



Pray Give Fast

Matthew 6:1-18

Text

Matthew 6:1-4

Topic

Jesus illustrates the righteous behavior of giving to the Lord's work by saying that our left hand should not know what our right hand is doing

Title

"Righteous Handed"

Introduction

You might one day be given a test to take in school or by a prospective employer. They'll tell you no one has ever finished it in the allotted time. You're instructed to 'read everything before doing anything.'

The test itself consists of a series of sixteen questions. They ask you to do a variety of increasingly complex things on the test paper. Then you get to the final question and it reads like this:

Now that you have followed the directions in the first paragraph to READ EVERYTHING BEFORE DOING ANYTHING, **do only sentence one.**

Sentence one instructs you to simply put your name on the paper and turn it in!

I remember being given a test like that by my older brother when I was in about the fifth grade. I failed miserably. But, man, did I ever nail it when I took it at school the next year in the sixth grade!

The test emphasizes that we often fail to fully read directions.

God's Word, the Bible, contains directions, and I think we'd admit they are the most important directions of all. They direct us as to how we are to relate to God, to ourselves, and to others.

When Jesus was on the earth the guys considered to be the most spiritual were the Jewish Pharisees. *But they were getting it all wrong!* The Lord often used them as an example of what not to do, then told us what to do and how to do it.

The verses we're going to look at over the next three weeks tell us what not to do, what to do, and how to do it, in three crucial behaviors: Giving, praying, and fasting. We want to get it right because our behavior in those areas will one day be reviewed and rewarded.

The first of these behaviors Jesus discussed was giving. I'll organize my thoughts about what He said around two points: #1 You Will Be Rewarded For 'Right' Or 'Wrong' Righteousness, and #2 You Want To Be Rewarded For The 'Right' Righteousness With Regard To Your Giving.

#1 You Will Be Rewarded For 'Right' Or 'Wrong' Righteousness (v1-2)

Giving, praying, and fasting are the three crucial disciplines Jesus discussed in this part of His Sermon on the Mount. In each case He assumed we would be doing them.

- In verse two Jesus said, "when [not if] you do a charitable deed..."
- In verse five Jesus said, "when [not if] you pray..."
- In verse seventeen Jesus said "when [not if] you fast..."

“When,” not if. Yet it’s been my experience personally, and my observation corporately, that these may be the three least practiced disciplines among believers.

- Regarding “giving,” the statistics are pretty dramatic. The average Christian gives around 2% of their income to the work of the Lord. When you figure in those who do actually tithe, who give 10%, it means that most Christians give nothing or almost nothing to the work of the Lord.
- It’s hard to give a statistical analysis of prayer, especially private prayer. Still, almost any believer will readily admit they don’t pray as much as they ought to or would like to.
- Fasting has fallen on hard times. A number of contemporary Christian teachers say that fasting is no longer a discipline Christians ought to practice.

The bottom line is this: Jesus told us to practice these three and He added that we would be reviewed and rewarded regarding each of them. We need His directions to do them and to do them right.

Matthew 6:1 "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.

Most of the competent Bible commentators point out that verse one is an intro to the entire section. They say that the best translation of verse one, from the best manuscripts, is something like this: “take heed that you do not do your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else you have no reward with your Father which is in Heaven.”

The word “righteousness,” then, is a general term that describes right behavior. Giving, praying, and fasting are the three particular aspects of right behavior that Jesus discussed in verses one through eighteen.

In each case there is a ‘right’ and a ‘wrong’ way to perform these behaviors. The wrong way is to do them “before men, to be seen by them.”

Recognition before men is something we crave. Whether we care or not, tonight are the annual Academy Awards. Certain individuals will be

recognized and honored by their peers for their achievements in the film industry. It's typical, it's human nature, to crave recognition.

Jesus tells you from the get-go that you should only be thinking about recognition and reward from God in Heaven.

After the resurrection and rapture of the church every believer of the church age will stand before the Lord for this review and reward. The apostle Paul described it like this in First Corinthians 3:13-15.

1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Should we care about rewards? *You betcha!* One reason why is that Jesus cares a great deal about bestowing them.

- He mentioned them prominently in these verses.
- In Matthew 5:12 He said of those who bear persecution that their reward will be great in Heaven.
- In Matthew 10:42 He said that whoever gives a cup of cold water in His name will not lose his or her reward.
- In Matthew 25:14-30 at least part of the teaching of the parable of the talents is that the faithful servant will receive his or her reward.
- In Matthew 25:31-46 there is either punishment or reward with regard to meeting the needs of the saints.

We could go on, but here is the point. If rewards matter to Jesus, they must matter to me.

In our subsequent studies I intend to say more about making rewards matter. One of the things I'll talk about is how rewards relate to the illustration of our being the bride of Jesus, and wanting to be the most beautiful bride we can. For now just know that rewards matter.

You want to be rewarded by the Lord, in Heaven, for eternity. You do not want the rewards of men, on earth, for the short time you have to live. In each of these disciplines - giving, praying, and fasting - it is all too easy to do the right thing the 'wrong' way and receive only the temporary recognition from men.

We should fight that natural urge for recognition. One thing that will help us in all three of these disciplines is to have a heightened sense of the review and reward awaiting each of us in Heaven. I will do everything I can to keep from being recognized and praised on earth so that I can expect to be rewarded in Heaven.

Matthew 6:2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

This is probably where we get the expression, "Don't blow your own horn." Except I would add, "Don't let others blow your horn, either."

Apparently it had become customary for the Jews to announce their "charitable deeds" by sounding a "trumpet" and gathering a crowd. It's like the practice today of hearing your name read when you give to some charity; or having your name put on a plaque on the wall of some building.

Let me say this: That's fine from a secular standpoint. That's the way the world does things. Just be aware that when you receive the recognition from men, it is your sole reward. There's nothing more awaiting you in Heaven.

The problem Jesus was highlighting was that when you do this to appear spiritual, in a church or Christian setting, then not only do you have no further reward. You are also a "hypocrite." A "hypocrite" was an actor who wore a mask to play a part. Those who give in such a way that they receive recognition from men are acting spiritual when, in fact, their motives are carnal. They are giving in order to receive rather than giving in order to bless others.

What's the 'right' way to be righteous in our giving?

#2 You Want To Be Rewarded For The 'Right' Righteousness With Regard To Your Giving

(v3-4)

I'm calling this discipline "giving." The word we read in the NKJV is "charitable deeds." In the KJV it is "almsgiving."

Technically, "almsgiving" is giving to relieve the needs of the poor. But I think we can discuss giving in general, and here's why. Jesus was talking to Jews who were under the Law. As such, they were required to tithe! The tithe was a payment owed to the Lord.

In fact, they did far more than tithe. The Law required several different offerings.

When Jesus mentioned "almsgiving" He was talking about giving above and beyond what was already required. It applied to free-will offerings. What He said about almsgiving, about having the right attitude, is especially appropriate for us in the church age. We are not under the Law but under grace. All of our offerings are free-will offerings and we thus ought to have the right attitude - the attitude described by the Lord in these verses.

The 'right' way of righteous giving is stated in verses three and four.

Matthew 6:3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Matthew 6:4 that your charitable deed may be in secret...

I've always been fascinated with the phrase, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Is one of your hands writing checks without you really knowing about it? Swiping your credit card? Putting your wallet in the offering?

Then I came across something that I think can help make some sense of the expression. There is something, a physical condition, called Alien Hand Syndrome.

It is an unusual neurological disorder in which one of the sufferer's hands seem to take on a mind of its own. AHS is best documented in cases where a person has had the two hemispheres of their brain surgically separated, a procedure sometimes used to relieve the symptoms of extreme cases of epilepsy. It also occurs in some cases after other brain surgery, strokes, or infections.

An alien hand sufferer can feel normal sensation in the hand and leg, but believes that the hand, while still being a part of their body, behaves in a manner that is totally distinct from the sufferer's normal behavior. They lose the 'sense of agency' associated with the purposeful movement of the limb while retaining a sense of 'ownership' of the limb. They feel that they have no control over the movements of the 'alien' hand, but that, instead, the hand has the capability of acting autonomously.

With regard to giving to the Lord's work, we are to experience a kind of spiritual Alien Hand Syndrome. We are to give as if the money in our hands was being controlled by another - in this case, controlled by the Lord.

How does the Lord get control of our giving? The Lord takes control of our giving "in secret" when we determine to give "in secret." In other words, when I am alone with the Lord, He and I determine in that secret, intimate time the scope of my giving. I emerge from my time with Him having given Him control.

There's a lot of teaching, a lot of instruction and direction, in the Bible about giving. Just two weeks ago, when we were in First Corinthians sixteen, we took a look at some instruction on giving. We saw the following principles for New Testament giving.

- "Every" believer is called upon by Jesus and by Paul to give to the work of the Lord. That should come as no surprise, really.
- Giving means your money. Serving is an act of love and obedience but no where in the Bible does it say we can substitute serving for giving. They are two separate delights.

- Giving is to be regular and systematic. It can be weekly, in the offering or the offering box. It can be monthly, or quarterly, if that's how your finances work. It can be mailed in or given online. But do it regularly and systematically.
- The portion is left up to you. The New Testament sets no limit, like 10%, on your giving. You're free to give as God leads. But His leading will not be less than what the Old Testament saints gave. Here's why. We're not under the law, but rather motivated by love. We are to give because of love and not because of fear of breaking the law. **We should not give less because of love than we would under the law.**
- New Testament giving is described as being sacrificial. If it doesn't cost you something, then it isn't valuable.
- Finally, but just as importantly, giving is to be done cheerfully.

If the statistics are true, and the average giving by a Christian is 2% or so, then I'd have to say that their left hand **does** know what their right hand is doing. They are not being controlled by the Lord Who gave these principles in His Word.

Matthew 6:4 ...and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

The word "openly" does not occur in the best manuscripts we have. The sentence reads, "and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you."

Some of the reward will be yours to enjoy now in a spiritual sense.

- There is the reward of personal satisfaction in knowing you are obeying the Lord, pleasing Him.
- There is the reward of being given even more work to do. In parables Jesus spoke of giving more responsibility to those who were faithful.

There are times a believer might lack a sense of personal satisfaction in his or her walk. You just don't feel quite right. They sometimes look for satisfaction by seeking a friendship, or a group meeting, or even by changing churches. It could be related to the issues of giving, or praying, or fasting.

There are times a believer feels stymied by a sense of not knowing what to do to serve the Lord in the place He has put them. They think that a change of employment or neighborhood or, sadly, even family is the solution. It could be related to the issues of giving, or praying, or fasting.

Ultimately, you are giving with regard to your review and reward in Heaven.

Giving, praying, and fasting are disciplines to be worked-out in “secret” as you meet with the Lord.

It’s hard to believe that I could emerge from a “secret” meeting with the Lord, having given Him control of my giving, and then give almost nothing or nothing to Him from my finances.

No, if I am meeting with Jesus, I will give more and more. Because in those meetings I must see that He gave everything for me. He became impoverished so I might have every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

“When you” give it is an expression of your love for the Lord having recognized the extent of His love for you.

Get alone with the Lord. Read some of the more than 800 verses on giving that He has shared in the Bible. Read Second Corinthians chapters eight and nine.

You’ll emerge having given Him control of your giving. You’ll emerge **righteous-handed!**