

The Righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees:¹
The Self-Centered Representative:
Matthew 6:1-18

C. The representative of God should not seek the selfish values of men but the values of God (6:1--7:6).

1. The representative of God does his relational activities in secret since God is in secret for to do otherwise results in the representation of oneself not God (6:1-18).²

(cf. v.5:16 for opposite behavior of a disciple - that of doing works so that men might glorify God.)

This section plays out the verses seen in 5:19-20; the actions of the Pharisees which are less than the standard set in 5:17-18. They are contrasted with the love of God for others (His righteous character) in 5:21-48.

Each of these activities on their own are not illicit, but on the contrary are activities which are commended. The problem is that each of these assumes a role for the representative that brings glory to himself instead of glory to the Father.

The "secret" is a major difference between God and man. Man cannot see the "heart" and must make evaluations based on externals. The point is that externals are not indicators of representative behavior. Only the heart can indicate that.³

a. Men are to avoid doing things that exhibit their relationship with God for the notice of men, for that will escape the notice of God (6:1).

It should be noted that 'righteousness' here is an attribute of these men who are evil. Thus, it is to be defined as their acts of imitation (or instruction) of God. It is considered righteousness,

¹ This is a reference to 5:20 where Jesus says that "unless your righteousness exceeds (abounds) that of the Scribes and the Pharisees . . ." Now that righteousness will be examined.

² A comment here: Public acclaim is contrary to the servant of God. He seeks only to be a servant of God. Any glory to oneself is contrary to that of pointing to God. Any distraction that the speaker takes to himself is contrary to the message. The response to the messenger of God should not be, "Isn't the speaker wonderful!", but "Isn't God through His word wonderful!"

³ This is in contrast to the statement of 7:16ff. regarding the evidence of false prophets as being that of an external evaluation. The essence then is, that it cannot be told by external works, but only by external testimony (teaching). This is what is commanded to be done publicly - teaching. Fasting, offerings and prayers are to be done in secret. Great personal effort should be made to minimize public acknowledgment of things done for God.

but is of no value before God. Thus, it is not true righteousness, just perceived righteousness.

However, the summary is, that works done to be glorified by men, are not glorified by God (Who is the Judge of righteousness).

6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

- b. **Alms⁴ are not to be public (God sees in secret) so as to not represent one's own glory but God's, which is *hesed*. (6:2-4).**

Alms were a giving to the poor in most cases. However, while God was in fact merciful in giving, and the representative was merciful (??) in his giving, it was clear that he was in fact not doing it out of love but out of a desire for a return, that of praise. Thus he did not reflect God, but in fact took glory for himself. This is reflected in 5:46 where they love those who can return their love.

2 "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing 4 that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

- c. **Prayers are not to be in public for show (God is in secret) so as not to represent one's own glory but to request of, or give praise to, God who gives to men so they can represent Him (6:5-15).**

The object of the prayer is to request or praise God as the Sovereign. Activity thus, is between the representative and God and does not involve others. It might be noted here that the 'asking' which is instructed later, would be in the form of a prayer. This 'asking' is a humbling oneself before God to request righteousness. Thus, it is totally inappropriate for one to 'ask' (be humble) in front of others (pride).

- 1) **The prayer of the representative needs to regard God as a perceiver of the heart with regard to request and praise not the public presentation which men see.**

There are several things condemned here. First of all, the main point is that God perceives the motives of the heart. It can be noted in public presentations when one is seeking their own glory. True motivation toward God would not be noticed by men.

⁴ The word here indicates that type of giving which is to the poor or needy.

The element of prayer here is request ("knows what you need"). Note also that the prayer is repaid, that is that the representative is gaining position before God based on his prayer. It is not that the prayer is righteous itself, but the content of the prayer (request for God's righteousness) is repaid by God. The point here is not that God knows what you will ask for (although He does), but that He knows what you need (that is 'righteousness'). Thus He is in concert with the correct request of the representative and thus gives to them since He agrees with the request. The repetition is a correction of a human perception that God is like man and will give in to multiple words, multiple requests, which are made, not from a heart which is burdened, but a heart which believes that God will respond simply due to the multiplicity of requests.

6:5 "And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. 7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 "Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.

1) The prayer of the representative needs to recognize God as holy with a desire to keep Him holy. (6:5-9).

The word here is ἁγιασθήτω which indicates 'holy, set apart'. As has been the case throughout the prayer, the representative is to recognize that he is not holy (cf. 7:11) and that God is holy, and it is God's values that need to be sought out. God's Name here stands for His values, His attributes. Thus the representative is to recognize and keep His Name holy. The Pharisee had brought God down to his level, and God was only as holy as the Pharisee. He had made God in his image.

6:9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

2) The representative of God needs to recognize that his desire should be for the righteousness of God to be represented on earth, ultimately in the Kingdom (6:10)

As was indicated in the Beatitudes, an understanding of the dispensations is important. The King has appeared, and those who wait for Him will be encouraged. However, the period to follow is the period of delay, marked by suffering. Following that period will come the kingdom, where there is reward, and God's

righteousness will reign in Jesus Christ. Thus the representative is to pray for God's righteousness to be present on earth, in the King, in the Kingdom. (cf. Luke 18:1ff.). The holiness of God in heaven would be desirable on earth.

6:10 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

- 3) The representative of God waits on God to provide all that he needs (6:11).

While the representative seeks God's righteousness as ultimate, he is cognizant of the fact that God provides His representative with everything (cf.6:25-33). Yet while the statement involves bread, it is clearly more. It really involves need (cf. 6:32). And clearly it involves a request for any need which includes the righteousness of God as represented in His word. In 4:3-4 Jesus stated to the evil one that "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

6:11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

- 4) **The representative needs to ask for forgiveness of his sins, as he recognizes that others also receive the message of forgiveness through him (6:12).**

This has been discussed previously as it is at the basis of the Sermon. God offers forgiveness, yet it is contradictory that man would take God's forgiveness and then not allow others to enter in on the same basis (force them into self-righteousness) toward God and toward self. This is fully illustrated in the parable in 18:15-35.

In addition this was covered earlier in chapter 5 where the brother was going to the altar to offer an offering and had a brother who had something against him. Thus, this one has not recognized reconciliation (through forgiveness) as a ministry of God toward him and thus does not perceive God as righteous in forgiving him.

6:12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

- 5) **The representative of God needs to recognize that God is not the source of human reasoning, but is the source of deliverance from them⁵ and that they desire to follow Him (6:13).**

⁵ This can be clarified by an understanding of James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil (lit. "the evil one"), and He Himself does not tempt anyone." The Pharisee would use human reasonings (i.e., "God gave me a brain to reason, thus . . .").

The verse is one of the most difficult, but may be seen clearly if viewed from the perspective of the representative. It is really a statement of affirmation. This is a litote.⁶ In other words what is being stated is that God does not "lead into temptation, but does deliver from evil". God is the source of all good, and no evil, nor temptation to do evil comes from Him.⁷ This in essence is a recognition that the representative desires to represent God's desires through revelation and not his own human reasoning.

Put another way, one should note that the prayer for the "kingdom to come" is a request that is really a sure thing. In other words, since God's kingdom will come, why would one request what is sure? It is a matching up of one's heart desire to that of God's; that of displaying His Glory on earth. So also, the affirmation of a truth here is a request that is in actuality at truth; that God will not lead into temptation (or a desire to do evil), but is continues to deliver from the evil one; as He has from the beginning.

If "the evil one" here is the more likely translation, then 13:38 comes into play where the tares are sown by the 'evil one', that is Satan. Satan had tempted Christ to go to a fleshly reasoning path (false prophecy) against that of God and the Scriptures. Thus, the "lead us not" is a negative way of saying that the prayer is that they be not deluded by the evil one (human reasoning) a prayer of request that God knows the need. The prayer is one that they be able to identify false prophets against the truth of Scripture.

6:13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.'⁸

6) The principle of prayer is rooted in requests for God to give, and particularly and primarily in the area of forgiveness, where perceiving God's forgiveness

James' point is that do not mesh natural desires as a source from God. Thus, in this prayer the requester is acknowledging that God is not the source of human reasonings, but purely of revelation of Himself, which is the source of all that is good.

⁶ A "litote" is "a figure in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary, as in *not bad at all*." (Reference: American College Dictionary, 1962, Random House, New York.)

⁷ In James 1:13-16 the same discussion takes place regarding apparently the same element of the Sermon. James is saying that God is not the source of any evil thoughts or evil justifications, those come from one's own lust. Again the point is to seek understanding and action based on the Word of God.

⁸ The phrase preceding is not present in the earliest manuscripts.

will be reflected in the mercy one extends to others (6:14-15).

This may be seen in its purest form in the sense of salvation. If one perceives God as forgiving, and thus asks God for forgiveness, this will be reflected in his ministry to others in evangelism. If he proclaims works as an approach to God, then he has not truly perceived forgiveness (perceiving his own salvation as coming through works). If he has experienced forgiveness (through proper perception and request) then he will offer the same in evangelism.

6:14 "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

d. Fasting is not to be done publicly (God is in secret) so as to not represent one's own glory but God's (6:16-18).

The fast was a means of reflecting one's humility toward God, usually reflective of a serious Godly concern. Thus one might fast to show his serious concern about distress which had come upon him and his desire to be penitent or humbly submit to the Sovereign's desire. It really is the restriction of human concerns for the sake of a Godly concern. It might be reflected in many applications.

A review of Isaiah 58⁹ sheds great light on Jesus discussion of this practice. Also cf. Joel 2:13¹⁰ where God calls on Israel to "rend your heart and not your garments."¹¹

⁹ Isaiah 58:1 "Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 "Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness, And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me *for* just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God. 3 'Why have we fasted and Thou dost not see? *Why* have we humbled ourselves and Thou dost not notice?' Behold, on the day of your fast you find *your* desire, And drive hard all your workers. 4 "Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like *you do* today to make your voice heard on high. 5 "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed, And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 "Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke? 7 "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 "Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 And if you give yourself to the hungry, And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom *will become* like midday

¹⁰ It is important to note the context of Joel here. The judgment was coming and God is exhorting Israel to repent. Israel in Jesus' day is no different, and thus God seeks heart repentance, not an open declaration of one's righteousness. Joel 2:12 "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping, and mourning; 13 And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, And relenting of evil."

6:16 "And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face 18 so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

¹¹ An additional passage is the request in Zechariah 7:2-10 when they ask regarding their practice of fasting. The fasting was being done for themselves and not for God. His response is that they administer true justice and compassion and treat their brothers well.