

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)

The New People of God

Study 8 – Secret Generosity

Introduction

One of the sad but true characteristics of all people is our capacity for pretence and self deception. This is true in a number of areas of our lives (diet and exercise being one!), but nowhere more so than in relation to spiritual matters. In religion it is very easy to be a hypocrite and it is for this reason that Jesus spoke so strongly and so often against the sin of hypocrisy, warning His disciples against this subtle and deadly sin.

Spiritual hypocrisy takes different forms of course but all expressions of hypocrisy have one thing in common. To be a hypocrite is to be one person when others are watching us, but someone quite different when we are alone. Thus in Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus warns against *giving* to be seen by men (6:1-4), *praying* to be seen by men (6:5-15) and *fasting* to be seen by men (6:16-18). Each of these practices were part of the religious tradition Jesus' day and in each of them Jesus' counters the temptation of hypocrisy with a stern warning and clear teaching about the true nature of discipleship. Hypocrisy is religion to be seen by men, true discipleship is lived out for an audience of one, namely God the Father Himself.

In this study we look together at Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus' warning against giving which is intended primarily not to help the person in need but rather in order to be 'honoured by men' (6:2). The person in need is of course still helped by this giving, but as far as the giver is concerned, the hypocrite has his/her reward in full in this world while the true disciple who gives in secret will be seen and rewarded by God.

Investigate and Think

Read Matthew 6:1-4

1. What phrase does Jesus use to describe acts like 'giving to the needy'? Why does He call them this?



1. How does Jesus' teaching challenge the prevailing attitude toward charitable giving in our society?
2. In what way has this passage challenged or encouraged you?
3. How would you use this passage to commend Christianity to someone?