

Jesus ended our previous study of this part this part of His sermon with the words, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What is this perfection? Is it an absolute?

It is the greek word teleios. It means coming to an end, mature, being complete.

As Jesus has full authority to say "but I say unto you and make these demands upon his people He has the authority to tell us to be perfect like our heavenly Father.

He has fulfilled all of the Law and the Prophets. His authority comes from the Father.

He has addressed the fallacies, misunderstandings and misapplications of numerous teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees and tells those who will be His that He demands a different kind of living.

God is not a hypocrite. If we are His children we cannot be hypocrites. God is transparent in all He does as He reveals Himself to us. We are to be the same to each other and the world. We are to be seen as growing in the completion that will be ours as we stand in glory with Jesus.

God is working to will and to do his good pleasure in us. And we are to work outwardly our salvation. This is not mere counsel, not just a precept, or that an absolute perfection in holiness is a thing in this life that is attainable. But it is our duty to labor for it, as Paul wrote which is an echo of Jesus words:

forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, Philip. 3:13,14.

Are you saying I cannot or I will not? Both are dangerous attitudes of heart if you profess to being a Christian. Neither is acceptable.

It is a matter of your heart.

Jesus says you can by His grace.

And now we will see what Jesus says about religious hypocrisy.

6:1* "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. **2*** "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the

synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3* "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4* so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. 5* "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6* "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. 7* "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8* "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

After being told that we are to pursue perfection, as we are hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of God, we are warned to be careful as to how we do it.

God demands it and God expects it but we need to be careful in how we want to demonstrate the fact that striving for it.

Remember that Jesus has already said that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in quality, not in how we show off with it.

True kingdom dwellers can just as easily be prone to hypocrisy, especially when there is sin in their life, as any religious person who does not know Christ.

It seems that the demand for perfection can lead to hypocrisy but only because we so easily forget that the true perfection is first a heart matter not an external demonstration to prove something to other people. If we are trying to prove our righteousness to other people then who are we attempting to please? Whose approval are we seeking.

A brilliant young concert pianist was performing for the first time in public. The audience sat enthralled as beautiful music flowed from his disciplined fingers. The people could hardly take their eyes off this young virtuoso. As the final note faded, the audience burst into applause. Everyone was standing -- except one old man up front. The pianist walked off the stage crestfallen.

The stage manager praised the performance, but the young man said, "I was no good, it was a failure." The manager replied, "Look out there, everyone is on his feet except one old man!" "Yes," said the youth dejectedly, "but that one old man is my teacher."

Do we have the same desire for God's approval as that pianist had for his teacher's praise? Our Lord's approval is what really matters.

God is interested in the heart attitude first, man is interested in the externals first.

The demands that Jesus makes on us as His people can never be confused with forms of external piety. In other words looking a certain way when worshipping, using a certain voice when praying, giving a certain amount of money, sitting in a particular pew to make it look like you are more interested than others.

But God's true righteousness in us is rewarded by the Father.

This is why Jesus begins this part of His sermon with the principle, 6:1 **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.**

The KJV places this as the second verse but it is misplaced. The question here is not about alms but about righteousness. True righteousness is not a show for approval.

After presenting the principle He relates it to three fundamental acts of Jewish piety and uses these to typify all other "acts of righteousness". The three acts are alms giving, prayer and fasting. With each example He offers a description of the act and denounces it and then He affirms the limited result of such false piety and finally He gives a contrast showing what true piety is and the results of it.

Giving of alms was not unheard of in Israel.

"For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'
(Deuteronomy 15:11

There were times when a trumpet actually sounded in the streets of Jerusalem to summon people to come and give to an urgent need. In this case, one may have been the first to close his shop, and run to the street and make way to the offering place and grandly give, to be noticed by others. Jesus may also be using a metaphor, saying there are those who like to blow their own horns when it comes to helping the poor.

2* "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men.

We cannot escape the fact that even giving to the poor first is a matter of the heart when it comes to pleasing our Father in heaven. And those who only do it for the honor of men have already received their reward. These kinds of people are called hypocrites.

They are two faced, they are actors on the stage of life. They play the role to a full house and wait for the applause of the adoring audience. They are engaged in the theater of piety.

There are deceptive hypocrites in Mt.22:15, who try to “catch” Jesus with His own words. There are deceived hypocrites in Mt.7:1-5, those who are blinded to their own faults and yet point out the faults of others and there are those who have convinced themselves that they are right and who are unaware of their own hypocrisy and will be encouraged by what they do as here in Mt. 6:1. Not many will see the hypocrisy because giving to the poor is a good thing. This is a theatrical piety. It is not from the heart even though it does good to others but it is the honor for doing it that is most rewarding to the person and that overrides the good that it does to others, as far as God is concerned.

So Jesus exhorts us to give freely, from the heart, out of love with compassion and not as a means of getting praise and adulation for being righteous people. And when we give in this manner we will be rewarded by our Father in heaven.

Now, what is the reward? The text makes no mention of it. It does not say we will gain in material goods or finances. It does not say that we will have material needs met as a reward. How can I understand what the reward is that comes from my heavenly Father when He is pleased.? I believe there is an answer and it is found in the greater context of the entire sermon. We are the blessed of God, remember, we are the favored of God, by His saving grace. As the blessed we are the ones who are spiritually prosperous when all others are still spiritually destitute and poor and do not know it. All that Jesus has taught in the sermon and is still teaching is that our relationship with God is proven by the attitude of our hearts and our desire to continue to grow and prosper in spiritual maturity, the perfection we have been commanded to attain. Therefore, when our giving to the poor pleases God we have spiritually matured, that is our reward. We know that God is pleased and He lets us know we are maturing for the sake of the kingdom and the name of Jesus. Is there really any better reward than knowing we have pleased God, genuinely pleased Him?

Giving to the poor pleases God. Not all manner of giving pleases Him and giving in and of itself is not a righteous act.

Prayer is the next form of piety that Jesus addresses.

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Public prayer is an opportunity for some individuals to make another show of just how godly they are. They are eager to pray, they pray long and loud and usually are trying to preach a sermon with their prayers. In the synagogue and on the street prayer was done in a standing position. For us, on the knees is perceived as the most pious of positions and those who want to show their godliness will be the first ones down.

But you never hear them acknowledge the glory of God or pray for forgiveness of sins, or for humility, or for a closer walk with God or for more compassion or to be longsuffering. Its God do this or God do that - almost commanding God.

There is nothing wrong with sincere, intense, heartfelt crying out to God, publicly or in private. Scripture is full of it, but there is the opportunity for hypocrites to take center stage even in the church and be acknowledged as the prayer warrior for the church.

And then when some one comes along who is really burdened by God for true, sincere heartfelt prayer and just lets loose, we don't know how to respond because we are not used to it.

The closet of prayer is where most of our praying would be done, if we are praying for some time each day. We do not gather together publicly for prayer that often and certainly at least not as often as the early church did for prayer. That is why Jesus is not relegating all prayer here to be private as an absolute otherwise the church in Acts was disobedient to Christ.

The second thing Jesus mentions concerning prayer is vain repetition.

The pagan form of prayer was consistently repetitious praying to each of the gods over and over again. This is done even today by self- professed pagans.

A Prayer to the High Gods at Bedtime

As I go to bed, I pray to the High Gods.

I offer you my worship, and ask you to bless my family.

I ask if I have done anything today to offend you.

If I have, I ask for forgiveness and for guidance,
that I might walk the sacred path in peace and in beauty.

As I go to bed, I pray to the gods of my household.

I offer you my worship and ask you to bless my family.

I ask if I have done anything today to offend you.

If I have, I ask for forgiveness and for guidance,
that I might walk the sacred path in peace and in beauty.

As I go to bed, I pray to the Ancestors.

I do you honor and ask you to bless my family.

I ask if you I have done anything to offend you.

If I have, I ask for forgiveness and for guidance,
that I might walk the sacred path in peace and in beauty.

As I go to bed, I pray to all numinous beings.

I do you honor and ask that you extend your blessings over me and mine.

- Ceisiwr Serith

The repetitions are due to a lack of intimacy with their God. Their god must be shown a due respect and yet all is ambiguous as what to expect from their God. There is no certainty of what the offense might be that would withhold a blessing. It is mere religious form and exercise to make sure that all the possible gods are mentioned and none are left out or otherwise no blessings, whatever they may be, will be available. We are told not to pray in such a manner.

So our secret prayer is referring again to the heart. It is our secret place. It is where all my desires, my hurts, my intentions and so on first live. So when we pray in a manner that is pleasing to God from the heart we have a guarantee from Jesus that our Father listens. Jesus says, *your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

Then Jesus says, *8* "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

The Lord Jesus knows that the fallen world in which we live in, often keeps us back from God in prayer. We doubt. We doubt the goodness of God. We doubt His concern about some things we may bring to him. Yes, there are priorities for prayer, as we have been studying on Wed. evenings, yet the heavenly Father is saying, "Bring them to Me. Bring them to Me. I already know about them, and I already

care about them, and I care about them more than you do. And I care for them more effectively than you do. Bring them to Me because I am good and I will give you what you need, even I will give it to you better than you could have prayed it yourself.” “Bring them to Me, because I am the one who provides. The world can’t do anything for you, the world can’t help you. You come to Me because I can provide.”

Then in verse 9-15 Jesus gives a fuller extrapolation of His teaching on prayer and we will look to that next week. But now we will go to verse 16-18 for the third example of false piety - fasting.

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:16-18.

Pertinent to a number of Jewish feasts was the practice of fasting and once again something that was meant as a time of spiritual and physical discipline with a godly purpose degenerated into show of external false piety. Some would actually walk around with horrible expressions on their faces to show that they were in deprivation or that they were spiritually pained. They would cover themselves in ashes in public and walk around all disheveled because they were neglecting themselves for God’s sake when most of them were not really fasting at all but just doing the theater of religion and seeking the applause.

Jesus says fast with a right heart and don’t let anyone know you are doing it and you will be made spiritually prosperous.

We have many things that we can be warned about today as we have considered this part of Jesus’ sermon.

First of all any thing that can be a legitimate outward showing of the change that God has wrought within in us can be misused and corrupted from its original intent.

Dressing nicely for church because it is different than the workplace or the playground used to be commonplace. In many a coal mining town a man had a suit of clothes that was his Sunday go to meetin suit. It was not a legalistic thing. But today, in some churches the gathering of the saints is no different than a fashion show on Sunday morning especially on Easter Sunday. I shudder in horror when I hear things like this, "Our pastor's wife is the sexiest woman in the church and you know it on Sunday when we have church." Looking nice to honor God is one thing , boasting over sensuality is sin.

Matthew 6:1-18 gives us a stark and direct warning.

The demand for righteousness of Matthew 5 is now complemented by the insistence that the righteousness we are to pursue never becomes confused with the theater of piety. There is no room for this kind of showmanship in the kingdom of God. The mask of falsity will appear on the stage of church life from time to time, but when it does we can hope that the truly righteous will see it for what it is and do what is necessary to make sure we in no way give in to the lure of pleasing men rather than pleasing God.