

Holy Versus Hollywood

In Matthew 6:1-18, we are impressed that Christ wants relationship, fellowship and communication with mankind. As students of the Word, we see that Christ Himself is the Mediator between God and man, but there is one area that the mediatorship of Christ will be of no avail and that is if we are hypocrites. So our Lord deals with it thoroughly in this passage. In Matthew 6:2, 5, 16, Jesus uses the word “hypocrites” which comes to us from the Greek word “Hupokrites” meaning an actor under an assumed character. The symbol for acting is represented by two masks. One smiling and one frowning. In the Greek tragedies the actors’ faces could not be seen from the distant seats in the amphitheater, so the actor would use a larger than life mask to reveal his emotion. In Mark 6:5, the Lord said these hypocrites do what they do, “...that they may be seen of men....” This is the essence of what an actor is doing: he or she is assuming a role, a character of whom is not really who they are. In Mark 7:6, Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 29:13: “He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” The prophet Ezekiel said it like this: “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not” (Ezekiel 33:31, 32). Pablo Casals, the accomplished cellist, rebuked one of his music students, “You are playing the notes, but you are not making the music.” This is what is happening in the church today; many are playing the notes, going through the motions, but their heart is far from God, in other words, there is no music of genuine Christianity in their life. It is a mere performance. Some are so good at it, they should be presented an Oscar. God is not looking for Hollywood actors on a stage; He is looking for holy men and women who, not only own the faith, but also practice it from a heart of love. Our Lord shows that hypocrisy surfaces in three areas: our apparent philanthropy, our approach in prayer and our ambition in discipline.

I. Our Apparent Philanthropy

Matthew 6:1-4

A. Giving is good.

The question is not if we give, it is when we give. Our Lord said, "When thou doest alms...." The Lord expects us to give. Jesus said in reference to giving the tithes unto the Lord, "...these ought ye to have done..." (Matthew 23:23b). Leviticus 27:30 says, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD." Malachi declares not giving our tithes is theft: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8). Tithing is not a matter of generosity; it is a matter of honesty, because the tithe is the Lord's. The Lord wants this done regularly as I Corinthians 16:2 designates, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

We are also to give to people in genuine need. I John 3:17 says, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Giving from the heart reaps great benefits. "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9, 10). Proverbs 19:17 says, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."

B. Motivation is determinative.

In Matthew 6:1, 2 Jesus points out that when we give only to be seen of men, we lose our reward from God. And if we give only to be seen of men, then we have our reward in this way only. Our motivation for giving determines if our reward is eternal or temporal.

C. Spontaneity is revealing.

Matthew 6:3 tells us when we see a need, respond quickly and give without prolonged procrastination. If someone needs help, then they need it now. The churches in Macedonia did not wait until they were financially "on top of the world," for the Scripture says in II Corinthians 8:2 and 3, "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves." Proverbs 3:27 commands us, "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it."

D. Anonymity is advantageous.

Matthew 6:4 teaches us that our giving should always be unto the Lord. In Matthew 25:40b, Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." In rebuke, the Lord made reference to these Pharisees, "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues" (Matthew 23:5, 6). Our Lord gives this promise in Mathew. 6:4, "That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

II. Our Approach in Prayer

Matthew 6:5-15

A. The "Mandatory" Approach

Prayer is not an option. Jesus said, "And when thou prayest..."(Matthew 6:5a). "But thou, when thou prayest..." (Matthew 6:6a). "But when ye pray..." (Matthew 6:7a). "After this manner therefore pray ye..." (Matthew 6:9a).

B. The Myopia Approach

Matthew 6:5. This is when we are preoccupied with how others see us rather than the way God sees us. Sometimes we are spiritually near-sighted.

C. The Magnifying Approach

Matthew 6:6. We magnify God for who He is, not for how others hear or see us give glory to Him. Like giving, if we pray in such a manner to impress others, that is as far as our reward will go. There is unique promise: if we learn the power of secret prayer, others will see the answer as well as ourselves. Jesus reiterated this truth when He said, "Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:3).

D. The Manner of Our Approach

Matthew 6:7-15. This is the great model prayer. Our Lord did not leave us a vague, ambiguous idea of prayer. He gave us the greatest possible specificity in these precious words.

III. Our Ambition in Discipline

Matthew 6:16-18

- A. Discipline is not an exercise in self-pity for admiration (Matthew 6:16).

- B. Discipline is as unto the Lord and not man (Matthew 6:17,18a).

- C. Discipline pleases God when we are most pleased with Him (Matthew 6:18).

Our fasting, our service and our life is to be dominated by these words of Jesus as found in John 8:29: "...for I do always those things that please him."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.