

Introduction:

Practicing righteousness and doing good works is the life of the Christian. In **Matthew 5:16** Jesus said, *“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* We are to do good works so that people will see what we have done and glorify God; however, there is a potential for self-righteousness in this, and apparently the Pharisees and people of the day had fallen into the trap. Therefore, in each of the three sections Jesus begins with a warning as he teaches his disciples what they must not do when they are doing good works before God.

The simple warning is that we would not do good works with the motivation that other people glorify us. What a warning for how subtle our pride is! If our motivation is to satisfy our human ego when we do good works as well as when we fast and pray, then we have already received our reward. Our hearts must be pure and glorifying God must be the object of everything we say and do.

I Corinthians 10:31 *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Analysis

1. 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.

2 When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get.

3 But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

4 Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Good works cease to be good when our motives are wrong. Doing good to win the admiration of people is a self-centered motive which isn't right in the eyes of God. Jesus calls those who do the “right things for the wrong reason” hypocrites!

- ❖ The word *hypocrite* came from the Greek word *hypokrites*, which is the same word to describe “an actor” or “a stage player.” Actors in ancient Greek theater wore large masks to identify which character they were playing, so the audience was never able to see the actor's real face, which allowed anyone to change roles at any given time. This is where we get the expression “**two faced**” which implies “*a person who acts in contradiction to his or her true beliefs or feelings.*”

In other words, when we do something nice, we shouldn't say, "Hey everyone, look at me!" If people honor us because we have done something good that's fine as long as we didn't do it for the purpose of being honored. In fact, Jesus states that we would be so secretive about what we are doing that the left hand would not know what the right hand is doing.

God knows everything we do, and he knows what we are thinking as we are doing it. If we do good because it is good, and because we know it makes God happy, he knows and is pleased. In fact, long after we forget about that good deed, God will still remember it and will reward us for it in eternity.

⁵ "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.

⁶ But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

⁷ "When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.

⁸ Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

God will not answer a prayer that is prayed to draw attention to self. Anyone who tries to be eloquent in prayer in order to impress those who hear is wasting their time. In other words, do not pray so that other people will admire you. Public prayer is necessary but public prayer to get people to notice you is sinful. *Where we pray isn't the issue, why we pray is the important thing to God.*

Some people repeat memorized prayers, and they don't even think about what they are saying. The words we use when praying are secondary because words mean nothing to God if they don't come from the heart. If we have a heart for God when we pray that's the important thing because many times we don't know how to pray or even what to pray for. Having a heart for God and a sincere attitude that reaches out to God are the most important things in prayer.

Prayer does not inform God about anything because he already knows everything. We pray because it's how we acknowledge our needs and dependence on God. We pray because it's how we communicate with God, and that by itself is a valuable thing. We pray because God will answer prayers, and do things that he otherwise might not do. The bible says we have not because we ask not.

The purpose of the prayer that Jesus provides is not to repeat it as a religious ritual but to serve as a guideline for entering God's presence with our hearts focused on his sovereignty and our complete dependence on him as our heavenly Father.

⁹ *Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.*

¹⁰ *May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ *Give us today the food we need*

¹² *and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.*

¹³ *And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one*

We should always begin our prayer with the acknowledgement that we are children of God. He is not only our Father he is also the ruler of the universe and everything in it. This should prompt us to worship and honor him because he alone is worthy. The Lord God doesn't need an ego boost; he's simply worthy of honor and praise. It's the right way, the appropriate way to enter into his presence.

After worship pray for the things that you know God wants, and at the top of that list is for the kingdom of God to come. In other words, pray for the strengthening and expansion of the Kingdom in the earth through the salvation of the lost.

At this very moment as God is receiving perfect worship in heaven his lordship and kingdom are being acknowledged as well. It's important to pray that those things will be true on earth as in heaven. God wants us to pray that his perfect will is done in every area of our lives just as his perfect will is being done in heaven.

Confess to God that because he knows what is best, you surrender your will to his will. It's alright to pray for what you think is best, but in the final analysis you should always place your faith in the manifestation of his perfect will. Expressing our trust in God is essential to prayers that are intended to glorify him.

After we have honored God and prayed for his will to be done; God by his grace has granted us permission to ask him for whatever we need. "The food we need" is not only what we consume to live but is also about blessing those who grow, produce, transport and prepare our food. Furthermore, this statement can take a more symbolic meaning by asking God to supply the things we need to sustain our spiritual being and keep it strong and healthy.

The forgiveness mentioned here doesn't involve forgiving the penalty of our sin. The complete and judicial forgiveness of sin takes place the moment a person receives Jesus Christ into their life as Lord and Savior. The request of "forgiveness" refers to the necessity of forgiving others when we have been offended as a demonstration of God's grace and love so that when we offend him, we can be confident that he will be *"faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

James 1:13 says: *"God never tempts anyone with evil"*. He doesn't tempt anyone with evil, but God does allow trials to test our obedience to him and to strengthen our faith. This part of the Lord's prayer teaches that we must not rely on our own strength, but we must pray to God, and trust that although we are tempted, we do not have to fail.

I Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be **tempted** beyond what you are **able**, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be **able** to bear it.*

In other words, we are to pray, lord help to live so that my life will glorify you. Every day it's important to ask God to give us victory over any word, act, or attitude that would displease him.

¹⁴ “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Once again, if we want to experience the blessings and benefits of a personal relationship with God, we must be willing to forgive others who have sinned against us. I have witnessed that the most miserable Christians are those who hold a grudge. The least little thing made them angry and rather than reclaim the joy of the Lord, which is the source of our strength, they choose to be sad, bitter and weak.

¹⁶ “And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get.

¹⁷ But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face.

¹⁸ Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Fasting is not simply about skipping a meal or removing certain foods from your diet. The purpose of fasting is to direct our hunger and thirst towards God by clearing our body of earthly distractions. Fasting develops self-control and discipline as we are challenged to deny the natural desires of the flesh in order to hear God’s voice clearly. This concept is clarified in **Galatians 5:17**--*For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.*

Fasting also demonstrates a profound need of God's help and guidance through complete dependence on him, which is why fasting is an essential aspect of our spiritual growth and development as the Apostle Paul stated in **I Corinthians 9:27** -- *I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

There's nothing wrong with telling someone that your fasting. Just don't mess up your hair, and walk around dragging your feet, with sad eyes so that people will think you're a martyr. Some people may buy the lie and think you're “extra” holy, but your fast won't mean anything to God. Fast, but do your best not to appear as if you are fasting. It's not the end of the world if someone finds out that you are fasting just make sure your motive isn't to fast in order to impress people.

Summary

People tend to do things for personal praise and honor. We become glory thieves when we steal the honor that rightly belongs to God. You will notice that in each of the three sections Jesus called such people hypocrites because they can play the role and even look the part, but they are simply fooling other people. We must not be surprised by this because the text confirms that Jesus had to deal with the fake people in his day and same issues can be found in the church today.

So, how can we go about doing acts of love, service and worship in a way that pleases God? You should first consider if you're keeping your good works to yourself or do you feel the need to tell the world about what you've done? Are you satisfied if no one knows about your good work? Are you discouraged because your prayers are not as eloquent as someone else's or that no one knows about the sacrifice you are making to go on an extended fast? Be perfectly honest and acknowledge whose approval are you seeking; your own, other people's or God's?

Finally, it is important to note that prayer is the centerpiece of this passage and the most important ingredient in our acts of righteousness. There is no better way to check your motives than to pray that God's perfect will is manifested and that he alone will be glorified in everything we do.