

This lesson will be an overview of Matthew 6:1-18 in which the Lord spoke of three religious activities that are generally common to all religions: (1) acts of charity in almsgiving (Matt. 6:1-4); (2) acts of devotion in prayer (Matt. 6:5-15); and (3) acts of self-denial in fasting (Matt. 6:16-18). The point of our Lord's teaching is to show how the one true religion of salvation by God's free and sovereign grace is to be different from false, hypocritical religions in that these acts are NOT to be done to be seen of men, out of pretense or for recognition. They are to be done solely for the praise and glory of God in Christ. The Pharisees were mainly concerned about public perception. Christ said of them, *"Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity"* (Matt. 23:28); *"Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15). As true believers, we are to be concerned with how we appear before men. We are to *"abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess. 5:22), but our motive and goal for all obedience is to glorify God and to express our love and gratitude to Him for His grace (Matt. 5:16). We want people to know that our only righteousness before God is Christ's righteousness imputed to us by God's grace! Some may reason that they do these things openly because they want others to see that they are "Christians" as if these actions are their witness. But giving, praying, and fasting are not the distinguishing marks of a true Christian. The Gospel wherein Christ's righteousness is revealed is the distinguishing mark of a true Christian.

(Matt. 6:1) - Alms-giving includes all charitable contributions and takes in what we give in support of the Gospel, though the context here deals specifically with deeds of mercy for the poor. It is taken for granted that God's true children are generous with what the Lord has blessed them (Psa. 37:21; Prov. 19:17; Acts 9:36; 11:27-30; 2 Cor. 9:6-7). Our generosity is motivated by the realization that God has given us all blessings and benefits of salvation freely in and by His Son (2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 1:3-4). Generosity was demanded by the law (Exod. 23:10-11), the prophets (Dan. 4:27), and by the grace of God (Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:16). Christ warns us here about giving to be seen of men, for when we do this, we lose our reward of glorifying and pleasing the Father.

(Matt. 6:2) - When we give, do not make it a public display in trying to draw attention to ourselves as if to impress people with our charity. If we do this to be seen of men, we have our reward - the praise and applause of men. But we lose the joy and peace of pleasing the Lord and glorifying Him alone. Unbelievers, in thinking that such actions are their witness before men, desire that men see them and declare them righteous (saved), but the testimony of men means nothing compared to God's testimony in His Word. If man's judgment of your salvation based on these religious actions settles these matters in your mind, then you *"have glory of men,"* and this is your *"reward."* But you have no reward from God Who rewards His people with salvation and all of its blessings by His grace through the redeeming work of Christ. God rewards His people, not based on their works or religious actions, but based on His grace which reigns in righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Matt. 6:3-4) - This means, literally, that when we give our alms, let us strive to do it secretly and privately so as not to draw attention to ourselves or to dwell on our gift-giving, praising ourselves with pride or considering it as a contribution to our righteousness before God. Do this for others with a willing and loving heart (Matt. 25:37-39). The Father *"seeth in secret"* as He is omniscient and knows our hearts (Heb. 4:12-13), and He rewards us *"openly."* This

does not mean, as many false teachers preach, that the Lord will reward us with more money if we give money. Our giving to others is not to be viewed as an investment on which we expect a financial return. He rewards us “*openly*” in that He gives us the assurance in His Word that this glorifies and pleases Him in Christ (Heb. 13:16; 1 Pet. 2:5).

(Matt. 6:5) - The Pharisees stood in prominent places repeating their prayers. They sought the praise of men, and when they received it, that was the full extent of their reward. But true prayer is an act of devotion and a matter of private worship. It is between the child of God and his heavenly Father. The reason for this is not that we are ashamed, but it is the nature of true prayer. It is to be done alone and “*in secret*” (hidden from the world), where no one will hear or disturb us. Secret prayer is heard by our heavenly Father and openly answered by Him in His own time and way (Prov. 15:8).

(Matt. 6:7-8) - Some imagine that repeating prayers time and again will influence the Lord’s answer. Our Lord condemns “*vain repetitions*,” such as the false practice of Roman Catholicism of promoting the saying of so many “hail Marys.” The repetition of words in no way changes God’s mind or influences Him to answer as we desire. Our Father knows what we want and need even before we ask Him. We pray to our heavenly Father through Christ, our one Mediator between God and men (Heb. 4:14-16). Why do we pray? We pray to worship God and confess our total dependence upon His grace to save, forgive, bless, and keep us by His power and grace by Christ. Prayer is one of God’s means by which He blesses us according to HIS will, and our wills are always to be in submission to HIS will (Matt. 6:10).

(Matt. 6:9-13) - This is a model prayer, given by our Lord to His disciples and intended as a pattern, a guide, not as words merely to be repeated. We will examine this model prayer more closely in the next lesson, but note the seven petitions of this prayer. It is a prayer for: (1) God’s glory (6:9), (2) God’s kingdom (6:10), (3) God’s will (6:10), (4) God’s provision (6:11), (5) God’s forgiveness (6:12), (6) God’s leadership and preservation (6:13), and (7) God’s praise (6:13).

(Matt. 6:14-15) - Our Lord is not putting conditions upon us to gain or earn forgiveness, for that would be a contradiction of the Scriptures that teach God’s forgiveness fully and freely upon the ground of Christ’s blood alone. Like all of salvation, forgiveness is a free gift of God’s grace based on the righteousness of Christ freely imputed and received by God-given faith. Forgiveness comes to us by the justice of God being fully satisfied by the death of Christ as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer (Eph. 1:7). This is simply stating that our forgiving others is a fruit and result of our realization that God has already forgiven us freely by the blood of Christ.

(Matt. 6:16-18) - All that has been said of alms-giving and prayer applies also to fasting - denying ourselves food due to sorrow over sin. Fasting was never commanded under the Law, but it was optional. The Pharisees were proud of this as it proved them to be going above and beyond the average worshipper (Luke 18:12). Again, they wanted to be seen of men, and they had their reward. If we choose to fast in a religious way, let us be sure that we keep it to ourselves and not appear as if we are fasting, so as to be seen and praised by men. The reward here is the same as in all religious acts of self-denial. It is not that we earn God’s favor and blessing in our fasting, but we have the assurance in His Word that He is glorified and praised in this act of worship. As in all our good works, they are accepted in the Beloved, on the ground of the merits of Christ our Lord and Savior.