

DON'T BE A HYPOCRITE!

Friday, February 6

Reading: Matthew 6:1-18

Matthew 6:5 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

As Jesus continues His sermon, He transitions to three important disciplines for those who live for God: Giving (1-4), Prayer (5-14), and Fasting (16-18). The religious leaders twisted these practices to their own advantage so people would see how "righteous" they were. Jesus calls them "hypocrites" because they were not doing these things to please God, but to get the praise of people.

GIVING – Today, we might say these hypocrites were 'blowing their own horns.' They wanted everyone to see how much they were giving so they would be honored. This was not giving from the heart, but from a desire for praise. Jesus said THAT would be all the reward they received. They got the praise of people, but NOT the praise of God. Jesus told His followers to give in secret. No one else needed to know what they were giving. Does this mean that all giving should be anonymous? Not necessarily! In Acts 4:32-37, everyone knew about Barnabas' giving. The point has to do with our attitude and reason for giving. Barnabas was honored because he gave out of a pure heart of love for God. In contrast, Ananias and Sapphira had selfish, deceitful motives for giving and died before the Lord (see Acts 5:1-11). Are you giving to please God or get the praise of people?

PRAAYER – The religious leaders made a show of prayer. They would stand in public places and pray as loud as they could so everyone could see them. Once again, Jesus tells us that the praise of people is all the reward they will receive. They were not really praying to God but praying so others would think them 'holy.' Jesus again tells us to pray in secret and our Father in heaven will reward us. Does this mean we should never pray in public? Of course not! Praying in services and other public venues is important. Once again, it is our attitude that counts. We cannot pray effectively in public if we are not praying continuously in private.

Jesus also warns against copying the practice of pagan worshippers. They would chant the same thing over and over to work themselves into a frenzy, much like Eastern cult members continuously chant a mantra. Our prayers should be sincere, not just worthless babble. We can get into the bad habit of using cliché terms and rote prayers without really thinking about what we are saying. They are just meaningless words that come from our mouth but not out of our heart. Even The Lord's Prayer (which follows this warning) can become babbling if we just say the words and don't think about their meaning and how they apply to our lives.

FASTING – The religious leaders would fast every Monday and Thursday and they made sure everyone knew it. Their actions and appearance were designed so that people would know they were fasting and praise them for their piety. Jesus instructs us to appear normal and don't tell everyone you are fasting. Then God will reward us.

It is interesting that Jesus does not say IF you give, pray, and fast, but WHEN you do these things. God wants us to give, pray, and fast but only with the right attitude and purpose behind them. How often do you give, pray, and fast? What are your motives when you do? Do Jesus' instructions show you where you might need to change?