

**Part Six**  
***Mercy for the Poor***  
***Matthew 6:1-4***

**Giving to the Needy**

<sup>1</sup> “Beware of practicing our righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**STUDY**

**1. READ**

- a. According to Jesus, how should we behave in front of others when we give to the needy?
- b. How does Jesus refer to people who give with the intent of being seen by others?
- c. What does Jesus promise to those who give in secret, without the intent of being seen by others?

**2. MEANING**

- a. What does the fact that Jesus says “when you give to the needy” imply about his expectations of his followers?
- b. Why is seeking the approval of others such a danger for those serving God? How have you experienced the sinful propensity to be “self-conscious” over good works – making them about us instead of God?
- c. What are some good and some not so good motives for giving to the needy?

### 3. APPLY

- a. How can we know if we are giving and doing good works in order to be seen by others instead of for God?
- b. How can we best guard against the tendency of seeking approval from others in ministry?
- c. What are some general principles for Christian giving?

### NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

v. 1 - Public acts of obedience are valuable and honorable, but if they are done merely for the sake of public recognition, there will be no reward from God.

vv. 2-4 - **Hypocrites** originally referred to Greek actors who wore different masks to play various roles. Jesus criticizes the religious leaders, most notably the Pharisees, for a particular form of hypocrisy: doing right things for the wrong reasons. To **give to the needy** was one of the pillars of piety, but the religious leaders gave to the needy in order to be **praised** by others. But that was all the reward they would receive.

v. 3 - When Jesus says not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, he is teaching that our motives for giving to God and to others must be pure. It is easy to give with mixed motives, to do something for someone if it will benefit us in return. But believers should avoid all scheming and give for the pleasure of giving and as a response to God's love.

v. 4 - It's easier to do what's right when we gain recognition and praise. To be sure our motives are not selfish, we should do our good deeds quietly or in secret, with no thought of reward.

## COMMENTS

The Bible touches often on the sensitive topic of giving and makes it clear that giving to the needy is an important practice for followers (see Leviticus 25:35-36, Deuteronomy 15:11). This is difficult for some Christians to follow, but it is important to recognize all that God has given us and how important it is to pass that on to others. The Bible offers several guiding principles about giving to the needy. Giving naturally happens when Christ is truly first in our lives. Christian giving should be planned and intentional and should be offered with a joyful heart. Giving should also be sacrificial.

In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus is not only implying that we should give to the needy, but he is also encouraging us to check our motives before giving to the needy. Seeking the praise of others instead of God is a sin that often accompanies giving and Christ refers to those who seek praise from others rather than from God as “hypocrites.” We can often tell whether our motives are pure by asking ourselves:

1. Is it important to me that others see or hear about the works that I am doing? Is it important to me that others know what I am doing?
2. Do I get overly excited when someone praises me for the work I do?
3. How do I feel when I am not recognized for something I think is a big accomplishment? Do I get overly discouraged or resentful?

In order to adequately guard our hearts when we give we should practice our giving in secrecy. By practicing our giving in secrecy, we acknowledge and address the temptation to be consumed with the thoughts and approval of others. We should also attempt to forget what we’ve done well, rather than self-consciously dwelling on the good work. Jesus refers to this by saying that the left hand should not know what our right hand is doing. We should learn to entrust our acts of goodness to the Lord and put our faith in the glory of God rather than dwelling on our acts. Through these actions we should have confidence that our giving will be rewarded by God (Proverbs 11:25, Psalm 41:1, 2 Corinthians 9:6-10). Our rewards might not be on Earth, but they might be eternal in heaven. However, the promise of our reward should not be our motive for giving. As mentioned earlier, if we are putting Christ first, radical generosity should be a natural response, with no expectation of receiving anything in return. Therefore, it is best to put our focus on Christ and let Him guide our acts of goodness.

## References

Bible.org, 2022, “18. Practicing Radical Generosity (Matthew 6:1-4) from the series: The Bible Teacher’s Guide, The Sermon on the Mount: Experiencing God’s Kingdom on Earth, available online: <https://bible.org/seriespage/18-practicing-radical-generosity-matthew-61-4> (16 January 2022).

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## Religious Practices Warnings:

### I. Audience Choice: Whose applause do you seek?

A. Other people: Worshiping or keeping the law (alms, prayer, fasting) to gain the attention, praise and respect of other people. This is self-enhancement, self-congratulation; it's overt religious practices that we purchase to gain the applause of other people.

Result: No reward from God

6:2 Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

B. The Audience of One: Worshiping or keeping the law (alms, prayer, fasting) to please God, out of gratitude to God, with self-forgetfulness and secret sacrifice.

Result: Reward from God

<sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Questioning our heart's intent: Whose applause do we want, need, seek, desire?

### 2. Religious Practice: Why do I do these practices?

A. Externalized Shoulds and Oughts: Worshiping or keeping the law (alms, prayer, fasting) because it's a command that I and my religious culture teach I should do. Motive: Do the right thing, especially around others and gain God's approval.

Result: Perfunctory, superficial, externalized ritual.

B. To be with God: Worshiping or keeping the law (alms, prayer, fasting) to please God, out of gratitude to God, with self-forgetfulness and secret sacrifice.

Result: Matt. 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.



Matthew 6:1-4  
“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

#### **practicing your righteousness:**

Jesus says beware of doing your practice of righteousness “before other people” instead of before God. Jesus illustrates his warning with the commanded practices of alms-giving, prayer, and fasting. The believer must always keep in mind that the act is *righteous* only if it is what it purports to be—the service of God. If a law-fulfilling, act of righteousness, is done as a means of enhancing the reputation of the person doing the deed, then it is no longer an obedient or authentic act of service to God, but a service of self-enhancement.

#### **to be seen by (before other people):**

Jesus is calling for the (often difficult) personal examination of one's intentions/desires/motives when we obey his commands to give alms, pray and fast. If your motive is to be seen and praised by other people you need to heed Jesus' warning. Jesus teaches that those who seek to gain human attention will receive no other reward than that human attention. They will not be rewarded by God (who is watching), because the act was not done to honor or enhance God.