



Sermon: True Religion

Text: *Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18*

Preacher: *Dr. Roger Lambert*

Introductory question -

In Judaism, prayer fasting and gifts to the poor were basic components of Jewish piety. The OT is full of encouragement to be generous to people in need. The responsibility is firmly linked to the Lord's own concern for the poor and the fact that he approves of such generosity. Also, the OT is full of prayers. The first recorded prayer in Scripture - that is, the first time we overhear a person talking to God - is Adam's frightened response to God's question "Where are you?" Adam replies "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3.9-10). It is remarkable that although sin had just thrown a terrible wall between God and humanity, prayer was still possible. Lastly, God's people in the OT fasted for several reasons (see 2 Chronicles 20.1-4, Ezra 8.15-23, Nehemiah 9.1-3, Daniel 9.1-3).

Jesus' words about giving, prayer and fasting in the Sermon on the Mount points us to the truth that "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16.7).

1. In which of these three areas do you especially want the Holy Spirit to purify your motives?

Reflection questions:

1. In verse 1 Jesus commands us "not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them." Yet, in 5.16 he said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds." Is there a contradiction here? Explain.
2. What does Jesus mean when he says, "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (v.3)? Why is this important (vv. 2, 4)?
3. In what ways are we tempted to be hypocritical in our giving?
4. What was wrong with the way hypocrites prayed in Jesus' day (v.5)? In what ways do hypocrites pray today?
5. Why and how is our praying to be different (v.6)?
6. How do you think the reward the Father will give us (v.6) differs from the reward we receive from others (v.5)?
7. In verse 16 Jesus assumes Christians will fast. Why and how should we fast (vv. 16-18)?
8. 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 of God? How can this passage help to purify our motives?