



What Did Jesus Say About Religious Duties?  
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## OPENING

We are spending this entire year walking through the life of Jesus. Our focus right now is on His preaching as we continue in Mark Moore's Quest 52 study. In Chapter 29 we are studying Jesus' view of religious duties. The actions we take regarding them have more of an effect on our relationship with God that others may not now – but He will.

## SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>

**Matthew 6:1-13** Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you **give** to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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**. Then your Father, who sees what is done **in secret**, will reward you. And when you **pray**, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done **in secret**, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

**Matthew 6:16-18** When you **fast**, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done **in secret**, will reward you.

## OBSERVATION

In Jesus' day, He noticed that, when **giving** to the needy, some people used heavy coins that would make a loud noise when deposited in the metal offering boxes – so that their gift would be noticed by others. Their reward came from observers who honored them as righteous, generous people. He also noticed people who **prayed** on street corners in full view of others who also honored them for their godliness. Finally, some people **fasted** and

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture is NIV unless otherwise indicated.

demonstrated it openly by disfiguring their faces to look “oh so somber” – obviously indicating they had deprived themselves of something precious in order to appear holy.

**QUESTION: When have you publicly given, prayed or fasted and regretted not doing it in secret? What actions have you taken that might be considered hypocritical by God?**

### **APPLICATION**

Jesus was describing three important religious duties of that time: **1) Giving.** He demonstrates an image of what not to do in those circumstances – don’t do it publicly; **2) Praying.** Jesus says “Don’t do it publicly all of the time. Have a secret place for devotions; **3) Fasting.** Don’t look like you are doing it. He says, “Perform all three religious duties in secret!” When they are done to impress others with our generosity, righteousness, holiness and thus pure relationship with God, we have received our blessings from the world. In God’s Kingdom, those who do these things are called hypocrites. Hypocrites claim to do something or act in a certain way, but in all reality they don’t or aren’t in their hearts. What we do on the outside should speak more to what’s happening on the inside and reflect that. Today, hypocrites are pretending to be someone else in our churches and on our streets. Jesus is trying to tell us that there is a difference between what we are doing in front of people and what is actually being done. Hypocrites are faking it – doing it for the wrong reason. We should want the reflection of our inside relationship with God to be evident to everyone around us so that He receives the glory for what we do. Things like **giving, prayer and fasting** are building blocks to strengthen our relationship with God rather than extend our reach to those around us.

**QUESTION: How can you tell if your eyes are fixed on God or on someone else?**

**QUESTION: Do you think there is a hypocrite within you somewhere?**

Jesus talks of heavenly rewards, but doesn’t tell us what they are because they were never His focus. Maybe the reward is simply knowing God more and aligning what is inside of us with what is outside of us. After all, when we are saved, we have the Kingdom of God living in us right here on earth. Jesus makes a distinction between two types of rewards: **1)** He says that hypocrites actually already received theirs. They were paid in full when they received recognition from people. **2)** But Jesus’ true followers are given something deeper. It’s the **not-yet** reward.

**QUESTION: What are some rewards you would like to receive from Jesus when you get to Heaven?**

**QUESTION: How much do you seek approval of others around you every day?**

**QUESTION: Who are specific people whom you particularly want to impress?**

Jesus wants us to understand that our covenantal behaviors or religious duties, should be more inward focused. They should be building blocks for our relationship with God, not something we do for others to see and praise us. When we do all the things God asks of us, but we do them without Him, we become hypocrites – empty shells that look like what God desires, but when someone gets a glimpse behind the curtain, there’s nothing there.

**QUESTION: What other religious duties do you think you are required to perform?**

So, what can we do to change ourselves into genuine Christians? Create space and time for God. Be authentic and unmasked in His presence. Bare ourselves before the face of our Father: The pain, shame, guilt, joy, laughter, tears, heartache, and the celebration and allow Him to build into us the image of His Son.

**QUESTION: How much do you want to be more like Jesus in your family life? What can you do to make that happen?**

**QUESTION: Where would you create a space for your secret devotions? What time of day would you set aside for devotions?**

“If we never get past our need for people’s approval, we will find ourselves in a relentless pursuit of human praise. When we shift to God’s approval, we will find an ever-present and inexhaustible source of self-esteem.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quest 52 Mark E. Moore. Waterbrook Publishing. 2021. Page 189.

## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, too often we seek approval from the people around us rather than from You alone. We don't want to be hypocrites in our relationship with You, but rather we want a deeper, more meaningful closeness with our Father, the Almighty God, who loves us beyond our greatest imaginings. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **QUESTIONS**

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**QUESTION: How can you tell if your eyes are fixed on God or on someone else?**

**QUESTION: Do you think there is a hypocrite within you somewhere?**

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