

Waging War on Misguided Motives

I don't expect this column to be among the most popular I've ever written. In fact, if you are looking for **prophetic insight** into the latest trends in **spiritual warfare**, you may as well stop reading. But if you are interested in touching God's heart now and heaping up eternal recompense, then join me in pursuing the rewards of obscurity.

In the **Sermon on the Mount**, Jesus outlined three specific areas in which we are tempted to put on a show for man: giving, praying and fasting. Giving, praying and fasting should be motivated by love and an obedient pursuit of His will that comes out of that love. When we give, pray and fast with the right motive, we can be sure rewards are waiting.

On the other hand, making a show of giving, praying and fasting ultimately backfires. Rather than love and an obedient pursuit of His will that comes out of that love, people who put on a show have their reward in full. That reward is called the recognition and admiration of man. I don't know about you, but I'd rather receive God's slight nod over man's standing ovation. And you get more than God's slight nod when His kingdom purposes motivate your heart.

Are You Tooting Your Own Horn?

In Matthew 6, Jesus said, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.

"Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your

right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (vv. 1-4).

Can you imagine? The religious leaders of the day—Jesus called them hypocrites—actually sounded a trumpet to draw attention to their good deeds. Their motive was clearly to look like the hotshots of Israel. And despite how deeply they dug into their pockets, the only reward they would ever get was the attention of man. God wants no part in that pretense. The one poor widow who is willing to quietly throw two mites into the offering touches the Father's heart more than every attention-seeking **religious spirit** put together (see Mark 12:41-47).

The Attention-Seeking Prayer Warrior

Jesus then said, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to **pray** standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:5-6).

Once again, Jesus points out the hypocrites. Their motive is to be seen by men and they have their reward through those who marvel at their dedication to prayer. Or maybe their motive is to demonstrate their ability to shout the devil down louder than their neighbor so they can prove what a fierce **spiritual warrior** they really are.

I've always wondered what kinds of prayers the Pharisaical hypocrites prayed. Maybe it sounded something like this: "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11-12). God much prefers the one who cries for mercy. There's nothing wrong with praying in public; it's the motivation that matters.

Why Are You Really Fasting?

Finally, Jesus said, “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:16-18).

Every year, we see ministries call fasts. And that’s an awesome thing. There is flesh-killing power in fasting. But if we are motivated by putting our name on the church’s fasting list so others can see how we’re starving ourselves for the cause, then our motives are all wrong. How ironic that even in fasting some have fleshly rather than godly motives.

I’m Not Trying to Impress You

Beyond giving, fasting and praying, people do all sorts of things to look more spiritual, more humble, more “whatever” than the other guy. The point is this: When you do things to impress people, you have your reward. Even if you start off in obedience to God by giving away your most prized possession, if you make a big deal about it—if you make sure everyone knows what you did so you can look like a sacrificial giver—you have your reward in full.

We should ultimately be motivated by eternity. When we look at our actions through an eternal lens, we see what really matters and what really doesn’t. When we behave as if an eternal God is watching—and He is—then we become aware of what truly matters and what truly doesn’t in this life.

The rewards of man may feel good in the moment, but even man’s greatest rewards are fleeting. Ultimately, only God’s rewards can truly satisfy our hearts. That’s why I choose to pursue the rewards of obscurity. Anything that’s not motivated by love won’t last in eternity. Amen.

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