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Be Not As The Hypocrites (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Be Not As The Hypocrites (Part 1)", Steve Gregg delves into the concept of righteousness and the importance of behaving in a righteous manner, even though it may not be explicitly required by God. He emphasizes that true religion is not about outward observances, but rather about pleasing God himself. Gregg discusses the importance of humility and avoiding ostentatious displays of religious acts, as this is what truly pleases God. He also touches upon the idea of rewards and how seeking rewards should not be the sole motivation for righteous behavior.

Transcript

Now let's turn to Matthew 6, which is the second of three chapters that Matthew devotes to the continuing Sermon on the Mount. Chapter divisions, of course, are not part of the original writing of Matthew. He didn't divide it into chapters, but they do reflect natural turning points in the discussion.

And so one would expect that at chapter 6, we move a little bit in a slightly different direction than we have been. We've spent several sessions already talking about the last portion of Matthew 5, where Jesus was expounding on the law, really, and righteousness. I think we could say that all of that discussion from Matthew 5, 17 on to the end of chapter 5 could be summarized under the heading of righteousness.

He begins by saying that he didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, and he goes on to say that your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if you hope to inherit the kingdom of heaven. And righteousness is really the big issue, because being righteous with God is all that matters. For God to declare you not guilty, for God to approve of you, is what righteousness is all about.

Fortunately, as Christians, righteousness is something that is imputed to us on the basis of our faith, but that does not mean that God is no longer interested in us behaving in a righteous manner. In fact, that is what he has saved us for. He has not saved us on the basis of our having performed well, but he saves us so that we might perform well.

That's what it says in Ephesians 2, 8, 9, and 10. Ephesians 2, 8 through 10 says, For by

grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

So, we are not saved by works, it is not of works, but it is for works. Our salvation is not of works, that is, it doesn't originate out of works, or it isn't produced by works, but our salvation is for good works. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, that he has foreordained that we should walk in.

So, on the one hand, as Christians justified by faith, we are righteous, and that is a settled matter for us. We don't have to worry about that so long as we stay in the faith, so long as we keep trusting Christ rather than ourselves or something else for our righteousness. But, having said that, it does not remove, it does not totally obliterate any obligation on our part to be righteous in conduct.

That's what God has saved us for, to be righteous also. And he said, Your righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, the scribes and Pharisees sought righteousness on the basis of the law.

And there is some justification for their doing so, since the law was a standard of righteousness. The problem is, of course, that their understanding of the law was extremely shallow and surface and external, and therefore they missed out on what true righteousness was, and what we have been studying in the end of chapter 5 has largely been an expansion on what true righteousness is. It is true that the law does embody a standard of righteousness, but there is a deeper righteousness that is not spelled out in the law, but is implied by it.

So that when the law said, Don't commit adultery or don't murder, it was certainly giving you some kind of a standard of righteousness, but there is a deeper righteousness which was not spelled out in those verses, but was implied in them. And that is, of course, that God wants us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that is the essence of righteous behavior. The righteousness of the law, or as Paul puts it, the righteous requirements of the law, in Romans 8.4, the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

And of course, the fruit of the Spirit is love, and love is the fulfilling of the law. Therefore, true righteousness amounts to simply behaving in a loving manner toward your neighbor in all areas of life. And so, Jesus, as we saw, quoted certain things from the law, which were in fact valid things.

He didn't quote them in order to invalidate them. He quoted them to say that these are valid things, but there is something far deeper that they were getting at, which you apparently haven't heard from your rabbis. You have heard this thing from the law, but what you need to hear, and what I say to you now, is that there are some deeper issues

here, and the issues are that you need to love your neighbors yourself.

And so, he tells us that the essence of righteousness, which must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, if we are to inherit the kingdom of God, our righteousness must exceed theirs. It exceeds it not in terms of instances of good behavior, but in the quality and depth of our good behavior, that it's not just external, but it's inward, that our good behavior springs from a consistent commitment to loving our neighbors ourselves, which, of course, only the Holy Spirit can allow us and enable us to perform, but it must be our commitment that we will not simply externally obey the least requirements of the law, but we will seek to be loving in all respects, and until we are committed in that way, our concept of righteousness is lacking, and we may be defining righteousness in terms of obedience to certain things in the law. And not only Jews, but also other religions, including many people who are in the realm of Christendom, define their idea of righteousness in terms of keeping certain laws.

With Christians, it may even be some of the same laws the Jews kept, like the Ten Commandments, or it may be other laws that are just distinct to our denomination. Some denominations forbid drinking or smoking or wearing jewelry or those kinds of things. For some, you're regarded to be a good Christian by whether you're regular in attendance at church or not, and whether you tithe and those kinds of things.

We still do tend, in our religious nature, unless we're better informed by Christ, we tend to view a person's righteousness in terms of religious externals and keeping certain laws. Now, Jesus continues a little bit on those lines, but he turns more directly in chapter 6 to religious acts, things that are done religiously, and that might not sound very different than what was discussed in the previous chapter, except that the difference is this. You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall, if you divorce your wife, give her a writing of divorce, and you shall keep your oaths that you take to the Lord, and you shall have an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

These are not laws that have to do with religious life, but simply with good conduct in general. To be a murderer isn't a violation so much of a religious law as it is a violation of basic morality. And goodness, it's just bad behavior.

Same thing with adultery, the same thing with divorcing your wife without a cause, or breaking your oaths, or any of these other things. Misbehavior in the areas that were categorized in chapter 5 is more or less not so much in the area of religion as it is in the areas of just decency, morality, ethics, just character, really. Whereas what we turn to now are in specifically religious actions, religiously giving alms, praying, fasting, these were things that the Pharisees did as a distinctive part of their religion.

Now, whereas the law in general that we have been discussing in chapter 5 speaks about mandatory things, I mean, the law is very explicit. You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not persuade yourself, that is, break your oaths. These are absolute

things.

When it comes to matters like giving alms, or praying, or fasting, there is no law that states exactly how much is enough, how often you should pray, how much money you should give to the poor, how often you should fast. The law left that at the discretion of the individual. Therefore, if a person interpreted religion in terms of these religious acts, like praying, like fasting, like giving alms to the temple, basically, I mean, the temple money was made available to the poor, but giving to the church, praying, fasting, these were things that were particularly part of religion.

And a person could show himself to be exceedingly religious by doing these very things more than others did. Since there was no law that said you shall pray X number of times a day, as, for instance, the Muslims have to pray several times a day, and the number is specified for them, there was nothing in the Jewish religion, nor in the Christian faith, that says you must pray every day, or you must pray this many times a day, or you need to pray on these particular days. Likewise with fasting, nothing in the law said that they had to fast on any particular days, except for the Day of Atonement, once a year.

But, of course, most Jews fasted somewhat more often than that. Even in the Old Testament, there were several other fasts that were added to their calendar year to commemorate various tragedies in their past, and those were not required by God, but religious people often add things like fasts, days of fasting, days of prayer. And as far as giving alms is concerned, it's quite obvious.

You're supposed to help the poor, but the Bible says in the Old Testament as well as the New, you'll never run out of poor people to give to. There will always be poor people around, and you could easily exhaust all the money you have and still not have alleviated poverty, so the question of how much you should give to the poor is strictly a matter of your own decision. The law couldn't say give X amount.

Of course, the law did say to give 10% to the Levites, but that's different than alms. To give 10% of one's income to the Levites was basically to pay taxes to the state religion. In Israel, the Levites were the full-time custodians of the state religion, and to pay 10% for their maintenance was to maintain, as it were, government officials, although they weren't functioning in a government capacity exactly, but Judaism was the state religion, and therefore it wasn't like giving to the poor.

It was more like a taxation that they had no option in. Beyond the giving of the tithes to the Levites, any giving to the poor as a merciful act was simply voluntary. And therefore, unlike murder and adultery and keeping your oaths and some of the things that were talked about in Chapter 5, where there's an absolute standard that everyone has to follow because it's basic morality, it's basic decency, it's basic ethics and goodness, it's basic requirements in living, when it comes to things religious like prayer, fasting, giving of alms, these things, depending on how religious you want to be, you can do more or

less of these things and not be in violation of any basic principle of law.

These are areas where God has left it up to the discretion of individuals so that it's as if they're doing something beyond what's required of them. The laws of morality are required to be followed, that the laws of almsgiving and prayer and fasting are things that are left fairly to the discretion of the individual. Now, the Pharisees, because they wanted to be seen as the most religious people in society, not only were very frequent in their practice of almsgiving, praying and fasting, but they were very ostentatious about it.

They fasted twice a week, the Talmud tells us, and they no doubt gave alms on a regular basis and their prayers were frequent, so that, you know, since they wanted to be very religious, these areas where it was left to their discretion, they chose to be very regular and very frequent in them. But because they not only wanted to be very religious, but wanted to be recognized by others as very religious, they were very ostentatious about the way they did these things so that they might not make these sacrifices for nothing, that they might be rewarded with the appreciation of those who were impressed by their devotion. And this is what Jesus points out to be the basic spirit of the Jewish religion at the time.

If the Pharisees were seen as the epitome of Jewish religiosity, then religion as a whole had fallen on hard times, because it had really degenerated in the life of the Pharisees to outward observances which were more concerned about the approval and veneration and honor coming from man than the secret devotion to God, things that were done without ostentatiousness, not concerned about whether man recognized it or not, but more concerned about pleasing God Himself. True religion, in other words, is what is the discussion here. True righteousness is what chapter 5 was talking about.

At chapter 6 we now talk about what is true religion, what is pure religion. Religion and righteousness are not quite the same thing, you know. Religion has to do with the performing of certain rituals or certain specific things that one's religious beliefs would dictate as distinctive of their religious practice.

Righteousness is more the standard of people of every religion fairly widely recognized. The need to be honest, to not commit adultery, to not kill, is recognized by irreligious people and by people of very many religions. But, therefore, righteousness is a much broader category.

It's just a matter of being good. It's just a matter of behaving. Whereas religion is a matter of doing those special things that your particular religion calls you to.

And so religion is a little different than righteousness. And by the way, throughout the Old Testament, one would get the distinct impression, especially from reading the Prophets and Psalms too, that God is far more interested in righteousness than in

religion. Now, that's not what Jesus points out here, but I just want to make that as I make the contrast in the subject matter from chapter 5 to chapter 6. And I say to you that chapter 5 was talking about true righteousness, whereas chapter 6 talks about pure religion.

And there is a difference. Between the two, God is far more concerned about righteousness than religion. And that's what Jesus said in the scripture we looked at before, Matthew 23, 23.

He told the Jews they were meticulous in their paying of tithes, a religious practice. They paid tithes of men, anise and cumin. But they neglected the areas of basic righteousness.

Faithfulness, justice, mercy. They neglected righteousness, but they were careful about religion. And sadly, while Jesus said they shouldn't neglect either, he said you should have done these and not leave the other undone.

That is, you should both be righteous and religious. He said that the righteousness was the weightier matters to the law. There are some things that matter more than others to God.

And if you must be careful about one to the neglect of the other, be careful about righteousness rather than religion. David eating the showbread was a violation of the religion of Israel. But it was not an unrighteous act, nor was it unrighteous for the priest to allow David to do this.

This was an act of compassion, of meeting human need. There have been times when religious dictates have been permitted to be sacrificed in the interest of righteousness. And any religion that restricts righteousness is bad religion.

That is to say, or if religion is practiced in such a way as to restrict righteousness. I mean, the Sabbath is a good issue where Jesus has clashed with the Pharisees several times already in the gospel. Sabbath keeping is a religious law.

It has nothing to do with essential righteousness because it is a ritual. There is nothing moral or immoral about keeping one day above another. You should be righteous every day.

You should be equally righteous every day. To set one day aside especially for meetings of worship or whatever is okay to do. But it should be recognized as a distinctly religious practice rather than something having to do with basic goodness or righteousness.

Now, Jesus did basically good and righteous and merciful and compassionate things on days when it was the Sabbath. And violation of the religious observation of the Sabbath. Showing again that God was more concerned about righteousness than about religion.

But that does not mean that religion has no place. A thing like prayer or giving of alms or fasting are religious things. But true religion only takes its value from its relevance to your relationship with God.

And that is again perhaps another distinction we should make between righteousness and religion. Righteousness has to do with the way you treat your neighbor. You don't kill him.

You don't commit adultery with his wife. You don't steal. You don't bear false witness against him.

You don't break your oaths to him. You don't hate him. You don't retaliate against him.

Righteousness has to do with your conduct toward your fellow man. And that's what chapter 5 was about. Religion has to do with the way you relate to God.

And the special things you do that other people wouldn't do or wouldn't feel compelled to do if they don't have a relationship with God. Prayer and fasting and giving of alms are things that you do because of your conscience toward God and your relationship with Him. They are part of your pursuit of God Himself.

Prayer and fasting obviously have a vertical dimension to them that simply not killing and not committing adultery do not necessarily involve. Those are horizontal kinds of concerns. Religion has to do with the special things a man does or a woman does to cultivate and enhance their relationship with God.

Your prayer life and your fasting has nothing to do with serving your neighbor. It has to do with something rendered to God only. That is another distinction between religion and righteousness.

Now, having said that God is more concerned about righteousness than religion, and then saying that righteousness has more to do with the way you behave toward your neighbor and religion more to do with the way you behave and worship toward God, it may seem as though I'm saying that God is more concerned about your relationship with your neighbor than He is about your relationship with Him. But that's not so. Because true religion is not the same thing as ritual religion.

And prayer and fasting and giving alms can be done in such a way that is true and pure and pleasing to God and basically which is indispensable as much as righteousness is. Or they can be done in a strictly external way which is an entirely dispensable type of behavior. And that's what Jesus is pointing out here.

That the nature of true religion is that whatever you do, you do it to please God. You do it because it is to reflect and enhance a relationship that you have with God. And it is a genuine relating with God that is to be the whole issue in religion.

It is not to be jumping through the hoops, following religious protocol, impressing others that you're careful and flawless in your religious behavior. It shouldn't have anything to do with your religious life. It is almost impossible for us to do this, but I think it can be done.

It is extremely difficult, but to divorce from our religious behavior any concept of what people are going to think about it. That's what Jesus is going to be talking about in these scriptures. I probably should have read them and then made all these comments, but we're going to read them anyway.

These could either be given as introductory to reading them or introductory to commenting on them. But I was just listening to Keith Green again. I listen to him quite a bit, but I was listening to him again yesterday and I was thinking, what is it? I thought this morning, what is it about Keith Green that makes him stand out more than any other? You know, I mean, what is it? I don't think anyone who's a fan of Keith Green or even anyone who's familiar with Keith Green, if they're not a fan, will deny that he stands out like a sore thumb in the world of Christian music.

I mean, there's just no parallel to him, in my opinion. Maybe that's just subjective, but I get the impression from talking to people, even people who don't like him that much, that they agree, there's just no parallel. There's nothing, he's one of a kind.

All other Christian musicians kind of are in a category, and then there's Keith Green in a different category. And I thought, what is it that's different? It's not necessarily the words of his songs, I don't think, because I've heard other musicians write words that are similar to his lyrics, at least in content. I don't think it was even, you know, it certainly isn't his musicianship, though he was an excellent pianist and a good vocalist, he doesn't stand out above all others in that respect.

But I just concluded yesterday, as I was thinking about it, what I think makes him stand out was his humility, which is a strange thing to say because many people probably thought of him as arrogant. You know, he had sort of a prophet complex and stuff, and he was always condemning the church and things like that. But there was another sense in which he had tremendous humility, it seems to me, and that was that he was totally unconcerned about what anyone thought about him.

I mean, on stage he did things that were, I mean, you know, he'd make verbal ejaculations and say things that were silly and stuff, and make even bad jokes and stuff, and seemed to be totally unselfconscious about it. Whatever he did, he did because that's what he felt, you know, compelled to do. I mean, he was just the most real.

I think this is my deduction. I think he was about one of the most real Christian performers out there. Everyone else has a certain amount of showmanship, a certain amount of slick, a certain amount of polish, a certain amount of professionalism, and a

certain amount of face to save, you know, because it's expected.

It's expected of performers in general, and it's also expected of religious performers. Keith Green just didn't care what was expected, it seems to me. He just kind of, he'd say things off the top of his head, even between lines of his songs.

I mean, he'd just kind of be himself, and himself happened to be intensely, emotionally devoted to God. And, you know, the guy comes off with, although he was capable of excellent musicianship, in certain of his songs he just casts all professional, you know, form to the wind, and he just emotes practically, you know. And while there's other people, I've seen other performers, one comes to mind, particularly I won't name, but who have definitely tried to take upon themselves the Keith Green mantle by writing songs that are confrontational and not only confrontational, but, you know, radical, you know, calling for radical discipleship and radical commitment and challenging the church and so forth.

You may know who I'm thinking of, but there's one performer in particular who I've, I mean, from the first album of his I ever heard, I thought, this guy is trying very, very hard to be Keith Green number two, but in my opinion, he fails miserably. To me, he just doesn't have that quality. And maybe it's because I get the impression, now maybe I'm judging him wrong, I mean, maybe you don't judge this guy the same way, but I get the impression this guy is trying to, he's too self-consciously trying to be like Keith Green.

And Keith Green wasn't self-consciously trying to be like Keith Green. He was just totally, it seems to me, un-self-conscious. And there was just an anointing on that and a power in that and a realness about that, which although I think a lot of people, including myself, had a hard time defining what made him so different, I've come to my own personal conclusion that that's what I think it was, that he was just, couldn't care less what people thought.

He was just going to relate to God the way he wanted to relate to God and he didn't care whether it fit into protocol, he didn't care if it met anyone's expectations, he didn't care who it offended, he just wanted to love God and just love God, you know, outrageously in a sense, in some respect. And in so doing, I think he made quite a few errors, that is, faux pas. I think he offended some people at times unnecessarily, I think he was not all as mature as he could have been.

I mean, let's face it, he was a top-selling Christian performer when he was two years old in the Lord. You know, that's not exactly, you know, a lot of time to get mature, and he knew it. But the point is, regardless of all the mistakes he may have made, he was, I think, the epitome of what Jesus is talking about in these passages, that his worship of God and his service to God, what we could call a man's religious life, was totally unconcerned about what anyone thought.

He didn't care who he pleased or who he displeased, he just wanted to please God. And I have never met a man like Keith Green, well, I shouldn't say I've never met a man, but I guess I've never met a famous person like Keith Green who was so quick to repent publicly, you know, when he realized he'd done something wrong, I mean, to humble himself, you know, publicly, and that's why I say I think his humility is what stands out, although some people think of him as the opposite of humility, just because he was so brazen, and just because he was so bold, and because he's so, in some cases, judgmental. Those were, in some cases, maybe areas where flaws in his character were seen, but in terms of his heart toward God, I don't think that he had any pride at all, and I think that he couldn't care less what people think.

Now, this is the opposite of the Pharisees. Now, I would guess that you and I are somewhere in between the place where the Pharisees were, and the place of being absolutely unconcerned with what anyone thinks. I doubt that anyone here is living their life for God just to be seen of man, and seeking only the reward of human approval.

I think everyone here has some genuine desire to please God, but I also think everyone here, including myself, has, you know, a bit of self-consciousness about our religious life. There's certain things that others expect us to do that we probably wouldn't feel comfortable not doing, even though we don't feel like God requires it, we just wouldn't want to neglect it, because Christians would think evil of us, you know, what if we missed church twice in a row, you know, what if we didn't go to church at all for a month, what would people think? Well, the issue shouldn't be what will people think, but it is probably more than we would like it to be in our lives. Everything we do, we should do to please God, and everything that is done to please God is an act of worship.

It is an act of true religion. Whatever is done to please man, even if it is outwardly an act of worship, is not in fact an act of worship at all, not such as God would recognize. And that is what Jesus says in this passage before us, we're going to be reading verses 1 through 15, and there are three illustrations to make the same point in this passage.

Now, by the way, in the midst of this passage, we have an extended teaching on prayer, in which we have the model prayer, sometimes called the Lord's Prayer given. We are going to save the dealing with that to another, we're going to give it a whole session by itself. So, we have two sessions to deal with these 15 verses, but we're going to take the whole 15 in this session, and kind of leave out the extended discussion on prayer for a separate session itself.

So, let's take a look at this material. Jesus said, 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.

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that they may have glory from men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will himself reward you openly.

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Therefore, do not be like them, for your Father knows what you have need of before you ask him. In this manner, therefore, pray, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Now, I gave that as the last verse. I wasn't thinking right. We need to go through verse 18.

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces. By the way, if you wrote 15 down, you can easily change that to an 18. Just one line does it, see? I think of everything.

No. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Now, anyone who read this material with the slightest attention notices that, again, we have a paradigm that Jesus uses to make three examples. I say again because the Sermon on the Mount has been full of paradigms.

Each, you know, the Beatitudes with which it began, they all are like each other. They all take the same form. Blessed are these people because of this.

Blessed are these people because of that. It's sort of a repetition of the same pattern.

Then when he got to you are the salt of the earth, there was that creative structure that was followed by you are the light of the world.

Both cases saying, this is how you function in the world and don't lose it. Don't let your salt become unsalty. Don't let your light be hid under a bushel.

So, in a sense, those two parables are in the same form as each other. Then we have the six illustrations. You have heard that it was said, but I say to you, and he follows that six times.

Jesus likes to latch onto a form of expression and then use it and reuse it to make the same point over and over again. Now, he's got a great number of these forms that he uses, but to make a given point, he'll sometimes use the same framework of a statement and make it several times altering the example a little bit in each case to make the same point. In this case, the paradigm is this.

He says, when you do such and such, in every case a religious act, don't do it the way the hypocrites do it. Then he tells how they do it. And he says they have their reward.

Then he tells you how to do it. And when he tells you how to do it, it's always, you know, with an emphasis on secrecy. There's an emphasis on being non-ostentatious in the way you do these things.

And he closes with a statement that your father who sees in secret will reward you openly. One of the key thoughts in each case is the idea of reward. In fact, in an opening statement in verse 1, the last line of verse 1 is that otherwise you have no reward from your father in heaven.

That particular statement is not repeated in the other paradigms, but it is a summary of the main thought of all of them. Because in each case when he tells us how the hypocrites do their thing, and each, you know, it's giving alms or charitable deeds, praying, fasting, these three things. The hypocritical religionists did these things, and the disciples would also do them, but they are not to do them in the same way.

And the principal difference is the question of rewards. He says they do what they do in the manner that they do it because they're seeking the approval of man. And you know what? They get it.

They get the approval of man, and therefore they have the reward they're looking for. It's a shame that they're so easily satisfied that they're content with such a little reward as that, to have only human approval and not God's. You should seek a better reward than that.

You should seek the reward of not man's approval, but God's. And if you do things in a non-ostentatious way, and sometimes Jesus bends over backwards to, in a hyperbolic

way, you know, advocate secrecy. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, which obviously is a non-literal statement since his hands don't know anything.

And even when he says, when you pray, go into your closet. Shut the door. I don't think he's forbidding all forms of public prayer.

He's just making an emphatic statement about, listen, just to make sure that you're not falling into the trap that the Pharisees do of doing it to be seen by man, try to do it in as much as possible in a way where no man can see it, where no man can credit you with it, where you know for sure that you're not doing it on that occasion for man's sake because man isn't seeing it and can't credit you with it. The point here is that he says all men seek a reward. Now, it would be nice for us to believe that men are religious in a disinterested way just out of love for God.

It'd be nice to think that, well, I don't care about any rewards. I just love God. Well, there are times where we really do feel that way.

There really are. There are times, at least if you're, I mean, I hope that I speak for us all. I can certainly speak for myself in this, and I think I probably speak for most of you.

There are times when you probably feel like I couldn't care less about any rewards in heaven. I just love God so much. I just want to please him.

I just want to pray. I just want to worship God. And I don't care so much about whether there's a crown waiting for me in heaven or whether I'll get some kind of a wreath or some kind of reward.

That's immaterial to me. I couldn't care less about that. I just wanted to serve God because I think he's so great and I love him.

And I believe true Christians have that motivation at times, but I believe that being human we also are drawn to that which we find most rewarding in general. I think we have our moments of total disinterest in rewards, but I think in general we make our life choices and choose our habits of life, including our religious habits, based on the effect it will have on our future happiness, in what sense it will repay us for our trouble. Now, I hate to say that because that makes us sound pretty self-serving.

It makes us sound kind of selfish. But then the Bible talks as if we're pretty self-serving and selfish folks, too. I mean, even the disciples following Jesus, even the apostles were still looking for the right and left positions at his hand in the kingdom.

Even Peter was saying, Lord, we have forsaken all to follow you. What shall we have? Now, I'm not denying that these men followed Jesus for the best motives available to man at the time to do, but I'm not sure man can do anything in an entirely unselfish way. The nature of the fall, I think, is such that it has affected human nature until the time of

our resurrection with an element of self-interest that cannot be entirely shaken until the day we are resurrected from the dead, I believe.

I suppose the less such self-interest motivates us, the better. The more we come to a place where I don't care anything about myself, I just care about God, the better it is. But in all realism, I think that even the best people have their moments when it matters.

Am I going to go to heaven for this sacrifice I'm making? Am I going to be... Is there going to be some settling of the score in heaven on this matter? And we could say, well, that's an awful, terrible thing to say about Christians, but you know the Bible implies it's true. If we were not motivated by the desire for rewards, why would there be so much discussion of rewards in the Bible? If God wished for us not to be motivated by the suggestion of rewards, why would he offer them? Are they not there as a motivator? What other use is there in mentioning them but to motivate? And as far as that goes, why would there be any threats of hell if not to motivate us on the basis of our self-interest? And when Jesus said, you know, it's better for you to pluck out your eye or cut off your hand and lose it and enter into life than to retain it and go to hell, is he not appealing to my self-interest? How could that statement have any effect on me whatsoever in motivating me unless I have some interest in saving myself from going to hell and suffering there? God assumes that fallen men are going to be motivated at some level by self-interest. But even that being the case, there are wise and foolish choices that can be made in terms of self-interest.

People who make short-term choices for short-term gratification are obviously fools. People who make choices to say, I will seek my gratification in whatever God chooses to reward me with, whether great or small, any reward from God, even God's approval itself is reward, and I want it. Just for God to say, well done, good and faithful servant at the end of this road, if there's no other reward than that, that's still a great reward.

I mean, it really is. It's very rewarding. And when Paul advocates that we be content with little, when he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, he says, godliness with contentment is great gain.

It's a great gain. To say, I'll put aside all earthly comforts, I'll put aside all earthly wealth and all earthly reputation and so forth to follow God, that might seem like an entirely unselfish thing to do, but I do it for this reason, that there's great consolation. I mean, contentment is gain.

It's a gain of its own. It's its own kind of gain. It's its own kind of reward.

It happens to be a reward that God approves of me seeking. When we're told in Hebrews 11 that Moses forsook Egypt esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and he endured as seeing one who is invisible because he had respect for the reward. Does that make his act less honorable in leaving Egypt because

he was looking for reward from God? No.

It said, what it's telling us is he had a choice between one kind of reward and another. He could have rewarded himself with fame and fortune by staying in Egypt or rewarded himself with more lasting and important rewards by being obedient to God and taking the side of God and embracing the reproach of Christ. There are rewards.

There is... Life produces rewards. And the human beings, on the basis of their, I guess, embracing biblical truth and values and so forth, choose what rewards they wish to seek. The Pharisees wanted the reward of being honored by men.

Jesus said, well, insofar as people do honor them, these men have the reward. But when Jesus repeatedly says they have their reward, well, at one level, that's saying they've taken an effective course and gotten what they wanted. You say that about many men and that's the epitome of saying something positive.

They are the picture of success. They had this goal. They sought it.

They pursued it and they reached their goal. To say that about a man is considered to be a positive thing to say about him. But there's an element of tragedy in Jesus' statement, they have their reward.

Because it really means they have the only reward they're going to get. There's no further reward for them but the one they've already obtained and they have settled for so little. They've settled for a reward that only is man's approval.

And he says, you should seek higher rewards. He implies it in the very opening verse. If you do it the way they do it, you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven.

This implies that you should want to have a reward from your Father in Heaven. And in every case, each time he says don't do it this way but do it that way, he closes by saying and your Father in Heaven will reward you, openly. It's quite clear that such rewards are intended to motivate us.

And that the person who makes righteous choices has nothing to boast in of being disinterestedly wonderful but he's still acting on self-interest to a certain degree just like the sinner is. It's just that the righteous person's self-interest is informed by his faith in what God has said. And he embraces truth that God has revealed and therefore values that are according to that truth and values things that are eternal instead of things that are temporal.

Values the approval of God more than the value of man, the honor of man. And so, this is implied through the entire discussion. I say all this because I have certainly met people who say, well, I don't think we should be motivated by rewards at all.

We should just love God. Well, that's a wonderful thing to say and I certainly don't deny it, frankly. Well, I think it's kind of idealistic to tell you the truth.

Although, as I said earlier, I certainly know from experience times when rewards are the furthest thing from my mind. There have certainly been times when I could honestly say I don't care if there's a heaven or a hell or not, I still want to just serve the Lord because He deserves it. You know, and He's worthy of it.

And I like to say that in that way all the time. But I'm afraid I'm not. And the Bible implies that disciples are not always motivated that way.

And that implication is found in the fact that they're continually offered this reward or that reward or to seek that reward and so forth. That self-interest is always a part of human nature in its fallen state at some level. And therefore, since it is so, there is no shame in saying I am seeking my rewards in heaven rather than my reward here.

Let me turn your attention over to Luke just for this principle before we get into the specifics of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. In Luke 14, Luke 14, verses 11 through 14, Jesus said, For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Then He also said to him who invited him, he was at a feast at the time, He said, When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Now, here we have another way of saying, and another illustration of what Jesus is saying in the portion of the Sermon on the Mount that we're dealing with in Matthew chapter 6. Jesus is saying, You've got a choice here. You can choose to be repaid in this life or in the next.

Let me give you a little advice. You're better off choosing to be repaid in the next. He said, If you invite people to a feast, normal social protocol and decency would suggest that most of them who are able to do so will invite you over to a feast.

And, you know, then you've been repaid for your generosity. And if you invite to your feast only such people as can repay you in this manner, there's a pretty good chance that they will. If you invite rich people and relatives and so forth to your feast, you're better off