**Purity of Heart in Worship**

Based on [Matthew 6:1-21](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt6.1-21)

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Ash Wednesday

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The appointed gospel for Ash Wednesday is Jesus famous words about hypocritical worship from the Sermon on the mount. He warns us, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Jesus has a lot to say against hypocrisy. It’s probably the sin he condemns most. When he rebukes murderers and adulterers, he rebukes those who believe they aren’t murderers and adulterers. You think murderers and adulterers don’t deserve forgiveness or love, well you who are angry with your brother are a murderer. You who think about another person with lustful thoughts are an adulterer too in the heart. You would have God condemn the murderer and adulterer? Then he would condemn you. Judge not, lest ye be judged…for the measure by which you condemn others so will you be condemned.

There are two reasons for Jesus’ condemnation of hypocrisy. First is to convict sin. God’s Law is like a holy mirror that shows you how you really look. We would use it to judge others, but it’s first and most important use is for us to judge ourselves. Jesus says, why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **4**Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? **5**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

The worst sinner you know is yourself, because you are acquainted with all your sins of the heart. And were it not for the precious blood and innocent suffering and death of the son of God, we would be eternally condemned to hell for a debt we could never pay off. This does not mean that we should never judge or correct anybody. We will judge the angels. It does mean that you should judge and correct yourself first, and more harshly than others. A haughty eye is despised by the Lord, but a humble and contrite heart He will not despise.

The other purpose of Jesus’ teaching here is to giving instruction to his disciples and saints. Jesus says, “**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God**.” How do you keep your heart pure? How can you know if you are serving God or yourself? Jesus gives instructions in this. He says, in order to keep your heart and motives pure, beware of practicing your righteousness before others, in order to be seen by them. And he gives three examples of how not to do this. : Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting. Do these things in a way that you will not receive any earthly reward for it. Then you can be sure your reward is in heaven.

First when you give alms, don’t do it for a reward. If you receive a worldly benefit for it, you have to question the purity of your motives. In the hospital, there are many bricks in the lobby with donors names listed on them. Anytime there is an event in town, there is a list of sponsors. I have even seen, on communionware, and church furniture such as altars and pulpits, engravings of dedications in the memory of someone. They receive a reward, increased business and standing in the community, recognition before men. Those who receive acknowledgment from the world are rewarded by the world.

So Jesus says, if you give to the needy, don’t let anyone put your name on a billboard in the hockey arena for it. If you truly wish to help the poor and thereby entertain angels unawares, give without letting anyone know. That is true charity, and if it is done for the sake of Christ and in order to deny yourself, then your reward cannot be on earth, it must be in heaven.

Next Jesus addresses prayer. In the church, at the dinner table, at the wedding or funeral reception there are public prayers. These prayers, if done in the Spirit of God and in accordance with his word, are pleasing to God and effective. But the fact remains that prayer by appointment or in front of others is a display. And there is thanks and praise from people for praying a good prayer. Those who receive thanks and praise from men have received their reward from men.

So Jesus says, in order to make sure your heart is pure, pray in secret. Go home, shut the door. Do not advertize but pray to your Heavenly Father for those things which trouble you. No one who prays in secret does so for earthly benefit, or to use godliness as a means of gain. If you pray in public, it can be for show. Therefore be sure to pray in secret then you know that it is for repentance and heavenly reward.

Fasting is not as common a Christian practice as it perhaps used to be. Not many people fast in the religious sense. However, it is not uncommon for people to fast for a cause. Fasting for cancer, fasting for world hunger. Also, people who wish to lose weight, intentionally eat less and reduce their calorie intake. That is a sort of fasting for diet. In Jesus’ day people would fast in order to mourn…and the hypocrites would advertize the fact that they were fasting so people would feel sorry for them and congratulate their piety.

So Jesus says, when you fast do it in secret. Fasting is to renounce your belly as god, that you may rather hunger and thirst for righteousness.

As a US citizen, I have to file taxes in the US every year, even though I live and work in Canada. The rule is that if Canada taxes what I make, then the US wont tax it. But if Canada doesn’t, then the US will tax me. This means that I can never have a tax-free savings account in Canada…because if Canada doesn’t tax it, the US will.

So too, everything you do is for some purpose, some reward if you will. And scripture makes sure you cannot serve two masters. If you receive your blessings from the earth, then there is no blessing in heaven. Just like if you pay taxes in Canada, then your taxes don’t go to the US. You do not serve two masters. Therefore, choose who you will serve. Choose to serve the Lord, and have no regard for earthly treasures. They may come and go, but righteousness before the Lord is worth more than all the kingdoms of the world. And it is yours, not because of your fasting, giving, prayer or other self-denials and good works, but because Christ prepared that treasure for you there. And when you serve him, your life is forfeit to God…it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. The ashes on your forehead remind you that you are a corpse according to the flesh, but have been resurrected with Christ according to the Spirit, to walk in the newness of life and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.