

OpenTheo

Be Not As The Hypocrites (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the dangers of hypocritical behavior in religious settings. He emphasizes the importance of seeking eternal rewards rather than temporal ones, and warns against seeking honor from men rather than from God. Gregg uses the term "hypocrites" to refer to those who pretend to be religious without truly honoring God. He also discusses the practice of fasting, cautioning against slavish observance and encouraging individual discernment in when and how to fast.

Transcript

They don't want to be guilty of a social faux pas, of accepting an invitation, not extending a corresponding one later. That happens all the time, even in our modern society. But Jesus says, how sad.

How sad to perform your generosity in such a way as to guarantee yourself, or to almost guarantee yourself, repayment in this life. Because any repayment you get in this life is going to be temporal. But he says, if you are wise, you'll do all you can to avoid being rewarded in this life for what you do.

Now this may be a slight exaggeration, but it is the principle, the principle certainly is essential and at the core of true piety. Namely, that when you make a feast, you'd be a lot better off inviting people who you were sure would never invite you back, because then you'd die with an unpaid debt. That is, God is indebted to you.

Because it says in Proverbs that he that shows mercy on the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord will repay him. And if you don't get repaid in this life, guess what? You'll be repaid in the next life, and everything in the next life is eternal. And certainly it is to be preferred that you receive repayment in terms of eternal things, rather than in terms of temporal things.

If your neighbors invite you back over for a feast, you'll enjoy a good meal, it may be, you'll be rewarded for your generosity, and the next day any enjoyment of it will be a thing of the past forever. But if you're never repaid in this life, if you never receive any kind of reward for your good behavior and for your generosity and so forth in this life,

then when you go to heaven or in the resurrection, you will have an outstanding debt owed you. And the only currency God has in heaven is eternal stuff.

And therefore, when he repays you, you'll have an eternal reward. Therefore, obviously, you make a good investment decision by being disinterestedly generous toward people without any consideration of whether they can pay you back. In fact, if you can give that any consideration at all, prefer the ones who can't, because you will then indebt God to you by his own promise.

And notice, Jesus is suggesting you should be mindful of reward. You should be mindful of being repaid, but better it is to be repaid by God in the resurrection than to be repaid by man now. And that's similar to what he opened that statement by saying, whoever exalts himself should be humbled, whoever humbles himself should be exalted.

It's better to be humble and receive no honor from man and have God exalt you in the end, of which the most prominent example of that is Jesus himself, who, it says in Philippians 2, though he exists in the form of God, did not think of equality with God, a thing to be grasped. He humbled himself, he emptied himself, took on himself the form of a servant, and having been found in the form of man, he humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name, in the resurrection, that is.

Jesus didn't receive this name and this honor prior to his resurrection. In his earthly life, he lived in humility and dishonor and died in disgrace. But in the resurrection, because he humbled himself, God highly exalts him.

So Jesus said, whoever humbles himself, God will exalt. Whoever exalts himself, God will humble. You choose your reward.

Do you want honor from man now or honor from God later? Do you want to be exalted by God? Do you want to be repaid by God? Or do you want to be repaid by man and honored by man? Well, these are the two choices. And this is particularly true when it comes to religious action. There's probably nothing more odious to God than religious behavior that is done with a motivation other than pleasing God.

Many people live their lives irreligious, that is, they don't go to church, they don't profess Christianity, and maybe they don't behave well either. And their life is displeasing to God. But if what Jesus had to say to the scribes and Pharisees, as opposed to what he had to say to tax collectors and prostitutes, is an engage of God's preferences, it seems that God is less offended with the unrighteous, irreligious person than he is offended by the unrighteous, religious person.

I mean, think about it. How did Jesus deal with the woman taking an adultery or the tax collectors or other sinners? They were prodigals coming home. He rejoiced to have them

come.

But to the religious hypocrites, who probably didn't sin as much as these prodigals, but who pretended to righteousness because of their religiosity, he didn't have a kind word to say to them. In fact, the harshest words probably spoken by any man to any group in history were spoken by Jesus in Matthew 23 to the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Now, Jesus in this discussion in Matthew 6 nowhere mentions the word Pharisee.

But he repeatedly speaks of hypocrites, and no doubt the Pharisees are who he has in mind. There can be no doubt about it, partly because the behavior he describes is the behavior of the Pharisees. Furthermore, it's very clear that he describes the Pharisees frequently as hypocrites.

Not only in Matthew 23, where seven or eight times he says, Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! But even prior to that, in Luke chapter 12, I think he says, Beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Now, the word hypocrite in our day, even in non-religious culture, has taken on a very negative form. One of the most accusatory things that can be said about a person is that they are a hypocrite.

And this is true not only of religious persons, but of politicians or anyone else. If you really want to make them look bad, somehow demonstrate that they are hypocrites. And the word hypocrite is just a term of contempt in our day.

We have to understand that Jesus is the one who gave it that sense. The word hypocrite actually comes from, it's a transliteration of a Greek word, which is something like hypokrites or something like that in the Greek. And that Greek word was not a bad word.

It wasn't an insulting word. It was simply the ordinary word for an actor in a play. Some people did that for a living.

For a thespian, for just a play actor. Most people, if they were play actors, were not ashamed of their profession. It wasn't like being a prostitute or a tax collector.

A play actor was... It may be that some religious people may have frowned on the content of some plays, and I'm sure they did, but it was considered to be an honest profession, and it was a profession that had some standing in society. To say a person was a play actor was no insult. To say he was a hypocrite, that was just the regular word for saying he was an actor in a play.

That is to say, it was no insult if, in fact, that's what the person did. If a person was a play actor, an actor in plays, and you called him one, he would not be insulted, because you're just using the word for what he was. But when you say that about somebody who's not ostensibly acting in a play at all, but is pretending to be genuine, then the word takes on an insulting quality.

Because an actor in a play, I mean, what is he doing? He's putting on a false front. In fact, in the Greek plays, at times, they even wore masks and so forth. And, you know, even in modern drama and movies, an actor may not wear a mask, but he puts on a different personality.

He puts on a different identity than his real identity. Some people are typecast into roles because their real personality is very much like a role that they commonly play, it may be. But for the most part, an actor is known to be pretending.

I mean, when you watch a movie, you know, I mean, it may be that they're very convincing actors, and you forget for the moment that they're pretending. But you know instinctively, and, you know, there's no mystery about this or secret about this, that person on the screen is pretending to be someone they're not really. The life that they're living on the screen is a different life than their real life.

They're doing it for some, you know, for something, maybe for money or for fame or for both. But they are pretending for the moment to be someone other than they are. The speeches, the things they say, are not their real thoughts.

They've been put into their mouths by a script writer. The life they are living is not really their real life. I've been very unhappy to learn about the private lives of some people who played Christians in certain movies, like Chariots of Fire.

I really love the movie Chariots of Fire. I was really unhappy to find out that the man who played Eric Little died of AIDS and was a homosexual. He was one of the finest depictions of a Christian on the secular screen in my lifetime.

And likewise, the movie The Mission, which I liked very much. You know, the actors in that are not exactly paragons of virtue and piety in real life. Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons, you know, some of the other stuff they've made, it makes it clear that their goodness and their religiousness and their love for God or whatever that they depict in that movie is nothing.

When I was a kid, I was very disillusioned to find out that Julie Andrews, who played in The Sound of Music, was an atheist. She was a nun in The Sound of Music and she's an atheist in real life. I mean, when people act like they're righteous and religious, it's shocking to learn what their real life is like sometimes, you know.

I mean, if they're very convincingly religious. Well, Jesus is saying that's essentially what the Pharisees were. They were all acting in a play.

Their whole life was a play. It was all pretense. They were outwardly, you know, walking in such a way that was choreographed for them.

They were speaking in such a way as was scripted for them. Their behavior was an

outward show, doing what was expected of them. But it was entirely that.

And just as an actor in a movie can fabricate tears and look like they're really crying, but as soon as they stop shooting that scene, they walk off stage and they don't have any of that emotion. It's not real at all. That's how the Pharisees lived their religious lives.

They prayed fervently. They gave seemingly generously. They fasted self-sacrificially.

So it appeared. But they weren't really generous. They weren't really pious.

They weren't really self-sacrificial. All of this was a sham. It was just stage scenery.

It was just props in their lives. And like I said, until Jesus used the term of religious persons, hypocrite, it wasn't a bad term. But as soon as you apply it to people who don't want you to know they're pretending.

See, actors don't care if you know they're pretending. They know that you know that. They're not really deceiving you.

They would like to be convincing in their role, but they don't really want you to think that they really are. In real life, when you walk away from that play, they don't want you to think that they really are the person they were depicting. They're not trying to deceive you.

But when somebody who is pretending not to be pretending, that is, who wants you to not know that they are someone different than they present themselves to be, when you expose that and you say, but you are just play acting, then it becomes a strong indictment. And of course, it was Jesus who transformed that word into an insult. Because now, of course, since the time of the New Testament, the word hypocrite has been applied to all kinds of people who are not at all play actors in the ordinary sense of that word, but it just means somebody who's pretending and doesn't want you to know they're pretending.

Somebody who's trying to convince you that they are someone, but they really are someone else. And it is most commonly applied, as it was by Jesus to the Pharisees, it is in modern times most commonly applied to religious persons, as we often hear that the church is full of hypocrites, but it is equally applied, probably or almost equally, to people who aren't at all religious, but they otherwise show themselves to be insincere. And so Jesus took a perfectly good Greek word and gave it a stigma that it'll never live down.

I don't think the time will ever come again when a person can be called a hypocrite and not be insulted by it, because the word simply has the meaning of a fake today, since Jesus applied it this way. But he was clearly talking about the Pharisees. So he says, 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 in 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, so that your charitable deed may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will himself reward you openly. Some translations do not have the word openly at the end.

It's not in the Alexandrian manuscripts. But simply, he will reward you. Now, as I pointed out, there is the danger of seeking a reward other than that which is the highest.

You may find that you have your reward, but you have no reward from your Father which is in heaven. As the hypocrites, it says in verse 2 at the end, they have their reward. But if you are like them, in verse 1 it says you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Obviously you should seek the reward that comes from God. Jesus made this observation about the Pharisees elsewhere. In John chapter 5 and verse 44, John 5, verse 44, Jesus said, How can you believe who receive honor from one another and do not seek the honor that comes from only God? This is the principal difference between himself and them and his approach to religion and theirs.

Whatever he did, he did without concern about whether he got honor from men. He sought the honor that was from God only. And God only means that in many cases, man won't honor you at all.

You may have, in fact, nothing but dishonor from man in certain circumstances where you're seeking only the honor that comes from God. Now, the Pharisees didn't even seek the honor that comes from God at all. They sought only the honor that comes from one another.

And Jesus said, As long as that is the way you're motivated, you'll never become a believer. How can you believe while you're in this state of mind? He said, Why? Because men will not argue for being a believer. As long as your priority is to be honored by men and not by God alone, you will be prevented from being a wholehearted follower and believer in Jesus Christ because it's never going to be the popular thing.

Now, Paul, on more than one occasion, made it clear that his motivation had, pleasing man was not part of his motivation at all in his ministry. In Galatians chapter 1 and verse 10, Galatians 1.10, Paul said, For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ. He doesn't live his life or do his ministry or conduct his religious behavior in such a way as to please men.

Now, you might say Paul's not exactly consistent in that because there were times when to the Jew who became as a Jew and so forth, especially when he came to Jerusalem that last time. But again, whatever he did in that respect, it was to please God too. He knew that by pleasing men at some level, he might keep them open to the gospel.

And that's very different than just seeking the honor that comes from men. Paul's only obsession in life was that all men might receive the gospel because that brings honor to God. And he knew God would honor that obsession.

And there were times when part of his strategy for reaching that goal was to acquiesce, to lay down his rights, to avoid offending people where it was unnecessary to offend them. But it was never... it could never be said that his motivation in life was to please men. He says the same thing in different words in 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 4 through 6. 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 4 through 6. Paul says, But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak not as pleasing men, but God, who tests our hearts.

For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness. God is our witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

So, Paul says, we have been approved by God and we live and preach not as pleasing men, but pleasing God, who tests our hearts, the one who sees in secret. No man can see our hearts, but God can. And therefore, when He who sees in secret will reward us, it will be because we have sought to please Him and not men who don't see our hearts.

And so he says, we don't seek glory from men. Now, that's exactly what Jesus is saying needs to be the case. That if we pray, if we do alms, if we fast, and we will do all of these things at one time or another.

Although Jesus is not trying to... He's not trying to give us a regiment about this. He's not making a law about it. Notice He doesn't say, thou shalt give alms, or thou shalt pray, or thou shalt fast.

He doesn't say anything like that. He does say in one place that men ought to pray and not faint. But He never lays down a law, thou shalt pray.

Obviously though, anyone who's really a Christian will pray. Anyone who's really a Christian will assist the poor. Anyone who is really a Christian will, on occasions, feel compelled to fast.

It would seem. But the very way in which He said it prevented Him from putting any particular regiment of fasting or prayer on people. Now, we can sometimes judge our own conduct in this wrongly by what someone else does.

I mean, if somebody is extremely generous, we may feel compelled to be as generous. Think of Ananias and Sapphira. Typical case in point.

Barnabas had just sold all the land he had and given the money to the apostles to give to the poor. That was giving an alms. That was doing a charitable deed.

Ananias and Sapphira realized that this man got tremendous recognition for what he did. Although he didn't do it to be seen by men. You know, the godly people appreciated him.

And so they wanted to pretend to do the same. Now, even if they had given all they had. Now, they didn't, as we know.

They hid some of it and sought to deceive the Holy Spirit. It cost them their lives. But even if they had given all, we can see that their motivation in the thing was apparently to appear to be as generous as everybody else was being, as Barnabas and others were being.

Measuring their own level of generosity in almsgiving by that which others were doing. And it's possible to do that in the area of prayer and fasting as well. The Pharisees fasted twice a week.

Is it a coincidence that the disciples of John also fasted twice a week? The Pharisees were doing it before there were any disciples of John. Why did the disciples of John fast twice a week? Was there some command of Scripture? No. It must be, or it seems likely that it was, that they didn't want to appear to be less righteous than the Pharisees already were in this respect.

But Jesus' disciples didn't fast at all. And the disciples of John complained about it. Why do the Pharisees fast often? We fast often.

Why don't your disciples fast? And Jesus says it's not appropriate at this time. His disciples were not supposed to try to measure up in this area to other religious people and judge whether they were fasting enough by whether others were. It would appear that John the Baptist's disciples, I don't know this to be the case, but it seems a likely deduction, that they had chosen to fast two days a week because that was the standard that had been set by the Pharisees and they didn't want to be less righteous than the Pharisees whom John had called snakes and so forth.

I mean, if they're snakes, we don't want to be any worse than them, so we better fast at least as much as they do. But Jesus didn't care. They were snakes, but he didn't care to prove that he was better by fasting more than they did.

He wasn't going to be pressured into religious behavior by precedents that were set by others. I know this to be a dynamic in one's prayer life. I know it from my own experience.

There was a time in my life where I was regularly reading books by and about people like Wesley, Reese Howells, John Hyde, Prayin' Hyde as they call him, and reading books by E.M. Bounds, which books, by the way, I highly recommend. I don't know if you're familiar with E.M. Bounds. He's written a whole lot of books about prayer and they're very inspiring and I highly recommend them.

But E.M. Bounds was a man who prayed about six hours a day, I think, something like that. And most of these other guys, and E.M. Bounds also brought to your attention in his books other people who prayed similarly, two hours a day or whatever. I think it was Luther who said, I'm so busy I can't afford to start my day without two hours of prayer in the morning and stuff.

And reading about these people who prayed hours and hours a day and reading repeatedly about these people and continually confronting myself with these prayer lives of these men made me feel like, well, that's got to be normative. If I don't pray a couple hours a day, then I must not be as close to God as they are. And there were many times in my life after reading such books, I resolved I'm going to start every day with two hours of prayer.

So I'd get up early and I'd start praying and I'd fall asleep, you know. And then I'd be self-condemned, oh, I haven't prayed as much as those people do and I must not be as close to God as they are and so forth. And there was a period, I would say, the period could be measured in years in my life when I carried around sort of a low-grade sense of guilt that I wasn't able to successfully spend two hours every morning in prayer.

And the reason was not because the Bible says somewhere, thou shalt spend two hours every day in prayer or even one hour a day in prayer, for that matter. I mean, truly, Jesus said to the disciples in Gethsemane, could you watch with me an hour? Could you not watch with me one hour and watch and pray? He did say an hour there, but that was kind of a special occasion. It doesn't translate into a command to pray one hour every day.

But what I'm saying is, I actually had this standard in my mind of, you know, a person who's really a good Christian would at least pray two hours a day like Luther and Wesley and Finney and all those great guys did. And because I didn't do it, I lived with a lot of, I'd say, low-grade condemnation. I didn't live with continual, you know, burden over it.

But I mean, whenever I'd think about my prayer life, it kind of convicted me and bugged me that I didn't have that habit in place. And I often tried it and failed, which made me feel worse. And it really was a breakthrough for me when I began to say, well, how much does the Bible say I have to pray? How many hours a day does the Bible say pray? I realized there's no instructions whatsoever on it, any more than there is on how often to fast or how much alms to give.

It's really a matter of discretion. And I also realized that my life, and I, I mean, this, I don't know whether the Holy Spirit pointed this out to me to comfort me or whether I just realized it, it dawned on me, that while I don't find it easy to lay on my face for two hours and pray very often, I've done it a few times with profit, but it's unusual. But it's very natural for me to talk to God all the time.

I mean, really natural. That I talk to God as naturally as if, as if He was right here, you know, all the time. And, and, you know, maybe that in my life is the counterpart of what praying two hours in the morning was to Luther or something.

I don't know. But I realized that I, I don't have to be ashamed because my hours I spend in prayer don't measure up to some other person I admired. Because I do have a life.

I do have a prayer life. And it's a good one. And it's satisfying.

And I have a relationship with God. And it's a direct connection. And it, and it's, it's everything I could wish it to be if I wasn't comparing it with someone else's.

The only thing it would ever make me dissatisfied with is reading about someone else who prays for six hours a day. And, and John Hyde who'd roll out of bed in the middle of the night groaning and saying, God, give me souls or I'll die. And groaning and writhing in pain with the burden for souls and praying for hours and starving himself to death, basically.

And his health deteriorated so he died very young because he, he prayed instead of eating. He prayed instead of living, you know. And I think, man, that's the way everyone ought to be.

I'm not sure everyone ought to be that way. I think he should have been that way. I think that was his, that's how his prayer life was.

And I think it's a wonderful thing. But the problem is when we begin to pray, we begin to set our standards of generosity and giving, of prayer, of fasting, of our regimens and this by someone else that we admire or somebody else that is generally admired. And you might begin to ask yourself, why is it that I feel compelled to pray two hours a day? Is it because I know that everyone admires John Wesley and he did it and people might admire me too if they found out that I did it? Or is it because the Bible says I must? Well, the Bible doesn't say I must.

Therefore, what other motivation could there be for setting that particular standard for myself? It is obviously to imitate somebody else. And it is obviously, not strictly speaking, what God would require me to do. It's just something that I'm putting on myself as a religious duty to be seen or appreciated by man, really.

I mean, if God's not asking me to do it, then who's going to be pleased with it? Not Him.

It must be man. And therefore, all of these things, you know, the danger is in letting human beings, the traditions of man or the examples of man or the expectations of man dictate to you when and how long you're going to pray, how often you're going to fast and how long and how much you're going to give to missions or how much you're going to give to the poor.

Now, having said that, any of you who may have been felt under a legalistic bondage to do this more than you really wanted to because someone expects it to you, you might feel relieved and say, Oh, good, I don't have to give much. Oh, good, I don't have to pray much. That's not at all what I intend to convey to you here.

What I'm here to say is that your prayer life, your life of generosity to the poor, your life of fasting and all other areas of your religious life is a personal matter between you and God. And where it becomes defective is where it becomes more a matter between you and other men. That you're doing it because men expect you to or because some other man did it or, you know, and you begin to add human traditions and human precedents instead of just what's real, what's real in your life with God.

It is, I think, better to pray fewer hours but pray really than to pray more hours and pray with mixed motives or whatever for it, you know. The point is that true piety and true religion is, in fact, a relationship with God not a relationship with other people. Now, I need to clarify because that sounds like it contradicts what James says.

James says, Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Fathers is to visit the fatherless and orphans in their affliction and to keep themselves unspotted from the world. It sounds like James is identifying true religion as a relational thing with your fellow man and it is at a certain level. But, see, James is saying true religion is really something more than just religion.

It also includes being righteous. And what James is addressing, of course, is people who are religious but not righteous. People who have religion but no righteousness.

People who have a relationship or seek to cultivate a relationship with God but are neglecting their relationship with their fellow man. And he is saying to be really religious you can't do so to the neglect of also being righteous. But if we make a distinction just for the sake of discussion and definition between what is essentially righteousness and what is essentially religion, religion has to do with your practices of worship.

And therefore, it's God-directed. It's no good if you aren't also righteous. In fact, righteousness is the priority for religion.

That's why Jesus said if you bring your gift to the altar, which is presumably to do an act of worship toward God, a religious thing, and you remember your brother has something against you because you've done something unrighteous to him, you go and make that

righteous. You get the righteousness thing squared away before you do the religious thing. And therefore, pure religion, in James, presupposes righteousness as a prerequisite for pure religion.

But, like I said, if we speak of religion and righteousness in separate categories, we're talking about religious things like prayer, religious things like Bible reading, like meditation, like fasting, like your private dispensing of your goods to the poor, which you do unto the Lord. That's an act of worship too. Those things are really very private matters.

Now, I don't think that Jesus is trying to make us feel guilty about people finding out when we do these private things. He says, of course, in verse 1, Do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen of them, otherwise you have no reward from your Father. I know people who, when they give money to the church, they refuse to write a check because their name is on the check and they can't be completely anonymous and they're giving that way.

They have to give cash so that no one will know what they gave. Well, that's okay. I mean, that's really okay.

But, it might be more legalistic than Jesus would intend to make it. He is not saying that it's wrong for people to see your righteousness. He said it's wrong for you to do it to be seen by them, which is a question of motive rather than result.

If you do a good thing and people later find out about it, you don't have to worry that your reward is lost over the matter as long as you didn't do the thing in order for people to find out about it. It's the whole question of what was your motivation. After all, people should see your good deeds.

Jesus said that back in chapter 5. And verse 16, in Matthew 5, 16, He said, Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, but not so that they might glorify you, but they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Good works, the good works in your life, do glorify God. Sometimes they even accrue to a little bit of credit to yourself.

Sometimes people admire you if they find out you're generous. And that's where the temptation comes to do it with wrong motives. You can't help it if you do something for the glory of God and you also get a little recognition out of it.

There are times when good works simply cannot be done in entire secrecy. There are some good works that can be done, but others you just... If you stop to help someone along the road who's got a car broken down, how are you going to keep that totally invisible? Other cars are going to go by and see you. Maybe one of the friends from your church is going to see you doing that.

They're going to find out you did it. Did you lose your reward? No, you don't lose your reward. Jesus nowhere in this passage talks about losing rewards.

There is a... Back in the 70s, the Christians I was in fellowship with used to have this expression about losing your reward. If you happen to mention something you did and it happened to have been a nice thing or a good thing you did, they'd joke and say, oh, you just lost your reward, brother. I don't know if that ever happened here in Oregon, but down in California that was sort of a tongue-in-cheek way of talking about it.

You know, if someone says, well, I'm fasting today. Oh, you just lost your reward, you know? And that's... And this is the passage, of course, they were alluding to, but if you look carefully, there's nothing here about losing your reward. There's a question of not getting one in the first place.

The reward that you get from God is incapable of being lost. That is to say, if you do something for the right motives and God, therefore, promises you a reward, you won't lose your reward by someone later finding out about it. What he suggests is the undesirable option here is not one losing his reward, but one not ever getting the right reward in the first place.

One settling for a reward that's an inferior one. The Pharisees, it doesn't say they lose their reward, it says they have their reward. That's the tragedy of it.

There's no more reward awaiting them than what they already have. The question is, did you do it to be seen by men? If so, then men have seen you, you have what you wanted, you've got your reward, expect nothing else from God. But if you do it not to be seen by men, even if men happen to see you, even if people happen to learn it, you are still doing it not to be seen by them.

You're doing it for other reasons than hoping to be honored by men. The reward that God offers you is the same. Now truly, Jesus does give examples of absolute secrecy.

Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing or go into your closet and shut the door where no one can see you praying. Or when you're fasting, hide it, conceal it. Meticulously conceal it.

Don't just figure your faces like the Pharisees do to make everyone know how much misery they're taking on themselves for God by fasting that day. It's mostly phony anyway since they only fasted from sunup to sundown anyway and that's hardly a sacrifice. But they always wanted people to appreciate the fact that they're making that sacrifice.

And so they wouldn't comb their hair, they'd remain disheveled, they'd look like they were really having a bad day because they were fasting. And Jesus said, listen, when you pray, you comb your hair, anoint yourself, wash your face, don't put on a long scowl.

Conceal the fact that you're fasting.

I know people who are so legalistic in their application of this instruction that when they're fasting, they do everything they can to keep anyone from finding it out. And if, for example, on a day they're fasting, they're invited to eat at someone's house, rather than say, I can't because I'm fasting today because that would be letting the cat out of the bag, they'll go ahead and break their fast and eat and then they'll extend their fast to the next day. And they'll start all over the next day rather than letting anyone know they were fasting.

Well, I mean, you can do that if you want, but to me that's kind of a legalistic approach. I don't understand Jesus to be saying that you're in big trouble if somebody finds out that you gave a gift to this or that charity or that you helped out this person or that someone heard you praying. You know, someone walked by your room and overheard you praying.

Uh-oh, you've lost your reward. No. Or someone finds out that you're fasting.

This is what Jesus seems to be saying by his use of these strong terms of secrecy. But it's quite obvious that if your good works are to be seen by men so they may glorify God, then he doesn't expect that every time you do these things it'll always be secret. What he's advocating is that you should live your religious life and perform your religious duties in such a way that it's calculated to not encourage you to expect human approval and not to seek it, but to seek only God's approval.

And that is especially the case, of course, when you do something in absolute secrecy. If it's done with absolute secrecy, obviously you can't get human approval and you're stuck only with God's, but this is not a bad deal. Because God who sees the secret things will reward you in his own way for it.

And Jesus is saying that you're better off with that. But I think it's, again, so many things in the Sermon on the Mount are taken by Christians in a legalistic fashion, which is sad because Jesus was about the most unlegalistic guy who ever started a religious movement. I mean, indeed, the most unlegalistic religious founder ever in history with only two rules.

Love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself. After that, everything takes care of itself. You know, I mean, how unlegalistic can you be? And yet people, because man is legalistic by nature, will take what Jesus said and apply it with a legalistic spin that Jesus never, I think, intended.

He's illustrating some spiritual principles, not laying out some new outward behavior kind of laws. Laying out new laws is not what man needed. Man needed to have the spiritual issues addressed.

And that's what Jesus was addressing. The typical thing for fallen man to do, if he is religious at all, is to become self-consciously religious and hope that people find out how religious he is and to do his religion in such a way that even though he may begin doing it for God, eventually he realizes that people appreciate, at least in religious circles, people appreciate an unusually religious person, a person who is very strict and very meticulous in his obedience to the expectations of the group and the particular religious practices of the denomination or whatever. And then, even though he may have done it for good reasons to begin with, the strong temptation comes to be aware of how much other people are appreciating what he's doing and then to continue doing it with the motive beginning to creep in more that I know people are appreciating, the fact that I lift my hands.

You know, there are certain things in the charismatic movement, like the lifting of hands, and in some circles I've been in where if the song has enough of a beat to it, you're supposed to dance to it in place and stuff. I mean, there's just certain things that are kind of Pentecostal affectations, which are okay. I've got no complaint against them.

Dancing to the Lord and raising your hands to the Lord are biblical things. I'm not criticizing that, but I will say this, that the cultural pressure is great in any religious movement. The religious movement I've been in for the last twenty-something years has been the charismatic movement, and therefore I'm more aware of the affectations and the pressures of that.

I'm not a real emotive kind of a guy. You may have picked that up. I mean, I'm not a guy who expresses a lot of emotion at different poles.

I'm kind of even. But in charismatic circles, the kind of ritualism of charismatic worship is of an emotional type, which I don't usually fit into that well. So I'm probably more aware than some of the kind of religious pressure there is to conform because persons are considered to be more in the spirit if they fall over when they get prayed for, or if they lift their hands when they worship, or if tears run down their face when they're singing certain kinds of songs and so forth.

And I don't say that with any criticism of those who do those things. I'm just saying that once something is established as the norm for religious persons in a particular group or circle, it's hard to be in that circle and not conform. Even though nonconformity does not necessarily involve you in any problem with God.

I mean, if you don't feel like raising your hands, then it'd be hypocritical to raise your hands if you don't want to. If to you that's not a true expression of worship, then what are you doing it for? You're doing it to please men. You're doing it to be seen of men.

You're doing your religious deeds in order to please people. And that's the very thing Jesus said not to do. Now, I want to balance that a little bit because almost everything I

say is extreme and needs balance.

There are times, perhaps, where you know you should raise your hands because you're being convicted to by the Holy Spirit, but you're feeling lazy or something you're not much inclined to. Maybe you're trying to hold on to a bad mood or something, and God's really calling you to release that and start enjoying yourself in worship. And where for you to do what you don't really feel like doing is really the best thing to do, not because you're pleasing men, but because you realize you need to obey God to break loose from some carnal complacency or carnal bad attitude or something you may have.

There are times when I've definitely felt that to be the case in my heart. That I didn't want to sing certain kinds of songs because they didn't express my particular mood, but I realized that my mood wasn't exactly the best it could be, and that if it was more like what those songs were, it would be better. So it was better for me to break free and participate because I felt that that would please God more.

And there are appropriate times when you should do that which you don't particularly feel like doing because you know God would be more pleased with it. But what we're saying is that there are times when people do it when they don't feel like doing, not because there's any reason to believe God would be more pleased, but because you know those around you who are looking on will be more pleased. And that's the very thing to guard against.

Now, having run out of time, we didn't talk about the specifics of giving alms in terms of what does the Bible say about giving alms apart from this business of being secretive about it. I mean, what does the Bible teach about prayer? Well, we're going to give a special, our next lecture in Life of Christ will be about prayer specifically. And as far as fasting is concerned, what does the Bible say about that? I think we treat it as fasting in terms of to what degree it's an obligation and when it is and when it's not appropriate to fast.

When we were talking about the question brought to Jesus by the disciples of John, remember he said, well, it's not appropriate for the children of the bride chamber to fast when the bridegroom is with them, but when he's taken away, then they'll fast. When we talked about that scripture, we went into some excursus about what the Bible does and does not teach about fasting. I don't think it's necessary to go over that material again here because it's not Jesus' point here.

Jesus is not here in these passages giving us a teaching principally about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. What he's giving us a teaching about is motives in worship, motivations in religious participation, whatever it is. These are examples.

Prayer, fasting, almsgiving, these are examples he could give, but the principle he's saying is don't do religious things for the approval of man because the worst thing that

could happen is you'd get it and then you'd be repaid for your trouble and then you'd have no further reward to be expected from your father. But do whatever you do in terms of religious behavior unto the Lord without any concern for what man thinks. And even if to break free from your slavish observance of what man expects you to do, even if it means you have to go into total privacy, total secrecy in your behavior for a while to get your motivations squared away, do that.

Do whatever you have to do to be one who worships in spirit and in truth rather than in outward forms and hypocrisy because otherwise you have your reward. Now, he does, of course, in this passage, give an extended treatment on prayer. And it's kind of unexpected because apart from the verses, I'm looking at the wrong page here, apart from verses 7 through 15, what Jesus has to say on prayer is almost exactly like what he has to say on almsgiving and fasting.

That is to say, if you simply consider verses 5 and 6, you have a teaching on prayer that resembles point for point his teaching on almsgiving and fasting. Namely, don't do it the way the Pharisees do it. Don't do it the way the hypocrites do it.

Seek a reward from God and that requires that you have, as it were, complete disregard for what people think even if it means absolute secrecy about it. And therefore, what he says about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are identical to each other with the exception that he has this excursus on prayer beginning at verse 7 and going through verse 15. And that's what we'll treat separately in our next session.

Okay, let's stop there.