



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



Are You the Real Deal?

Tim Badal | February 9, 2014 | Matthew 6:1-4

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 17

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 6. We're in the middle of our series "Upside-down Kingdom" which is a study on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. We are turning the page to a new part of our series as we look at Matthew 6.

We have spent the last six weeks looking at Jesus' words regarding true spirituality. We've learned that the Christian life is a very earthy type of faith; in other words, it involves much of what we do. Jesus says true spirituality is found in the way we talk, control our emotions, control our passions, keep our commitments and love others—including our spouses and even our worst enemies.

Before we make the mistake of thinking our faith is simply the things we do, we must remember that we cannot separate the actions God calls us to from our heart's condition. Our heart should be the reason why we do those things. We can get close to perfection in these six areas by doing exactly the right things but if our heart's motivation is not right, then we fail to live out Christ's calling.

When we do those six things from the end of chapter five, we may receive the fanfare and the applause of men. But if we do them—even perfectly—for the wrong reasons, God says we forfeit our reward in heaven. So we need to pay attention to why we do these things, not just do them meaninglessly.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to ask ourselves the important question: why do I do the things I do? Why do I serve God? Why do I serve others? Why am I involved in Christian disciplines? Is it to look holy? Is it to make people look at me as a spiritual hotshot? Is it so people will applaud me and say nice things about me? Is it so people will think I'm an important individual? If we don't understand why we do what we do, we will never know whether God approves of what we've done.

Now before you simply say, "Well the reason why I serve, give, minister to others and minister for God is because of God," let me remind you that it is easy for us to deceive ourselves. It's easy for us to become self-deceived because we are fallible. We need the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and the power of God's Word to show us the condition of our hearts.

So that begs the question each of us must ask ourselves: am I the real deal? To find the answer, we may turn right away to the old adage, "Character is who you are when no one else is watching." That's a good adage but I think Jesus is saying what He finds to be right and good in His followers is seen through who you are on the inside when everybody else is watching, applauding and saying good things about you. In that moment, what is your heart's desire? When you serve God and others, when you give to God and to others, what is your heart's motivation? Remember that God knows our hearts and will judge us accordingly.

These are some important questions before us that we can't answer without the power of God's Word in our lives. Let's open God's Word and look at Jesus' words to us in Matthew 6:1-4. He says the following:

¹ "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. ² 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. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Let's pray.

Father God, my prayer is simple. We want to serve You in such a way that You might reward us. Get rid of all the deceit, hypocrisy and self-aggrandizement that we place around what we do, who we are and why we do what we do. Strip all of that away so when we are serving You all praise, glory, honor and renown fall solely on You and Your precious Son Jesus. For it is only then that we will know we have rid ourselves of all hypocrisy and deceit. Teach us that our hearts are deceitfully sick. The heart fools us into thinking our motivations are right. Let us put those reasons on trial today so that our consciences may be clear and we may honor You in all we do. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

So the question before us is, "Are you the real deal?" That answer can't be found through a poll of your friends, family and those around you. The answer has to come from God Himself. So we need to go to God's Word and ask, "How do I know if I'm the real deal?" Our text shows us three things regarding this question. Being the real deal involves:

Guarding Against Being Phony

Becoming Pure in Heart

Heading down the Right Path

1. Being the Real Deal Involves Guarding Against Being Phony

Verse one says, "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.*" It is easy to see why Bible translators put the chapter break here because right away we see that Jesus is speaking to a certain situation. Without this chapter break—and really without verse one—we would think Jesus is continuing to address individual issues of how we as Christians ought to live. But the first word in verse one is a word that should make us pause. It's the word "beware." It doesn't take years of seminary training, long hours of study or a scholarly understanding of the Greek language to know that when Jesus

says, "Beware," we should listen. When the Second Person of the Trinity says, "Watch out," it means we need to watch out.

We don't need to look very far to see what Jesus wants us to know. He wants us to stop in our tracks because He has a word of protection for us. It's a word that is still applicable to us today. As Christians, we hear from our detractors that many people will not be found dead in a church because there are too many hypocrites in our assemblies. We can get angry at that statement but I think they're right to a degree and I think Jesus would agree with that assessment. He tells us, "Beware." We have a propensity to take our righteousness and use it for the wrong reasons—we use it to highlight ourselves instead of highlighting the God Whom we serve.

When Jesus says "beware" it literally means to hold before one's self and take heed; to be in a state of high alert; to watch and be on guard. The idea is to turn one's attention solely on the thing before them and to guard against it. So after teaching on all of these different subject matters that are so vitally important to our lives, Jesus stops and says, "If you think all you need to do is follow the corporate line as a Christian, then you're not understanding My Word. It is more than just expressing your anger in the right way, not looking at people in a lustful manner, staying true to your spouse, keeping your word when you swear oaths, not repaying evil for evil and loving your enemies. It isn't just about doing."

Notice that Jesus isn't saying to beware of people but of ourselves. If you don't already know this, you need to hear it. While the devil may be a strong enemy against us and his demons are formidable opponents, I believe our greatest enemy is ourselves. It's because of our flesh and our susceptibility to sin that Jesus says, "I love you. I don't want you to fall prey to these things because when you do, your testimony comes into question. You become one who is no longer doing things for the glory of God but for yourself."

So in this context "beware" points to the motives we have as Christians. We have to ask ourselves, "Why do we do it?" when we give offering, preach sermons, pray, help the poor, serve in the nursery, help with a small group, help with the student ministries, teach Sunday school, work in the kitchen, hand out bulletins, work in the church office or whatever we do for the ministry of Christ Jesus.

When Jesus says beware (*prosechō*) He says it in the present imperative. He's not saying it lackadaisically, "Well, maybe you should beware." He's saying, "Beware, beware, and as you beware, beware all the more." In other words you are never done guarding against this thing because hypocrisy is alive and well in our hearts. Right when we think we've mastered it, "Look out!" It's going to come at us again so we need to be on the lookout.

Kenneth Wuest—a Greek scholar—helps us understand the meaning of this word. He says, "This idea is a present imperative which means that you and I are called not to act before men in order to be attentively viewed by them as a spectacular performer." The goal of the Christian life is not for people to say, "Wow! That person is great. They really are a phenomenal Christian." To "beware" means that we are to be vigilant to the ever-present danger—even in the lives of believers—to practice righteous acts for the wrong reasons.

Jesus wants to grab our attention. He wants to show us the multidimensional level of who we are as human beings. He says the problem is the heart—not the four-chamber organ in the middle of your chest—the seat of why you do what you do. He urges us to ask ourselves, “Heart, why do you do serve in this way? Do you do it out of duty or out of desire? Do you do it so you look good or so God may look good? Are you doing it so people will pour adulation and praises upon you or so they will pour praises and adulation on Me, your God Who is in heaven?”

This word “beware” is a powerful word. It tells the mind to continually interrogate the heart as to why you do the things you do. You must continuously question, “Is it about me or is it about God?”

Notice He doesn't just leave it there. He says, “Let me help you because I don't want you to think this is esoteric or theoretical. It is earthy; it's real.” He says we need to beware because we can become hypocrites and He says, “I don't want you to become hypocrites.”

It has been said that hypocrisy is that which makes us sick when we see it in the lives of others but we are so very comfortable with it in our own lives. Have you noticed that? When you see someone being hypocritical, it makes you want to vomit. It's dirty. It's ugly. It's seen for the sin that it is. There's nothing pretty about hypocrisy—except when you're doing it because then it feels oh so good. We have to be careful because it can happen so very quickly.

For example, we can see on our caller I.D. when someone who drives us absolutely crazy is calling. We have no intention of answering the phone because we know who's on the other side of the line and we have no desire to talk with them. Then our kids answer the phone, give it to us and say, “It's so-and-so on the phone.”

Then we take the phone and say, “Hey! How are you? Glad that you called!” Without thinking about it, we are doing that which we hate in the lives of others—being a hypocrite.

So how do we know what hypocrisy looks like? Jesus helps us. He tells us three things hypocrites do. Now it's not one strike, two strikes, three strikes you're a hypocrite. Some of us may say, “I do one of these things but not all three, so I'm not a hypocrite.” Hypocrisy happens when we live out any of these things.

Phonies Play the Part

We guard against being phony by knowing that phonies play the part. In the middle of verse two we see that the word for phonies is hypocrites, or the Greek word *hypokritēs*. It was used in ancient Greece for an actor playing a part on the stage. Have you ever thought about acting as one big deception? The job of an actor is to deceive the audience about who they really are. When I act, I am no longer Tim—I'm now the character that I play.

I acted in some plays in high school. Our director used to tell us, “You must become that person. You are no longer who you were. Now you are in character; you are always that person. You need to get into that character as much as possible.”

The late actor Heath Ledger's last major role was the Joker in the latest Batman movie. Some people say that he lost his mind because he took on too much of the Joker's character. While we can't know that for sure, we do know he died a terrible death full of drugs, alcohol and depression.

The human heart can yearn to play a certain part so much that it destroys who we really are. This is true for the Christian as well. We can play this righteous role too well, become the character that we play and forget who we really are.

Now let me apply that to our service and our giving. We can play the part and say we're doing these things for the glory of God, for His righteousness and for the opportunity to be rewarded by Him one day in glory. We can even think that's our reason but the real reason we do it is to be known as a good, solid Christian individual. We want people to step back and say, "That person is spiritual; that person is right." We can play the part for so long that we lose ourselves in the character we're playing and forget who we really are. The actor—this *hypokritēs*—was supposed to act in such a way that people saw the character and not the real them. So a hypocrite is someone who acts a part and conceals his or her real motives and agenda all the time.

Here are some sayings about hypocrites:

- A hypocrite is like a clean glove that hides a dirty hand.
- A hypocrite is one who preaches by the yard but practices by the inch.
- A hypocrite is one who prays on his knees on Sunday and preys on his neighbors on Monday.
- A hypocrite is a man who lets his light shine before men so that those who see him cannot see what's going on behind the light.

The hypocrite lives a duplicitous life. Many of us are doing this and don't even know it. We're giving the appearance of one motive when in reality there's a hidden motive. Beloved, I don't want this to be said about us. Yet I know this is something with which we all struggle. It is so easy for us to spot improper motives in other people but can be so difficult for us to see them in ourselves. So Jesus says, "Beware. Be on guard. I don't want my people to be actors playing a part. I want you to be the real you who's been changed by My Spirit and to live that way before others and when you're by yourself."

Phonies Perform for the Crowd

What part were the people playing? Verse one says, "*Beware of practicing your righteousness.*" Jesus is saying, "The sin of the hypocrite is not in what they're doing but in why they're doing it." We see from the text that what they're doing is righteousness. That word righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) is the Greek word meaning straightness. It refers to a state of conforming to an authoritative standard. It has the idea of what is good, right and pleasing to God. Jesus is saying, "It's not enough just to do the right things, but you also need to do them for the right reasons."

That begs the question, "Why in the world would these people go so far as to practice the right stuff but not do it for the right reasons?" They do it to perform for a crowd. What they are doing—righteousness—isn't the problem; it's their motives—to be seen by others.

The hypocrite does righteousness before other people. The phrase “to be noticed” is the Greek word *theomai* which is the root of our English word “theater.” So the hypocrite is gathering a crowd around him as a caller would, saying, “Come and watch what’s happening.”

If you go to a fair or an amusement park, no doubt you will come upon an individual who is trying to draw a crowd for his show. He will announce to all, “Come and be part of this wonderful thing! Come and your eyes will be dazzled with excitement! Your hearts will be thrilled if you come be a part of this.”

That is what the phony does. Jesus says the phony blows his trumpet. So before the hypocrite does any of his righteous things, he blows a fanfare on his bugle and cries, “Hear ye, hear ye! Everybody look at me! Make sure you get a good look at what I’m about to do.” The hypocrite puts himself in the middle of the crowd, whether it’s in the synagogues or the market square.

Phonies Seek Earthly Praise

Why would the hypocrites do all of this? Why would they do their righteousness before all these people? It is so they can receive what they’re looking for—earthly praise. They do all these good things before other people so they can be seen and praised.

A hypocrite is like the stage player in the play. He does his hard work before others so that he can receive a standing ovation at the end of the show. When we are being the hypocrite, we want the people around us to see our righteous deeds and yell, “Bravo! Encore!” They’ll heap upon us bouquets of flowers to say how good we are.

Jesus says, “My followers, don’t live the Christian life like that. Don’t be one who externally shows holiness while inwardly desiring props and accolades.” Jesus says we must flee from this hypocrisy.

2. Being the Real Deal Involves Becoming Pure in Heart

So how do we flee from hypocrisy? The answer isn’t given per se in our text today, but we know Jesus is building one truth upon another. Go back to Matthew 5:8 which says, “*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*” In the heart of the Beatitudes Jesus tells us that if you want to flee from hypocrisy then you must be one who is pure in heart. So instead of playing a role, performing for the crowd and seeking earthly praise, we need to become pure in heart.

How do we do that? How do we become pure? This word pure (*katharos*) isn’t so much the idea of holiness but rather the idea of being single-minded. We’re not being double-minded and mixing one of our reasons for serving God with one of our self-serving reasons. It’s unadulterated and entirely unmixed.

Being pure means that we are not two-faced individuals in our Christianity. It means that when we do something publicly we’re doing the same thing in our hearts. Our motivation is the byproduct of what you see in real life. Therefore there’s nothing to hide. What people see on Mondays is the same thing we see on Sundays. So when people see your godliness they know it’s the real deal, not an act.

But how do we get there? Turn in your Bibles for a moment to John 1:43 when Jesus calls His disciples. Let’s look at verses 43-46:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

So these fishermen were approached by Jesus and they had this "come and see" approach. They said, "We found the Messiah, the One we've been waiting for, the One about Whom Moses wrote. We found Him and you have to come see Him."

Others asked, "Well who is He?"

The fishermen replied, "His name is Jesus and He's from Nazareth. He's the son of Joseph the carpenter." Scholars believe inherent in this dialogue is a sense of surprise that the Messiah comes from Nazareth. If you look at any history of Nazareth, you will find that Nazareth is not a well-received town. Nazareth was not a world-renowned city; it was a poor country city. It was a shepherd town known only for being a town outside of Jerusalem.

Scholars believe the sense of this passage is that the disciples who were coming to know Jesus were changing their opinion of Nazareth because if the Messiah came from there you couldn't say it was a bad place. They were saying, "Hey, I always thought Nazareth was a great town! Even though no one else liked Nazareth, deep down inside I always had a special place in my heart for it. I knew God would use Nazareth for some wonderful plan."

But Nathanael said, "Are you kidding me? Nothing good comes from Nazareth!" He was just speaking his heart. There was no deceit, guile or hypocrisy. He said, "Let me tell you what I think of Nazareth on the inside. Can anything good come from that place? I mean that place has never been good for anything." Let me pause for a moment and give some grace to those who speak their minds. We get beat up a lot for speaking our minds but I think Jesus vindicates us to a degree. He says, "It's a good thing for us to speak our minds." Now, I know some of you might try to call that a spiritual gift and use it to beat up on people verbally, so let me clarify. You need to speak the truth in love. You need to be edifying in your speech with others. So we can't just speak whatever comes to our minds; we have to do so with grace and mercy.

Look at the example of Nathanael; he just spoke what his heart believed, "Is there anything good that comes from Nazareth?" It is not good for us to speak with a forked tongue. We need to not be deceitful because that's what breeds hypocrisy.

There is something else we can learn from this passage in John. Verses 46-47 say, "*Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!'*" The word "deceit" (*dolos*) is also translated as "guile" or "hypocrisy." So Jesus points to Nathanael and says, "There's no hypocrisy in him." It wasn't the other disciples who said that; it was Jesus.

Now look at verses 48-49, *"Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'"* Wait a minute. Jesus says, "Nathanael, I've kept my eye on you." Most Bible scholars believe that fig tree experience happened before Jesus came to Galilee, so Jesus is telling Nathanael that He has been watching him all along.

When Jesus talks about hypocrisy, He is reminding us that we may be able to fool everybody else with our flesh and blood but we can't fool Jesus. The reason we can't fool Jesus is because He is all places at all times and He knows our hearts. You may be able to fake out the people around you but you can't fake out Jesus because He is sovereignly watching all that we do. We need to recognize that although we can get away with hypocrisy with others, we'll never get away with it with God.

This Purity Means Serving Diligently

Therefore, because God is sovereignly watching all that we do, we must serve diligently. Verse one tells us to diligently practice righteousness. Practicing something is a present tense action; it's a lifestyle. We are to devote our lives to serving God well.

Notice also that Jesus doesn't just want us to be diligent in what we do but in how we do it. So again we have to ask, "Why do we do the things that we do?" Why do you serve where you serve? Why do you help in that ministry? Why do you give? What are your motives? Many of us will quickly say it's all about God but—sadly—for many it's about what we can get out of it.

It is easy to say, "It is all about God." If I'm not careful, speaking in this pulpit can become very affirming for me as a pastor. It can be a power trip to be the one talking with everybody else listening. It can easily turn into me standing up here because I like to have my ego stroked. If I can get everybody to listen to me for 50 minutes, that will feed me for seven days. Then right when I start feeling as if I'm not getting the adulation I deserve, I'll get back up in the pulpit and have my ego stroked again.

You might think, "Tim, you wouldn't do that." Do you want to bet? Do you think I'm not capable of that? I have to remember that God spoke through donkeys. Whenever I start to think I have something to bring to the table, God reminds me, "Don't you remember Balaam's donkey? I used a donkey. So do you still think you're something special?"

So we need to be careful that we check why we're doing what we're doing. Maybe we fall into this trap because people say, "You're the best Sunday school teacher we've ever had," or, "Our kid hasn't learned about Jesus from anyone else like they have from you," or, "We haven't seen so many kids come to know Jesus in all our lives except through you. You're the best."

Brothers and sisters, we need to be careful that we're not setting the trap for our friends by saying things like that. Our ministry can't become all about the praise we receive from others. Otherwise it turns into us going back and forth saying, "You're great," and "No, you're great." We sit there, pat each other on the back and think we're all just so wonderful.

That doesn't mean we should get rid of all encouragement or affirmation. Rather let's make sure that as we give and receive affirmation and encouragement, it quickly bounces off us and goes to God. The praise of others should deflect off us and go to the One Who truly deserves all glory, honor and praise. We need to serve diligently knowing that our service is not about what we get but the glory God gets.

If it's truly about God, then shouldn't I be doing all I can to honor Him in my service? That means when I serve I should be dedicating and preparing myself in prayer beforehand. I need you to pray for me also, recognizing, "It is a tempting thing for our pastor to stand and preach before hundreds of people and be told he does a good job. I don't want him to fall prey to the idea that it's all about him instead of being about God."

When we serve we need to get on our knees and say, "Lord, I know that when I serve You well the spotlight will be put on me and I don't want it to stay there. So I pray by Your Spirit that You will convict me and move me to push it away from myself and onto You."

This Purity Means Practicing Generosity

Matthew 6:2-3 tells us, "*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. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*" Jesus brings attention to our giving. He says it's not just about practicing righteousness, but about how we do so. He says that our giving, serving, praying and fasting should all be done in secret. In the weeks to come, we will address these more specifically. For right now, let's look at the issue of giving in secret.

During the first century Christians were called to financially help those in need. They were to give as an act of kindness and mercy. Giving was not to be lorded over the people receiving the help. Money was not to be given with interest. It was to be given freely. It was to be given in such a way so as not to enslave the person you're giving to; there was to be no requirement for anything in return.

Notice the present tense verbs Jesus uses in this section. Verse two says, "*...when you give.*" In verse five He says, "*...when you pray.*" Verse 16 says, "*...when you fast.*" These are all expectations our Master has for us. Christ says, "When you practice your righteousness..." He's assuming you're going to do it.

Those of you who aren't serving in any capacity, why not? Your pastor doesn't assume that you are; Jesus does. How are you serving the kingdom? If you say, "Jesus doesn't say we have to give," you need to recognize that He says, "*When you give.*" Jesus is assuming that every one of His followers is going to give to the ministry of the gospel. He goes on to say, "*When you pray.*" So Jesus is assuming that His followers are going to pray and do these other things in this passage. He tells us, "When you do these things, be careful that your heart is in the right place."

So we need to ask ourselves, "How generous am I with God and with others?" How quick are we to serve God and others with the gifts God has given us? This passage reminds us that we are to be busy doing the work of the gospel and to do so without keeping a running total of our good deeds.

How can we make sure we're doing this? I find myself asking, "Lord, how are we to be public yet private? And how are we to be private yet public?" The text says do all these things in secret, but then Matthew 5:16

says, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

So I'm left asking, "Wait a minute Jesus. You're telling me to do these things in private but a chapter earlier You said to do it in public so that everybody can see it. Jesus, have You lost Your mind? Are You saying two different things that are coming out of both sides of Your mouth?" But we need to understand this: all the things we do in public ought to be the same things that we're doing in private, and they should all be for the same reasons.

3. Being the Real Deal Involves Heading Down the Right Path

How do we get there? We have to head down the right path. What do we need to do? Jesus helps us. He tells us how to make sure every spiritual activity is done so He receives the glory and we might receive a reward. Hypocrisy is kept at bay when we pursue three things.

A Holy Motivation

Within this idea of a holy motivation, there are some concrete things for us to remember. Never forget how subtle hypocrisy is. It happens so very quickly that we're engaging in it at times without even knowing. So we have to be questioning our hearts constantly.

Hypocrisy is one of the greatest enemies of Christianity, even all the way back to the patriarchs of the faith. Some of the greatest men and women in Scripture struggled with this great sin of hypocrisy. Why is that? Because idolatry is at the heart of hypocrisy. We make idols out of public opinion and people's praise. In order that we might receive praise from others, we will serve people in any way so that they might bless us with their favor.

How do we combat against that? Hypocrisy is defeated in the Christian's life when you serve an audience of One; when the Only Person's opinion Who matters is God's. When someone is standing and applauding how great you are, you politely nod your head and say, "Thank you," but all the while asking God, "Are You standing up and affirming what I've done? Because it's You alone Who matters."

When I was a teenager, one of my favorite Christian music groups was Petra. To some of you, that makes me really old and to others of you, that makes me really young. Either way, Petra had a great song called "Godpleaser" that helps us understand this idea. Listen to some of the lyrics:

Don't wanna be a man pleaser, I wanna be a God pleaser
I just want to have the wisdom to discern the two apart
Don't wanna be a man pleaser, I wanna be a God pleaser
I just want to do the things that please the father's heart
(*"Godpleaser" by Petra*)

Do you want to get rid of hypocrisy in your life? Make that your daily prayer. "It's about You, Jesus. It is You Who I want to please. So I serve You, I'm holy, I'm right, I'm good and I'm just in all of my practices so that

men will not shine a light on me but that they might see You instead." We should be like John the Baptist who said, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30).

A Hidden Mission

How do we balance that? Jesus says in verse three, *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."*

This verse has been used in all different kinds of ways in sermons. I remember hearing this preached as meaning anonymous giving, or hiding your giving. So when you go to the offering box, you are supposed to hide what you're doing. If the offering box is over there, just make sure nobody's looking when you go and put your gift in quietly. We don't want anybody to see it.

We need to be careful if that's what we think the meaning of the text is because Jesus says the same thing about our prayers. We've done some praying here in our church—but our prayers are to be done in secret. If that's what this text means, then I think we have done a bad job of praying here at Village Bible Church. I mean, Pastor Keith has prayed so all of you could hear him. I guess I have too, so I can't call him out or I'd be a hypocrite.

So how do we interpret this? We need to understand that Jesus is not talking about anonymous giving, anonymous praying or anonymous serving. That kind of living—especially in the area of giving—is not even biblical. If it were, then the New Testament church was in sin because they laid their gifts at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:32-37). Barnabas was encouraged and affirmed for giving his property to the church (verse 36).

No, this calling for anonymous giving is not biblical at all. You will not even find it anywhere else outside of twentieth and twenty-first century American Christianity. It's an invention of a people group who believes their money is their business and no one else's. Do you wonder why we struggle with materialism here in America? It's because we think our money is about us. But Jesus says, *"Beware...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:1, 21).

So to apply Jesus' words as a constructive theology of secret prayers, secret giving and secret services is to the detriment of His preaching. So what in the world does, *"Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing"* mean? It means don't announce your acts of service and your acts of giving so that everybody can see them. Your job is to do good works—not to talk about them. Your job is to serve God, not keep track of your hours. Your job is to honor God, not yourself.

When Jesus uses that phrase, *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,"* He's speaking to a person within his or her own body. He doesn't say, *"Don't let the person on your left side know what you're doing on the right side."* He is speaking to each of us on an individual level.

To unpack this passage even more, not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing is saying to yourself, *"It isn't about me. I won't keep spiritual books about the works I've done. I'm not going to write a profit-loss statement for myself. I'm not going to think, 'Look at how much I've given this year. Look at all*

that I've done. I must be a spiritual person,' or, 'Look how much I've served,' or 'Look at how many sermons I've preached.'"

Jesus is saying don't announce it to yourself because in doing so you are allowing the sin of hypocrisy to creep into your heart. So when God motivates you to do something, do it and then forget about it. Don't keep track of it. Don't put on your lapel how many years you've served in ministry or how many times you've done this or that.

Hypocrisy is so very subtle. When we announce our service for the wrong reasons, people will still applaud. They will say, "Well done!" But when that applause is over God says, "You've gotten your reward. I hope you enjoyed it. What you did is good, but you did it for the wrong motives and the people around you weren't any wiser, so it's done. It's over."

A Heavenly Commendation

When we fix our eyes on Jesus and serve Him with the right motives, Jesus says that we will receive a heavenly commendation. Verse four says, *"So that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Beloved, while you may serve God and honor Him for the right motives, you may not receive a plaque for your years of service. You may never be told, "Well done." You may even be reviled for your service to God. But Jesus is clear in this passage that it is not our job to keep account of our righteousness, and we can rest assured that God is keeping an account. He will judge each of us according to what we have done for Christ in the body.

So stop trying to impress others and start impressing the only One Who matters—Jesus Christ. One day when this life is done, we are going to stand before our Lord in the company of angels and saints and on that great and glorious day we will receive honor and glory when our Savior looks deep within us and says, *"Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master"* (Matthew 25:23).

So let's keep our eyes on the eternal, not the temporal. Let us pursue the praise of God, not the praise of man. Let us live each day under the Latin phrase *coram Deo*—before the face of God. Let us be always serving, always giving and always living before the face of God, living only to please Him. *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Let's pray.

Father God, we come before You knowing You can read our minds and know our hearts. As the righteous Judge, put our motives under trial. We don't want to be quick to think we have been acquitted of the crime of hypocrisy. Help us to not look at the person next to us, at our children, at our spouse or at our friend who struggles with this. We want to put ourselves on the stand and ask for the righteous Judge to convict us of this sin. Challenge us in why we do what we do. Give us the right motivation. This is not about us; it's about You. I pray that we would continually be asking this question because we know hypocrisy is just around the corner. It's so damaging because it brings into question why we serve. The unbelievers around us are just dying for the opportunity to see hypocrisy come up in us so they can point their fingers and say, "The only reason you serve God is because of what you get out of it." Rid our lives of hypocrisy.

Lord, what a pointed message this is for us as a church. We're getting big enough, and well known enough, to be tempted to think that it's about what we're doing. It could easily seem that our motive is just to become better known. Purge that sin from the staff, the elders and every person in this place, so that when people see Village Bible Church they praise the name of Jesus and not us.

Oh Lord, we want to be God pleasers. As we leave this place, we go into a world that is all about pleasing man, making man well known and making man glorious. Let the people around us not see how glorious we are but rather that our only greatness is the greatness of sin, which points us to a glorious Savior. It's because He saved us, died for us and lives inside of us that we now do what we do for His glory, His renown and His fame. Make this our motivation. As we practice our righteousness, challenge us every day to not do it as the hypocrites do but to do it for the right reasons and in the right ways. We love you Jesus. We want to honor You so teach us Your ways this week. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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