

THE NEW NORMAL

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Jesus, having told his disciples of all the negative things that could pull them away from living a life in the Kingdom of God, now warns them of the danger of religious hypocrisy. He warns them of all the “good” things, when wrongly focused on, could pull them away from walking in the Kingdom of God. In Matt 6:1 they are told *Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.* The Revised Standard Version says, *Beware of practicing your piety before men.* The New English Bible says, *Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men.*

To do “righteousness” is an expression found elsewhere (Psalm 106:3; Isaiah 58:2; 1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10). Jesus is not so much dealing with a different kind of righteousness, or with mere acts of righteousness, as with the motives behind righteous living. D A Carson says “To attempt to live in accord with the righteousness spelled out in the preceding verses, but out of motives eager for men’s applause, is to prostitute that righteousness.”

Some people have said that there is a contradiction here because in Matthew 5:14–16 the disciples are told to let their light shine before men so that they may see their good deeds; but there the motive is for men to praise their heavenly Father. Righteous conduct in the Kingdom becomes visible so that God may be glorified, it must never be visible in order to win man’s praise.

Some in Jesus’ day believed giving to the needy earned merit in God’s eyes. Jesus assumes his disciples will give to those in need (he says WHEN not IF), Jesus warns about why they do the practice, not about the practice itself.

The Pharisees’ weakness was that they loved men’s praise more than God’s praise (John 5:44; 12:43). Those who give out of this attitude receive their reward in full, they win human applause, and that is all they get.

The way to avoid hypocrisy is not to cease giving, but to do so with such secrecy that we scarcely know what we have given. Jesus’ disciples must themselves be so given to God, that their giving is prompted by obeying God and having compassion on men. Then their Father, who sees what is done in secret (Heb 4:13), will reward

them. Jesus does not discuss the location and nature of the reward; but the New testament evidence supports the understanding to be both in time and in eternity, as well as character and joy.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, is moving people to a place where they so embody the life and love of God that it effortlessly flows out of them. Matt 5:17 *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”.* Jesus is not against the law, He has come to show what the law, the words, the prophets look like when they take on flesh.

The word “to fulfill” has the connotation of “to make it speak”...“I have come to make the law SPEAK.” Jesus is interested in transcending the law from something people just do, into something people effortlessly incarnate.

The prophets said, “care for the poor,” Jesus says He wants his people to simply naturally care for the poor (Its why Jesus starts with BLESSED are the poor in spirit). When we understand how we have blown it and we are most acutely aware of our shortcomings, when we see and know our life is unmanageable, God meets us there and blesses us. There is a joyous life to be found in trusting God.

At one point instructional words sounded foreign, but eventually you understood the words and they took on flesh. What was once an external reality, a bunch of commands, becomes internalized (simply the way you do it). Information has led to transformation. Jesus is teaching people how to move from New to Normal to Second Nature.



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