

## When Your Halo Is Too Tight - The uselessness of pride

Mt 6:1-18

Intro: To the Jew there were three great important works of the religious life as seen in these verses – charity or giving, prayer, and fasting. Jesus did not have a problem with these things in their lives, nor does he in ours, but He had or has a problem with doing them with the wrong motive.

A person may give, not to really help the person in need, but to demonstrate his own generosity so he can receive praise for doing it. For example, some people won't give unless they get their name on a wing of the hospital that is supposed to help others with healing, etc. Were they more interested in helping the suffering or getting their name in lights??

Also we can pray in such a way that our prayer is not really addressed to God, but to man. Or we fast, not really for the good of your own spiritual life, but to simply show off our self-disciplined character. You know them don't you, those holier than thou folks. Those people, church members, who claim to be so spiritual while looking down their own noses at others who are not as spiritual, as they think they are or should be.

When our halo is too tight all kinds of complications set in. It has been observed that when we wear a hat too tight, we will get a headache, *but when we wear our halo too tight we give other people a headache*. We turn people off and make Christianity distasteful. In other words don't let our halo pinch us. Keep in mind as someone noted “A halo has to fall only a few inches to become a noose”

So how can we tell if our halo is getting too tight and making others feel or look bad? Lets look at the three main points in this passage to see and remember.

I. Our Halo is Too Tight When we do Good Deeds to Attract Attention.

Mt. 6:1-4 *"Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.*

*When you give a gift to someone in need, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do--blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I assure you, they have received all the reward they will ever get.*

*But when you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.*

Did the people Jesus was talking to literally go around blowing a trumpet before they gave? Whether they did or not, who knows but, His point is clear, when you do something good don't toot your own horn. Now we can toot one another's horns but not our own. Prov. 27:2 says *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.*

Maybe the church needs a little more tooting of one another's horns, instead of having people trying to toot their own in order to feel like they are worth something. If you go around tooting your own horn to attract the attention of others, then that will be your reward.

When Jesus says, "they will have their reward" in V 2 , He uses a word from the business world. He is saying that when we do our deeds before others for the purpose of receiving their applause, that applause is the payment for our good deed. So don't expect God to reward us too.

When we do things with the wrong motive it is like God turns His back and refuses to look at our deed. It's as if He says "*why should I look at what you have done, why should I notice, you didn't do it for me, you did for yourself.*"

Look at V 3 again. *Don't reach in your pocket with one hand and raise the other in the air to let people know.* Jesus is saying that when you put your hand in your pocket to get something to give, be so secretive about it that your other hand doesn't know what you are doing.

V 3 has often been interpreted to mean that all good works are to be done in absolute secrecy. But true righteousness cannot be kept entirely secret and

should not be. Ps. 106:3 says, “*How blessed are those who keep justice, who practice righteousness at all times.*” Earlier in chapter five Jesus said, “*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deed and praise your Father in heaven.*”

When our good deeds are done for the right reasons, the attention and glory are focused on our “Father who is in heaven,” rather than on ourselves. Jesus Himself is our perfect example. He preached His messages in public, He performed His miracles of healing, compassion, and power over nature in public. Yet He always focused the attention on His heavenly Father.

So to do this, look for opportunities, take them when you find them, do them quietly and behind the scenes if possible, but whatever you do, don’t go around bragging that you did that you did them.

## II. Our Halo is Too Tight When We Pray in Order to Impress Others.

Mt. 6-5-15

What would happen if we prayed publicly and said before other people, so they could hear us, Father forgive me because I hate so and so. Or, Father forgive me because I have a terrible attitude. Or, Dear God my faith is weak and I hate it that you are doing this to me. We seldom hear any public praying like that do we??

We should not pray like the hypocrites do. Our prayers are to be a sincere matter between ourselves and God. I think of a man who loved to pray aloud. He would pray for 20 minutes and not give anyone else a chance. And in those 20 minutes if he didn’t say, I’m just a worm or shine the spotlight on me at least 10-15 times, he didn’t pray a word.

Also, standing was a normal position for prayer among the Jew during New Testament times. Did you hear about the *Three preachers that sat discussing the best positions for prayer, while a telephone repairman was working nearby. "Kneeling is definitely best," claimed one. "No," another contended. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."*

*"You're both wrong," the third insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor." The repairman could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted, "the best prayin' I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole."*

In Jesus time, prayer had to be said wherever you were at those appointed times, 9, noon and 3, even if you were walking down the street. The word used here for street is not the same as the one used in verse two, which refers to a narrow street. The word here refers to a wide, major street where a crowd was most likely to be.

The hypocrite and the Pharisee loved to pray where there was a large audience. There was nothing wrong with praying at a major intersection if that's where you happen to be. But it is wrong if they **planned to be there** at prayer time for the purpose of praying where the most people could see them.

For Jesus, prayer was a personal and private communication with God. He told His disciples to pray in private, and God would see and reward their prayers. Jesus was not condemning all public prayer, it's not wrong to pray in public, but as someone noted, it is wrong to pray in public if we are not in the habit of praying in private.

The use of meaningless repetition was a practice picked up from the Gentiles. Those who prayed to pagan gods, thought their deities first had to be awakened, then persuaded, and pestered into listening and answering them. So our halo is too tight when we pray to impress others and yet refuse to forgive those who have offended us.

F.F. Bruce observed "In the eyes of Christ a person confessing sin is nearer to true goodness than a person boasting of his goodness." The Pharisee or the hypocrite could pray wonderful sounding prayers, but they would be empty if their hearts were filled with pride, arrogance and unforgiveness. In other words their halos were so tight it choked off their hearts

III. Our Halo is Too Tight When We Fast to Appear Spiritual.

Mt. 6:16-18

Like giving and prayer, fasting must come from the right motive or it loses its value. The Jewish fasting customs were pretty simple. It was mandatory that you fasted once a year on the Day of Atonement from morning till dark. Other than that it was up to the person when they fasted.

The hypocrite would walk in amongst the crowd calling attention to himself by not having his hair kept clean, wearing torn clothes, putting dirt and ashes on his face, and some would even use makeup to look pale or sickly. The reward they wanted was recognition by men, and that reward was the only reward, they received in full and there would be no reward from God.

Jesus said that when we fast, we are to comb our hair, wash our faces, put on clean clothes and deodorant. Our fasting is to be between us and God. We should do everything to make ourselves look normal and not attract attention to ourselves. **For example** we may want to show God how much we respect him so we're going to get some new clothes for church. Not a bad idea.

However if we want to get new clothes to impress someone else, then we have lost the impression we wanted to make on God. If you want to dress up, dress up. If you dress up it is you honoring God, However, *that does not mean your neighbor who isn't dressed up, is not honoring God*

The same thing is true with fasting. If you go around make a big deal about it, your doing it for the wrong reason. Fasting is not a corporate activity. Fasting is something between you and God

Now understand, it is okay to tell people you are fasting, especially your wife, imagine if she cooks you a nice big juicy steak and you did not eat it and did not tell her why, you might be in trouble. But on the other hand, don't purposefully go around trying to look like a starving child in Africa because we certainly aren't, are we?

So Jesus directs us when he said that when we fast, we are to comb our hair, wash our faces, put on clean clothes and deodorant. Four times in this passage Jesus uses the word "secret" I think we need to take note of this.

Why? Jesus wants us to know that our relationship with God is to be deeply personal. In reality, it doesn't make any difference what we look like on the outside. The clothes we wear, the length of our hair, or how big of a Bible we carry around.

What matters is if you have a deep personal relationship with God. So if you are like most of us, our relationship with the Lord is one that has its struggles and shortcomings

Then don't get around other people and try and act like we have our life all together when secretly we don't. We could paraphrase it like this ( **BE REAL**)

**In Closing:** Halos are a invention of the imagination created by medieval artists. Our relationship to Christ and to others will become far more meaningful when we not only stop wearing our halos so tight, but stop wearing them at all.

Don't forget Verse 1 of Chpt 6 *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

**Lets finish it up with this thought:** What after all, is a halo? It's only one more thing to keep clean.