

“LIVING UNDER FALSE PRETENSE”

Matthew 6:1-7, 16-18

“hy·poc·ri·sy” ... *the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform; pretense.*

Kevin DeYoung wrote this in an effort to clarify this thorny issue for believers...

Some Christians wonder if they should still go to church if they don't feel like it. They wonder if it's right to sing the praise songs if they aren't feeling worshipful that morning. They hesitate to give generously because “God loves a cheerful giver” and, well, giving doesn't make them very happy. They aren't sure they should repent of their sins or work to forgive their offender unless they feel really sorry and feel like forgiving. Many Christians fear that doing the right thing without the right feelings makes them hypocrites.... Of course, as Christians we want to grow so that we feel good about what is good. But the Christian life is full of instances where the doing and the feeling do not exactly match—sometimes with feelings ahead of obedience and sometimes with obedience ahead of our feelings.

Hypocrisy is not the gap between doing and feeling; it's the gap between public persona and private character. Hypocrisy is the failure to practice what you preach. Jesus could spot a hypocrite a mile away. In Matthew 23, He nailed the Pharisees to the wall...

Matthew 23:23–28... “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. **24** “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! **25** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. **26** “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. **27** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. **28** “So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Here’s the bottom line for those wanting a heart full of God’s presence: you must never stoop to living your life under false pretense. [Citation: Gordon MacDonald, author, speaker, *Leadership* editor-at-large, in *Leadership Weekly* (7-8-03)]

How serious is God about this problem of living under false pretense? Consider God’s Word through His prophet Amos...

Amos 5:21–24... “I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. **22** “Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; And I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. **23** “Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. **24** “But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

I hear it all the time from unchurched people—“I don’t come to church because of all the hypocrites.” I want you to know that God hates hypocrisy! Jesus drove this truth home in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, He nailed those who...

1. GAVE UNDER FALSE PRETENSE

Matthew 6:1–2... “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.

“Beware” means to take hold of something and pay close attention to it. It carries the idea of being on guard.

“To be noticed” refers to a spectacle to be gazed at.

“Righteousness” this is what God is looking for, not some kind of religious performance.

“You have no reward with your Father” indicates that God will not reward people who desire to put on a show with their religion. Why? Because they are taking usurping the glory God.

Verse 2

In this verse, Jesus goes right into a common example of hypocrisy—giving alms to poor people.

“Hypocrite” is introduced in this verse and repeated throughout this section. A hypocrite was a Greek actor who wore a mask that portrayed in an exaggerated way the role that was being dramatized.

“That they may be honored by men” this is the goal of the one who pretends to be something they are not!

“Alms” refers to acts of mercy like giving food, money, or clothing to the poor.

Matthew 6:3–4... “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.”

Verse 3

“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” This is a proverb. It means to give spontaneously with no show or no desire to draw attention to yourself. Here’s the question being addressed here —*is the attention focused on the glory of God or themselves?* Motives are the real issue!

Matthew 5:16... “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.”

Verse 4

“Your Father who sees in secret will repay you”— Listen, giving is an integral part of God’s cycle of blessing. (Proverbs 11:25; Luke 6:38)

Proverbs 11:25... The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.

Luke 6:38... “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

So, Jesus nailed those who *gave under false pretense*. Secondly, He nailed those who ...

2. PRAYED UNDER FALSE PRETENSE

Matthew 6:5–7... “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. 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.”

William Barclay mentioned several problems that had developed in the prayer life of Jews...

- Prayer (Shema) had become ritualized.
- Every occasion had its own prescribed prayer (traveling, bad news, etc.).
- Prayer was limited to specific occasions (certain times to pray).
- They valued long prayers. (Mk. 12:40)
- They used meaningless repetitions.
- They wanted to be seen and heard by others.

“Synagogues” and “street corners” were gathering places for large amounts of people. These street corners were major intersections. These religious leaders would make sure they were there for the prescribed times of prayer.

Verse 6

“When you pray” gives great freedom about the timing of prayer.

“Inner room” means simply a private place. Prayer is meant to be intimate communion with God!

This does not forbid public prayers, but it does place some serious limits on our motives when we pray publicly.

Verse 7

“Do not use meaningless repetition” refers to the intimate communion model of prayer. Listen, we have a personal relationship with the God of the universe. This reflects how we must learn to talk to Him!

Jesus nailed those who *gave under false pretense* and who *prayed under false pretense*. Finally, He nailed those who...

3. FASTED UNDER FALSE PRETENSE

Matthew 6:16–18... “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. 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 your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Verse 16

“And whenever you fast” points to fasting as an appropriate spiritual discipline that Jesus affirmed as long as it was done in the proper way and with the right motive. The word “fast” literally means not to eat. Now it could be a partial fast or a total fast. Many Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12).

“Gloomy face” and **“neglect their appearance”** point to their motives. They wanted people to know they were fasting.

Verse 17

“When you fast” indicates that fasting is to be a normal part of a believer’s life. Fasting is mentioned some 30 times in the New Testament. Nearly always it was carried out in times of testing, struggle, or trials.

“Anoint your head and wash your face” refers to good grooming.

Verse 18

MacArthur noted that “the one who sincerely wants to please God will studiously avoid trying to impress men.”

CONCLUSION

The message is clear. Jesus could not stomach public, sanctimonious displays of a person’s religion. God hates hypocrisy! What Jesus preferred was a life where we live out our faith with integrity and we do so for the glory of God! Here are some ways to avoid hypocrisy...

1. Focus on God.

Do this as you pray, as you give, and as you fast. Your faith is meant to be lived out with genuineness, and it can only be done as you focus on God!

2. Live for God’s glory.

You exist to bring glory to God and that’s why we exist as a church. God cannot be glorified if we say one thing and live something totally different.

3. Value God’s reward.

People can give you only what lasts for a temporary time. When God rewards you, it is an eternal reward! (1 Cor. 3)

4. Know that God knows.

That’s right, He knows your heart. He knows why you do what you do.

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You can't fool God. Practice what you preach!