

Matthew 6:1-4

How the Righteous Give

At the end of the day, we all want to be liked, accepted, and validated. This is why we filter and edit our photos before posting on social media, censure our words around certain people, choose our social circle, want our boss to approve of our job, our spouses to love us, our children to honor us, our in-laws to tolerate us, our friends to like us, and our neighbors to welcome us. We just want to be liked.

This is a serious temptation in religion. Religion and ritual profits off our natural desire to be approved and liked. While our social lives largely involve working for the approval of others, religion adds an extra bonus, the approval of Heaven. When faith is stripped from grace, it will, in the end, promote pride. Jesus addressed this head on. In the opening four verses of the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus applied this principle to charity followed by the pride of achieving approval through public spirituality beginning with prayer (vs. 5-15) and then through fasting (vs. 16-18). In these eighteen verses, Jesus accomplishes two things. First, he shows the fakery of religion which is like actors wearing a mask. Secondly, he shows the good news of gospel-love.

Following the Christmas parade growing up, Santa would meet with local kids. One year, I was shocked to discover that Santa Clause was my uncle! Obviously (spoiler alert) my uncle is not *really* Santa. He was only an actor. Santa is more than a red suit and a white beard. Anyone can wear a costume. I knew my uncle, and although he is a wonderful uncle, he is no Santa Clause. He is an actor. Likewise, sometimes piety isn't really piety, its playacting.

Jesus begins by laying out **the Principle** (vs. 1). In the previous chapter, Jesus showed that sin begins in the heart. That is to say, outward sin begins with inward motivations. Adultery, for example, begins with lust (5:38-42) while murder begins with hatred and anger (5:21-26). Jesus now does the inverse. Righteousness likewise begins in the heart. Outward righteousness does not equal inward righteousness.

True righteousness is born out of motivation to please God, not men. When you give, for example, do it to please the Lord and not others (vs. 2-4). Likewise, when you pray, do it to please the Lord and not others (vs. 5-15). Finally, when you fast, do it to please the Lord and not others (vs. 16-18).

Our actions, therefore, must be judged by the heart. Think about it, are wrong things always wrong? Can they ever be right? If I shove my wife, is it automatically wrong? What if I was saving her from oncoming traffic? Likewise, a kiss is an outward expression of love and trust. It

could also be used to betray and beguile (cf. Judas). Charity, prayer, and fasting may outwardly look righteous, but unless they are done with the same motivations, they aren't.

Having laid out the principle, Jesus turns to its **Application** (vs. 2-4). To begin, charity, especially regarding giving to the poor, is clearly commanded by God throughout the Bible (see, for example, Leviticus 19:10, Deuteronomy 15:7, 1 John 3:17-18).

Although charity is good, it is not necessarily righteous when our hearts remain corrupt. Corrupt motivation begins when we want to be "praised by others" (vs. 2). To emphasize his point, Jesus utilizes sarcasm. There is no historical evidence anyone sounded trumpets and had literal parades to draw attention to their lavish gifts. This is an exaggeration of the man who seeks praise through charity.

It is worth mentioning the Jews believed that giving to the poor resulted in salvation. In Tobit 12:8, for example, Jews were told that "charity will save a man from death; it will expiate any sin." Similarly, the Wisdom of Sirach 3:30 claimed, "As water will quench a flaming fire, so charity will atone for sin." This gave the average Jew in Jesus's day the impression that salvation was easier to achieve for the wealthy because they could donate more.

This isn't unique to First Century Judaism. Even now, we judge people by their charitable giving. We don't sound trumpets; we hold large checks and change our profile pictures. Jesus calls those who's generosity is motivated by the praise of others "hypocrites." The word means "an actor," "an interpreter," "one who personates another," or "one who wears a mask." A hypocrite is someone whom you see is not the *real* person.

Seek instead to be generous for the glory of God. Meet the needs of others, not the ego. Again, Jesus uses exaggeration to make his point. Our giving should be so secretive (so that God will receive the glory), our left hand should not know what the right hand is doing. This carries the idea of spontaneous giving without any intention of special effort or for showing off.

All that we have is God's. We have not earned our salvation but were given it. We have not earned our possessions, our families, or our schedules. We were given them. Will we not sacrifice for others as He sacrificed for us?

The wife of Charles Spurgeon, Susannah Thompson, would sell eggs at church every week. Due to Spurgeon's popularity, they were not poor, and yet his wife refused to give away the eggs their chickens laid even to close relatives. As a result, many thought the Spurgeons were greedy and selfish. It wasn't revealed until after her death that the money she collected from the eggs didn't go into their bank account but went to support two poor widows at the church. She gave to the glory of God. May we, who have been given the gracious blood of Jesus, do the same.