

Lesson #8 – Give to the Needy – Matthew 6:1-4

Review of Previous Weeks

- Last week's interpretive addition runs contrary to Scripture. What additions to Scripture do we have in today's cultural Christianity?
- What did Jesus mean when he said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away?"
 - We are to take drastic actions to steer clear of sin in our lives.
 - What are some examples of this?
 - When Jesus says, "It is written," he is referring to Old Testament law.
- When Jesus says, "Do not take an oath at all," is he banning all oath taking?
 - No. There are other places in the New Testament where people take oaths.
 - No. In the Old Testament, there are places where God makes an oath.
 - No. Jesus, in his trial before Caiaphas, took an oath.
- What is the difference between "you have heard it said" and "it is written?"
 - "You have heard it said" does not refer to Old Testament law. It refers to the oral teachings / traditions / interpretive additions of the Pharisees.
- What are the four manners in which we are to love our enemies?
 - Love them
 - Do good to them
 - Bless them
 - Pray for them
- What is common grace? Why is it important?
 - Common grace is the gracious favor that God bestows "commonly" without distinction on all men.
 - Common grace provides us with God's example to love those who reject us.

Opening

- In the previous seven lessons, Jesus focused on the relationships of believers with their fellow men. The next three lessons focus on man's relationship with his Creator – worship.
 - Jesus is moving from man's *moral* righteousness to his *religious* righteousness.
 - Both of these dimensions of righteousness are based in the heart.
 - In modern evangelicalism, people often lean toward one dimension of righteousness or the other.
 - Religiously devout Christians display their piety in public (through church attendance) and in private (daily devotions and prayer.)
 - Morally devout Christians display their piety in taking care of their neighbors.
 - However, according to John Stott, "there is no need to choose between piety and morality, religious devotion in church and active service in the world, loving God and loving our neighbor, since Jesus taught that authentic Christian 'righteousness' includes both."¹⁰⁸
- Jesus calls his followers to be different from others in both moral and religious righteousness.
 - In Matthew 5, he admonishes his followers to have a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees (religious professionals).
 - He then, later in Matthew 5, admonishes his followers to have a righteousness greater than that of the pagans.
 - "Christians are to be different from both Pharisees and pagans, the religious and irreligious, the church and the world. . . Jesus also saw (and foresaw) the worldliness of the church itself and called his followers not to conform to the nominal church either, but rather to be a truly Christian community distinct in its life and practice from the religious establishment. . . Authentic Christian

¹⁰⁸ Stott, 126.

righteousness is not an external manifestation only, but one of the secret things of the heart.”¹⁰⁹

Scripture

- Matthew 6:1-4 – “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. 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. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
- Three points
 - Jesus expects us to care for the poor.
 - True piety means impressing God alone.
 - If we do flaunt our piety, we will receive a lesser reward.

Dangers of Religious Hypocrisy

- Now that Jesus has finished the section on the six antitheses, he moves on to the area of religious hypocrisy.
- Jesus, in the following 17 verses warns against the danger of religious hypocrisy.
- Verse 1, the thesis statement for the section on religious hypocrisy, introduces the three primary parts of Jewish piety:
 - Giving of alms / tithes (verses 2-4)
 - To give alms is to serve our neighbor, specifically those in need.
 - Prayer (verses 5-6)
 - To pray is to seek God’s face and acknowledge our dependence upon him.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

- Fasting (verses 16-18)
 - To fast is a way to discipline ourselves and acknowledge our dependence upon God alone.
- However, the principles applied to these three categories of Jewish worship also apply to every other religious observance as well.
- These three duties express our duty to others, to God, and to ourselves.
- All three of these principles use the same structure and the same key words.
 - Matthew 6:2-4
 - Matthew 6:5-6
 - Matthew 6:14-15
- Christ's teaching protects us, if we follow it, against hypocrisy.
 - Hypocrisy is one of the most common (and subtle) of foes.
- In addressing each of these parts, the structure is the same:
 - A warning against being praised by men
 - A guarantee that those who seek man's praise will receive it, but no more.
 - Instruction on how to perform the act in private.
 - Assurance that the Father will see and reward.
- What matters is sincerity in our relationships with God. The cardinal sin is hypocrisy.¹¹⁰
 - What is a hypocrite? Hypocrites are those people who pretend to be one thing when they are not.
 - History: Hypocrite is based on the Greek word, *hupokrites*, which is roughly translated actor. In ancient Greek, the *hupokrites* was an orator and then an actor. He is someone who "lays aside his true identity and assumes a false one." The Greek word is a compound word that is translated as "an interpreter from underneath." This definition makes sense when you understand that Greek actors wore masks to mark the character they were portraying. Therefore, the actors were interpreting from underneath their masks. The

¹¹⁰ Hunter, 59.

Greek word eventually began to be used to refer to someone wearing a figurative mask and pretending to be someone they were not. Today, we understand that a hypocrite is a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.

- Hypocrisy in the church
 - A 2019 Barna poll found that 85% of millennials who do not attend church believe that the church is full of hypocrites.
 - My initial reaction when I read a statistic like that is to ask whether or not it is true.
 - Given the amount of time I spend with college students, I absolutely believe it to be true. We are hypocrites. At least I know I am.
 - I claim Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and at the same time yell and cuss at other drivers around me.
 - So, how do we correct this problem?
 - I'm glad you asked.
 - We read the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tells us how to avoid hypocrisy. It's right there in Scripture! We'll get to that in a few minutes.
 - First, I want to talk about almsgiving in the Ancient Near East.

Almsgiving in the Ancient Near East

- When we speak of almsgiving, we are not talking about tithing. That is a completely different thing.
 - Tithing is our financial obligation to God.
 - This is like our typical Sunday offering.
 - Almsgiving is our giving to the poor.
 - This is like our monthly Barnabas offering, which is earmarked to help folks in the congregation and their friends and family.

- The practice of exhibition during the giving of alms was likely a frequent occurrence in the Ancient Near East.
 - Rabbinic writing frequently warned against exhibition when tithing. The frequency of warnings against this practice would indicate that it was a common practice.
 - One example of this can be found in Tobit 12:8 and following, “It is better to give alms than to lay up gold; alms doth deliver from death, and it shall purge away all sin.”
 - It was a commonly held belief by the Pharisees that those who gave alms in secret was “greater than Moses.” T. Bab. Bava Bathra, fol. 9. 2.¹¹¹
 - Inside the temple, specifically in the Court of Women, stood thirteen wooden boxes with horn-shaped bronze funnels to guide the coins into the box.
 - The sounds that the coins made against the metal would indicate how much people were giving.
 - The collection boxes provided an opportunity for exhibitionism during the giving of alms.
- In ancient Judaism, almsgiving was a religious duty, not a charitable obligation.
 - In the Ancient Near East, there was no governmental form of social security or welfare.
 - Society’s poor relied upon the charity and benevolence of those around them.
 - This became an important part of Jewish religious life.
 - The purpose of almsgiving was to care for the poor.
 - The Jewish religious leaders were very organized in this area, and they were very efficient in taking care of the poor.
- The Pharisees’ weakness was that they desired human praise more than they desired God’s praise.
 - Indeed, it is easy to criticize the Pharisees for their desire for man’s praise.

¹¹¹ Gill, John. *Exposition of the Entire Bible*. Matthew 6. Accessed 24 June 2020.

- However, modern evangelicals are no better. We often draw attention to our giving to the needy in order that we may receive praise from our fellow man.
- We like to turn an act of mercy into an act of vanity. However, self-centeredness is characteristic of the old life. Our new life in Christ is one of unwavering generosity.¹¹²

Jesus Expects us to Care for the Poor

- Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will give to the poor.
 - Verse 2 begins with, “Thus, *when* you give to the needy. . .” (italics added)
 - Jesus doesn’t say, “If you give to the needy. . .”
 - Based on what Jesus says, it is a given that his disciples will generously give to the poor.
- Since God is gracious and merciful to us, we are to be kind and merciful to others.
- Throughout the whole of Scripture, believers are commanded to take care of the needy.
 - Proverbs 19:17 tells us, “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.”
 - Hebrews 13:16 says, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”
 - 1 John 3:17 warns against not helping those in need, “But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”
 - Deuteronomy 15:11 says, “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”
 - The poor will always be with us.
 - And we are commanded to always open our wallets to help them.

¹¹² Stott, 130.

- This falls in line with Jesus’ reply when asked “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40)
 - We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to take care of them as we would our own family.
- “Much of today’s church is divided between those who emphasize personal intimacy with God in prayer, and those who emphasize justice for the true poor. . . Without keeping God himself in view, we can pervert either form of piety.”¹¹³

True Piety Means Impressing God Alone

- When we follow the words of Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, we begin to fulfill the righteousness of God.
 - Our lives will reflect the righteousness of Christ in our actions.
 - We will naturally begin to live a life full of good deeds.
 - This is where the danger lies.
 - When our acts of righteousness pass through our sinful hearts, the motivation for those acts of righteousness has the potential to become skewed.
 - It becomes very easy to begin practicing our deeds of righteousness in front of other people in order to receive accolades from them.
 - Jesus is warning us against performing good deeds for the wrong reasons.
- When Jesus commanded his disciples to “sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets” (Matthew 6:2), he was speaking metaphorically.

¹¹³ Keener, 137.

- He was instructing them to give without calling attention to themselves.
- Those who were giving were not giving for God’s glory, or even for the benefit of those in need of the alms. They were giving for their own glory.
- Jesus was literally instructing his disciples not to “blow their own horn.”
- As followers of Jesus, we are not to parade our religiosity in front of others.
 - We are not to play to the crowd.
 - We are to play to an audience of one.
 - Charles Spurgeon felt very strongly about this.
 - In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, he declared “Let God be present, and you will have enough of an audience.”¹¹⁴
 - Earlier in that same commentary, Spurgeon said, to stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy.”¹¹⁵
- Sincerity in worship is the key to an authentic relationship with God.
 - Our motive for charity must never be the desire of praise from others.
 - Our motive should be for God’s glory alone.
- There appears to be a contradiction between Matthew 6:1 and Matthew 5:16.
 - Matthew 6:1 says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.”
 - Matthew 5:16 says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
 - So, which is it? Are we to practice our righteousness in front of others or not?
 - This contradiction is in word only, as Jesus is addressing different sins.
 - In Matthew 5, he is addressing fear of sharing the gospel.
 - In Matthew 6, he is addressing self-glorification.

¹¹⁴ Spurgeon, 33.

¹¹⁵ Spurgeon, 32.

- A.B. Bruce summed it up when he wrote that we are to “show when tempted to hide” and “hide when tempted to show.”
 - Our good works are to be done in public so that God receives the glory.
 - Our religious devotion is to be done in secret so that God receives the glory.
- “Religious observance is to be directed toward God, not to gaining the approval of men.”¹¹⁶
 - We are not to give in order to show how charitable we are.
 - We are to give quietly, so that others do not know what we are doing.
 - We should give in such a manner that there is no temptation to receive glory for our actions.
 - Our lives are public lives; however, that does not mean that we need to show off our devotion to God.
 - “Alms may be given publicly, but not for the sake of publicity.”¹¹⁷
 - “True religion demands sufficient faith to settle for God’s approval, to do what pleases him no matter what others may think.”¹¹⁸

If We Flaunt our Piety, We Will Receive a Lesser Reward (verses 2-4)

- When we give to the needy, the issue is not so much what is occurring between the right and left hands, but between the right hand and the heart. We give to the needy for one of three reasons:
 - We are seeking the praise of our fellow men.
 - We are internally congratulating ourselves for being so generous.
 - We are desiring the approval of our merciful Father.

¹¹⁶ R.T. France. *Matthew*. TNTC. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.) 130

¹¹⁷ Spurgeon, 32.

¹¹⁸ Keener, 138.

- Those who flaunt their piety, according to verse 2, “have received their reward.” However, according to verses 3-4, “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
 - Self-centered piety leads to self-righteousness.
 - The human reward for piety is acclaim and honor in this life.
 - The Greek word for reward, *apecho*, refers to a commercial transaction, and means to have the balance paid in full.
 - The divine reward refers to spiritual benefit and growth in holiness in this life.
- Jesus promises eternal reward for those who seek to please God rather than men.¹¹⁹
 - While our heavenly reward is an excellent motivator to do good works, we do not become Christians based on what we hope to gain.
 - We become Christians based on our response to the generous graciousness of God.¹²⁰
 - When we do good works in order to be seen by men, we forfeit the only reward worth having.
 - Those who do good works in order to be seen by men receive their reward in the present.
 - They were not giving to earn God’s favor, but rather buying it.
 - Be assured, we cannot expect two rewards for the same action.¹²¹
 - We are to forget our good deeds. We are to follow God. We are to perform good deeds and then forget them.
- “Men who do good works so they will be seen by men receive the applause of men. Those who do works for God’s glory receive God’s smile. The reward for the latter is overwhelming – and always will be.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ *ibid* 136.

¹²⁰ Green, 80.

¹²¹ Spurgeon, 32.

¹²² R. Kent Hughes. *The Sermon on the Mount*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001). 152.

Review Questions

- Why are we to give in secret?
- Have you ever flaunted your piety in front of others? What did you do?
- Have you ever seen someone asking for money and not helped them? Why or why not?