

Dr. Bill Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Lecture 9, Matthew 6:1ff, Following on the Works of Piety

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This is Dr. Bill Mounce in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. This is session 9 on Matthew 6:1 and following on The Works of Piety.

Well, we're to chapter 6 on the Sermon on the Mount.

The bulk of the discussion of at least the first section on chapter 6 is going to be on prayer but we'll just kind of plot our way through and see how we do. So, let's pray we get started. Father we're thankful for your sovereign control and oversight on all things.

On Kirsten, on the issues in our lives and the issues in our churches, and often we don't understand what you're doing, but we trust you, and when it comes to prayer, Father, would you give us perhaps new convictions and give us new ways of thinking and new ways of preaching about prayer that will encourage our people to talk with you, to communicate with you and to trust you. In Jesus name, Amen. Okay, we're on to the next major section on the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 6. The overall question of chapter 6 is not only about these first three acts of piety but also about the discussion of money and seeking the kingdom of God's words all the way through chapter 6. The real question is, who do you want to please? Who are you living for? Do you live so that you're praised by other people, or do you live so that you're praised by God? That's the overriding question, and Jesus, it's a natural movement out of chapter 5. You know the call to be different, to be salt and light.

The call to submit to his supremacy and his understanding of the Old Testament. You know, it's not like he's gone to a totally new topic, but it is a good topic on who we live for. Who are we committed to? Whose praise do we seek? Something just occurred to me. It came up in this morning's breakfast discussion about last. Let me just parenthetically say about the law. In turn, as you struggle with Old Testament, New Testament relations, and stuff the thing that one of the things that trips me up is when I see the law, I tend to think Old Testament, and sometimes the law does refer to the Old Testament normally it refers to the Mosaic law right the Pentateuch and I didn't make this point yesterday.

Paul is very clear that the Mosaic law was intended to bring us to Christ, and it is done away with, right? I mean, that is the message of Galatians, so it's frustrating that I didn't think of it. We're still under the Abrahamic covenant, which is an eternal

covenant, but the Mosaic covenant was meant to bring us to Christ, and it's done away with and replaced by the law of Christ.

If you were with Doug Moo here last time, he made his point much better than I can make it, and so those parts of the Mosaic law that are repeated in the New Testament we hold to, but none of that discussion affects major, minor prophets the writings Psalms and Proverbs that they're not part of the Mosaic law so I just wanted to emphasize that we talked about law and its effects. The Mosaic law, according to Paul in Galatians, was a temporary measure to bring us to Christ, and it has been replaced by Christ's law. So, I'd stick that and put it back into yesterday's lecture anyway and by the way one of the one of the twists on that is Sabbath because we all know that Sabbath and tithing are two of the real obvious things in the Old Testament that are not repeated in the New Testament.

The thing about Sabbath keeping is while the command is not repeated, it's written into the fabric of creation in Genesis 2, so you still have to kind of deal with the cycle of life and work and rest that God establishes in creation so just because the Sabbath commandment is not repeated in the New Testament you still have to deal with Genesis 2. Anyway, maybe that will help a bit with that conversation. All right, so who do you want to please? Who do you want to live for? Who is your praise for? Well, Jesus starts the chapter as he often does by just telling us right up front what he's talking about. Here's the thesis: be careful not to practice your righteousness, in other words, your acts of piety, in front of others to be seen by them.

There's the key. To be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

It's interesting, isn't it, that sin is so subtle and it's so deceptive that we can do the right things for the wrong reasons. We're going to look at three traditional acts of piety of giving prayer and fasting and the acts of piety. There's nothing wrong with these things, but if you do them for the wrong reason, that's what condemnation is brought about in chapter 6. Because it means the only praise you're going to get is from human beings. It's not going to be from God.

I keep forgetting where I am. I can say man here can't I? Your praise is not from man, it's from God. All right.

The whole key is the motivation. It's not that the works of piety are wrong but righteous deeds can be done for the wrong reason. They can be done in order to be seen by people.

It's the motivation. It's the heart which again which is what we've been talking about right through the back half of chapter 5. It's the heart. It's the purity in heart right that they can be done for the wrong reasons.

And what is the value of good things done for wrong reasons? You have no reward from your Father in heaven. The assumption is that we all want the reward from God is infinitely more valuable than human praise. He's saying if you do the right thing for the wrong reason you get nothing from God out of it.

No matter how much you give and pray and fast you get nothing back from God. One of my all-time favorite sermons I heard wasn't mine. It was at a church I went to in Spokane years ago, and the pastor was quite brave, he got in trouble periodically for saying things too strongly, but I always liked it.

During the week with a member of the church who was very wealthy, he made it very clear that if the church wanted to keep getting his money, they better just knuckle down or express and do what he wanted them to do. Well, he told the wrong pastor that. And so, the next sermon, we call it the stinking offering sermon.

Live in infamy in that church. And he said these words in conclusion. If you're giving money in order to control this church, your stinking money is stinking up the offering.

It's stinking up the church, and I don't want any of your stinking money. Take your stinking money and get out of here. Have you heard a sermon like that? Out there, just beaming from ear to ear because I knew who he was talking about.

And I thought, wow, man. Yeah, it was well, and it was interesting as far as I know the gentleman, and he wasn't a gentleman. He just had a real issue with his personality.

He didn't leave the church, but he may have stopped giving. I don't know. But he got the message very clearly, and he never again tried to manipulate the pastor.

In these terms, the pastor is saying if you're giving something for human praise, you don't want it. I don't want it. Just don't do it.

No praise. From God and, in this case, no praise from us. Anyway, no matter how much you give, pray, and fast, you will get nothing back from God or from Pastor Rick Porter.

So, he has three examples of traditional piety, giving prayer, and fasting, and I've got way more to talk about when it comes to prayer. So, I'm going to alter the order a little. We're going to talk about giving fasting, and then we'll come back and talk about prayer.

All right. Giving. Verses two to four.

The basic thrust is that giving should be from the heart. It should be given. Money should be given.

Alms should be given for the right reason. So, when you give to the needy, again notice the assumption that we do give to the needy.

Do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets to be honored by others. Truly, I tell you they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that you're giving may be in secret, and then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Do you have access to the giving records of your people? When I wrote the constitution for our church, I strictly forbade that. Strictly forbade it for all kinds of reasons. One was compliance with scripture.

You know, for tax benefits and stuff we talk about, someone's got to know. But I just want to. I don't remember this being my notes, which is why I'm saying it now. You shouldn't know.

I remember a very awkward situation in which, because I was unwilling to confront, I didn't do what I should have done. But I had one pastor get in the face of another pastor and say, "You don't give anything to this church." In other words, the first pastor violated the constitution and got into the giving records to see what the other staff members were doing.

What should I have done? They probably fired him on the spot. But it's, you know, you just this whole thing of giving the worst person in the world to know who is giving is the preacher. I really encourage you on that.

Anyway, okay, let me get back to my notes. Giving should be done from the heart. What are these trumpet blasts? Do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets.

Well, probably the best guess is that the place, and we know from archaeology that the place where the money was given, had receptacles that started small and came out big. They were made out of metal, and Quarles does a good job of explaining that the idea is you can't reach in and get the money, but you can give because these horns were made of metal. How much money you gave would be signaled by the amount of sound being made as the denarii and whatnot shekels went down like shekels I guess would go down into the actual container. So, Jesus, at one level, could be speaking metaphorically about, you know, so do you come into you do you I guess in modern day it is doing you do you get a single hundred dollar bill and put into the

offering or do you go get a hundred one-dollar bills and give this big wad as the offering plate goes by.

So, it's somewhat of a parallel. The other possibility is we know that there were trumpet blasts to announce feasts and different events in the religious cycle in Judaism, and I've always read that what some of these people were doing were actually having an entourage with them they would strut into the synagogue or out on start out on the street and they would have fanfare they would toot their own horns they would literally blow them to announce that a major gift was being given. Quarles says that there's no evidence for that but I don't know what else to do with the phrase on the streets.

If the horns of the trumpet blasts are only the receptacles, I don't know what on the streets would mean. So, I haven't had time to research that, but generally, those are the two things that are thinking that it was done for so much show. Lots of smaller coins are dumped in these metal trumpet-shaped receptacles, or people actually look at all this money I'm giving.

Either way, their almsgiving their giving was for human praise, and the consequence was that they were not going to get anything back from God. The Greek word hypocrites is an interesting word. It's the word well. The Greek word comes into English later English as hypocrite. It originally meant actor. It was someone who appeared to be something that they weren't. Right, and hence, it evolves into the word hypocrite, so you know these are people who give because they think the church is a stage, the money is a prop, and giving is pretense, and the goal is to impress others.

And Jesus says they've received their reward, and actually, the NLT translation is the best one here. The NLT says they have received their payment in full, and the reason that's a better translation is that the Greek word is a technical, commercial term that actually means a payment received in full. In other words, it's this is all they're going to get. Everything their praise has been given to them by people in full; there's nothing coming from God.

Again, the parallel in Luke actually makes it worse. Luke 16:15 says you are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts, for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. So, it's just not that this giving for human praise is a bad thing it's an abomination.

It's an abomination. By the way, the King James difference—we saw one of these, I think it was yesterday—openly. The King James has. Is it then that your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you openly? Is that the King James?

Is that where the openly is. I've got a foot. That's where it is.

Okay. Yeah. That's a textual issue, and the modern translations think that the Greek word openly was added later, which is why it's not there, partly because it's it really is a contradiction of the whole point.

The whole point is not to have open praise, not to have public human praise. And so to have God seeing in secret rewarding openly, if that really were the text, it'd be confusing. So, but it's a textual issue.

The best Greek manuscripts don't have the word openly. So that's why it's not there. So, in typical language for the sermon, Jesus is using dramatic speech to drive a point home because the only way for your left hand to not know what your right hand is doing is to have a lobotomy right.

So this is again this our old friend creeping up again. How do you let the strength without being simplistic in understanding it. I got to find a better word than simplistic.

You have to understand things contextually—something like that. You know, previous examples of cutting off a hand and blinding yourself.

He's still making a point. It is our motivation to be the opposite of the hypocrites. So rather than announcing our giving, we have to do whatever it takes to give for the right reasons for divine praise, not for human praise.

One of the first debates that Robin and I had when we were married was over this verse. Because she thought it was wrong to take a tax deduction on giving. Because then your left hand knows what your right hand is doing.

You're tracking your giving, and you're getting a tax deduction. Well, you're not being taxed on charitable giving, and that's not really a deduction. It was interesting.

We argued on this for almost a year, and this is one of the times I finally won. She's really sensitive to things, more sensitive than I am. So, by default, on these kinds of things, we tend to go with Robin. But I just said the deduction was important to me, but I don't think that's what the text is saying.

But it is saying give in secret. That's why I like the tradition that when they pass the offering, it's a bag and not a metal plate. Because you know the metal plate goes by, you can see what the guy next to you put in.

Have you seen the Bill Cosby routine about the offering plate? It's been ages, but basically, he was talking about how much he enjoyed going to church when the offering was taken because they put the double stick tape on their fingers, and as the

offering came by, they'd pretend to put money in and, hey, what'd you get? Hey, I got 38 cents. What did you get? As they were sticking their fingers and pulling the money out of the offering. My favorite offering is the trash receptacles in the back of the church. We didn't do that at our church.

It was a mistake. I wish, in our context I wish we had. I know that offering is an act of worship.

It's helpful when it's part, you know, worship is a cycle of revelation and response, right? Great seminar on worship on BT. If this doesn't make sense to you, really encourage it. I don't think anybody should get up and lead worship without listening to the seminar on BT on worship.

It's that good. Anyway, worship is a cycle of revelation and response. So if you don't have a clear revelation of God in your singing or your preaching, it's not worship.

If you don't enable the people to respond to what they have learned, it's not worship, all right? So, singing songs that theology is wrong is not worship. When the worship leaders are singing and no one else is singing, because it's a show, a performance, that's not worship, right? So, it comes out of Isaiah 6, this cycle of revelation and response. And so, I was always looking for ways to enable people to respond, okay? For the revelation, it was my preaching, and it was the words in the songs, which every song went past me.

I had to okay every song. The response was that we pushed the sermon earlier in the service, which nobody liked, but I didn't care because I wanted a response to the sermon, and the singing afterward was a response. The giving is a response.

The response of reading is a response, okay? So, the cycle of revelation and response. And so that's probably why we kept the offering as part of the liturgy of the service. But there are so many problems connected with it that I enjoy it when I go to churches where there's just a trashcan receptacle in the back, and that's where you put your money.

I was in one church, though, their biggest problem was they literally used trashcan receptacles built into the wall. And you see people walking around with checks going, where do I put the money? Where do I put the money? And they finally moved to some kind of pyramid-shaped thing in the back of the aisle so people could see where to give their money. But anyway, the whole point is we give not to be seen and to be praised, but we give to be praised by God.

There is nothing so important as a poor memory when it comes to giving. Forget your generosity as soon as possible. How do you feel about capital campaigns that promise that a person's name is going to go up on a wall if they give over a certain

amount of money? Yeah, where do they want their reward? On the wall or from heaven? Yeah, I haven't made up my mind on this, but I initially was very opposed to it.

I couldn't see any way that it wasn't a violation of this. On the other hand, they don't do it for this reason, but I would like to honor people. I don't know if that's right or not.

It's just one of those things. Frank would never do that here. Yeah, academic institutions and biblical training are different.

I don't know if somebody came and said, I want to give a million dollars to biblical training, but I want a page on your site that thanks me. I don't have the answer. I would really like to have to figure out the answer to that question.

So, if you've got somebody that wants to change the face of education in the majority world, give them my number, and we'll see and work with Matt, and we'll see about putting their name up on a page for a million bucks. I went to them. I used your example to motivate them, and they gave a whole lot more than I expected.

And now, some of them are coming back with me to finish the offering that you began in your book. And so, I want you to give what you promised to give, because if you don't, then I'm going to be embarrassed about telling them that people who are coming with me from Macedonia will be embarrassed because they expected so much and you're going to be embarrassed if you don't follow through. The difference with the Macedonians is that he doesn't isolate the individuals and how much each one gave.

He says the Macedonians are really generous. But if someone came to you and offered to give, and you said, would you allow me to put a page on our website about your generosity, would you agree to that? You would be using someone's generosity as an example for someone else. And that discussion actually has come up some with us, where we've received some large gifts, and when I've talked about what to do, the person says, no, I don't.

I don't want to be on your website. I don't want to be acknowledged in your newsletters. That's not why I'm giving.

We've been given \$10,000, \$15,000 at a pop and they don't want to be named. So, anyway, it's just an open question. The problem that that creates is if that person is known as a good giver and their name is put out, others will solicit.

Oh yeah, yeah, there's all kinds of problems. Really? No, no, among, I need to repeat this for the video. So, so among Southern Baptists, the general rule is no memorials.

And the point is that a man who gives a million dollars is sacrificed. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

And I just throw it out. I think it's a very interesting discussion, but we need to move on. I shouldn't have raised the money of, money with pastors.

Except, all right. Yes, you. They, they give till it hurts, but as a group they're sensitive to pain.

Yeah. All right. All right.

Let me get to the, what the really controversial thing I want to say here is, I don't think there's anything I've ever said in all my teaching that didn't create more ruckus than this. All right. You ready? All right.

My comment was, I don't believe in rewards. Boy, people got really, really frustrating. Let me, let me explain what I mean.

And then we'll just kind of talk about it because you say, how are we going to be rewarded? But what is Jesus talking about when he means rewards? And I think we would all agree that we're not talking about the kind of rewards you get from the prosperity preacher gospel, you know, preaching. It's one of the reasons the gospel is spreading in Africa. It's one of the reasons the gospel is not the whole gospel in Africa, but it's a dominant theme.

If you become a Christian, your cow will give you more milk. If you give and become a Christian, you will; your wife will not die in childbirth. I mean, there's there, this is the prosperity gospel.

In fact, if you want to, I'll say another questionable word, but I have to if you want to go on YouTube, look for John Piper crap. And I think it's his most viewed YouTube video link. Yeah, they're going to it.

And he hates the prosperity gospel, and he hates what it's doing to Africa. And he actually uses that word. That's why it's, but I mean, there are a couple of million hits on that link.

But anyway, it's, I'm not, none of us here think that they're thinking of rewards in terms of prosperity gospel, get a bigger car, a nicer house, that kind of stuff. And part of my problem in all of this is the Bible never defines the rewards. Now, there's some discussion in 1 Corinthians 3 about rewards that it's like he almost gets there, but when the reward is never defined, it makes me really wonder what the word reward means.

And sometimes, if I'm in an argumentative mood, I'll say, what do you want? A bigger house in the millennial kingdom? I mean, what? I just can't conceive of a reward. Randy Alcorn, in his book on rewards, is very good. I disagree with him, but it's a very, very good book.

He makes the point of, even if you can't conceive of what the reward is for giving in secret, there's going to be something. And so, we should be working to get the rewards in heaven. Anyway, let me split it and break it down between earthly rewards and heavenly rewards.

Earthly rewards. What's the reward of parenting? That they leave the house? No. Isn't the reward of parenting our kids' growth, our kids' maturity, and our kids coming to love the Lord? I mean, isn't that the reward? It's, you know, there's relationships and stuff, but isn't that the ultimate reward? Seeing your children walking with the Lord is the reward of parenting.

And the point is, it's the end of the process is the reward. So the reward that Rob and I get back from having Tyler, Kirsten, and Hayden is the incredible joy at watching our parenting and God's provision working out in their lives. I'm not going to get a bigger house.

I'm not going to get a nicer car. Although Tyler says if he ever has a lot of money, he's going to buy me a BMW. But, you know, the reward is not something physical or monetary or anything earthly like that.

It's the absolute joy of watching three kids become who God created them to be. My three kids are fundamentally different from each other. It's like there's three dads and three moms.

They're just so different. And we just love watching them develop and grow and nurture one another. I mean, isn't that the end? It's the end of the process is the reward.

And I think that holiness is its own reward. And as you and I grow in our maturity and learning about giving is part of that, there's great joy in that. So, what's the reward of giving? I think the reward of giving is seeing the need met.

We give to many different things. In every one, we've picked Christian causes that we think are really important. The reward that we get from giving to the Alliance Defense Fund, to Africa Inland Mission, and to all the different places that we give is seeing African Inland Missions maintain the airplanes for the missionaries to take them to the remote parts of Africa.

The reward of giving to ADF is seeing their lawyers defend religious freedom in this country. So, I think as far as the earth is concerned, the reward, when we give money to a church or whatever, the reward is seeing the need met. What else do you want? What else should anyone who gives the right reasons want? In terms of heavenly rewards, and this is the 1 Corinthians 3 passage, I know some works will be destroyed through fire.

These are the ones where the motivation was human praise. And then it talks about it. Some works will survive the testing by fire, and there will be a heavenly reward.

But what is that? Frankly, for me, sometimes I'll say no; I believe in one reward, and that is laying everything at the foot of Christ. And we're going to talk about amassing treasure in heaven this afternoon. And for Matt and me, a ton of why we do biblical training, why he's going to be involved in Freedom to Lead, to help create healthy organizational structures in churches in majority world countries.

Right, Matt? Give a plug for Freedom to Lead. Freedomtolead.net, good organization, based out of here, in this area, by the way. Using the language later on in chapter 6, Matt and I want to have a massive pile of rewards waiting for us.

We want to amass treasures in heaven. Why? Because we're told to. Why do you pastor? Because you want to amass treasure in heaven.

And I think the greatest reward is having this, whatever it is, this humongous, massive pile of treasure that you've spent your whole life working for by God's grace and saying yours. I simply can't conceive of anything else that would be a reward. So, when I look at this, what he sees and what is done in secret will reward you, but the reward that I'm expecting is no reward.

The reward that I'm expecting is for Jamie Johns to be here in class. Oh, I'm sorry. I had to say something.

The reward is seeing the need met here on earth. And whatever it looks like in heaven, being able to cast it down with all the other crowns and lay them at Jesus' feet. I mean, I do.

When people fight me on this, I'll say, what do you want a bigger house in the millennia? You want to be over 10 cities? You know, going to that parable. Why would anyone in the right mind want the administrative responsibility of running 10 cities? This is heaven, not hell. That's hell.

Administration over... I hate administration. All right. What is the reward that you are expecting? Or have you thought about it? You know, I am going to talk about amassing treasure in heaven and what that looks like and how I think we do that.

So, we'll talk about that later on. But anyway, this is... I don't know of anyone who holds this position that I hold. So, I'm in... At least I'm in an extreme minority on this point, but... I know it's kind of hard to say.

Well, I want a bigger house in the millennium. You know what I want in the millennium? I want to finally be able to sleep outside, no matter if it rains. You know, I love the outdoors, but I'm just not tough enough to take a backpack and go up to the top of Mount Hood and sleep under the stars.

And that's my idea of heaven. The idea of a bigger house is just yuck. But that's me.

I can't think of any way of saying that. Children relating to marriage. Yeah.

Marriage itself means the reward is a long and pretty reach. I'm able to report there and appreciate that. There is something that goes, but it's in a full mode.

Satisfaction: I've increased my giving in church, and the bottom line of my business is to stay the same. When can I expect it to increase? I like the idea of comparing rewards to blessings. I think that's a nice contextual way to do it.

When you look at the Beatitudes, you don't think in material terms about any of the blessings. And so, why switch here? Anyway, it's just something to think about. We will be rewarded.

So, I believe in rewards, and yes, I definitely expect to be rewarded. But it's not in any way, I believe, going to be reflective of what the world thinks on earth the reward would be. I'm going to go with blessing.

The reward is what we lay at Christ's feet. That we say, the reward is, I died exhausted, I've done what you've called me to do, and I did it joyfully. It's given me great pleasure, and I believe it's given God great pleasure.

And that is the reward. Knowing that we've done what we're called to do, we've done it well, we've done it joyfully, and we have earned our Savior's smile. Have you seen that picture? I think it's called Journey's End, and it's kind of a beat-up teenage kid, kind of just exhausted, falling into Jesus' arms.

Have you seen that picture? Yes, yes. This is the artist that draws things with, there's lots of stuff in the shadow in biblical meaning. So, like there's a picture of a young pastor, and underneath it talks about we're surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, and then they fade in, all these Old Testament saints in the background.

Have you seen that picture? Okay, it's the same artist. Probably my favorite of his pictures is, if you're the artist, it's the back of a dad kneeling, praying over his little boy's bed, and in the background you can see the angels keeping off the demons. Have you seen that picture? Dominant colors blue.

My son has it tattooed on his shoulder. That's why every time I see him, I'm reminded of that picture. Anyway, I think the reward is the joy of pleasing God, of responding to Him, of having grown up, and seeing the prayers answered in ways that advance the kingdom.

I think that's basically what the reward is. Yes, I think about that old song, Thank You for Giving to the Lord. Yeah, yeah, I love that song.

I think about the joy of seeing people whose lives have changed because of all that God has made for them in this life. I guess I've never looked at it quantitatively. Do you all know that song? It was the annual song for the CMA's annual giving thing years ago.

But, you know, thank you to the Lord, and it tells a story about a man's in heaven, and someone comes up to him and thanks him. And I don't remember the exact words, but it was basically, you know, I don't know who you are. He said, well, when the missionary came to your church, and you gave, that money enabled him to come and see me, and I was saved.

I like that. That would be another thing I'd want to use. I often tell people, people, why do you and Matt and Ed make biblical training free? It makes it really challenging when there's not a revenue generating side.

And part of my answer is, like, so I guess this is a reward. I want to run into hundreds of thousands of people in heaven. And they'll say, you know what? You provided my soul education.

You trained me to preach the gospel. So let me show you the 10,000 people that came to the Lord because of my ministry, which would have never happened if you had not sent that micro SD card to Africa and given me a free education. So I think that's another way.

That's it. I need to write that down—thankfulness in heaven.

Ray Boltz. Thank you. Yes. Hmm. Hmm. Yeah.

It's a great song—it really is. OK, let's look at fasting real quickly because I don't have a whole lot to say about it.

And then we'll take our first break. The third act of piety is in verse 16. So, skip down there, please.

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly, I tell you, they have received the full reward. The only reward they're ever going to have is human praise.

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting. But it will only be obvious to your father, who is unseen. And your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Now, the disclaimer is I've never fasted. It's not something I've ever felt conviction to do. And so, it's a little hard for me to teach this with any conviction.

Certainly, it was impossible for me to preach it with conviction. So, what I did when I preached this passage is I went through the data and then I had my older son come up. And Tyler does fast on a regular basis.

And so, I had him close out the sermon. And so, just as a disclaimer, this is not something that I have personal experience with. I think, though, of the stuff that I've looked at, John Piper's book, *A Hunger for God*, is probably a very good book on fasting.

And if fasting is something that's important to you, I encourage you to look at it. In fact, in biblical training and seminars, John gave us his seminar on fasting. It's called *Prayer, Meditation, and Fasting*.

So, if you'd rather hear John teach on it, you can get to it through biblical training. What an amazing site. It's just amazing.

Oh, they're looking for human praise. What is fasting? Fasting is depriving yourself of food, but generally not water, for a set period of time. Depriving yourself of food, not necessarily water, for a set period of time.

In the Bible, there are many different kinds of fasts and many different reasons for fasts. There are corporate fasts, you know, National Day of Atonement. When there was a threat of invasion, they fasted. The church at Antioch fasted before sending Paul.

There are many corporate fasts and individual fasts. Jesus is the most obvious example.

You have Paul fasting when Jesus struck him blind on the road. A lot of individual fasts. And lots of different levels.

There appears to be a partial fast, like Daniel, who was a vegetarian, who really restricted his diet. Certainly Jesus, 40 days in the wilderness, had to have drunk water. That would not have been a complete fast.

But it appeared that Esther did have a complete and total fast of everything for three days before she went to see the king. So, lots of different fasts in the Bible, New and Old Testament, for a lot of different reasons. But what is fasting not? Sometimes it's so much easier than defining what something is, it's easier to define what it's not.

I would argue, number one, that it's a biblical practice but not a biblical command. It is a biblical practice. We see it all over the place.

But it's not a biblical command. Jesus fasted once, as far as we know, and not again. The disciples didn't fast until after Jesus' death.

I think the statement in Matthew 9:15 about the bridegroom is not a command that we fast after the bridegroom's gone, but it's saying that's what's going to happen. But we're not going too fast now. Now is a time of joy.

There's no place for fasting. But anyway, it is a biblical practice, not a biblical command. Number two, biblical fasting is never done for physical reasons.

I dated a girl for a while in college who wanted to have a quote, biblical fast to detoxify her body. And from what I understand, fasting is the worst thing you can do because your body goes into shutdown mode, builds up more fat, and doesn't get rid of anything. Fasting is never biblically for physical reasons.

If you need to lose weight, lose weight. Don't call it a fast. Thirdly, and probably most, well, very importantly, biblical fasting is never done because we think the body is evil.

Now, that's part of secular fasting in other religions. It's the dualism that because the body is material, it's inherently evil. The spirit is who I really am.

And a lot of fasting in other religions has to do with the denial of the flesh to, in a sense, release the real me, the spirit. Well, that is as unbiblical as it can be. We are body and soul, combined at conception, temporarily separated at death, and reunited permanently at judgment.

And so, we're not; the body is inherently evil, and the real me is not the spirit. So, you've got verses like in 1 Corinthians 4, Colossians 2, that assert that all things that God created, if they're taken with thanksgiving, are good. Alright? So, I enjoy thinking about some of the implications of these things.

One of our best friends, his son, is one of the premium pot growers in Vancouver. And he specializes in really, really high-grade marijuana. And he was doing this long before it was legal.

And he came up in Sunday school once. It was really interesting. He said, you know, we used to know that pool halls were evil.

We used to know that movies were evil. We used to know that dancing was evil. We used to know that drinking was evil.

We used to know that pot was evil. Is pot evil? And the answer has to be, no, it's not. All things created by God are good.

But just like red meat has to be consumed properly, so also pot has to be consumed properly. My friend's son said he's had examples where people have come to him where their children have had like 20 epileptic fits a day. He uses pot as a chemical liquid and just puts one drop in their hand, and all convulsions go away for the day.

God created. This is not a man-made thing. It has to be used properly.

Opiates. Incredible pain reducers, right? We tend to use them. Well, we don't.

Other people tend to use them improperly. But they're there for us. How did Native Americans deal with headaches? They chewed the bark of a tree.

I think it was the aspen tree. You should know that. Why? Because God put medicinal value in the bark to take care of pain.

So, everything that God created is good. We have to use it as God intended. For enjoyment, it's probably not how God intended it.

Well, it's definitely not. But the body is not bad. Food is not bad.

Nothing that God created is bad. So, when people fast because of the inherent idea that evil, what is material, is bad, that's about as non-biblical as you can get. Yeah, there's monasticism in the history of the church that was really wrong.

It was based on the dualism that the body was inherently evil and the spirit was inherently good. That's pure Platonism. It's not biblical at any level.

But yeah, there's a lot of... I mean, I have other issues with the monastic kind of asceticism because they're no longer in the world. And that's a whole other issue. Anyway, so number three is Christian fasting is not because the body is bad.

Number four, and this is the issue in our passage, and that is Christian fasting is never an opportunity to impress. Only one corporate fast a year is required in the Old Testament. Pharisees fasted twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays.

They would disfigure their faces. It's a very strong word in Greek. It means, oh, I walk around the streets.

Oh, look at me, how religious I am. They made themselves almost unrecognizable. Facial contortions, not performing normal hygiene, ashes on their heads.

Then the solution is, don't do that. What is your motivation? Do it for God. Now, Piper's closing question is an interesting question.

That is, are you willing to do whatever it takes to grow in your hunger for God? Am I willing to do whatever it takes to grow in my hunger for God? Am I willing to give up anything if doing so helps me love God more? Perhaps we should fast from our consumerism. Perhaps we should fast from our consumption. I had a fascinating discussion with a group of people about the book. Oh, what's it called? It's about living a simple life.

Pastored down here somewhere. What was it? Anyway, they were talking about giving to homeless people, giving away their homes, and living in apartments. Usually, when we have these kinds of discussions, it means that nothing is ever accomplished.

Because everything is so big and grand, it's kind of out of the realm of possibility. And I just said, you know, Randy Alcorn had an interesting comment about fasting from our, well, he's talking about fasting, but he's talking about money. He said, how much money should we give? We should give away enough money so there's things we want to do that we can't.

So, when I think about fasting from consumerism, fasting from consumption, one place my mind does go is, okay, Robin and I sit down, get our taxes, look at how much we give, and say, okay, are we giving enough so that there are things that we want to do that we can't? I think it's a great guide for giving. And it fits into this discussion of fasting. Let me close with this, and then we'll open it up.

I had a friend who was very heavy, probably 100 pounds overweight. And we moved to Boston, came back four years later, and I looked at him, and I said, you're not half the man you used to be. Because he literally was not half the man he used to be.

And I said, how did you lose 100 pounds? I didn't say 100, but that's what it was. How did you lose so much weight? And he said, I just had to decide that food wasn't my god. That's a great way to think of fasting, I think.

And it answers John's question, am I willing to do whatever it takes to increase my hunger for God? Well, what are the gods in my life? Because there's only room for one, so I need to give up the other false gods. And if food is a god, if the need to feel full so propels you to destroy your body, God's temple, then maybe you do need to fast from food by telling yourself, the food's not my god. Just an illustration.

When I'm sitting there staring, I'm a browser, a grazer, that's what my wife calls me. I don't eat a lot at any one meal, but I'm always going by the cupboards. So she hides food from me.

I'm 62 years old, don't hide food from me. Just don't buy it. I'm not strong enough to not eat it.

I am strong enough not to buy it, so if I'm not supposed to eat that trail mix, please don't buy it, don't hide it from me. But I'll be standing there, and I'm looking at the trail mix; I just need to confess, and so when I eat food I'm not supposed to, I have to tell my wife. So, I say, okay, if I eat this, I'm going to have to tell Robyn, she's going to be disappointed.

But what I finally do is say, okay, food is not my god. I don't have to feel full. I don't need to worship the sensation of the taste on my tongue.

And this is what overeating is, right? If it's a good day and I'm strong, I shut the door. If it's a really good day, I pick it up and throw it away. Comments on fasting?

Yeah, that's one of the arguments that I'm wrong. It says, when you fast. It's done against a context, though, where everybody fasted.

Maybe not twice a week. But it's kind of like if I were saying, when you speed, I should look at the Prius driver. When you speed and run red lights, don't complain when you get a ticket.

See, that wind doesn't tell Dave if he has to speed or run red. He actually didn't run a red. It was slightly amber.

When he put his foot down, oh, it's the friend you gave me. It's he who gave me the fruit.

Yeah, that never worked. Never has worked. So, that is an argument.

The counter argument is, when isn't imperative. It's just saying, when you do this. If, when.

Let me see what the Greek is, just a second. 17. It's just a participle.

Actually, that makes it stronger. But you, fasting, anoint your head. But it's probably temporal.

But it's not imperative. Yeah, I mean, it's an argument that I'm wrong. I grant that.

I grant that. Let me close quickly with this story. I was at a faculty meeting at a school once.

I won't tell you which school. And I came in late. And the person that taught the spiritual formation class was giving the devotion.

And what I heard was, in my last 40-day fast, here are the things that I learned. Yeah, I went, oh. And I sat down next to a friend.

I listened to the guy speak for a bit. Then I leaned over to my friend and asked, "Are you uncomfortable?" And he said, "Yes, I'm extremely uncomfortable." I should have been.

The joke is that when I told that story, I preached that part of the sermon, I told the story of, you know, in my last 40-day fast, I walked down, Tyler walked up, and in very professorial tones, he goes, well, in my last 40 day fast. And if the church was over at that point, they were laughing so hard, they could hardly even listen to him. And he stole the show.

But yeah, I was very uncomfortable. Listening to a spiritual formation professor brings attention to the fact that this is one of his many fasts and that it's a 40-day fast; it's so much easier to say, you know, I know some of you fast; some don't.

It is a spiritual discipline and I've chosen to practice. Let me share some things I've learned. See, that's great.

It's non-self-congratulatory. You can still convey the information. How different from, well, my last 40-day fast.

He was wrong to do that. Okay, let's take a break, and we'll get to prayer. Let's do it when we come back.

Yeah, we'll start with comments when we come back.

This is Dr. Bill Mounts in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. This is session 9 on Matthew 6:1 and following on the Works of Piety.