

The Proper Motive for Righteousness  
Matthew 6:1

**Introduction**

This morning we begin a new section within the Sermon on the Mount, but its theme is the same as we have been studying since we entered into this wonderful section of Scripture. What is the nature of the righteousness that surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees that is necessary to be able to enter the kingdom of heaven? In the Beatitudes we saw the characteristics that will mark the person who is righteous in heart: Poor in Spirit, Mournful over sin, Meek, Hungering and thirsting after righteousness, Merciful, Pure in heart, and a Peacemaker with the result that the unrighteous will persecute them. None of these characteristics can be produced by man's own effort, They are produced only in those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus stated clearly in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to annul the law but to fulfill it and that not that even the smallest part of the Law would not pass away until all was accomplished. Jesus restored the meaning and spirit of the law which the Scribes and Pharisees had distorted. Jesus gave six specific illustrations of this in which He contrasted the true spirit of God's law with the teaching of the self-righteous religious leaders. Those who are truly righteous will keep the spirit of the law from the heart and not just the letter of the law by outward actions. Murder is sinful, but so is unrighteous anger and expressing it verbally. Adultery is sinful, but so is lustfully looking on someone other than your spouse. Divorce is not commanded and only under one severe restriction can it occur without it resulting in an increase in adultery. The righteous have no need to swear or take an oath for they will keep their promises without such things. They keep their word to do what they say they will do and will not lie. In addition, when the righteous are treated unfairly, they rely upon God and leave justice in His hands instead of seeking revenge for themselves. In fact, they not only refrain from retaliation, they go on to even love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them.

In this new section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues this same theme about the nature and practice of true righteousness, but now He will be contrasting the religious practices of the scribes and Pharisees instead of their teachings. Jesus will do this in three specific areas: giving alms, prayer and fasting. All of these are supposed to be acts of worship to God, but they had been turned into displays of self-righteousness by these religious leaders. After Jesus deals with these three areas, He then gives three prohibitions - commands to not do certain general things found in the lives of these self-righteous religious leaders. The person who is truly righteous will desire to do all for the glory of God instead of glory for himself.

**The Theme - Matthew 6:1**

This section is introduced in Matthew 6:1. This verse continues the theme of the sermon and marks off the main thought that runs through each of the illustrations and each of the prohibitions that follow later. Turn and read with me.

*"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."* Before we go further let me correct something that causes confusion sometimes. In some translations instead of using the word "righteousness" in verse 1 and another term in verse 2, they use "alms" (KJV) or "charitable deeds" (NKJV) in both verse 1 and verse 2. Verse 1 is the general case and verse 2 begins a specific illustration of it. If your Bible does not distinguish this, then write "practicing your righteousness" in the margin and draw a line where it says

“alms” or “charitable giving” in verse 1. That will help you to remember that verse 1 is the introduction to the whole section which goes through 6:18 and not just to the illustration in verses 2-3.

Look now carefully again at this verse. Beware of (take heed that you do not) practicing your righteousness (doing good things) before (in front of) men to be noticed by them (in such a way as to attract their attention, so as they can observe you, to be seen/looked/gazed upon). Otherwise (if you do) you will have no reward with your Father who is heaven. If you do what good things you do in order to impress men, then the praise of men is the only reward you will get. Jesus is dealing with the motives that are in the heart of a man. Once again we see that true righteous is a matter of the heart and not just what is done outwardly.

### **Proper Interpretation**

There are some that have used this verse and those following it that illustrate its principle to teach that we are to do everything in secret, and that if someone sees you, then you have lost your heavenly reward. Again we find an error in interpretation that is similar to so many others that we have noted in our study. A passage of Scripture taken out of its context is a pretext. There are two major ways this error occurs. The first is innocent in motive, but erroneous in outcome. A verse or passage is examined without considering the larger context of what occurs before or after the passage or what is taught about that same subject in other Scriptures. There are many that make that error in studying these sections of Jesus’ teaching.

The second way in which this error occurs is not innocent. People can be very quick to look for verses to support what they already think. It is called proof texting and is the common way in which heretical doctrines are developed. If the verses and phrases of a Scripture passage are examined without consideration of their context, it is possible to make it seem like the Bible will teach just about anything you would like it to teach. Whenever Biblical interpretation is done without careful consideration of the context, then it becomes easy to make errors in interpretation. Personnel opinion is irrelevant. The only thing that is important in interpreting the Bible is discerning what God intended to reveal. You must know the meaning of the text before you make personal application of it.

Jesus states in verses 3 & 4 that your right hand should not know what the left is doing so that your alms may be in secret. In verse 6 Jesus says to “*pray to your Father in secret.*” In verses 17 & 18 He says you are not to let other people see that you are fasting. Is Jesus actually teaching that we must be sure no one ever sees you giving to someone else or putting your offering in the Faith Box? Is Jesus really saying that all prayer must be in private and that public prayer is without reward? Is Jesus saying that if someone finds out your are fasting that your reward for skipping all those meals is gone? NO! If He did, then we had better set up a system by which you can give to the church by depositing cash (checks are traceable) into a night security box here at the church so that no one will see you do it. And we must cancel our prayer meetings and cut out all the prayers in our worship service. And as far as fasting, well, most of us could get a great benefit out of that even if it wasn't spiritual in nature.

Look back at Matthew 5:16. Notice that Jesus specifically states there to “*let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*” Is Jesus now contradicting this in chapter 6? Of course not. Remember the context of this passage is the nature of true righteous compared to self righteousness. Jesus is not contradicting Himself. He is contrasting the practice of the Pharisees with true righteousness. The issue through this whole section is your motivation. Why do you do what you do? Is it to bring glory to God as stated in Matthew 5:16, or is it to gain glory from men as Jesus warns here in Matthew 6:1?

### **Improper Motivations**

Scripture records over and over again that the motivation for the Scribes and Pharisees was to gain glory from men. Luke 16:13-15 states, “*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the*

*one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.' Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things, and they were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, ' You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.'* You may be able to fool people about the nature of your heart, but you cannot fool God. He knows your heart and what you esteem and what you do not. He knows whether you love Him or just yourself.

Over in John 5:44-47 we find that the very reason the religious leaders would not receive Jesus was this same issue. They loved themselves and getting glory from one another - not God. *"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words."* Jesus is addressing this same problem with them in the Sermon on the Mount. They say they are following Moses, but Jesus contrasts their teaching and practices with true righteousness and shows that they are not. In fact, the law of Moses condemns them.

The demonstration of their true concern is seen very clearly in John 12:43 which states, *"Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."* Do you fall victim to this same mindset?

It can be very difficult to deal with motivations. What is your motive for so many of the things you do or do not do? Are they really done for God's glory or for your own? Are you seeking the approval of God or of men? Even things that should certainly be for God's glory can be done with the wrong motivation and there will be no reward.

How about preaching? Wouldn't that be something done for God's glory? In Philippians 1:14-17 Paul mentions his imprisonment had resulted in some gaining courage to preach the gospel, but there was a mixture of motivations. Paul says, <sup>15</sup> *"Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; <sup>16</sup> the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; <sup>17</sup> the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."* That seems incredible, but good things can be done with wrong motives.

What about my motives in preaching today? Is my motive to glorify God or impress you? Do I choose the words I speak because I am compelled to be faithful to proclaim the Word of God, or do I tailor what I say so as tickle your ears with what I think you want to hear and avoid what might upset you. I would like to say that of course I preach only for the glory of God, but I know how deceitful even my own heart can be. I do not like to have people upset with me because of what I say. I want people to like me the same way any of you would also be liked. I also want people to think my sermons are interesting, witty and relevant. This creates a very real temptation to carefully assess your interests, likes and dislikes and then tailor my sermon accordingly, and there are plenty of books, seminars and websites to help pastors do just that. It would not be that hard to bend what I say or do not say in order to please you, but I resist that because my goal is to preach the whole counsel of God as accurately as I possibly can regardless of the reactions I receive. Nevertheless, motivations can waver so I ask you to pray for me that I might accurately divide the Word of truth and do all for God's glory.

What about you? Why are you here today? Is it because you genuinely wanted to come and gather with other believers and praise God corporately? Do you listen to the sermon because you want to understand God and His Word better and live according to it? Or perhaps there is some other motivation. Does someone make you come against your will? Do you come because it keeps you out of trouble? Are you trying to impress someone else or even yourself with how spiritual you are? Do you see how subtle this can be?

The Scribes and Pharisees were really no different from many people in American fundamental Christianity of which this church is part. They thought what they were doing was pleasing to God. They thought they were doing all that God asked them to do. It was not until Jesus exposed their hearts that their motivation for what they did were revealed for all to see.

I am not trying to get us to the point where we are second guessing everything we do and driving ourselves crazy with extreme introspection. However, we do need to examine ourselves and see why we do what we do. If Paul would issue a warning to the Corinthians to “*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you - unless you fail the test?*” (2 Corinthians 13:5), then certainly we should also examine the motivations of our hearts and correct them. In fact, in very practical terms, you cannot truly live the Christian life Jesus has called you to live if your motivation is anything other than wanting to please God and bring Him glory.

### **Proper Motivations**

You may be able to fake things for a while just because you want other Christians to approve of you, but eventually your heart will come out. Proper motivation begins by being poor in spirit. We are to come to God as beggars who have nothing and can offer nothing but can only plead for God's mercy and grace. A person can fake a self-deprecating attitude for a while, but eventually pride will arise and reveal what is really in the heart. True humility only comes when a person sees and believes himself to be unworthy of God for only then will there be true gratitude toward Him and for all that He has done along with a desire to please Him. Being poor in spirit is also necessary to humble with other people and seek their best interest over your own as commanded in Philippians 2:3-4.

A person can also fake being sorry over sin for a while, but since it is not godly sorrow, it will never lead to repentance which is the evidence of true godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). And only those that have the godly sorrow that brings repentance are comforted. Meekness belongs only to those that have their full trust in God. Otherwise there will always be a limit on what you are willing to do and suffer for on account of serving the Lord.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is also only true of those that want God's approval over that of man. Everyone else will always end up defining righteousness according to some man-made list of acceptable behavior. A strong evidence of this is what such people do when they encounter someone that does not follow their particular list of rules. Are they humble? Do they mourn over that person's “sin?” Are they merciful? Or do they look down on that person considering themselves to be superior? Self righteousness eventually demonstrates itself by what it demands of others in order to give approval.

Mercy comes from those that have received it. Those that seek the Lord's approval seek to be like Him and give mercy to others the same way they have received it. Those who want the approval of men will give mercy only when it is to their advantage. And purity of heart simply cannot belong to someone that values the approval of men over the approval of God.

A person that wants to please men will define peace as the absence of conflict and if compromise must be made to achieve that, then so be it. A person that desires to please God wants true reconciliation and restoration which can only take place when there is truth and justice. That is why a biblical peacemaker will persevere through the conflict in order to achieve true peace. They have a godly motivation.

Then there is how a person reacts to persecution. Only a person consumed with the glory of God can rejoice even when they are insulted, slandered and persecuted. There are some cults that thrive on being persecuted under the belief that such tribulation means they are approved by God, but they fail the test of not seeking revenge, going the extra mile, loving their enemies and praying on behalf of the ones persecuting them.

Only a person consumed with their relationship with God will be concerned about attitudes as well as actions. They will be just as concerned with unrighteous anger that occurs in their hearts as they would be if they murdered someone. They seek to put to death the desires of the flesh and not just avoid carrying them out. In a bad marriage they do not seek an easy way out but strive to be a Hosea that continually demonstrates the love of God even to a wayward spouse. Because they are righteous, they can be trusted to keep their word and fulfill their promises.

True righteousness is of the heart and it comes out in the motivation behind what we think, say and do. That is important for it is not enough to do good and be nice. Even those with no claim to know Jesus can be moral. The Cheyenne Indians showed moderation, dignity, generosity, and manifested an almost unbelievable degree of self-control. Parents loved their children and gave them lots of affection without spoiling them. They also taught them ethical values at an early age so that they were dedicated, self-sacrificing, and well behaved. Similar things can be said about many cults and having a sense of love is often one of the things that attract people into a cult. But being ethical or following a religion with high moral values is not enough for they do not meet God's standard of righteousness and remain under His just condemnation. An inward change is required. The heart must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

## Conclusions

A lot of thought has been given to how our church can reach this community for Christ. There are many different methods and programs we have tried and others we have thought about, and though I am still not sure what would be the most effective, of one thing I am certain. Unless there is something radically different about us we will not be much of an influence in the community. That radical difference will not come from displays of outward religious morality such as abstaining from drinking, smoking and sexual immorality as well as boycotting stores that sell pornography and businesses that support abortion or the radical homosexual agenda. Those may be good standards and practices, but they do not attract people to Christ. If anything, the non-Christian looks at those things and thinks we are right wing zealots that are trying to limit their freedoms.

What will attract people to Christ? What will have an effect on our community? What will cause people to recognize their own sin and cry out for God's mercy? It is when the people who profess to know God actually do and therefore live godly lives for His glory. If we are going to affect this community for the cause of Christ, then each of us as individuals will have to live lives that demonstrate without any doubt that we know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. One thought must control everything we do as a church and you do as an individual - what will bring glory to Jesus? He is the one you must want to please instead of yourself and other people. I want my reward to come from Him. I want to hear Him say, "*Well done thou good and faithful servant.*" What about you?

There are too many professing Christians that sing the hymns but do live in the reality of what they sing about. They sing *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, but are content with only a couple of minutes a day. They sing *Onward Christian Soldiers*, but they must to be drafted before they will do anything. They sing "*O for a Thousand tongues to Sing My Great Redeemer's Praise,*" but they act as if that applies only in church because they are hesitant to praise the Lord on their own in public. They sing "*I Love to Tell the Story,*" but they tell no one. They sing "*Blest be the Tie that Binds,*" yet they will sever relationships over the least little offense. I think you get the idea.

Do you live according to your profession of faith? Do you really love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Or are you so busy trying to do all the things you think other people want you to do that you neglect the more important things that God wants you to do? Are you so afraid of what people might think about you that you fail to live the radical life Jesus has called you to? Do you shy away from living for Christ out of fear of being called a fool or a fanatic?

I mentioned last week that if you are to live the way that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount then you must die to self and live for Him alone. Paul said it so well in Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*" If you are crucified with Christ and He

lives in you, then your greatest concern in all that you do is Jesus Christ. What does the Lord think about your plans? What does Jesus want you to do? Your personal desires become subservient to His and what other people think is irrelevant. If you have been crucified with Christ, you are motivated to please the Lord Jesus Christ instead of men. Are you seeking the rewards that come from your heavenly Father or those that come from men?

Sermon Notes: The Proper Motive for Righteousness  
July 6, 2014 - Matthew 6:1

**Introduction**

The Beatitudes describe the characteristics of the \_\_\_\_\_ which surpasses the scribes & Pharisees  
Jesus came to \_\_\_\_\_ the Law, not annul it.

Jesus gave six specific illustrations in which His teaching \_\_\_\_\_ true righteousness to the law  
Jesus will explain of the \_\_\_\_\_ of true righteousness in giving alms, prayer and fasting

**The Theme - Matthew 6:1**

The correct translation is practicing your “ \_\_\_\_\_,” not “*alms*” or “*charitable deeds*”

If your motive for doing good things is to \_\_\_\_\_ men, then the praise of men will be your only reward

**Proper Interpretation**

Scripture taken out of its \_\_\_\_\_ is a pretext

A passage must be examined in its larger immediate \_\_\_\_\_ and compared with similar passages

Looking for verses to support what you already believe is proof-texting and often leads to \_\_\_\_\_

Proper interpretation is to discern what \_\_\_\_\_ intended to reveal, after that personal application can be made

Jesus stresses secrecy in giving alms (3-4), prayer (6) and fasting (17-18) - Is secrecy \_\_\_\_\_?

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus commands us to do our good works so \_\_\_\_\_ them and praise God

Jesus is not contradicting Himself for the issue is the \_\_\_\_\_ for the particular practice

**Improper Motivations**

Luke 16:13-15 \_\_\_\_\_

John 5:44-47 \_\_\_\_\_

John 12:43 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 1:14-17 \_\_\_\_\_

We are to be properly introspective by examine motives and \_\_\_\_\_ them

**Proper Motivations**

Proper motivation begins by being \_\_\_\_\_ in spirit

Godly \_\_\_\_\_ brings repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-10) and leads to meekness toward God

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness desire God’s \_\_\_\_\_ over that of man

Those who have received God’s mercy desire to be like Him and extend \_\_\_\_\_ to others

A person who desires to please God wants others to also be reconciled and restored to God - a \_\_\_\_\_

Only a person seeking God’s glory can respond to persecution with \_\_\_\_\_ and prayer instead of revenge

Only those consumed with their relationship with God will be concerned about \_\_\_\_\_ as well as actions

True righteousness is of the \_\_\_\_\_ and it comes out in the motivation behind what we think, say and do

The righteous are motivated to please the \_\_\_\_\_ instead of men

