

False Piety

Matthew 6:1-18

Introduction

1. Chapter 6 addresses one of the most sensitive areas of our lives – **spiritual social security**.
 - There is a human motivation for religious “showboating” - To be accepted in the community. This is especially true in congregations that emphasize holiness over grace.
 - Our fear is that if people see us for who we really are they will reject us. We want to be sure that they notice our good deed not to glorify God but to glorify us and thus give us tenure in the community.
2. Chapter 6 presents a contrast with certain parts of chapter 5(vs.13-16) where we are challenged to let our light shine before men so that they will see our good works.
 - Jesus is addressing two different concerns in these chapters.
 1. In chapter 5 the concern is to not to hide our witness to the Kingdom’s values.
 2. The difference between chapters 5 and 6 has to do with who is glorified, God or self.
 - When we are tempted to hide our good works we should show them. When we are tempted to show our good works (to glorify self) we should hide them.

A. False sanctification (6:1-18)

- It is not enough to do the right thing if the motivation is selfish.
- Three criteria for righteous conduct - 1) Is the act consistent with the commands of Scripture? 2) Is the act motivated by love? 3) Is the act sensitive to context (time)?

1. Looking good with respect to giving (6:1-4)

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.

- This passage suggests that Jesus assumes a certain commercial exchange with respect to our good works. We seek a reward from either man or God.
- It is possible that this assumption is to be understood under the context of the Old Covenant and not the New Covenant in that we do not see such an emphasis in the Apostle’s teaching.

2. Looking good with respect to praying (6:5-15)

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 For 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.

- The lessons we can learn about prayer in this text are 1) Be careful that public prayers are really to God not to the community. 2) God is not hard of hearing.
- The Lord's prayer is really the disciples prayer and is a balance between spiritual and material concerns. It is best understood under the Old Covenant. Our forgiveness of others is the standard for our forgiveness by God. This is Old Covenant theology and it is why many evangelicals do not use the prayer in public services. **Eph.4:32**

3. Looking good with respect to fasting (6:16-18)

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.

- When we suffer as a result of our religious discipline we want others to notice so we will get our due credit. While fasting was and is a common practice in many cultures it is not as common in our present culture. But there are many other forms of spiritual discipline that might be included in the lessons from this paragraph – abstaining from certain forms of food, drink, activity, etc.
- Note that the word “anoint” in this passage is the same word used in James 5:14 where the elders are to anoint the weak (or sick) as a part of their healing ministry. This might suggest grooming rather than ceremonial cleansing.

B. Lessons

- Recognize the danger of form over substance in your own faith.
- Be careful to encourage true faith in others by offering genuine acceptance of people for who they are.
- **Do not hide your light or lose your saltiness but be careful to not shine the light on yourself.**

Psalm 51

“¹⁶ For thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
Thou art not pleased with burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”