

“Why We Do What We Do”

Matthew 6:1-4

Toward the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third century B.C. there was a very famous Greek architect by the name of Sostratos. The king of Egypt, Ptolemy, used him in order to build the famous Pharos Lighthouse of Alexandria, which was the last of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The king's purpose in building this beacon light was that the ships might find their way into the safety of the port. When the massive undertaking was completed, architect Sostratos was instructed to chisel the king's name on a stone that was part of the building. Though only the king's name was allowed on buildings erected during their reigns in the period, Sostratos got around this by also carving his own name with a dedication, which was then covered with plaster. The consecration in honor of Ptolemy was then carved into the plaster, which over time peeled away leaving only the name of Sostratos and the dedication to himself.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of those who in many ways are much like Sostratos in their supposed acts of outward righteousness. Though they appear righteous before others, and though it would seem like the name of the King is chiseled in what they do, God who sees the heart can see through their thin plaster.

We are going to study a subject this morning that we seldom emphasize—motive. The point that Jesus makes in this chapter is that God examines our heart and its hidden motive.

“Motive” - *something that causes a person to act*

If I were to define the word, I would say that motive is simply WHY we do what we do. Motive is the attitude behind the act. Motive is the intention behind the decisions we make.

What a sobering thought it is that God is watching every action of my life as well as the heart motive behind it. Our objective as Christ's disciples ought always to be to please God, not just to look good before men.

F. B. Meyer referred to this paragraph in the Sermon on the Mount as “The Inwardness of True Religion.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones - *“Here we have what we may well call a picture of the Christian living his life in this world in the presence of God, in active submission to God, and entire dependence upon Him...this section presents a picture of the children in relationship to their Father as they wind their way on this pilgrimage called life.”*

This passage brings us face to face with ourselves. It shows us that our King is always concerned about the hidden motives of the heart. No matter how outwardly pious or religious a person may be, outward actions without the proper attitude and motive behind them do not please God. Integrity means that one’s motives are right as well as one’s actions.

God’s Word has much to say about the motives of our heart:

Philippians 1:15-18 - **“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”**

Proverbs 16:2 - **“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.”**

Acts 8:22 - **“Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.”**

What is it that motivates us to live obedient and surrendered lives? Grace!

There are two huge emphases in this text:

- the practice of righteousness
- the possibility of reward

Here in chapter 6, Jesus mentions three ways that righteousness is practiced in the life of a believer—giving, praying, and fasting. These are three disciplines in the lives of His disciples. But before Jesus gives the instruction, He emphasizes the intention behind it. The motive of the heart is just as important as the method of the discipline.

It is possible to be the most generous person in High Point, and yet still have no reward from God. Or, you can pray the most eloquent prayers of anyone for miles around, and yet have no reward from God.

Kent Hughes - *“I find this terrifying, for it means that my life, which is ostensibly given to God, can in the end count for nothing. The outwardly most self-effacing saint in our congregation may have all his good deeds rejected.”*

Jesus doesn't want for this to be the case. Within this passage, Jesus reveals at least three different motives that some have in the way that they practice righteousness before others, only one of which is blessed by God.

1. For the sake of APPEARANCES only (6:1)

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

In these verses, Jesus is speaking specifically about giving to the needy. Consider how other translations render this verse:

6:1 (KJV) - **“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”**

6:1 (NKJV) - **“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”**

6:1 (NLT) - **“Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.”**

Jesus' exhortation to "beware" or "be careful" is in the present tense form, and He is emphasizing the need to be on constant alert to the temptation that exists of us to seek our reward from others as the motive for our good deeds.

Matthew recorded the term "Father" seventeen times in this sermon, which was something fresh to Jewish ears. Jesus is emphasizing the reality of a relationship. The Pharisees practiced a performance-oriented "works-righteousness" apart from any relationship, which led them to do what they did for recognition.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases verse 1 this way:

6:1 (Message) - "Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding."

It is important to understand here that Jesus is not condemning giving that CAN be seen by others. Instead, He is condemning giving TO be seen by others, meaning that being seen is the reason behind one's giving.

Keep in mind what Jesus has already said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:16 - "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus is not condemning the righteous acts themselves. Genuineness is His focus, not the acts by themselves. His concern is the motivation behind the actions.

The same act of obedience can be right or wrong, depending on why a person does the act.

An illustration of this is seen in the early church through the hypocritical example of Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5.

2. In a search for APPLAUSE from others (6:2)

“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”

In all three warnings found in this chapter, Jesus warns His disciples not to be like the hypocrites (6:2, 5, 16).

Jesus says that true righteousness doesn't have to be recognized by others in order for it to be a reality. It gives because it loves God and people, not because it loves to be applauded.

“Sound no trumpet” - *only time this verb is used in Scripture; Jesus is using symbolic language; the phrase ‘blow your own horn’ comes to mind*

Jesus is warning us against the danger of hypocrisy. If it reigns in us, it will ruin us. So He warns us to beware of it. Hypocrisy is religion that is only skin deep. It is a religion of words and works, but not of grace, heart, and spirit. Hypocrisy is a form of godliness, an outward show of religion, but it is without the life and power of God in the soul.

Augustine - *“The love of honor is the deadly destruction of true piety. Other vices bring forth evil works but this brings forth good works in an evil way.”*

Hypocrisy is dangerous and destructive, but it is also deceptive. It uses things that are basically good for purposes that are basically evil.

- Giving for self-recognition
- Serving for selfish reward

Hypocrisy motivates a person to do something so that they can get the credit, and unless they receive credit, they won't step up.

Ronald Reagan - *“There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit.”*

“Praise” - *glory; honor; to think highly of*

It is the idea of wanting people to notice you and attracting their attention so that they can honor you with flattery and words of praise. Jesus says that it is very hypocritical.

Why is hypocrisy dangerous and deceptive? Here are four reasons:

- hypocrisy presents a covering for what's really wrong in your life
- hypocrisy promotes a thirst for human applause
- hypocrisy prevents an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ
- hypocrisy provides a false sense of security about the future

The ultimate hypocrite in Scripture is man by the name of Judas Iscariot. From what we know about Judas, he loved appearances and recognition.

As a hypocrite, Judas used good things for evil purposes:

John 12:1-6 - “Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

Judas took the disciples' moneybag and made it a personal piggybank.

Luke 22:3 - “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.”

Luke 22:39 - “And [Jesus] came out and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and His disciples followed Him.”

John 18:2 - “Now Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with His disciples.”

Judas was privy to the place where Jesus prayed with His disciples and used it as the place of betrayal.

Luke 22:47 - “While He was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss Him, but Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Judas used the appearance and language of affection as the sign for the betrayal. Though outwardly he appeared the same as the other disciples, inwardly he was in league with Satan.

God sees through the thin veneer of hypocrisy and weighs the heart.

Amos 5:21-24 - “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Jesus reminds us that true righteousness means that we live for the purpose of impressing God alone.

It is living our lives in the recognition that God knows every thought and deed, and it is His approval alone that matters. Therefore, I don't need recognition and I don't have to get the credit.

3. From a selfless ATTITUDE of obedience (6:3-4)

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The right motive is not based on feeling; it is based on relationship. For instance, some will argue that they shouldn't pray when they don't feel like it because it would be hypocritical. They shouldn't give when they don't feel like it because it would be hypocritical. This is not what Jesus is saying.

“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” - *an expression that simply referred to doing something spontaneously with no special effort or show*

It means that we do what we do with no thought of reward or recognition.

Reward comes from God when we do what we do with His glory in mind and with no thought for our own. Jesus says that a future reward belongs to those who forgo present honor.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the life of Jesus:

Philippians 2:5-11 - “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Those who practice righteousness to be seen and applauded by others have their reward and nothing more. Those who serve God from the right heart motive by keeping God's glory in mind will be rewarded by God Himself.

Here's a fitting question to ask yourself: Would you rather be rewarded here by men, or would you rather be rewarded there by Christ?

WHY do you do WHAT you do? Do you do it:

- for the sake of appearance only?
- in a search for applause from others?
- from a selfless attitude of obedience?

When God examines the motive of your heart, does He see someone who is self-seeking and pretentious, or does He see the selfless attitude of His Son?