

# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Part 4 – how not to be religious

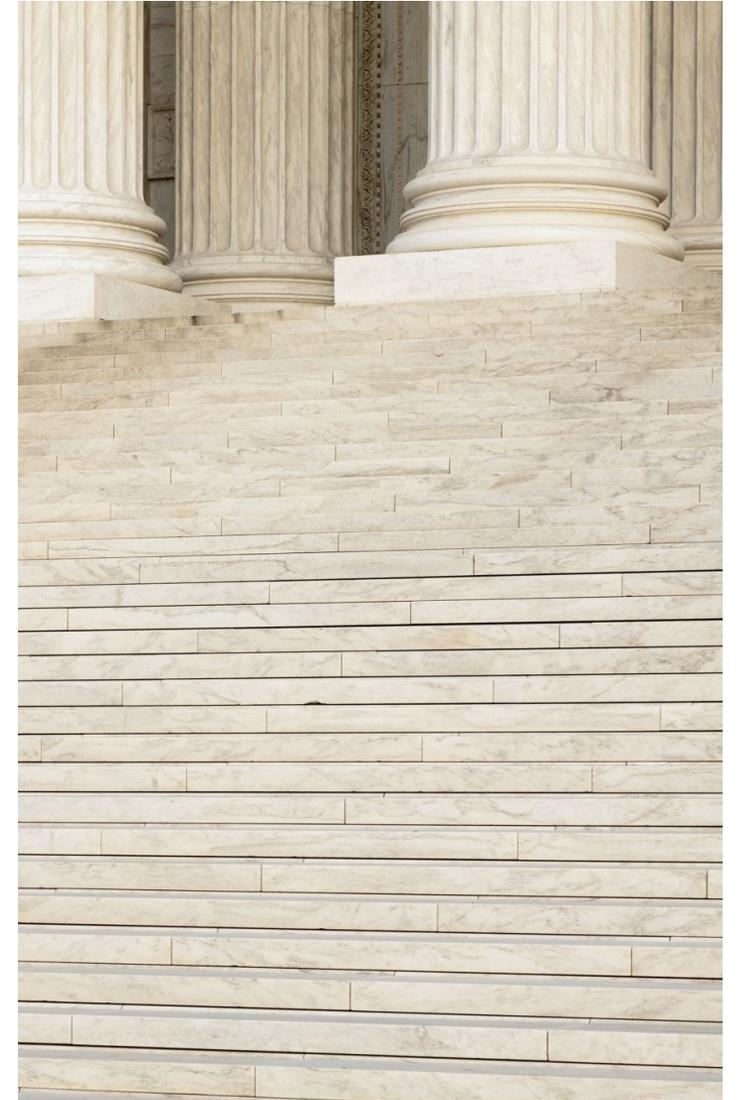
Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Based on John Stott's '12 studies for  
individuals or groups'



# AN INTRODUCTION FROM JOHN STOTT

- Not conforming to 'the world' is a familiar NT concept, but it is not so well known that Jesus also called us not to conform to the religious establishment.
- He saw (and foresaw) the worldliness of the nominal church and commanded the Christian community to be truly distinct from it in life and practice.
- In Matthew 5 Jesus taught us that our righteousness must be greater than that of the Pharisees (because they obeyed the letter of the Law), but our obedience must come from the Heart, AND be greater also than that of the Pagans (because they love each other), but our love must also be extended to our enemies.
- Now in Matthew 6 Jesus draws the same two contrasts regarding our religion. He says that we should not be hypocritical like the Pharisees and not mechanical, like the Pagans.





# MATTHEW CHAPTER 6, 1-6 AND 16-18 - ESV

- “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”.
- “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. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you”.
- “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you”.
- “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you”.





# WHAT IS 'THE WORLD'? DISCUSS!

## 1 John 4:5 (ESV)

They are from *the world*; therefore, they speak from *the world*, and *the world* listens to them.

## John 15:19 (ESV)

If you were of *the world*, *the world* would love you as its own; but because you are not of *the world*, but I chose you out of *the world*, therefore *the world* hates you.

## John 1:10 (ESV)

He was in *the world*, and *the world* was made through him, yet *the world* did not know him.

## John 3:17 (ESV)

For God did not send his Son into *the world* to condemn *the world*, but in order that *the world* might be saved through him.

## 1 John 2:15 (ESV)

Do not love *the world* or *the things in the world*. If anyone loves *the world*, the love of *the Father* is not in him.



# HYPOCRITICAL BEHAVIOURS WHEN . . .

- Giving
- Praying
- Fasting

Verse 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”.

What images come to mind when reading about the hypocrites in verse 2?

*ESV Bible Notes – the term ‘Hypocrites’ originally referred to Greek actors who wore different masks to play various roles. Jesus criticizes the religious leaders, most notably the Pharisees, for a particular form of hypocrisy: doing right things for the wrong reasons.*

*STOTT – the purpose of the lesson was to consider proper and improper motives behind religious conduct. Jesus paints a picture of the hypocrite’s way of being religious – it is the way of ostentation.*



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“Not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them” – verse 1

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But in 5:16 he said – “Let your light shine before men, so that they see your good deeds”

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Is there a contradiction here?  
How do we explain it?

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- *STOTT* – the discrepancy is only verbal, not substantial. Jesus is speaking against different sins. It is our cowardice that made him say “let your light shine before men” and our vanity that made him tell us to beware practicing our piety towards men.
- *A.B. BRUCE* – we are to show when tempted to hide and hide when tempted to show!



# WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAYS

- “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing?” – verse 3

Why is this important?

*STOTT – it is not so much what the hand is doing but what the heart is thinking while the hand is doing it!*



# PRAYING – AVOIDING HYPOCRISY!

What was wrong with the way that hypocrites prayed in Jesus's day (verse 5)

In what ways do hypocrites pray today?

Why and how is our praying to be different? (verse 6)

*STOTT – there is nothing wrong with standing to pray, for this was the usual posture among the Jews. Nor was praying on street corners or in the synagogues if their motive was to break down segregated religion. Jesus was addressing their true motive in praying publicly – to be noticed by others. Behind their piety lurked their pride. We are to close the door against disturbance and distraction to shut out the prying eyes of men and to shut ourselves in with God. Nothing destroys prayer like side glances at human spectators and nothing enriches it like a sense of the presence of God. The essence of Christian prayer is to seek God.*



*STOTT – the Greek word for the room into which we are to withdraw to pray was TAMEION i.e., the storeroom where treasures might be kept. The implication being that there are treasures already awaiting us when we pray (see Romans 5:5 and 8:16, plus Numbers 6:26).*

*STOTT – he lifts the light of his face upon us and gives us peace. He refreshes our soul, satisfies our hunger, quenches our thirst. We know we are no longer orphans for the Father has adopted us. No longer prodigals for we have been forgiven, no longer alienated for we have come home.*

# RECEIVING OUR JUST REWARD

- In what ways have the hypocrites already received their reward and why is that bad news for them?
- How do you think the reward the father will give us (verse 6) differs from the reward we receive from others (verse 5)?



# FASTING

- In verse 16 Jesus assumes that Christians will fast (although few of us do). Why and how should we fast?
- Fasting was a way that people were trying to seek the approval of others. In what other areas are we tempted to seek the approval of people rather than God?
- How can this passage help to purify our motives?

STOTT – fasting has to do with self-denial and self-discipline and can be partial or total – a voluntary abstinence from food may help to improve our self-control. First and foremost, to “fast” and to “humble ourselves before God” are virtually equivalent terms – see Ps.35:13 and Is.58:3,5). Penitence and fasting often go together in Scripture, but prayer and fasting are even more often coupled.

Although one of the refrains of this passage is “before men in order to be seen and praised by men”, it is not men with whom the hypocrite is obsessed but with himself. The remedy then is obvious. We have to become so conscious of God that we cease to be self-conscious. And it is this that Jesus focuses on.



# BIBLE STUDY NOTES:

## FROM MEETING ON 12<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2023

- Some versions of the bible have the hypocrites receiving their “full” reward – they can’t receive anything more, they have had their “fill” and stored nothing up for later
- “The world” refers to the people who do not include God in their lives
- “Truth” – where will the modern generation go for this? OAM reports that it’s the young people who are asking questions, but we need to go to them!
- Hypocrites lacked humility – “look at me!” attitude / wanting to be the centre of attention and boasting that “mine is the glory!”
- The light is that which shines on others, not on yourself
- We are living close to the Lord, so we are unaware of our own light, but others can see it – the purpose of our light is to bring praise to our father in heaven
- We are often unknowingly leading people through our example
- People that work at foodbanks often do so in the background – unseen – though they are part of the process that is giving to the needy
- Not wanting to be thanked - but God sees you!
- Hypocrites were outwardly focused – even sounded a trumpet - their real audience was not God or the people, but themselves!
- We must pray to God unaware of others around us, spontaneous and from the heart, not by rote i.e., it’s genuine – no one else is listening but God – not repeated words like an incantation which is shallow and meaningless
- Fasting is the denial of ‘pleasure’ – does not just have to be food, but back then it was all that they had which they could deny themselves

