

## Lesson 12

# Righteousness That Surpasses the Scribes and Pharisees - Part 7

Key Scripture Readings: Matthew 6:1-7, 16-18

### Summary

- Practicing their “righteousness” before others was another ungodly practice in which the scribes and Pharisees were guilty. The core to this problem was found in the hearts of these wicked men. There are times when people must engage in religious practices and good works before others, but these men did them with evil intent. They were more concerned with impressing men than the Lord (Matthew 6:1).
- Some scholars believe that the elite Jews of the first century would often literally “sound a trumpet” when giving to the poor (Matthew 6:2). They would do this to call the poor to them so that others could witness their giving and praise them. By saying, “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” Jesus is using a figure of speech to teach disciples not to give to impress others (Matthew 6:3-4). Followers of Christ should give to bless others and please God. They should not give to impress and show off before others!
- In the first century, the Jews would offer certain prayers at prescribed times each day. This meant that if one timed things correctly, they could be in a public place when praying. They could be in the marketplaces or on the street corners showing how religious and devoted to God they were (Matthew 6:5a). Jews would even engage in this practice in the temple. Jesus speaks of a tax-collector who wanted others in the temple to see him pray and honor him for being so “righteous” (Luke 18:9-12). Praying to impress others does not please God (Matthew 6:5b). Prayer is something that a person must do to pour their heart out to God and draw closer to Him. It is to focus on God, not on promoting our piety before others (Matthew 6:6).
- In addition to the scribes and Pharisees, the Gentiles also had wrong prayer ideas (Matthew 6:7). They felt that if they prayed enough to their gods, they would eventually be given whatever they desired. Jesus condemned their concept of mindless prayers. Prayer is not something His people do to trick God into giving them whatever they want.
- Fasting was a big part of Jewish life in the first century (Matthew 4:2; 6:16; Mark 2:18). While the Old Testament Law only commanded one day of fasting (Leviticus 16:29-31), in the time of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were fasting twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays). Fasting was supposed to be something done to help someone give extra focus and attention to God. Sadly, the corrupt leaders were parading their fasting and using it to promote their “righteousness.” Jesus condemned their behavior (Matthew 6:16-18).

## Study Questions

1. Why can seeking praise and honor from men be tempting? How can we avoid caving to the temptation?
2. List some practical ways in which we can be guilty of “sounding a trumpet” when giving to the less fortunate. What does Jesus say about this kind of behavior?
3. List some practical ways in which we can be guilty of praying to receive praise from men. What does Jesus say about this kind of behavior?
4. List some practical ways in which we can be guilty of praying like the gentiles of Jesus’ day. What does Jesus say about this kind of behavior?
5. What did fasting often involve in Bible times? Is fasting commanded under the New Covenant? What are some benefits of fasting? What warning does Jesus give about fasting?
6. In this section, is Jesus teaching that it is wrong to engage in religious practices publicly? If not, what is the main thing that He is teaching?
7. What kind of reward will God give the disciple who focuses on Him first? Why is it easy to lose sight of this reward? How do we stay focused on receiving it?