doing them to be seen by people. Such acts of piety, done for show, indicate you are only playing a part. You are a hypocrite.** Note how Jesus repeats this warning three times here in Matthew 6.

Note **v. 2:** "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." (Matt 6:2 NKJV). Note **v. 5:** "'And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.'" (Matt 6:5 NKJV). Note **v. 16:** "'Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.'" (Matt 6:16 NKJV). Cf.: NET: "When you fast, do not look sullen like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unattractive so that people will see them fasting. I tell you the truth, they have their reward" (Matt 6:16 NET).

Why were the Pharisees performing their acts of piety? They desired the momentary breath of people, the temporary praise of those around them.

Jesus consistently condemns this attitude. In fact, the indication is, **if our focus is on making an impression on people, getting people's praise, rather than seeking the praise that only comes from God we give indication we do not know God.**

Jesus told the Pharisees in **John 5:44: Slide:** "How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don't seek the praise that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44 NET). [Blank Slide] **If you are more concerned about what other people think of you than of what God thinks of you, your faith is inadequate, not genuine.**

The apostle John confirms this in **John 12:42-43** when he states: SLIDE (or Slides) of John 12:42-43: "Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess Jesus to be the Christ, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. ^{12:43} **For they loved praise from men more than praise from God**" (John 12:42-43 NET). (Paul makes a similar point in Rom 2:29): SLIDE: "A person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people" (Romans 2:29 NLT). [blank slide]

APPL: Whose praise are you seeking? Are you seeking praise from people or from God? Jesus tells us here in Matthew 6 that **those who have a true relationship with God seek God's praise, not people's.**

APPL: If you and I are going to live successful lives for God we must get a bigger perspective on life. Our focus must go beyond our present existence. We must focus on our eternal relationship with God. **Why are you doing the good things you are doing?** Are you performing acts of charity to build up your reputation? To make others think more highly of you? Or have you truly

given your life to God and see yourself as His servant? Are you seeking to live for Christ's glory?

APPL: Charitable giving here in v. 2 includes more than just monetary gifts or gifts of food. This can *include any acts of kindness or mercy you show to others*. We could broaden the application here to your work as an AWANA leader, a Sunday School teacher, your work helping with funeral dinners, and other activities of the church. What is your motivation for your service? **Do you do it as unto the Lord; or do you do it to be recognized and praised by people?** If you give so as to see your name put on a roll of contributors to a worthy cause; to boost your ego; you are giving for the wrong reason. And to such people Jesus says, "You have your reward." When we give or perform acts of kindness with the purpose of being seen and admired by people we have all the reward we are going to get. **Jesus warns: Good deeds do not merit more than one payout—if we get our reward from people; if this is our motivation for the good we do, we will not receive from God.**

ILL: Fund-raising consultants often approach educational institutions and offer to set up campaigns for these schools. They guarantee that these fund-raising ventures will substantially increase the revenues of the school. Usually their subtle and not-so-subtle strategy includes publishing the names of the people who contribute, listing them in categories according to the amount they donate. Those who give will be trumpeted and by implication, perhaps, so will those who don't give. These firms raise the needed money and get what they want—a percentage of the take. And the contributors get what they want—their names printed on a plaque or program and the subsequent applause of others. In Jesus' words, they have been paid in full.

APPL & TRANS: If you want public acknowledgment for your righteous acts, you have missed the point of Jesus' message in Matthew 6. This applies to our praying as well as our giving.

EXPLANATION (cf. Robinson, p. 183): When you pray, Jesus warns, don't be like the hypocrites who love to stand in the synagogues or out on the street corners and pray where everyone can see them. Prayer was an important part in the Jewish religion as it is in the Christian faith. **Jesus warns us against allowing prayer to turn into a performance.** Several years ago, a Boston newspaper reported on a prayer given by a noted clergyman as "one of the most eloquent prayers ever delivered to a Boston audience."

Jesus is not against public prayer. But He is against the motive that turns it into a performance. That's why He admonishes us to go into a room and close the door. In the Jewish homes of the first century the only private place where the door could be locked was the storeroom, and that's the word Jesus uses. The term translated *room* refers to the inner room of a house, normally without any windows opening outside, **the most private location possible** (BDAG 988 s.v. ταμείον 2; cf. NET notes). In a private place where no one can see us, showmanship disappears, and we are more likely to talk with God.

Trans: Jesus applies the motive behind worship also to the matter of **FASTING**. Look at Jesus' warning in **Matt 6:16** (NKJV) "*Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*"

Traditionally the pious Jew covered his head with ashes when he was fasting, outwardly symbolizing their inward repentance. This custom of covering one's head with ashes goes back

to at least the time of Job (several hundred years before Christ) [Hartley places Job's composition in the seventh century B.C., John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 20]. At the end of the book of Job we hear Job saying, "Therefore I despise myself, and I repent in dust and ashes!" (Job 42:6 NET).

Jesus says if you want God's pleasure and reward, change your motives and mode of operation. Fasting always has to do with the acknowledging of sin in the Old Testament. The people of Israel fasted at times of national repentance. On the Day of Atonement all Israelites were to fast. **If prayer draws us to God, fasting draws us away from self.** If you fast to wean yourself from the ordinary distractions of life so you are more able to concentrate on God, that's fine—but do it in private.

Reit/Trans: Giving, praying, and fasting are not things we do for public display. They are private actions done for the good of others or for the strengthening of our own spiritual lives. **What can you do to maintain right motives as you seek to do what is in harmony with God's will?** **First**, Jesus says, "Don't trumpet your own devotion to Christ for the sake of being praised by people. " **Second**,

Let your acts of devotion—such as giving, praying, and fasting—be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not by self-congratulation.

Not only are you not to tell other people about your giving with the purpose of being praised by them, you are not even to tell yourself. What do we mean by this? You are not to be self-conscious in your giving, for self-consciousness will readily deteriorate into self-righteousness. So subtle is the sinfulness of our heart that it is possible to take deliberate steps to keep our giving secret from people while simultaneously dwelling on it in our own minds in a spirit of self-congratulation. (cf. John Stott, 130 Chr. Counter-Culture.)

Note how Jesus instructs us in each of our acts of devotion to do them with self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, rather than to bring praise to ourselves. Note Matthew 6:3-4a (NKJV): "*But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; that your charitable deed may be in secret.*"

Jesus instructs us in our prayers along similar lines. Not v. 5 (NKJV): "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place." [or: "**pray to your Father in secret.**" [Cf. NET: "*But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.*"]

And in **vv. 17-18a** (NKJV) we read: "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place." (or, to your Father who is in secret).

APPL: You and I cannot very well close our eyes while writing out our checks. Nevertheless, as soon as the giving of a gift is decided and done, it will be in keeping with this teaching of Jesus that we forget it. We are not to keep recalling it in order to gloat over it, or to preen ourselves on how generous, disciplined or conscientious our giving may have been.

REIT: Our giving, praying, and fasting are to be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not by self-congratulation.

ILL: After Jesus' sermon we read these words in Matthew 8:1-4 (NKJV): "When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. **2** And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." **3** Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** And Jesus said to him, "**See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**"

APPL: Can the same be said of you and me? **Why do we do what we do?** Are you secretly praising yourself for the good deeds you do? Or, are you seeking God's favor?

Reit/Trans: What can you do to maintain right motives? **First**, Don't trumpet your own achievements for the sake of being praised by people. **Second**, let your giving, praying, and fasting be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not by self-congratulation. **Third**,

Remember, when you give, pray, or fast with the motivation of seeking God's approval, not the praise of people, God will reward you. See Matthew 6:4, 6, 18.

Make sure you seek God's approval in what you do, not people's. Be so given to God that your giving, praying, and fasting are prompted by obeying God and having compassion for others.

Have faith that God sees and will reward your devotion to Him. As you help the needy, pray, and fast, with a heart that seeks after God, and not for the praise of others, **God will reward you.** God sees your heart. God knows your motivation and mine.

Notice Jesus' promise as we give, pray and fast seeking His approval not peoples. Note first vv. 3-4 (NKJV): "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** that your charitable deed may be in secret; **and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you [openly]."**

Do you want to be rewarded for your charitable giving? Make sure you give to enhance God's reputation, not your own. "**Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you**" (Matt 6:4).

Jesus makes the same point about our praying and fasting (and any other religious activity we might do).

Trans: Jesus makes the same promise to us as we get alone to spend time with God in prayer. God promises to reward us. "*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you [openly]*" (Matt 6:6 NKJV).

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you [openly]" (Matt 6:17-18 NKJV).

Play for an audience of One! Focus on pleasing God. **As you give, pray, and serve God with pure motives, God will reward you.**

Summary: God expects our relationship to Him and His promise of rewards to motivate you and me to assist the oppressed and needy, to pray earnestly to Him, and to fast at times in deep repentance. Matthew 6 does not say "if you give to the needy, if you pray, if you fast, rather when you give, when you pray, when you fast."

But as we seek to serve the Lord in many different ways in our lives, Jesus warns you and me: **God is not impressed with our outward religious activities.** God looks beyond the outward actions that others may see. God looks this morning at your heart, my heart. Christ calls us to examine the motivation for why we do what we do.

Remember, Jesus says here: You get what you go after.” Whose praise are you seeking? The praise of people or the praise of “Your Father in Heaven?” I like what Haddon Robinson says:

“As human beings we want our piety known. It is difficult to give generously and never be commended. It is hard to pray for an hour without letting someone know of our devotion. It is tough to fast—in fact, most of us, don’t—and not have someone [sympathize] with our devout hunger. **We forget that in all of this there is an important Onlooker who knows all our motives and cares about our true devotedness to Him.** [God] will see that we are rewarded in His own way in His own time.”

Is your giving, your praying, your fasting—your worship—truly for God? If it is, your Father in Heaven who knows your deepest wishes will reward you with treasures you really value.

In our giving, praying, and fasting let’s be in His Majesty’s secret service.