

**MT. 6 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Continued)**



After Jesus magnified God's laws as they were originally intended, He now focuses on magnifying and making honorable *the three main religious practices* the Pharisees had distorted. He first reveals the wrong way the Pharisees were keeping and teaching them, and then He shows us the proper way to keep them.

He says, "Take heed 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. 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 them. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (6:1-4).

What are these charitable deeds? First, they refer to the alms for the poor. The Greek word for alms means "having compassion," and we read in Deut. 15:7-8 the law about being compassionate toward the needy. It says, "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs."

Of course, the key law about alms is the tithe for the poor, or what we call third tithe, because we are to give God our first tithe, then keep a tithe to observe God's Feasts, and every third and sixth year of a seven year cycle, we are to give a tithe for the poor. We read, "At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do. At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts" (Deut. 14:18-15:1).

In the 1996 doctrinal paper on Third Tithe, the Church ruled: "Therefore, the Council of Elders has

resolved that where governments provide programs, the intent and purpose of which is to provide for the needs of those that the biblical third tithe was designed to assist and that where such programs are funded by an annual rate of taxation greater than the biblical third tithe, members who are so taxed are not obligated to pay what amounts to an additional third tithe to the Church. Members not taxed in this manner should follow the scriptural instruction to pay the third tithe. The Council of Elders further resolves that since there will always be members of the Church whose needs will not be adequately provided for by national government social programs, and since the clear example in the Scripture is that the Church care for its members in need (Leviticus 19:9-10; Isaiah 58:7; Matthew 25:35-40; Galatians 2:9-10), that those members of the Church who are able are encouraged to contribute to the Church Assistance Fund so that the biblical injunction to care for the needy within the Church can be fulfilled."

Unfortunately, the Pharisees had often turned almsgiving into a showy badge of righteousness to earn salvation. *The New Bible Dictionary* explains, "...there arose in the Intertestamental period the idea of *righteousness secured through almsgiving as efficacious in annulling the guilt of sin, and as ensuring divine favor in time of trouble....* Jesus does not reject almsgiving as futile in the search for right standing with God, but stresses the necessity for right motive, 'in my name.' He rebuked the ostentatious charity of his day and emphasized the blessedness of giving (Acts 20:35) and its opportunities" (p. 26).

We see a Pharisaic example of this attempt to "win favor" by ostentatious works that, inwardly, they didn't really want to do, but performed it out of spiritual vanity and a false sense of pride which is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy comes from the Greek word for an actor—one that only acts the part.

We read in Luke 18:9-12, "Also He spoke this parable to some who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous*, and *despised others*: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men...I fast twice a week; I give

tithes of all that I possess.” So God wants giving to be done privately and not publicly, so there won’t be the temptation for boasting and vanity. That is one reason why we usually put our Holy Day offerings in envelopes, and what we give to the poor, we normally either give it privately or give it to the Church to be distributed anonymously.

Next, Christ focuses on the incorrect and the correct way to pray: “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. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (6:5-8).

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* mentions, “Rather than making prayer a matter between an individual and God, the Pharisees had turned it into an act to be seen of men—again, to demonstrate their supposed righteousness. Their prayers were directed not to God but to other men, and consisted of long, repetitive phrases. Jesus condemned such practices.”

Jesus then gives them a prayer outline with seven categories: 1. Honor God the Father; 2. Pray for God’s kingdom to come; 3. Ask that God’s will is done here on the earth, in particular in His Church; 4. Request for our daily needs, which include sustenance, health, protections, and the spiritual supply we need; 5. Ask for God’s help in developing right relationships based on love, service and forgiveness; 6. Solicit God’s aid in facing and overcoming temptations and to restrain the Devil; 7. End by glorifying God, because He is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving.

Next, Christ focuses on the third religious practice—fasting. He says, “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like 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. But you, when

you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face, 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.”

*The Expositor’s Commentary* says, “In Jesus’ day the Pharisees fasted twice a week, probably Monday and Thursday. Some devout people, like Anna, fasted often. But such voluntary fasts provided marvelous opportunities for religious showmanship to gain a reputation for piety. One could adopt an air that was ‘somber’ and disfigure oneself, perhaps by not washing and shaving, by sprinkling ashes on one’s head to signify deep contrition or self-abnegation, or by omitting normal use of oil to signify deep distress. The point is not that there was no genuine contrition but that these hypocrites were purposely drawing attention to themselves. They wanted the plaudits of men and got them. And that’s all they got.

“Yet Jesus, far from banning fasting, assumes his disciples *will* fast, even as he assumes they *will* give alms and pray. His disciples may not fast at the moment, for the messianic bridegroom is with them; and it is the time for joy. But the time will come when they *will* fast. What he condemns is ostentation in fasting. Moreover he forbids any sign at all that a fast has been undertaken, because the human heart is so mixed in its motives that the *desire to seek God will be diluted by the desire for human praise*, thus vitiating the fast. Washing and anointing with oil were merely normal steps in hygiene. Oil does not here symbolize extravagant joy but normal body care. The point of v. 18 is not to draw attention to oneself, whether by somber mien or extravagant joy. Jesus desires reticence, not deception. And the Father, who sees in secret, will provide the reward” (notes on Mt. 6:5-7).

Christ continues, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (6:19-21).

*Expositor’s* adds: “The present tense could well be rendered ‘Stop storing up treasures’ rather than ‘Do not store up.’ The *love* of wealth is a great evil (1Tim. 6:10), calling forth frequent warnings. For

heirs of the kingdom to hoard riches in the last days (James 5:2-3) is particularly shortsighted. Yet...elsewhere the Scriptures require a man to provide for his relatives (1 Tim. 5:8), commend work and provision for the future (Prov. 6:6-8), and encourage us to enjoy the good things the Creator has given us (1Tim. 4:3-4). He's concerned about *selfishness in misplaced values*. His disciples must not lay up treasure *for themselves*; they must honestly ask where their heart is.

"This verse does not prohibit making sensible provisions for the future, but being covetous (like misers who hoard and materialists who always want more). The 'treasures on earth' might be clothing that could be attacked by moths. Fashions changed little, and garments could be passed on. They could also deteriorate. 'Rust' (*brosis*) refers not only to the corrosion of metals but to the destruction effected by rats, mildew, and the like. Older commentaries often picture a farm being devoured by mice and other vermin. Less corruptible treasures could be stolen: thieves could break in, referring to the mud brick walls of most first-century Palestinian homes, and steal. By contrast, the treasures in heaven are forever exempt from decay and theft. The words 'treasures in heaven' go back to Jewish literature. *Here it refers to whatever is of good and eternal significance that comes out of what is done on earth*. Doing righteous deeds, suffering for Christ's sake, forgiving one another--all these have the promise of 'reward.' Other deeds of kindness also store up treasure in heaven, including sharing.

"The point is that the things most highly treasured occupy the 'heart,' the center of the personality, embracing mind, emotions, and will; and thus the most cherished treasure subtly but infallible controls the whole person's direction and values. Those who set their minds on things above (Col. 3:1-2), determining to live under kingdom norms, discover at last that their deeds follow them (Rev. 14:13)."

Next, Jesus says, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he

will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:22-24).

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "One's attitude toward wealth is another barometer of righteousness. The Pharisees believed the Lord materially blessed all He loved. They were intent on building great treasures on earth. But treasures built here are subject to decay or theft, whereas treasures deposited in heaven can never be lost. The Pharisees had this problem because *their spiritual eyes were diseased. With their eyes they were coveting money and wealth. Thus they were in spiritual darkness. They were slaves to the master of greed, and their desire for money was so great they were failing in their service to their true Master, God*. Money is the translation of the Aramaic word *mamona* for 'wealth or property.'"

Jesus then warns us not to be overly anxious or obsess over the need of physical things. He tells us God takes care of the birds and the flowers of the field, how much more will He care about our needs—but not our greeds. There is one caveat—He wants to see how we prioritize our lives--what we put first. He ends the section saying, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and *all these things shall be added to you*. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (6:31-33).

The same commentary adds, "The Pharisees in their pursuit of material things had never learned to live by faith. Jesus told them and us not to worry about these things, for life is more important than physical things. He cited several illustrations to prove His point...Jesus was saying God has built into His Creation the means by which all things are cared for....Rather than being like the pagans who are concerned about physical things, they should focus on the things of God, his kingdom and righteousness. Then all these needs will be supplied in God's timing. This is the daily life of faith. It does no good to worry [or fret] about tomorrow. As a disciple cares each day for the things God has trusted to him, God, his heavenly Father, cares for his daily needs."