

**Mt. 6:2b:** *as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.*

*Hypocrites* are generally not too concerned about who hears or sees their *righteousness*. Here Jesus expressed this fact with the words “*synagogues*” (*sunagoge*) and “*streets*” (*rhume*). The Lord knew some want the “*glory of men*” (*glory—doxazo*—is also applied to God in Mt. 5:16) and will do almost anything to get it. All who seek personal glory instead of glorifying God (Mt. 5:16) are *hypocrites* who “*have received their reward*” (compare verse 5).

Back in the early 1900’s, some pieces of papyri were discovered in the dry sands of southern Egypt. These papers, which were actually receipts, illustrate how the word *have* (*apecho*) was a “technical expression used in drawing up a receipt, meaning ‘paid in full,’ and regularly appeared at the bottom of the receipt” (Hawthorne, Philippians, p. 206). Perhaps this explains why the NIV translated Mt. 6:2 as: “*have received their reward in full.*” By using the word *have* and expressing it with the present tense, Jesus meant those who make a show of their faith not only have their “card stamped,” they have “their card stamped full” and have no expectation or right to receive anything else. “They have in hand the receipt for what they have supplied” (Spicq, 1:164).

Luke (6:24) also used the word translated “*have*” in his account of the Sermon on the Mount, but he used it to say the “*rich*” (a metonymy for the unsaved) have no hope beyond this life (compare Lk. 16:19-26). If people are not in a right relationship with God, this life and all that goes with it (possessions, status, power and popularity) are all they will ever have. Apparently some memories (Lk. 16:25, 27) will survive this life, but the unsaved will suffer unending punishment (Mt. 25:41) and experience a total loss in the hereafter.

**Mt. 6:3-4:** *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: 4 that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.*

These verses build upon the preceding two. Stated another way, *hypocrites* sometimes give to others (verse 2) in order to receive praise from men (verse 1), but members of God’s kingdom (the church) live in a much different way (verse 3). The saved live to fulfill God’s will (verse 4).

Saying the “*right hand*” should keep knowledge from the “*left*” is logically impossible. This is figurative speech, just like “*cutting off a hand*” and “*plucking out an eye*” in Mt. 5:29-30. Here the point is *give in such a way where we expect no appreciation, credit or recognition*. God’s people are to give willingly **and** be willing to remain completely anonymous. It is not wrong if others know about our giving (Mk. 12:41-44; Acts 4:36-37; 9:36-39; Mt. 5:16). Trying to tell others what we have done is wrong. We are to be the opposite of the Pharisees (compare Lk. 18:11-12).

The word “*secret*” (*kruptos*) “objects to the practice of charity by the pious intended for public recognition” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:323). Brown (2:216) said Jesus condemned the “*type of piety which sought to make a display of itself (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18)*” and illustrated this fact by the *right* and *left* hands. While not the Lord’s primary point, *seeing in secret* is a reminder of God’s omniscience (He knows all, Prov. 15:3).

Kendall (p. 190) noted how it “is wrong to keep a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians

13:5—which means throwing up the other’s past mistakes. It is equally wrong to keep a record of rights—that is, registering when you have done a good thing.” On the following page Kendall fittingly asked, “Who gets the credit? Who said it first? Who gave the money? Who had that idea? Who prayed for the healing? Who brought enemies together? Who was the mover or shaker that made this or that happen? Do you insist on getting the credit? Or can you wait until God’s ‘then’? Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

One man who violated the Lord’s teaching asked for a meeting with the elders of his local congregation. After some pleasantries were exchanged he took out a check and showed the elders “how much he would be giving.” Others have done a similar thing by giving a check to the local preacher and slyly saying, “Please give this to the treasurer.” God “looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7); “when we give” (Mt. 6:1-2), don’t make a show of it (Mt. 6:3-4).

If we give in the proper way, we will be rewarded (verse 4 and see the study on *rewards* just prior to the commentary on Mt. 5:48). The ASV describes this reward (*apodidomi*) with the word “*recompense*.” Brown (3:135) said this verb “has its home in the NT expectation of judgment and punishment.” God will *reward* all people (see the discussion on Mt. 24:45-47 in section 33 of this commentary) but not all *rewards* will be desirable (compare Rom. 6:23).

The KJV has the word *only* (*phaneros*) at the end of the verse as well as verses 6 and 18 because of a manuscript variation. Whichever rendering is accepted, the key point is a “certain reward” will come from God (2 Cor. 5:10) and it will be perfectly just.

**Mt. 6:5:** *And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.*

The Jews had three set times for daily prayer (compare Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10; Acts 3:1; 10:9). Not all Jews prayed “as *the hypocrites*” (this term is discussed in the introductory commentary on verse 2), but some did. There were people who “*loved*” (*phileo*), a present tense verb, to “*be seen of men*” (impress others) when they *stood* and prayed. Others (compare Lk. 18:9-14) wanted to impress God. This verse illustrates the wrong way to pray and verse 6 tells us the right way to pray. The so-called “model prayer” is then given in verses 9-13.

To *be seen* (*phaino*) described “a role that one plays before men” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 852). *Streets* (*plateia*) is the feminine form of the adjective used in Mt. 7:13 (there Jesus spoke of the “broad” way). Here, *streets* suggests very public places where large groups of people would be found. One can easily imagine how a “devout Pharisee” would pretend to be accidentally caught in a high traffic area such as a corner at the time of prayer and “refuse to let the public deter him from praying to God.” Praying at specified times is not wrong; praying to impress others (compare Mk. 12:40) is.

Jordan (p. 83) said: “To the pagans, God was a celestial landlord who had to be worried into fixing things up for them. They made sure that God was informed (in high-sounding, dignified language, of course) of the terrible mess that his earthly estate was in and how badly that part of it in which they lived needed patching up. They had either too much rain or too little; it was either too hot or too cold; their rent was too high, their

income too low; their job was good, but the boss was bad; profits were wonderful, but labor was terrible; things were getting scarce, and a war was coming on. For goodness' sake, couldn't God do something about this creation of his?" Showy prayers may impress men, but God always knows the heart. Those who pray or do other things to be seen and honored of men have "*received their reward*" (this expression is discussed in the preceding commentary on Mt. 6:2b).

Although perhaps not a prayer, Jesus' teaching against seeking attention and prominence may also be applied to those who publicly say things like "praise the Lord" and "thank you Jesus" multiple times a day. Such repetition would seem odd if it were done with the word *love* (imagine a spouse or anyone else saying to their mate *I love you* dozens of times each day). Repeated public pronouncements such as *thank you Jesus* may indicate some desire to *be seen of men* or fall into the category of *vain repetitions* (Mt. 6:7).

**Mt. 6:6a:** *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door,*

In contrast to hypocrites who pray to be seen of men (verse 5), *righteous* people (Mt. 5:20) properly *pray* by entering into their "*inner chamber*" and *shutting* the "*door*." The word *when*, in contrast to *if*, implies prayers are an expected part of the Christian life. Additionally, the verb *pray* is expressed with the present tense and the verb "*enter*" is expressed with the imperative mood (it is a command).

The translations "*inner chamber*" (ASV) and "*closet*" (KJV) are based on a single term (*tameion*) which is found only here, Mt. 24:26; Lk. 12:3, 24. This word meant storeroom or "an innermost room or secret room, a kind of private office where passersby could not look in to see what one was doing. As a storeroom it was where one kept his most prized possessions. The treasure of prayer was appropriate to be kept there as well" (CBL, Matthew, p. 107). Whedon (Matthew, pp. 91-92) said, "not only may we be in our *closet*, our *closet* may be in us."

The word *shut* (*kleio*) described the closing of a door and may be understood "both literally and figuratively. Believers may actually enter a room and 'shut' the door, or they may simply find a 'private place' in which to commune with the Father" (CBL, GED, 3:351). A "closed room" is where someone can "shut himself away from every disturbing or distracting influence and be alone with God (compare Mk. 1:35). There would be no one present to criticize the wording of the prayers, and it would be easier for the believer to pour out his heart" (CBL, Matthew, p. 107) because prayer "is too serious to be done in pretense" (ibid).

It is not uncommon for many to now have a private place in their homes to do things. Such was often not true in the first century or even now in some places. Many have lived their entire lives in single one room homes. Cabins have had no walled off rooms. Others have lived in tepees or tents. People in one room dwellings can still "pray in their closet" because Jesus' point is about attitude rather than absolute privacy. Complete privacy can be helpful and perhaps preferable but not essential.

A story is told about an elder (Tit. 1:5-9) who built a "prayer room" adjacent to his house. Each morning he went there to pray. After a well-known preacher heard this brother pray he said, "I would have traveled all this distance just to be a part of that prayer." The following comments come from Jordan (p. 82) and Ryle.

"You may feel that you cannot follow Jesus' teaching here, for you have no private

place of prayer. 'I don't have a private room,' you say. Neither did Jesus; he didn't even have a bedroom (Matthew 8:20). But you can be alone with the Father even with other people around you. Your heart can signal quiet messages of prayer to the Father even while you ride a bus, while you are at work, while you are in school. And you can sometimes find those private places Jesus found—a wilderness (Luke 4:42), a mountaintop (Matthew 14:23), and a garden (John 18:1). No job, no city wall, no busy engagements kept Jesus away from these private places of prayer." Ryle (Matthew, p. 47) pointed out how it "is not enough to join in the prayers of the congregation on Sundays, or attend the prayers of a family on week days: there must be private prayer also."