



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Matthew 6:1-18 Live for an Audience of One

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PASTOR FRANK ERB / (916) 412-7625 / www.capitolcom.org / FRANK.ERB@capitolcom.org

NO ONE LIKES IT WHEN SOMEONE IS PHONY. IT MAY BE THOUGH THAT NO ONE HAS EVER LIKED IT LESS THAN JESUS DID. HE SPOKE OFTEN, AND ALWAYS EXTREMELY NEGATIVELY, ABOUT THE RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITES OF HIS DAY. UNFORTUNATELY, POLITICIANS ARE HIGHLY DRAWN TO THIS TYPE OF BEHAVIOR ALSO.

Matthew 16:1-18 continues Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount discourse to his followers.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2 So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 5 When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may 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, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. ..."

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE...

The word translated *noticed* in verse 1 is the Greek word *theomai*, which is related to the term from which we get our word "theater."¹ Similarly the word *hypocrites* in verses 2, 5, and 16 are a word that had its origins in the Greek theater, describing an actor who wore a mask.² So, this passage is addressing those who are like actors in a play pretending to be spiritual in order to win the praise of men instead of the attention of God. Such hypocrites are easy to find.

- *Cain pretended to worship by offering a kind of sacrifice God did not want. When his hypocrisy was unmasked, he killed his brother Abel out of resentment (Gen. 4:5-8).*

- *Absalom vowed allegiance to his father, King David, while plotting to overthrow his kingdom (2 Sam 15:7-10).*
- *Judas pretended to love Jesus while betraying him.*
- *Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give more money to the church than they really gave, and God struck them down as a result (Acts 5:1-10).*

Hypocrisy may be fairly common, but it is always disgusting to God, and it should be to us as well.

"When reputation becomes more important than character, we have become hypocrites."³

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

"Your Father who sees in secret" (6:4,6,18)

Jesus reminds us that, though we might fool all of the people some of the time, we are always in the presence of God ... and he is never fooled. *Hebrews 4:13 "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."*

WHOSE REWARD TO YOU WANT?

This being the case, Jesus says, we must choose who we wish to please. We can practice our faith in order to impress people or to impress God. These two are mutually exclusive. It's one or the other.

1. The Hypocrites ***"have their reward in full" (6:2, 5, 16)***

God knows those who are merely pretending to honor Him in order to earn the praise of men or for some other human benefit. They will have their reward: be it admiration, popularity, or perhaps some other earthly perk such as money, power, or position. However, this is *all* they will get. Note the absoluteness of the phrase "reward in full."

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS @ 7:30 A.M., ASSEMBLY RULES CONFERENCE ROOM (3171)

STAFF/LOBBYISTS: WEDNESDAYS @ 12:00 NOON, ROOM 125

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“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. It was the word which was used on receipted accounts. For instance, one man signs a receipt given to another man: ‘I have received (apecho) from you the rent of the olive press which you have on hire.’ ... What Jesus is saying is this: ‘If you give alms to demonstrate your own generosity, you will get the admiration of men – but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full.’”⁴

The point is terrifyingly clear. If our giving is done with a motive to impress (perhaps making sure our name gets attached to that project for the needy?), it will be completely unnoticed by our Heavenly Father. If our praying is done with a selfish intent (perhaps being focused on long or eloquent prayers to impress that group), our prayers will fall on deaf ears. And, we might well extrapolate and realize that *anything* done with selfish desires does not impress God who searches our hearts.

2. The Sincere “... your Father ... will reward you” 6:4,6,18

On the other hand, when we give or fast or pray (or, we might infer, do anything God has told us in His word to do) with a sincere desire to please Him, God definitely takes notice and will never forget it. What a wonderful promise!

Jesus often spoke of God’s rewards. He taught that God will reward those who are persecuted because of their faith in him (Matt. 5:12), who leave behind wealth or family to follow him (Matt. 19:29), or who faithfully serve him (Matt. 25:14-30). Here he also affirms that God will reward those who give, pray, or fast out of sincere devotion to him.

But, we might wonder, what are these rewards? Jesus doesn’t say here. It may be that the rewards are at times in this life, as in having our prayers heard, or the rewards may not be until we reach the next life. No doubt though, our greatest joy in eternity will be the realization that we lived our life on earth in a way that pleased the Lord. (Matt. 25:23, Rev. 4:10-11).

WHEN TO GO PUBLIC?

So, is it ever ok to pray or give or fast in public? Yes. Earlier, in this very same sermon, Jesus taught us to serve God in front of

others. *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).* The key, then, is to always serve God “in such a way” as to deflect attention away from ourselves and direct all the glory to God. Though this is not always easy to do, God judges our inner motives and intent with regard to this.

QUESTIONS EVERYONE IN POLITICS NEEDS TO ASK:

It can be tempting for political leaders, like the religious leaders of Jesus day (and our day too), to do everything for public recognition. This is understandable, since their career success is at least partially dependent upon their popularity. Here are some good questions, therefore, for everyone working in government leadership to ask themselves:

- **Am I doing any religious activity, such as giving to the poor, praying in public, or abstaining from something (fasting) – in order to impress people more than to impress God?**
- **Do I ever show up at church to be seen?**
- **Do I have a Bible in my office to gain admiration?**
- **Do I have a hidden agenda for my spiritual service?**
- **Do I overstate my spirituality in some gatherings in order to garner support?”**
- **When was the last time I spent a sustained period of time humbly praying alone without telling anyone?**
- **Do I most want to impress God ... or people? Really?**

¹John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7* (Moody, 1985), 354.

²John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2006).

³Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 1* (Victor, 1989), 27.

⁴William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster, 1975), 186.