

TO BE SEEN OF MEN

Appearances

The following verses are all about appearances. Not the, “Make sure you look good” type, but the type designed to lift oneself or one’s side up. The type whose base lies in the two big baddies: pride and covetousness.

The issues I have to cover, give me no pleasure in doing so. I do not enjoy pointing out faults, but just as Jesus said nearly 2,000 years ago, so it needs to be presented for understanding in our present society.

Let’s jump into the passages:

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: 4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. 5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:1-6

38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, 39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: 40 Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Matthew 12:38-40

These words of Jesus deal with religious issues found among the Jews, they list:

- **Charity**
- **Prayer**
- **Dress**
- **Speech**
- **Honor/Respect**
- **Covetousness**
- **Pride**
- **Showmanship**

As we read these verses, we can easily imagine the pictures of these practitioners. We can see them standing in devout looking attire, lifting up loud prayers, or other such behavior, for the world to see.

The problem with this, is we put centuries between our customs and theirs. Unless you live in Israel, or near some Jewish Orthodox community, you will never see such. These words from Matthew do not only apply to the Jews of Christ’s time, they apply to the Christians of today. Transfer the issues across to apply to use today, and we can see an abundance of these violations amongst the religious.

Charity

Matthew 6:1-4 addresses the issue of charity, otherwise called “alms”. It is important to note that these Pharisees did give to charity. They were not covetous in the sense that they never gave to help on some needed cause. They did look good in the newspaper, with their picture handing the check over to the charity representatives. Maybe they weren’t actually in the photograph. Maybe their name was on the giant check that is displayed, being handed to the recipient.

Today we see many who call themselves, “Christians” being very diligent in giving. They may even speak reproachfully of someone else they don’t see giving so much. It is these we SEE giving who are the violators of the

warning of Jesus.

No one should know how much, or to whom, we give. If we give in an offering plate, avoid checks. I have lived in small towns and know that such checks are generally processed at one of the few local banks. The people at those banks see those checks and know the giving habits of certain individuals. These bank workers talk with others and word does get around. Not only that, when the offerings are counted, there are generally two people who tally up the offering and a third who does the church’s bookkeeping. That makes three people, at least, in the church who will regularly see those “secret” checks. Why checks in the first place? Tax write-offs. We want to make sure the IRS also gives credit for our offering. Such is hardly not letting “thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth”.

The issue of charity is used for a show of religious pretence. There are those whose whole life rotates around looking religious. They really believe the religion they are following is the only true group. In promoting their religion, they calculatingly do everything to make it look good. They know the “charity” game works for a good sell. After all, it was the Shriner Hospitals that made the sell to Roy Rogers to join the Masons. The Mormons use the same techniques to pull in victims and so do many Neo-Evangelicals and Methodists, just to name a few.

Prayer

Matthew 6:5-6 and 12:40 address the issue of prayer. Standing on street corners doesn’t have quite the effect it did in that society. Also, gathering together to pray for something needed is not condemned, for that is praying in public. What is condemned, is showmanship prayer. Though there is ample of this, just listen to some public prayers, the modern variation of this is found in telling everyone how you “Pray” for this and that. You were talking with someone and told them you would pray for their situation, which isn’t bad, but for the modern Pharisee, that is a

technique used to look holy. They not only tell the person concerned they will pray, they tell others about telling them they will pray for them.

Looking at the passages we need to notice it doesn't indicate they don't pray. These Pharisees and scribes did actually pray. It wasn't they didn't pray, it was the ulterior motives that lay behind their prayers. Don't think that just because you do pray, it means you are doing a good thing. Are your prayers motivated by "holier than thou" impulses or for appearance sake? God knows the answer. If they are for these corrupted reasons, don't think they will be catered to in the courts of heaven. God may take care of the need addressed, but don't go boasting it was because YOU prayed!

Dress

Matthew 12:38 touches on clothing in the context of pride. Their "*long clothing*" was a point of haughtiness. It is not speaking of modesty or decency of any sort. Another passage that expands on this is:

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, Matthew 23:5

The "*phylacteries*" are the small leather boxes Jews bind on their heads and hands in prayer. They have scripture inside them. They are part of the Torah. The problem wasn't the wearing of these phylacteries, for that was good, it was the making them pretentious, so they looked more holy in the eyes of men. The enlarging the borders likely referred to the tassels they wore on the corners of their garments.

In many Christian circles, dress can also play a similar role. In some churches, we see a codified dress similar to that of the Old Order Amish. In a lesser manner, appropriately modest clothing is expected amongst congregations. The members dress to such a standard and can fall prey to the self-righteous, and holier-than-thou problem the Pharisees had.

Looking at a cult for an example here, we have the Mormons. We see their missionaries going out in the typical white shirt and black pants, clean cut. They do this and wear name-tags that read, "Elder Smith". Their very title speaks of this religious Pharisaical pride. They actually expect everyone to address them as "Elder". Talk about "holier-

than-thou" displaymanship. Dress isn't quite enough to get what they want, so they also have to have it written upon them! Neither dress nor name-tags literally, "make the man or woman".

Speech; Honor/Respect

Matthew 12:38-39 covers these issues. The speech I'm referring to is the hearing of salutations in the marketplaces. The honor/respect is seen in the chief seats in the synagogues and upper rooms at feasts. Such jointly speak of wanting to be recognized as a "somebody". That is why they coveted the title of "Rabbi". They wanted the focus to be upon themselves. They wanted people to think they were holy and to be had in reverence. They weren't interested in reverencing God, except in appearance to gain self-reverence.

In the Christian communities of today, we see this in too many ways. There are the obvious titles adorning many of, "Reverend, Father, Pastor, Elder and even Rabbi (Messianic congregations)." Other than titles, we see this in the way certain people are shown special "privileged" status. "She's the pastor's wife, we must do this special thing for her which sets her apart as more than another sister in the Lord." I have seen this with my own eyes.

Then again, the charity issue comes up here. Is the person who has given a large donation for some project given the seat of honor? Maybe his or her name on a plaque on the side of the new building or hall? Oh, the scriptural violations here!

What of the salutations? Such refers to greetings of honor. Of course it speaks of bearing the title, remember that doesn't just include "Reverend", it would also include "Doctor". Salutations would also include constant recognitions as being worthy of praise. Does the TRULY humble want such praise? Of course not!

What of the function of these? They speak not only of pride, but also of control. Such can, and are, used as pegs of maintaining control. If you have everyone around you granting you some special title, all you have to do against someone who challenges anything you happen to teach, is knock them down to size without addressing the issue. The title will support the, "who do you think you are", and so will all the followers who recognize the title. The issue is not addressed and you are silenced. I saw a video of such a confrontation

in the United Nations Human Rights Council. A representative of a watchdog organization stood up to the injustices and hypocrisy of the council. He spoke very accurately, and may I say courageously. The response? The president of the council insulted him and told him no more would be permitted. Any further would be struck from the minutes and the record of what was said.

Covetousness

This is addressed in Matthew 12:40 where we find, "*Which devour widows' houses.*" Remember, these are people who gave to charity and prayed. So why would they harm the widows? The widows were the helpless who had the remains of what their husbands had left them to survive on. They were easy prey. If they really cared for charity, it would start here. Their pretense for charity is solely for the sake of appearance. They know how to play the game to get their ends. Such is seen with many politicians. They want to look like they are concerned about the poor in a community, yet some tax laws are set up to rake it in for the government. I believe some of this particular law has been repealed now, but I have seen inheritance taxes strike down the security a widow had. Example: A widow has a home she owned with her husband. He dies and the taxes force her to sell her home to be able to pay the taxes on half the home she inherited from her husband. She suddenly finds herself a widow, then finds herself forced out of her home as well. Such oppressive, and wicked taxation, put through by politicians who would claim to be concerned about the poor.

Pride; Showmanship

The heart of the matter lies in pride and showmanship. Such people work hard to "make their religion look good", or so they think. They don't work in the sense of walking righteously and humbly with God. They do not hate evil, but they do want everyone to think they do. Just look at what they watch for entertainment, if you want to know if they hate evil. If they do not hate evil entertainment, you can know they don't hate evil.

This showmanship is seen in many ways. If you turn to stations such as TBN, you will hear them all talk

approvingly of each other on that network, but beware the false prophets.

If you hang around Neo-Evangelicals, you will hear them all speak praisingly of fellow members of that persuasion, but beware the sins committed under cover of darkness.

If you hang around Mormons, you will hear them likewise speak praisingly and wonderfully of the blessings of their fellowship, but beware the poison that lies there.

One other “pride; showmanship” item I want to mention is the technique of saying, “I just felt the Lord lay this burden upon me, or impressed this upon my spirit.” Now it certainly should be true that whatever message we give is that which the Holy Spirit would call for us to deliver. The item of concern, is that by making sure everyone has been notified we are “moving in the Spirit” and speaking a “thus saith the Lord”, we are either knowingly or unknowingly manipulating people. The Lord has honestly commanded some of His prophets to say, “thus saith the Lord”, but in this day, there is a great danger with so many following the “feely, feely” route. For the true saints of the Lord, in this day of so much manipulation, we need to take special care to faithfully deliver what God has shown in His Word. Expound upon it for the help of

others, but never speak in such a way we will coerce people though “impressive spiritual” sensitivity. Remember, many who are young and old in the Lord do not necessarily “feel” direction. In fact, such “feeling” can also be created by the enemy to our undoing. Now, for some of the saints, God leads by the less spectacular method of giving understanding of His Word as they meditate upon it. If your public declaration of “feeling” belittles these other brethren, or falsely impresses them, you have done wrong. If they are impressed, let it be because they see you are faithful to God’s Word in expounding upon it and following it. Remember, discernment is not feeling and feeling is part of the foundation of such groups as the Mormons - the burning in the bosom. They also utter many, “Thus saith the Lords.”

Many groups use the method we have covered to attract others to their bait, or just to look stunningly righteous. They use the techniques that have proven to be successful in the open market. Such carefully orchestrated behavior and speech will fool many. Just remember and consider the following words of Jesus:

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. 15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. 21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 7:13-23

Didn’t Jesus nail it on the head in every sentence here? It simply remains for us to take heed. Do not follow them and do not be one of them. Be one of those few who enter that strait gate.

