

## STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

### HYPOCRISY!

Read Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18

#### **Definition of Hypocrisy:**

Although no distinct Hebrew word for hypocrisy occurs in the Old Testament, the concept does — primarily in terms of insincere worship. Hypocrisy manifests itself in an inconsistency between external religious activity and religious profession. The root idea in the Old Testament may be that the hypocrite has a godless heart or a heart that rebels against God's laws. The New Testament seems to combine the Old Testament concept of the godless rebel and the Attic Greek hypokrisis [ὑπόκρισις], "stage-playing or acting."

Hypocrites make an outward show of religion, whether in giving alms, praying, or fasting. The English concept of hypocrisy as failing to practice what one preaches is rarely found. The hypocrite is self-deluded by his or her own pretension, which fools no one else.

#### **Jesus & the Pharisees**

As stated in our previous study, Jesus was correcting the interpretation of the law by the Pharisees and Scribes and particularly the attitude towards the law. Jesus said:

*"In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." (Luke 12:1)*

The doctrine of the Pharisees is all covered in hypocrisy. Again, Jesus said:

*"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matthew 23:1-2,27-28)*

This will bring context to the statement Jesus made in Matthew 5 that we studied last week:

*"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20)*

#### **Alms, Hypocrisy & God's Reward (Matthew 6:1-4)**

"Charitable deeds" is actually the word righteousness. Jesus tells us to not do righteous things for the sake of display or image. Jesus addressed the danger of cultivating an image of righteousness just to be noticed or receive human accolade. The idea is when we do righteous deeds for the attention and applause of men, their attention and applause is our reward. It is much better to receive a reward from your Father in heaven.

It was a custom for some in Jesus' day to draw attention to their giving so they would be known as generous. Such performers are rightly called hypocrites, because they are actors, acting the part of pious, holy people when they are not. It is not having a standard that makes someone a hypocrite; it is falsely claiming to live by that standard when you in fact do not, or when you have a double standard that makes one a hypocrite.

Jesus tells the one who gives so he can hear the applause of others that he should enjoy the applause, because that will be all the reward that he will receive. There will be no reward in heaven for the one who did it for the motive of an earthly reward. It is all they will receive. “It would be better to translate it: ‘They have received payment in full.’ The word that is used in the Greek is the verb “apechein”, which was the technical business and commercial word for receiving payment in full.”

If someone finds out that we have given something, do we automatically lose our reward? The issue is really a matter of motive. If we give for our own glory, it does not matter if no one finds out and we will still have no reward from God. But if we give for God’s glory, it does not matter who finds out, because your reward will remain because you gave for the right motive.

### ***Prayer, Hypocrisy & God’s Reward (Matthew 6:5-8)***

Jesus assumed that His disciples would give, so He told them the right way to give (Matthew 6:1-4). He also assumed that His disciples would pray, and it was important that they not pray in the same manner as the hypocrites. There were two main places where a Jew in Jesus’ day might pray in a hypocritical manner. They might pray at the synagogue at the time of public prayer, or on the street at the appointed times of prayer (9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m.).

These hypocrites prayed not to be heard by God, but to be seen by men. It begs the question today as to why people pray? Those praying to be seen of men have their reward, and they should enjoy it in full – because that is all they will receive. There is no reward in heaven for such prayers.

Rather, we should meet with God in our room (or “closet”). The idea is of a private place where we can impress no one except God.

- The specific ancient Greek word “room” was used for a storeroom where treasures were kept. This reminds us that there are treasures waiting for us in our prayer closet.
- Jesus certainly did not prohibit public prayer, but our prayers should always be directed to God and not towards man.

We do not pray to tell God things that He did not know before we told Him. We pray to commune with Him and appeal to a loving God who wants us to bring every need and worry before His throne. Prayer is not designed to inform God, but to ask with a humble heart, to excite his desire, to inflame his faith, to animate his hope, to raise his soul from earth to heaven, and to put him in mind that THERE is his Father, his country, and inheritance.

### ***Fasting, Hypocrisy & God’s Reward (Matthew 6:16-18)***

Jesus spoke to these fundamental practices of spiritual life in His kingdom: giving, praying, and now fasting. Clearly, Jesus assumed that His followers would fast.

When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites: The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees wanted to make sure that everybody knew they were fasting, so they would have a sad countenance and disfigure their faces so their agony of fasting would be evident to all. When hypocrites receive the admiration of men for these “spiritual” efforts, they receive all the reward they will ever get.

In contrast, Jesus instructed us to take care of ourselves as usual and to make the fast something of a secret before God.

