**Motive Masquerade**

Matthew 6:1 “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. (ESV)

Jesus begins this section of the Sermon on the Mount with a staunch warning: BEWARE. We use that word to watch out for—sometimes even to be afraid of something. Christ wants us to know that what He speaks of is to be avoided. Here He states we must be cautious of trying to impress others with our good deeds and holy living. Pretty simple right? But what makes this way more complicated is that it appears Jesus has already said the opposite earlier in this sermon.

What are we supposed to do with this teaching that we are not supposed to do our good deeds before others when just earlier in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that we ought to practice good before men? (Matthew 5:16) Ultimately this tension—what appears to be a contradiction—is not contradiction at all. Jesus will never contradict Himself—the Word of God never contradicts itself. If the Word of God seems to contradict itself we are misunderstanding it. This apparent tension in Jesus’ words helps us look deeper into the meaning of each statement and it brings clarification for us: Jesus is dealing with the motivation behind our actions!

First Jesus says do your good so that people may see, and then He later says not to do it in front of others. But here is where we often get confused: Jesus tells us exactly what our motivation should be for each of these circumstances. When Jesus says we ought to do our good deeds in front of others, He says SO THAT they may glorify God. When He says to beware of practicing our good in front of others He says IN ORDER THAT it may been seen by others. It is all about motivation. Even more so, when Jesus says that we ought to do good deeds it is not so that WE may be seen but that THEY might be seen. What does He mean by “THEY”? He is speaking of the good works. People aren’t meant to see us, but to see the good that is happening in front of them! IT IS NEVER ABOUT YOU!

We can come to this conclusion: There is nothing wrong with doing good deeds in front of others as long as our motivation is not to receive praise for ourself but rather for God. Matter of fact, Jesus commands that we SHOULD do good deeds and live righteously for the sake of glorifying God. Glorifying God is to be our primary motivation in everything we do.

1 Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (ESV)

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (ESV)

It’s also important to note that Jesus uses the word righteousness because practicing righteousness is not always the same as doing good deeds. Good deeds are righteous but not all righteousness is good deeds. Righteousness is to be right—to act right. That is why we know it is about so much more than good deeds acts of kindness, but rather it is deeper. The question to ask yourself is “Do you act good because others expect you to or because Christ calls you to?”

Are you kind to others because it’s what is expected of you and you want to receive approval for your behavior or do are you kind because God has made you kind and it is now natural for you? It’s so often we live based on people’s expectations of us. Sometimes those expectations are grounded in Scripture even, but our motivation cannot be to please them but to please God. We know anyway that when we try and please others it is often just to bring positive attention to ourselves. But our life is not meant to be lived for ourself. This religion is not to the glory of man but to the glory of God.

Although Christ came to save us, we must not forget He came to save us as a people FOR HIMSELF. He does it selflessly, but we are made to worship Him. We were made to be in relationship to Him. He made us for Himself because He loved us and wanted us. In light of this our actions and behavior should have everything to do with Him. A religion made for self could be practiced by atheists.

One day we will all stand before God. Some people say Christians will not be judged but the Bible is clear that we will be judged even if we are saved but our judgement is different. Our judgement is for the works and deeds we did while in this life on earth (1 Corinthians 3:10-15) This judgement isn’t a determination of whether we go to heaven or not. It’s a determination of if what we did following salvation was worthy. This judgement either leads to loss or reward. Jesus even says in this passage that we will receive a reward in heaven for good works and righteousness.

There is only one thing you can take to heaven with you: other people. You can’t take clothes, food, homes, possessions. You can’t take your PlayStation to heaven. You can’t take your phone to heaven. You can’t take your diploma to heaven. You can’t take your YouTube channel to heaven. The only thing you can take is people. You won’t lead other people to heaven if they are looking at you!

Did our works and righteousness lead people to ourselves or did they lead people to the cross? Make it present tense. Do your works and righteousness lead people to praise you or praise God? Is your motivation that God would be glorified above all else? Is your heart that others would see God? Is that what you hope for? Do you desire that Christ would be worshipped above all else, especially above you? If so everything you do would exemplify this truth. Your motivation must be Christ above all else—not you in front of everything.