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Matthew 5:43 - 6:18: Love of Enemies and Hypocrisy



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 5:43-6:18, Jesus exhorts his followers to love their enemies and to avoid hypocrisy in their religious practices. He cautions against seeking attention and praise for one's charitable deeds and encourages private, sincere prayer. Jesus emphasizes the importance of loving others, even those who may be considered enemies, and warns against the dangers of hypocrisy in religious behavior. Though the concept of perfection can be daunting, Jesus may simply be calling for spiritual maturity and growth over time.

Transcript

Let's look at Matthew 5, 43. Perfect is a good thing, but we have to understand what perfect means. The word perfect, as it is thus translated with the word perfect, means flawless, without defect, and it's very difficult for most of us to measure up to a standard of perfection like this.

There are two other meanings of this Greek word, though, and it is used in all these senses in Scripture, in different connections. But the word perfect also means complete, and it also means mature. A good example of where it means mature, there's a couple of examples coming immediately to my mind.

One's in Philippians chapter 3, and he says in verse 12, Philippians 3, 12, not that I have already attained, or I'm already perfected, or the King James would say just perfect, but I press on. Now Paul says I'm not yet perfect, and yet if you look at verse 15 of the same chapter, he says, therefore let as many of us as are mature. That's the same word, perfect, in the Greek, same word there.

You've got the same word in verse 12 and verse 15, both, one's translated perfected, and the other's translated mature, and that is because of context. I believe the difference in translation is reasonable and justified here. When Paul says, as many of us as are perfect, in verse 15, he means mature, because the word means mature, sometimes, in some contexts.

It also means perfected, or flawless, or without defect, as it seems to mean in verse 12. I'm not there yet, Paul says, but I am mature, same word. Also in Hebrews chapter 6, it

says, let us go on to perfection, and this is in a context where he's just complained that his readers are too immature.

They're still babes. They haven't grown up, and so when he says to them in Hebrews 6, 1, let us go on to perfection, most interpreters would agree he means maturity, since he's just complained in the previous verses that his readers are not mature. They're babes.

So perfect can mean mature, perfect can mean complete, or perfect can mean what we usually mean by that English word. Of course, we're talking about a Greek word in this case, but the Greek word has all three of these meanings. Now, when Jesus said, be perfect as your Father is perfect, let us suppose for a moment that he meant perfect in the absolute sense, flawless, sinless, without any defect.

Well, on one hand, this is encouraging, because if that is the goal, a command of Christ means it can be reached by his power, and it would mean that we could anticipate reaching perfection. However, it does get frustrating, because even if we go long periods of time thinking we're making progress in this direction, it's usually not very long before some great disillusionment comes up by a gross imperfection in our behavior or thoughts or something, some imperfection in our speech. After all, James said, in many things we all offend, we all stumble.

He says, if anyone does not stumble in word, he's a perfect man. Now, it's interesting, because James said that if you don't stumble or offend in your speech, you are perfect. But he said, we all do stumble, which means we're not perfect.

And so there are times when our speech or something gives us away that we're not perfect, and then we feel like, wow, do I have to go back to square one and start working toward perfection again? If perfection means sinlessness, let me simply say that I believe perfection of that sort is a hypothetical possibility. But whether anybody really reaches it, I do not know in this life. I have question, I have some doubt, but I mean, I don't know.

There are some who would say, oh, we'll never reach perfection until we die, but I'm not sure why that would be necessarily true. The Bible says that there is no temptation to take in you, but it's such as is common demand. But God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able to endure.

With every temptation will permit you a way of escape if you wish to take it, so you don't have to succumb. If that is true, then that means every time you're tempted to sin, then there will be an opportunity not to sin, which is a bona fide opportunity which you could avail yourself of, and therefore you could not sin if you wish. I mean, that's always the case.

There will never be a time when you have to sin. And that being so, it is hypothetically

possible that you could never sin. You could just live without sin.

But I say it's hypothetical because I don't know of anybody who doesn't ever, ever sin. And this is not a defect in the teaching of Scripture that there is always a way of escape. It is a defect in our nature that we do not always desire that escape as much as we desire some more selfish thing.

And how to get our desires perfect is the problem. Now, David was said to be perfect before the Lord, and other persons in the Old Testament were said to be perfect before the Lord, but I think we either have to take perfect in that sense either relatively or else it means his heart was perfectly the Lord's, in which case we'd use the word perfect more like complete, completely the Lord, that his heart was wholly devoted to God. And that is a second possible meaning, of course, of be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Maybe it just means be totally, have a perfect heart, have a heart that's completely surrendered to God or devoted to God. It's not likely that Jesus is saying be mature as your Father in heaven, simply because maturity is something that comes with time, and I don't know that telling someone to be mature will necessarily make them so. But of all those possibilities, I think the real meaning of Jesus' words is missed by all of them.

And I can say that on the basis of a parallel statement in Luke, because Luke has the same statement of Jesus, but it's rendered a little differently. It's in Luke chapter 6, in the sermon there that resembles the Sermon on the Mount, if it's not the same one, it's a very similar one, and it falls in the same central spot in the discussion. Notice Luke 6, verses 27 through 36 are essentially parallel to what the passage in Matthew we've just been reading.

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other also. Now here we don't mention the right cheek particularly.

Matthew mentions the right cheek. From him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you.

Everyone, hyperbole. And from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return. And your reward

will be great, and you will be sons of the highest, for he is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your father also is merciful.

Now, you recognize, as I read that passage in Luke, many of the thoughts in the Sermon on the Mount, most of them right in this very section, we're considering. And particularly, if you only do good to those who do good to you and only love those who love you, so what? You're no better than sinners. That's what Jesus says just before he says, be perfect, just as your father in heaven is perfect.

But in Luke, it is rendered in verse 36, therefore be merciful, just as your father also is merciful. Now, taking that parallel into consideration, look back at Matthew 5. Verse 48 starts with the word, therefore, which means that verse 48 summarizes what he has been saying before that. Therefore, since all these things are true that we've just said, do this.

Now, that means that verse 48 is, in a sense, a summary of what has gone just before. What has just gone before? Well, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you. Not only to those who love you should you love and do good and salute, but you should greet and love those who don't love you, just like your father does.

He sends rain and he sends the sun on the crops of the good and on the evil. He doesn't only do good to his friends, he does good to his enemies too. Therefore, be like him.

Be perfect or complete must mean be complete in your love and your mercy. Not just giving it to friends, but be like your father is in his mercy. He gives mercy to people who are not his friends.

That is, let your mercy, your love, let your generosity and kindness be extended to all parties, even as your father does. Perfect then would mean comprehensive or complete. But in particular, he means comprehensive in mercy, so that Luke renders it, be merciful as your father in heaven is merciful.

The idea here is that everybody has people they'll do favors for, but most people do favors for their friends and will not do favors for somebody that is not a friend and especially not for one who's an enemy. But that's not very much like God. God does favors for everybody.

God's grace, there's a thing called his common grace that extends to all people, whether they're his friends or not, simply because they are people, simply because they are in need. There are many stories of persons of false religions experiencing tremendous providences from God. The Mormons have a story they're fond of telling, which I assume to be true, that when their ancestors first came to Utah, to the area of the Great Salt Lake, there was very little food and very little water.

They had a great need. They were actually in danger of starving. They did scratch out a bit of farmland and plant crops, and some began to grow.

And there was hope that they would not all starve, but that they'd have crops. But as the crops began to grow and before the harvest had come, a plague of locusts came and threatened to devour every green thing and destroy their livelihood. And it would certainly have resulted in their starvation, cut off as they were from most of civilization out there, the desert.

And so they prayed, and they sought mercy from God. And a huge flock of seagulls came and ate the locusts and saved the crops. Now, I don't know how much this story can be verified, but I don't have any particular reason for doubting it.

Of course, the Mormons in telling it are hoping that you will see that God is clearly on their side, that they are indeed the people with the true religion because God worked this miracle to sustain them. To me, it's not surprising that he would do that. I would do it for them too if I could.

I mean, it doesn't... I would do that for any starving group of people that cried out to me if I had the resources. They don't need to be my friends. They certainly don't have to be people I agree with.

God does kind things for people that are not his friends, for people whose beliefs are not right, as Luke puts it, to the unthankful even. And the Mormons, you know, I believe their doctrine is wrong, and I believe that many of them are not... probably most of them are not really saved because the gospel they preach is the wrong gospel. But that doesn't prevent me from believing that God, who is merciful toward all, seeing people who cry out to him, even in their ignorance and in their deception, that he would not come to their aid in the manner that they described.

I personally believe that happened, and I believe it was God. Some people say, well, it was the devil. The devil did it in order to confirm to them that their beliefs were right and so forth, and to deceive them further.

Well, the devil could have done it, but the devil... I don't know, I just didn't give God the credit. Why not? It's more like a thing God would do. I mean, the devil might do something like that to deceive people, but why... I mean, if the Mormons give credit to God, why should Christians give credit to the devil for a very godlike act that, as far as we know, God may have done? Jesus said that he makes his son rise on the evil and on the good, since right now I'm the just and the unjust.

In other words, his mercy is comprehensive, is total, is perfect. And you must be perfect like he is perfect in this particular respect. Now, there may be other places in Scripture from which we could derive exhortations to general sinlessness, and we need to resist

sin and live holy lives.

It certainly is taught in Scripture. But I don't know that Jesus' words here in verse 48 are words that are... that he intends to be understood that way. I think what he means is, instead of being selected in whom you will greet, in whom you will love, be comprehensive as God is, complete.

Your mercy and your love extending and your kindness toward all parties, not just your friends, not even just Christians. The Good Samaritan story is a good example of the fact that our goodness toward people is not supposed to be only given to Christians. Now, let me say this.

Jesus is talking about love of enemies here, and we will talk about love of enemies, but let me talk about love of non-Christians first, because we know we're supposed to love the brethren. Jesus said, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another. And this almost certainly speaks of the kind of love that is exhibited within the Christian community for one another.

But what about love for non-Christians? Well, that's, as I say, addressed in Jesus giving the story of the Good Samaritan. Here's a man who is not of the same as the Jew who fell among the thieves. Now, when Jesus told that story, it was because he had said to a scribe, You shall love your neighbors yourself.

And the scribe said, Well, who's my neighbor? And the scribe was hoping to justify himself by narrowing the definition of neighbor sufficiently so that he could see that he was already doing that. The few people he loved might be the few that classify as neighbors, and that the people he didn't love he hoped might not fall into the category of neighbors since he had to love neighbors. So he said, Well, who's my neighbor? Seeking to justify himself.

And Jesus extended the definition of the word to people of a different race and religion than oneself in telling the story of the Good Samaritan. We have a Jewish man of Jewish faith. He falls into trouble, and a man of Samaritan ethnic origin and Samaritan religion finds him and helps him.

And this is the example of a man loving his neighbor as himself, Jesus says. So we know that our love to the brethren is supreme, but there must also be love for people who are not brethren, people who are not Christians. And this is not even going so far as to say people who are enemies.

Many non-Christians are not our enemies. Some of them may make themselves our enemies, but many non-Christians would in no sense consider themselves our enemies. And yet, sometimes we might not feel like we have an obligation to them because they're not Christians.

Paul said this in Galatians 6.10. In Galatians 6.10, Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially those who are of the household of faith. Now there's two classes here. There's the household of faith, and then there's all, which includes people who are not of the household of faith, people who are not Christians.

Who are we to do good to? All. Who are we supposed to do especially good things to? The household of faith. We are to be good to all.

God is better to Christians than he is to non-Christians. Not necessarily in terms of making their crops grow better, though that might even be true sometimes, but in terms of his general dealings, answers to prayer, and all that kind of stuff. God shows more mercy to Christians than to non-Christians, but he shows mercy to non-Christians too.

General graces. Likewise, we are to be merciful as our Father is merciful. We should be generous as we have opportunity to do good to all, especially the household of faith.

Now this is an interesting point when we consider the previous section we were talking about, about resistance and whether or not my love for my enemy and for the bad man means that I must not resist him even when he's hurting an innocent person. Well, of course, in a situation where there's a bad person, an aggressor, injuring an innocent party, your intervention or non-intervention will determine whether you are loving the bad person or the innocent person more. If you are concerned more about the welfare of the innocent person, you will intervene to protect him from the bad person.

If your sympathies are more with the bad person because you have to love enemies and bad people, then you will not perhaps do anything to harm him or interfere with him or resist him, and in that case you side with the evil against the good. When there is a conflict, where is the priority, is the question. To whom am I obligated to do good? Well, to all people as opportunity permits, but especially to the household of faith.

That is, especially to the... there are priorities in love. I'm supposed to love all people, but not all people necessarily equally, in terms of distribution of my funds. For example, if I have only enough to feed my family, but my neighbor's family is also in need, what shall I do? If I have only enough for one meal? Well, one possibility is to invite the other family over and just ask God to multiply the food and see what happens, but short of that happening, I dare say it's... it can be argued that my obligation to feed my family is greater than my obligation to feed my neighbor's family, though I have obligation to feed his family too, if both are possible.

But where a choice has to be made, there are certain priorities of responsibility, and while I would grieve if my neighbor's family were not fed, it is technically his responsibility to feed his family and mine to feed mine. If I can feed both, then I will help to assume the responsibility for his as well, if he is not able to meet it. But I have one very clearly defined responsibility in my own family.

Likewise, when it comes to distribution of money to the poor, or service, or doing good to people generally, the priority is to the household of faith. You're Christian brethren. Our special love for our brethren is the mark of our being disciples.

And if there is a certain amount of money to be distributed and a great number of poor people, it seems to me that the priority should be to seek out the poor among the household of faith first, and do what can be done for them. And if there is a surplus, then to go out to those who are not our household of faith, just because of what Paul said. Now we don't have opportunity to help everybody, and he says only as you have opportunity, do good to all, but especially meaning giving priority to the household of faith.

Likewise, I personally believe there'd be a priority to show love toward the innocent as opposed to the guilty in a case where there's a conflict between an aggressor and a victim, for the simple reason that God is on the side of the innocent, not on the side of the sinner. And therefore, if a Christian is deciding, well, should I love the aggressor and not interfere, or should I love the victim and interfere, it seems clear that God is on the side of the victim, and the Christian who's making a choice who to favor must favor the victim, not the aggressor. That leaves open the question of what form of resistance is biblical or Christian, but that resistance in some cases is necessary, as we've said earlier, seems to be confirmed by the fact that there are priorities in love.

When Jesus says, love your enemies, he doesn't mean that you have to love them supremely over all other people. He is simply saying that most people don't love their enemies at all, they hate their enemies. And you need to have more of a heart like God's heart, more of a mercy like his mercy.

If you only greet those who greet you, if you only love those who love you, you're no better than the tax collectors, you need to be better than them. You need to be like God, not like the tax collectors. Now, Jesus said in verse 43, you have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

Now, as far as I know, this is the first instance in all of the examples Jesus gives at the end of this chapter, the first instance where he actually includes something that they have heard that is not actually in their Bible. All of the other things that he says they have heard were in fact things that they've heard from their own scriptures. Their own scriptures, of course, did say and do say, and their scriptures are ours also, love your neighbor as yourself.

So you've heard that it was said love your neighbor is a quote actually from Leviticus 19 in verse 18. But it doesn't actually say anywhere that you must hate your enemy. There are, however, places in the Old Testament that may give the impression that it is okay or even necessary to hate your enemy.

These impressions, I think, are misguided and those who use them as an excuse to hate people that they had animosity toward were, in my opinion, misunderstanding altogether what God was saying in the Old Testament. But you do find things in the Old Testament, some things, that make it sound as if perhaps people should hate their enemy. It says, for example, in Deuteronomy 23 verse 3 and following, An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the Lord forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse you.

Nevertheless, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you, and you shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all of your days forever. Now, to say you shall not seek their peace, you shall not seek their good, sounds like you're supposed to not love them. Likewise, of course, we're familiar with cases where God said that the Amalekites, in Exodus 15, I think it is, or 16, 17, somewhere around there, I think it's actually 17, Exodus 17 talks about, you know, God will make war with the Amalekites forever, and eventually he told Saul to go and exterminate them all.

And he told Joshua and the people of Israel to exterminate all the Canaanites, and to show no mercy, to have no pity on them. Now, these instructions certainly sound as if there's a class of people called enemies, like the Amalekites, or Canaanites, or in this case the Ammonites and the Moabites, whom you are not to have any love for. No mercy, no pity, don't seek their good, don't seek their prosperity at all.

And that could easily have been in the mind of the Jew, used as a justification for hating anybody that they thought was an enemy of God, and of course a religious person usually thinks that all of his own enemies are the enemies of God, because he's a man of God. And this is easily made a justification for hating whoever you want to hate. And so apparently the rabbis either taught, or else the Jews just had the impression, that in addition to loving your neighbor, there was, you were to hate your enemy.

Now, what do we do with those Old Testament statements? Jesus told you to love your enemies. Well, in my opinion, God has the right to judicially condemn any group of people he wants to. He judicially condemned the Amalekites and the Canaanites.

And in the instructions about not showing kindness to the Ammonites and the Moabites all your days, he obviously was saying this is going to be his judgment on the Ammonites and the Moabites. They offended him. They hired Balaam to lead the people of Israel into idolatry.

They would not allow the Israelites to pass through their land. They were hostile toward them. And God therefore declares this judgment upon those people.

And it would be wrong to show kindness to somebody that God has declared that the judgment on them is that you will not show kindness on them. He's not going to show kindness on them. The fact that God shows general kindness to mankind does not mean that he never singles out a group because of extraordinary sin and says, these people I will show no more kindness to.

Pharaoh, the Canaanites, the, you know, certain groups that God says, okay, I've shown enough kindness to them. They have sinned so grievously that they are now under my judicial condemnation. And you should not therefore do kind things toward them.

You shall even exterminate them, he said. Now, I would say I don't know of any group of people about which God has made that declaration today. We might say, well, doesn't he declare homosexuals or murderers or, you know, certain classes of sinners worthy of death? Yes.

Yes, he does. And there's a sense in which perhaps we should even support the enforcement of God's judicial judgments exercised by the state on people who do things worthy of death like these things. I don't know.

It's a very inflammatory thing to say, but I'm not afraid to say inflammatory things if they're biblical. Paul himself says such things are worthy of death. But I'm not going to be the one campaigning for that.

The important thing is that I must have no malice toward any man. If God says certain people must be executed, I'll let the courts handle that the way they will. If they do the will of God, so well.

That's fine. If they don't, then they'll answer to God for that. They're not going to answer to me.

My task, just like with respect to an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, that's the court's task. My task is not necessarily to resist the man who injures me. It may be that the government has the task of punishing evil doers and wicked people that God has judicially condemned, but that doesn't mean that I have to be the executioner.

My heart has to be clean. I am not the one called to do these kinds of things. I'm called to love the person who is my enemy.

Now, of course, the persons who are condemned by God, whether it's Pharaoh or the Canaanites or whoever, or the Sodomites or whatever, they're not necessarily my enemies anyway. They're God's enemies, and if he declares their judgment, that's his business. But when it comes to people who persecute me, who curse me, who hate me, that's the category, again, that he describes in verse 44.

I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you. This is personal relationships

here. Do good to those who hate you.

Pray for those who spitefully use and persecute you. Now, you may be aware, I don't know what translation you may be reading, but in the Alexandrian text, this verse 44 is much shorter. It simply says, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

It does not say, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you. And it does not say, pray for those who spitefully use you, but simply pray for those who persecute you. So there's quite a few phrases in the Textus Receptus, which are King James and New King James follow, added that are not found in the Alexandrian text.

And of course, many scholars believe the Alexandrian text is more authentic, and therefore the NIV and the New American Standard and the modern translations will leave out those phrases. But whether or not those phrases were found in the original version of Matthew, we cannot say for sure, since there is a textual discrepancy there. But we don't have to be in question as to whether Jesus said those words.

Whether Matthew recorded them or not, it is clear that Jesus said them, because Luke recorded them. And there, there is no textual discrepancy. The Textus Receptus and the Alexandrian text agree here.

In Luke chapter 6, verses 27 and 28, which we read a moment ago, it says, love your enemies, those of you here, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. So all the things that are missing from the Alexandrian text version of Matthew 5, verse 44 are found in an undisputed passage in Luke that's found in all the manuscripts. So we can look at this verse without being concerned, is this authentic or not? All we know is that whether Matthew included it or not, in his original version, Jesus included it in his statements, and that's good enough for me.

Now, what does it mean to love your enemies? Here's a very good example of what I said in a previous session, our last session. Love does not necessarily constitute feeling something about someone. Now, all the better if you can feel loving toward someone.

The more people you feel love toward, and the more people you like, the easier it will be to show love. But notice what he says, love your enemies. How do you do that? Well, he gives three examples.

You bless those who curse. I can bless someone whether I like them or not. I can bless them.

I can speak kindly to them and of them and do kind things to them and bless them. Do good to those who hate you. Okay, I can do good whether I feel like it or not.

It's possible to choose to do good to someone, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. So, how do I love someone? I bless them, I do good to them, and I pray for them. Is that possible to do with or without emotion? Yes.

With or without affection? Absolutely. Although, I think you'll find that as you set yourself to blessing someone and doing good to someone and praying for them, that your heart warms toward them too. Love is first and primarily, and at its core, action.

Things you do. Because, I mean, I shouldn't say love is that. I should say love is measured by that.

Love exists in you as a choice, and what you do demonstrates that you've made that choice. What you feel doesn't always demonstrate it, but when you make the choice to do the loving thing consistently, you'll often find that your feelings will conform to it. I remember hearing a Christian counselor say that he was approached by a woman who did not feel she loved her husband anymore.

That all the love had gone out of their relationship. They didn't feel anything of love toward each other at all, and he counseled her. The counselor said, and this is a minister, okay, well, how did you act toward your husband when you did love him? And she recalled certain ways she treated him and things she did for him and so forth when she felt love toward him, and the counselor said, for six weeks, act that way toward him.

For the next six weeks, just act exactly as you would if you were in love with him, which she did, and she came back predictably and said, hey, guess what? My feelings have returned for my husband, and it is true that often feelings dictate actions, but what is often forgotten is that actions can often dictate feelings too. They can encourage feelings. The choice of your action is a tangible choice, and it gives you feelings permission to agree.

If you are choosing to gossip about someone, to grumble about someone, to avoid somebody, to injure somebody, your emotions are never going to feel any permission from you to like that person. If you're making your tangible choice to act in a loving manner toward that person, then the likelihood is great that your feelings will eventually say, you know, there's probably something I could like about that person too. But even if that doesn't ever happen, and this is not guaranteed, it's not taught in scripture that that will happen.

I believe that that is something observable, but not necessarily promised in scripture. Then your actions must be loving even if your feelings are not liking somebody. And Jesus said that when you do that, you will be sons of your Father which is in heaven.

Remember earlier he said, blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons of God. And it is because this action is peacemaking action, that you are resembling your

Father which is in heaven, like sons resemble a father. Now I want to say this too.

Who is an enemy? I'm to love my enemies. Who is my enemy? Well, again, just as love is defined by bless, do good, and pray for, so also these three phrases tell us who an enemy is. An enemy is one who curses you, one who hates you, and one who spitefully uses you and persecutes you.

If someone isn't doing at least those things, they hardly deserve to be called an enemy. There's somebody toward whom you have maybe a neutral relationship, but if someone is acting in a hostile manner toward you, and therefore what he is saying is, you need to extend mercy, because as he said earlier, if someone acts hostile toward you, the law permits you to act hostile toward them, but you don't need to do that. You can give up your right to a grudge, you can give up your right to hostility, and you can then extend grace and mercy to them, and that is loving, so that you become like your Father.

God is love, and what Jesus is saying he wants is a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness described in the Pharisees, because their acts they did to be seen of men, but they did not have any love for God or for man, therefore their righteousness was no righteousness at all, it was just externalism. But as Jesus points out in the six examples in this passage, God, even when he gave these laws, had deeper issues that concerned him. Justice and mercy and faithfulness, and these are the things, the weightier matters of the law, this is what love is.

So that in a sense, all that Jesus teaches about the law is, love your neighbor as yourself, and you will fulfill the law by so doing. But he has to give illustrations like this, because people do not automatically know what love is. Almost everybody thinks they know who they love and who they don't love by how they feel about people.

And Jesus has to make it clear that love is more in practical decisions of behaving justly and mercifully and faithfully toward others. Now there's more contrast between the scribes and the Pharisees, religion and that of Christ and his disciples, that is brought up in the beginning of chapter 6. Here we have a change of form, because Jesus no longer gives examples of you have heard that it was said, but I say unto you here. Nonetheless, there's a change into another paradigm that's followed repeatedly.

And that is, 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 your 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. 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 for their many words.

Therefore, do not be like them, for your Father knows the things 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.

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 a secret place.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Now, the reason I read this whole section is because I wanted you to observe the symmetry of this section, just like there was a symmetry of the previous section. That symmetry in the previous section was seen in the paradigm, repeatedly saying, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you.

Now there's a different paradigm, but it's equally symmetric. You've got, or symmetrical is a better word, you've got in verse 2 through 4, the first example of this. Verse 5 through 6, the second example of it.

And then you have to skip down to verses 16 through 18 for the third. There's a long, right in the middle of the whole thing, there's a long parenthesis about prayer. And, but apart from that parenthesis, the three examples follow.

When you do X, do not be like the hypocrites, for they do it in thus and so a way. And they do it to be seen by men. But when you do that, you do it in this such a way, and you will be rewarded by your Father which is in heaven.

He says in each case of the hypocrites, they have their reward. So there's certain things

that belong to each of these things. When you do a charitable deed, don't do what they do, they sound trumpet before them.

And he says, assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, then he tells them what to do. And he says that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

He closes each one with that statement. In verse 6, your Father who is in secret place, your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And at the end of verse 18, your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

There are three practices here that Jesus talks about, and it's clear that the one thing he's trying to get across in all of them is that when you do such things as these, you should not be ostentatious, you should not draw attention to yourself. You should do it in such a way as to procure for yourself a reward that is more worthy of having than the reward the Pharisees seek. The Pharisees have the reward they're seeking.

The one they want is man's attention and man's recognition. They have that. You should seek a better reward than that.

You should seek the reward that comes from your Father who sees what is done in secret. Now, there is obviously a frequent use of hyperbole here. He says, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

That is not, of course, a literal statement, but it's certainly making a strong point of being somewhat secretive. Likewise, when you pray, you have to go and shut your door in your room. Make sure no one can hear you.

Well, that's not... Jesus didn't follow that pattern all the time. He prayed in public sometimes, and so did the apostles in the book of Acts. And fasting, he says, make sure you wash your hair and comb it and wash your face and so forth so you don't appear to be fasting.

The idea here is not that you have to do these exact things, but that you need to do your religious acts in such a way that you are not drawing attention to yourself. Do it as privately as you can, and there's nothing wrong with someone finding out that you're praying or fasting or that you did a charitable deed. Sometimes I remember in the 70s, there was kind of a joke that went around among Christians that if someone said, oh, I picked up a hitchhiker today and witnessed to him and so forth, and someone would say, oh, you just lost your reward, brother, because you just told us about that.

Someone said, I saw this poor person, I gave him a buck, and oh, you lost your reward because you mentioned that. That if somehow someone found out that you had done something good, that you would lose your reward over it. I don't know where they got that idea, because Jesus doesn't say anything about losing their reward.

What he says is that those who do these things to be seen by men have their reward. He doesn't say they lose their reward. They have their reward.

What he's saying is they're settling for much less reward than they ought to be looking for, but they have the very reward they deserve. But as he says in verse 1, they have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. So the idea here is that Christians should be seeking a reward from the Father who is in heaven, not the relatively worthless reward of human approval.

But the point here is that religion can be done two ways. The way the hypocrites did it, and the way Jesus did it. All the things he mentions are, in a sense, religious obligations, helping the poor, praying, fasting.

They have to do with religious life. They are not necessarily the things like the law in the previous illustrations. The law doesn't command, thou shalt give X amount to the poor.

It does command you should pay tithes, and these tithes, among other things, should be partially available to the poor. But additional giving to the poor was expected. There's just no set amount given.

Likewise, the Bible doesn't say you should pray X amount or fast X amount. Giving to the poor, praying, and fasting, these three illustrations are things that are somewhat, you're sort of on your own to decide how much to do them. Arguably, the more you give to the poor, the more you pray, the more you fast, up to a certain point, the better.

But there's no set amount of praying, or giving, or fasting that is the right amount to be righteous. It isn't praying more than another person, fasting more than a person, or giving more to the poor than another person does, that makes your righteousness exceed that other person. It is the sincerity of it, and doing it unto the Lord, that makes it a more rewardable act.

Earlier, Jesus said, your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Well, they gave tithes, they gave to the poor, they prayed, they fasted twice a week, you've got to exceed them. What? In more fasting days per week? More gifts to the poor? More prayer time put in than they did? Probably couldn't do it.

But exceeding their righteousness did not require that you do these activities more. The Bible itself, the Old Testament, never dictated how much these things should be done. These are your own choice, but the fact is that when you do them at all, you must do them for the right reasons, or else there is no reward, there is no value in it.

The right reason, of course, is to please God. If a person's religious acts are done to please God, though they be many or few, they are acceptable to God, and it does not matter whether anyone ever learns of it. In other words, the person is not thinking about what people think, the person is thinking what God thinks, and what Jesus is saying is

that all religions that have any value at all has got to be God-concerned, not man-concerned.

And yet, the biggest trap of religious people is that which the Pharisees fell into, and that is, if religion is a good thing, then to be thought religious is a good thing to be thought, and if people think you're religious, they'll think well of you. And if you can't be thought well of by some other means, maybe you can get people to think well of you by these means. I mean, if somebody is absolutely beautiful, and everyone loves them for that reason, or athletic, or musically talented, or they have all kinds of skills that people think well of them and speak well of them for, fine, but what if you're not good-looking? What if you're not athletic? What if you're not talented? What if you're not particularly bright? You can always be religious.

You can always be religious. It's sort of like the poor man's way to recognition. And not everyone loves a religious person, but there's always a crowd.

You can always be the big fish in a little pond. You know, if you can't make it in the world as a popular person, you can always join some small church and be the most pious person there and have respect for them. Religion can be a way of just getting the same kind of carnal strokes and stroke in the ego that other people who aren't religious seek through other means.

And that is apparently what many of the Pharisees did, and they were hypocrites. Now, Jesus repeatedly refers to these people as hypocrites. He actually never calls them the scribes and Pharisees here.

He does mention them by that name back in chapter 5, verse 20, when he says, I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. So we know who he's talking about as the standard to measure against negatively. But here he doesn't refer to them as scribes and Pharisees.

He just calls them the hypocrites, the hypocrites, the hypocrites. Presumably a person could be a hypocrite without being a Pharisee. There might be hypocritical Sadducees or hypocritical Zealots or hypocritical Atheists for that matter.

You don't want to be like the hypocrite anyway. And there could be people who were Pharisees who weren't hypocrites. There were some sincere Pharisees.

Paul was, Saul of Tarsus was before he was saved. He had a degree of sincerity. But Jesus says you're not supposed to be hypocritical.

The Pharisees, generally speaking, followed patterns that smacked of hypocrisy. Now, hypocrisy or hypocrite comes from a Greek word, hypokrites, which means an actor. If you call somebody today a hypocrite, they will be insulted, even if they are a professional actor.

If you know somebody who's a professional actor and you call him a hypocrite to his face, he'll be insulted. He'll be defensive. But in the Greek world, if you spoke to a professional actor and called him a hypocrite, he would not be offended at all because that's what he was.

Hypokrites means an actor, a thespian, a person who made his living in drama. It was not necessarily a pejorative term unless somebody didn't like drama. I mean, there were persons, religious Jews and Christians who thought drama was a carnal and evil thing.

But the majority of people who used that word in common speech didn't use it as a pejorative. And certainly if someone spoke of someone as a hypocrite, then that person was saying that person makes his living in the theater. When Jesus said of certain religious practitioners, you are hypocrites or actors, he was using a word that in itself is not pejorative, but when applied to people who are not professional actors and who, at least in their public image, are sincere religionists, and you say you're just acting.

You're just an actor. You're just on a stage. You're just wearing a costume with props.

You're following the blocking of some script. You're not showing us who you really are. You're pretending to be someone else.

That becomes insulting. Now, if you say that to an actor who's actually doing all those things on stage, no one cares. It's not a criticism to tell an actor, you're not really that person you're pretending to be.

Because they say, of course I'm not. I mean, everyone knows that. I'm an actor.

I'm playing a role here. There's no stigma attached to an actor playing a role. Unless, of course, he's in real life playing a role.

And he's not really an actor at all in the sense of a vocation. He's just not a sincere person in what he professes to be. Everything in his daily life is a pretense.

He's wearing a mask. He's doing what he thinks the script calls for him to do. His heart's not in it.

I've never been much of an actor. I was an actor in high school a little bit in drama, but I'm certainly not a good enough one to know how actors really think. I mean, I've always wondered, you know, when you see actors in playing roles for that to cry and real tears come out of their eyes.

I imagine they have something they wave under their nose or their eyes that kind of makes the eyes tear or something. But I think that a really, truly good actor can bring tears to their eyes without that. I'm always amazed at a convincing laugh in a movie.

When you see someone laugh convincingly, when you know that they're just laughing

because the script calls for it and they're not really amused. I mean, there's all kinds of laughs, but it's hard to appear to be really amused and not just being sneering or cynical when you're not really amused. I mean, an actor obviously has to somehow put himself or herself in that frame of mind of the person that they are portraying and somehow make themselves feel those emotions or else they cannot convincingly do it.

And in that sense, an actor may be even more sincere than the Pharisees were because the actor actually is trying to be the person for the time being that they are portraying. The Pharisee, I dare say, was probably not trying very sincerely to be the person he was portraying himself to be, and his thoughts all the while that he was doing good things were probably somewhere else, thinking about how many sacrifices he'd make and how many sins he'd like to really commit if he really didn't want to play this role in front of everyone's eyes. Jesus said to them in John chapter 5, he says, I know you that you have no love of God in you, and yet everything they did pretended to be for love of God.

But they didn't have any love for God in them. They were just playing a role. They had a costume on.

And it's probable that in many cases they didn't even, I mean, they knew they were playing a role. But it's also possible that sometimes they had lost sight of the fact that they're playing a role. We are easily prone to deceive not only others but ourselves.

And if we play the role convincingly enough, we begin to think ourselves to be as religious as we pretend to be. And we need to be warned about this because it is a sneaky thing. You can be a hypocrite without knowing you're a hypocrite.

You can be insincere without knowing you're insincere. In Luke chapter 12 and verse 1, Jesus said to his disciples, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy.

I'd like to note that the word beware, though Jesus uses it a variety of times, he only uses it of two different vices. Beware of this vice. Now he does say beware of men and beware of these people and so forth, in which case he's warning you to watch out for certain physical dangers and physical threats.

But there's only two sins that he says to beware of. One is covetousness, which is even later on in this same chapter. In Luke 12, verse 15, take heed and beware of covetousness.

But the other is hypocrisy. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Now, why would he say beware of these things? Beware means be wary, be alert, be on your guard.

There is a danger lurking that might overtake you without you noticing it if you're not wary. Now, he doesn't say that anywhere about drunkenness or about murder or about

adultery or blasphemy. He doesn't say beware of those things.

And I suspect that it's not because he had more affinity for those things or more tolerance for them, but rather that people don't need to be warned in the same way about such things. If a person is a drunkard, he probably knows he's a drunkard. I mean, unless he's in denial, as I say.

But if a person is having an affair, he knows he's having an affair. If a person is a murderer, he knows he's murdering people. This is not something that sneaks up on you, or if it does, at least doesn't remain hidden once it's had its effect.

If you commit a sin like murder or adultery or theft, you know you've done it. But if you're being covetous or if you're hypocritical, you may not know it. It sneaks up on you and sometimes entrenches itself and it remains and dominates and dictates behavior and you don't even know it's arrived.

These are very devious vices, so sneaky you might not notice them yourself. There are many, many Christians who are covetous and yet Jesus and Paul both indicated that covetousness is a very grievous sin. Paul even included the covetous in the list of people you shouldn't have any company with if they profess to be Christians.

Which is if anyone professes to be a brother and he is A and then he lists a long list of sins that have no company with him, don't even eat with him. One of those people in the list is if he's a brother, claims to be a brother and he's covetous. It's a very wicked thing and yet how do you know when you're being covetous? Well I guess sometimes you can tell.

Sometimes you get convicted and realize I'm just being greedy here. But your attachment to your possessions, your attachment to your things, your security that's in them and so forth is a very subtle thing. And most Christians will say they are not covetous.

Most Christians will say, you know, all that I have is surrendered to God. But he rarely gets any of it. And they say, well if God would tell me to get rid of all my stuff I'd gladly do it.

But they're pretty sure he's not going to. And so they never really have to find out if they would or not. But covetousness exists in a high degree in the church and there's probably most people who are covetous just don't know it.

They have not been wary of it. It snuck up on them. Same thing with hypocrisy.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. It's possible to become a hypocrite and if you weren't wary of it, if you're not watching out for it, it may exist. It may dominate your entire religious life and you not know it.

And that's why Jesus gives very tangible, somewhat exaggerated examples of what not to do and what to do. To raise awareness of this subtle thing, he speaks in anything but subtlety about it. He raises the awareness of it by use of striking illustrations.

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. Now here's the point. This is a summary statement of all the three examples.

Don't do what you do before men to be seen by men. I know some people who when they put their money in the church offering, they won't write a check, they'll only use cash because their check can't be anonymous. And they are afraid that if they put a check in there, they're violating what Jesus said.

Jesus said, don't let people see what you're doing, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. And this is okay. I mean, you know, I think the point here that Jesus is making is why you're doing it.

It's a little like when he said, whoever looks at a woman to lust after her. There's a difference between looking at someone and experiencing lust on the one hand, or looking at someone to lust after them. The intention of the heart is where the hinge is there, where the pivot is, between one being an innocent temptation and the other being an actual sin.

Likewise, there's a difference between doing a good deed and someone knowing about it, on one hand, and doing a good deed to have people know about it, to be seen by them, on the other hand. This refers to intention and motivation. If you give your money to the church in a check, I don't think you violate anything.

However, there is a reason why Jesus did say these things, and that is because if you do good deeds and people do know about it, there will be the very subtle temptation to think in terms of continuing to do good things for these people to continue to see you do it. If you do things in such a way that people see them, there's always that danger that you might be doing it for them to see you, since the heart is a deceitful thing. It's hard to know to what degree our good deeds, our religious lives, are being done really out of a total concern about God's approval and how much is done because we happen to live in a religious community, a religious environment, where doing good things are recognizably virtuous and people will think, boy, that's a good brother, that's a good sister, because she did that thing.

I think we don't know our own hearts very well, and for that reason, to do what Jesus did, essentially said almost as literally as possible, is not a bad idea, although there are examples in the scripture where Jesus was not himself as secretive in some of these things as he could have been, or where the disciples were not, and apparently neither he nor the disciples felt like these instructions had to be followed to the letter literally

necessarily, but they're making a point that it is safer to do good deeds in a way that people see them. To be totally private and secretive about your acts of charity and of prayer and so forth, simply because you know that in such cases you're not doing that to impress anybody, because nobody could possibly be impressed. You're doing it in such a way that no one could conceivably know or be impressed, and therefore your motives you can be quite sure of.

It may be that your motives can be good in other situations which are not as secretive, it may be that you can give to the poor when somebody's there and you couldn't care less if someone saw you, you did it unto the Lord, and that's fine, but when you do it in total secrecy, you know for sure that your motives are right. And for that reason, Jesus advocates that as something of a norm, and I think that is, as I say, it's like with the fasting. I know a pastor who says that every time he fasts he doesn't tell anyone, not anyone at all, and if someone invites him to eat, just so that he will not have to disclose the fact that he's fasting, he'll say, okay, he'll accept it, and he'll eat and then he'll secretly extend his fast another day to make up for the day that he broke his fast.

That way he doesn't ever have to tell anyone he's fasting. Well, to my mind, that could be very unworkable. I mean, what if every day someone invites you to eat, then you have to break your fast every day and extend it secretly the next day, and then break it the next day if someone says... Much easier just to say, no, thank you, I'm fasting today.

I mean, of course, you haven't kept it a secret in such a case, but you might well be totally pure in your heart about it that you're not doing it to impress anyone. It just happens that it came up by necessity in conversation. There's no reason why you should feel guilty if you have given to the poor or you pray or you fast and somebody is aware of it.

The thing to feel guilty about is if you're doing it so that people will be aware of it. If you're doing it to be seen of men, then there will be no reward from God, because if you're doing it to be seen of men, you're not thinking about God at all. Why should he reward you? You're thinking about men, and that's what the Pharisees did.

Their religion was all man-concerned, and Jesus' whole life was God-concerned. And the disciples, in all religious expressions, were to be doing them in the correct spirit of religious expressions, as an act of reverence and piety to God. But it is so subtle and so dangerous that what could be done as an act of piety can become an act that we realize people are respecting us for, people are admiring in us, and then we begin to kind of enjoy that and want to perpetuate that a little bit and want people to still think well of us.

And of course, worse yet, a person may do that right from the beginning, to be seen of men and not even have ever had any sincerity in it. There is the possibility of a person being a total and outright self-known hypocrite, just acting, no sincerity at all, no concern

to be sincere. But the more subtle danger, and the one that really is dangerous to the Christian, is not that a person who is irreligious will pretend to be religious, but that a religious person will be religious more when there's likelihood of people finding out and respecting them for it, than at times when only God knows.

And Jesus wants the disciples to have their hearts set on God to the point where they don't even know, don't even care if anyone's looking. Now Jesus, actually the way Jesus describes it, if taken literally, would make you very conscious of other people who would say, oh I can't pray because someone's in the next room, they might hear me, can't pray out loud today. I can't fast because that person will find out I'm fasting.

I can't give, I'd like to help that person but someone's with me, I dare not give because someone will find out. The way Jesus tells it, if taken literally, without acknowledging hyperbole, there'd be times when you couldn't do the right thing because you simply couldn't do it with a sufficient degree of secrecy. And so we should not assume that Jesus is insisting upon the secrecy.

He's emphasizing the secrecy in order to emphasize the motivation. And so, if you do your good deeds to be seen by men, you have no reward from your Father in Heaven. Now he gives the example, there's a variety of examples he gives.

One is of alms, as the King James says, or doing charitable deeds, the New King James says. This is essentially the giving of money to the poor. He indicated that the Pharisees, when they did this, or the hypocrites when they did this, they sound a trumpet before them, before they give.

The image is that there is a Pharisee walking down the street and there's a beggar there. Pharisee is obligated under the laws of piety to help the beggar, but he doesn't want his gift to go to waste without giving him some kind of return in terms of public respect. And so he has a trumpeter who walks around with him and sounds the trumpet.

Oh, the trumpet, everyone pay attention, this Pharisee is about to help this poor person. And once the trumpet sounds and everybody's looking, then he throws his coin in the pot. Now this is, it is not known from Jewish writings outside the scripture whether the Pharisees literally did this or not.

Jesus might be speaking figuratively. You know, we talk about someone blowing their own horn. You know, I mean, that's a figurative expression.

If somebody is boasting or whatever, we might say that person's tooting his own horn. Well, if someone heard us, they might think we're saying they're literally blowing a trumpet. And there may have been a similar expression.

Jesus may have been meaning it that way. These people toot their own horn and they sound a trumpet, as it were. They make sure everyone's, you know, they've got

everyone's attention.

They rally the troops to observe them throwing a coin to the poor. Now, some have suggested there's even another possible meaning. And that is that in the temple where the tithes and the gifts were thrown, there was a brass receptacle that was shaped sort of like the horn of a, you know, the mouth of a trumpet or of a trombone or a tuba or something like that.

It's brass. And that as they would throw coins in, of course, it would be noisy. The clatter of metal against the brass trumpet, as it were.

The sort of the bell of the trumpet that received the gifts into the treasury box. And that people could draw a lot of attention to their giving in such a case if they poured a large number of coins in a noisy manner into the box. I mean, you could just slip your coin down in there and not rattle it against the receptacle at all.

But others who want to make sure that people knew it, they could sound the trumpet, as it were. By dumping their coins noisily and, you know, as they would clatter and make noise and ring the trumpet sound and not the sound of a blowing trumpet, but in a sense the clanging of the brass receptacle. But this was how they sounded the trumpet before them.

It's not known which of these two practices Jesus is referring to. But whatever it is, he's obviously saying that there are some people who will not give unless they've got everybody's attention. And if they don't already have everybody's attention, they'll make sure they get the attention in the act of giving.

And he says they have their reward. Because they're doing it to be seen by men. And that's exactly what happens.

They are seen by men. And if that's what turns them on, then they've got what turns them on. They've been seen by men.

But Jesus indicates that's a tawdry and cheap reward to get for your sacrifice. Better to have God observe it. Better to have God appreciate it.

And God reward it. So he says, 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.

So there's business about not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing. See, I said earlier when he talked about striking on the right cheek, that Jesus assumed most people are right-handed. This is clear.

He does. Your right hand is the one that's doing the charitable deed, because you're

right-handed. Your left hand is left in the dark about it.

But this is clearly hyperbole. To literally not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing is impossible since neither hand knows anything. The hand is not a knowing part of the body.

Just like plucking out your eye or your hand is not going to be a suitable way of ceasing from sin. But the point he's making is a figurative one, and that is that you should be as private as you can be. Be totally secret about it, if possible.

But it does not mean that if you encounter a person in need and you happen not to be alone, then there's no way you can give that gift in absolute secrecy that you should not give the gift, because you can only give gifts in total secrecy. The point he's making, of course, is be just the opposite of the Pharisees. The Pharisees want everyone to see.

You should prefer for people not to see, and do things as privately as possible. That way you can be more sure of your own motivation in it. The next example, by the way, what I'm going to do is I'm going to look at these three examples, then in our next session when we come back to it, what I want to do is look more carefully at the subject matter of charity and of prayer and of fasting.

We'll give more of a biblical teaching on those subjects. I just want to show you what he's saying about hypocrisy at this point. So he says, and when you pray, verse 5, you shall not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corner of the streets, that they may be seen by men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. Yeah, they want to be seen by men, and they are. That's the reward they want.

That's the reward they've got. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Same idea.

They're fasting. Moreover, verse 16, 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.

They want to appear to be fasting. Well, they do. They do appear to be fasting, therefore they have what they want.

They have their reward. Now, what's interesting about this is that the Pharisees, we know, did fast twice a week, but it's clear that they didn't like it. They didn't do it out of love for God.

They didn't get any spiritual joy out of it, or benefit. They were upset about it, and they

wanted everyone to know how upset they were about it. They went around with a gloomy expression when they were fasting.

This way, at least they could get the gratification of everyone knowing that they're going, they're making a sacrifice. That everyone knows, at least, that they're grumpy, because they're fasting for God. And Jesus said, no, you do the opposite.

When you fast, anoint your head, wash your face, look normal, in other words. Now, you don't have to start anointing your head with oil if you don't normally do that. I mean, if you don't usually put grease on your hair, you don't have to do it just because you're fasting.

He's just saying, do the normal thing. Don't look out, don't do anything out of the ordinary, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father, who is in the secret place. And he rewards you openly.

Now, this business of rewarding you openly, which occurs in all three verses, four, six, and 18, the word openly is actually omitted from the Alexandrian text, it's only found in the Texas Receptus. So, whether the promise of the reward is truly an open, invisible, and public reward, or not, is perhaps open to question. It's not clear exactly what kind of reward he's talking about here, but it's a spiritual reward, and it's likely that the reward in question is not in this line.

Now, it might be, if it's not openly, it may be an inward reward. See, if God is going to reward you openly, probably the reference is when, at the Day of Judgment, he says to you, well done, good and faithful servant. There will be a public acknowledgement by God of your good deeds, and you will receive open recognition for it at that time.

But if the word openly is not found here, and it is not in some manuscripts, then he's just saying your father himself will reward you. And that reward may be now. It does not have to await the Judgment Day for him to reward you.

Virtue, in a sense, has its own rewards. Generosity is a very delightful thing. It's a greater blessing to give than to receive, Jesus said.

There's a blessing in it. There are certain rewards to be had in fasting, and in prayer, definitely. Immediate rewards.

And they are spiritual in nature, which makes them far more desirable than the reward of human recognition that the Pharisees seek when they give alms, or when they fast, or when they pray. Now, I have deliberately avoided getting into the subject of charity and prayer and fasting in this session simply because those will detain us too long, and they are not really the major subject of this section. They are simply the illustrative material to make the basic point that all religious activity should be done unto the Lord and not unto man, and that we should guard very carefully against falling into the trap of acting

religious in front of people whom we thought of as religious.

And that is his point. But at the same time, he did say things about alms. He did say things about fasting and prayer here.

In fact, there's an extended section about prayer that falls outside of the symmetry of the three illustrations, and that is, of course, verses 7 through 15, where he takes it off and says additional things about prayer. So, there's two levels of instruction here. There's the major point, is whatever you do of a religious nature, do it unto the Lord.

Ideally, do it secretly, privately. Guard your motives, and it tells you what your motives are more thoroughly and more sincerely than if you do it in front of people and you don't know for sure what your motives are. But the main thing is that you do it unto the Lord, and you not do it unto man.

Religion is not for man, it's for God. At the next level of meaning, he is actually giving some teachings about the need to give charitable gifts and to pray and to fast. He doesn't say very much on the subject of charitable gifts here or of fasting here.

He does say a great deal more about prayer. But there are other places in Scripture where we do fill in the gaps in what the Bible says about charitable gifts and fasting as well. And so, what I want to do next time is talk about those three subjects that Jesus raises here.

Although they are in a sense the secondary meaning of the passage, they are nonetheless part of his teaching and so we will look at them when we come back next time.