

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 10

“Give... Pray... Fast... Secretly”

Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

In our last study on “The Commands of Christ,” we looked at the ninth; which was a very difficult one indeed. This command was found in Matt. 5:44, where we are told that you are to “love your enemies and bless (imperative command) those who curse you.” The next imperative found in the great Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew chapter six. “Take heed (“Beware” – imperative) 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.” The principle is shown in verse one, and then specifically applied in three areas.

The principle is; “BEWARE OF DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR THE WRONG REASONS.”

The fundamental principle is found in that the word translated “take heed” or “beware” is not only an imperative but it is in the present tense denoting that the disciples must continually guard against doing good deeds for the wrong reason.

The question that we must each ask ourselves is: “Do I want the approval of God or the approval of others?” The truth is that it is almost impossible to have both. What Jesus deals with these verses is the human tendency in each of us that desires the applause of others. This is shown when in verse one the word translated “to be seen” (theathenai) is from the same root word that we get the “theater” from. It has in mind a spectacle to be gazed at.

Before we go on and see the three applications that Jesus gives I want to share with you three signs that we may be “approval addicts.”

The first sign that we might be an “approval addict” is the need for Comparison. This is when we are guilty of constantly comparing our homes, cars, looks, talents, portfolios, personal possessions, degrees, intelligence or whatever. Approval addicts compare and despair when they perceive that they do not measure up.

The second sign that we might be “approval addicts” is Deception. This is when we feel the need to save face. When in school did you every do miserably on an exam and then tell your friends, “I really didn’t study.” Or we can do the opposite, depending on the friends we hang out with, if you did well on the exam but studying is not cool, don’t tell your buddies you studied like crazy for three days.

The third sign that we might “approval addicts is Resentment. If approval does not come from the people we seek it from then approval addicts just get tired of the performance and harbor ill will at those people.

Now let’s look at the three areas that Jesus applies the general principle in.

First, he says beware doing the right thing for the wrong reason in the area of, Giving (vv. 2- 4). In giving there is a wrong way and a right way as with the other two Christian acts, there is a wrong way and a right way to go about it!

First Jesus points out the wrong way to go about giving (v. 2). “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

When the Lord says, “they have their reward” he uses the terminology of commerce to indicate that they have been “paid in full.” He indicates that this honor or applause of humans is going to be their reward in full. In others words they can have the approval of God or the applause of others. If we choose the applause of others, then the applause becomes our reward.

Yet it is not whether something is done in a public place or not, but rather the motivation that matters. The ancient Christian preacher, Chrysostom, of the 1st century stated it this way. “You may do good deeds before men, and yet not seek human praise; you may do them in secret, and yet in your heart wish that they may become know to gain that praise.”

There is also a Right way to go about giving (vv. 3-4). “But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (4) that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

The Roman orator Mark Aurelius once said, “One man when he has done a service for another is ready to set it down to his account as a favor conferred. Another, while he may not go so far as that, still thinks of the man as his debtor, and is conscious of what he has done. The third does not, if we may so speak, even know what he has done and betrays no consciousness of his kindness, but is like a vine which produced grapes and seeks for nothing after it has produced the fruit proper for it. As a horse when he has run, a dog when he has caught game, a bee when it has made honey, so a man when he has done a good act, does not call out for others to come and see, but goes on to another act, as a vine goes on to produce again grapes in the season. What more do you want when you have done a man a service? Are you not content that you have done something conformable to your nature and do you seek reward for it, as the eye should demand a recompense for seeing or the feet for walking.” [Mark Aurelius. Mediations.]

Not only in the area of Giving but also...

Secondly, he says beware doing the right thing for the wrong reason in the area of Praying (vv. 5-8).

As with giving there is a Wrong way given in (v. 5). "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.

It should be noted that the Lord spends more time devoted how this principle applies to the subject to prayer than to any other Christian act. This is not doubt because it is easier to be a hypocrite in praying than in any other Christian act.

It is not a sin to pray in public. It is not a sin to stand while praying. The fault lies in the desire to be seen and applauded by men in doing it. Deep with each believer is the desire to pray and to have people stand in amazement at our skillful use of words, to say, "Did you hear that wonderful prayer?" "Wow, I sure wish I could pray like that."

There is also a Right Way depicted in (vv. 6-8). "But you, when you pray, go into your room ("enter"- imperative), and when you have shut your door, pray (imperative) to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (7) And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathens do. For they think they will be heard for their many words. (8) Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him..."

There are two imperatives in verse six, "go into" or "enter" and "pray." Here Jesus tells us of the value of praying in secret! Since prayer is communication between a believer and his God then anything that can be done to eliminate every possible distraction and disturbance is wise. Prayer can be done in public, but it must all ways be remember who is being spoken to.

Jesus also tells us to "Cut to the chase!" God is not impressed with the number of words that we use in our prayers. It is my contention that some of the world's most effective prayers have been short. Peter prayed a very effective prayer from his heart as he was sinking in the sea after trying to walk on the water to Jesus. He said, "Jesus, help!"

Not Only in the area of Prayer but also ...

Third, he says beware doing the right thing for the wrong reason in the area of, Fasting (vv. 16-18)

Jesus first of tells the wrong way (v. 16)

"Moreover when you fast, do not be like (ginesthe - imperative) 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." The problem, as in the other cases was the motive of the heart. Those who wanted to be "seen fasting by men" would put on a gloomy

face. It is the attitude that said, "I may have to fast but by golly I want people to notice how spiritual I am." They wanted everyone to know they were denying themselves. Even self-denial can be a self-gratifying experience when we do it for the sake of being noticed by others.

Finally there is a Right Way to fast (vv. 17-18). "But you, when you fast, anoint (aleipsai-imperative) your head and wash your face, (18) so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

Conclusion

Why do we do the things we do? Why do we serve in the church? Why do we teach Sunday School? Why do we work in AWANA? Why do we help others? Why do we pray?