

THE SIN OF PRIDE IN THE CHURCH—WRONG MOTIVE FOR SERVICE

God through Peter says to us as believers, “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (I Peter 1:15-16).

What does it *mean* to be holy? It means to *separate* ourselves from sin—and *consecrate* ourselves unto God. So far, we’ve been focused on the first half of that definition—separating ourselves *from sin*. I agree whole-heartedly with what **J.C. Ryle wrote**: “He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness, must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of *sin*.”

God has much to say about sin. There are *lists of sins* in Romans 1...and Romans 3...and I Cor 6...and Galatians 5...and Colossians 3...and II Timothy 3. But what is sin? Two weeks ago, we looked in-depth at the following **definition**: Sin is “Anything we do (I John 3:4), fail to do (Jas 4:17), say (Mt 12:36), or think (Mt 15:19) that is contrary to the character of God (Hab 1:13), the will of God (Eph 5:10, 17), or the Word of God (Jas 2:10).”

--There are sins of commission—*doing the wrong* that God tells us not to do

--There are sins of omission—*failing to do the right* that God tell us to do

--There are sins of speech—*that which we say*

--And there are sins in our *thought-life*

Two weeks ago I gave you somewhat of a “teaser” and said that today we would be looking at *sins in the church*. So *what are* the sins of the church?

Where do we start, right? The reality is that much of the same sins that are *outside* the church—in the world—are also *inside* the church? Why? Because God’s children—although *called saints* by God—are nothing more than *sinner* saved by grace!

As we get started here this morning, I want to remind us again of the “Big Picture.”

--“Big Picture,” we are talking about God’s command for us to *be holy*. To be holy, we need to be separate from sin—and separated unto God.

--Right now, we are talking about the sin “half” of the equation. Sin is a huge subject, though, and two weeks ago I gave you somewhat of a “shot gun” approach by going through sins *in general*.

--Today, we are starting on sins *in the church*. That, too, is a broad subject, so this morning I want to take more of a “sniper” approach and focus on *one sin in the church*—the sin of *pride*.

The topic of pride—even when “restricted” to pride *in the church*—is still an incredibly large one, so I’m going to focus on one aspect—our *motive* for service. Motive, of course, is *why we do* what we do. We can *do the right things*—even serve God—for the *wrong* reasons, can’t we? Jesus warns His followers about this in Mt 6.

Let’s turn there; please follow along as I read verses 1-6. The title of my message this morning is simply this: “*The Sin of Pride in the Church – Having the Wrong Motive for Service.*”

1. *The reality of wrong motive*

How do we know there are wrong motives for service? Because Jesus exposes the wrong motives of *hypocrites*—that’s what *He called them*—and had it recorded in God’s Word to warn us against doing the same thing!

A. Exposure of wrong motive

Notice again vs 1 “Take heed that ye do not your *alms* before men, **to be seen of them...**”

What hypocrites were doing in appearance *was right*—but the *reason* they were doing it was wrong!

What does it mean to “*do alms*”? I had always thought that it meant simply “giving.” In other words, do not make known—don’t broadcast—what you give to the church. That’s the idea behind vs 3—not letting your *left hand* know what your *right hand* is doing. Since a hand can’t *know* anything, it is obviously a figure of speech regarding doing things in secret—not for show.

As I studied this out, though, I was struck by a couple of things.

- 1) First, the word “alms” is used in verses 1, 2, 3, and 4. Not a big deal—until you dig a little deeper and find out that the word “alms” in verse 1 comes from **a different Greek** word than the word translated “alms” in verses 2, 3, and 4.
- 2) What is even more interesting is that the word translated “alms” in vs 1 has nothing to do with “giving” like it does in verses 2, 3, and 4! Instead, it comes from the Greek word *dikiasoonay* which means “righteousness.”

Dikiasoonay is used 92 times in the Greek NT. Some of the verses we are familiar with are Mt 5:6 (“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness”) and Mt 6:33 (“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”).

Verse 1, then, would be better translated “Take heed that ye do not your **righteous acts** (or deeds) before men.” Why **wasn’t it** translated that way? I have no idea! Enough on the Greek!

Back to vs 1. “Take heed that ye do not your righteous acts before men, to be seen of them...” Contrast this verse with Mt 5:16—a verse we looked at not too long ago. Notice what it says: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may **see your good works**, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

--Mt 5:16 says **let men see your good works**, but Mt 6:1 seems to say, “**Do not** let men see your good works!”

Is Jesus contradicting Himself? Obviously not!

--In Mt 5:16, Jesus **gives the reason** we want men to see our good works. What is the motive?

“To glorify—give praise to—**your Father** which is in heaven.”

--Notice now Mt 6:2. What did Jesus say **their reason** was to be seen of men? Was it to bring glory to their Father? No; it was **for them** to “have **glory** of men.”

Their goal **was not for God** to have glory—it was **for them** to have glory!

They **weren’t interested** in God being praised—they wanted **themselves praised!**

John 12:43 reminds us of this very thing: “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Is it possible that we can do righteous acts...and give...and pray—for the wrong reasons? It certainly is or Jesus wouldn’t have warned us about it!

So we have the exposure of a wrong motive, I want to now share with you...

B. An example of a wrong motive

I’ve mentioned on a number of occasions that I used to be a Recruiter for the National Guard. Part of my job consisted of **giving presentations** in high school classrooms. My **target audience** was juniors and seniors because they were usually 17—or close to it—and could actually join the NG!

Sophomores couldn’t join so I rarely did classroom presentations for them. The main exception was **Marshfield Sr Hi School**. My predecessor had agreed to teach a “career planning” class to each of the sophomore English classes each year and when I took over for him, I was asked to do the same.

We couldn’t just “do our own thing,” though—we had a booklet called “Career Directions” that we were supposed to use. The booklet was **designed to take 2-3 class** periods to go through. Most schools gave us 2 class periods—**but not** Marshfield! We had **one class** period—of roughly 45 minutes—to fly through the booklet. And fly I did!

I don’t remember exactly, but it seems like I did about 16 of those presentations in a week. On more than one occasion, I did 4 in a row **on the same day**—back-to-back-to-back-to-back—with about a 3-minute break in between. Needless to say, speaking for almost 3 hours non-stop was pretty exhausting!

Going into each of these presentations, I had **one goal**. Anyone care to guess what it was? Here was my goal: For every one of those sophomores to think, “Wow; that Sergeant Meinke with the NG is a cool guy!”

Was that **really** my goal and motive? **Yes, it was!** I wanted them to **remember me** when I called them back a year later to see if they wanted to join! Did they remember me? Many of them did!

So was that a **good** motive—or a **bad** motive? You could probably argue it both ways. My job was to **put people** in the N.G. A way to do that was for them to **remember me**. They remembered me because I gave a high-energy presentation, talked fast, and threw pencils at them!

The flip side, of course, is that “being cool” is **about me**—not about the Lord! It is about making a name **for me**! And if people **think** I’m cool—and **tell** me I’m cool—I might start **believing** that I really am cool!

Fast forward to now. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote this: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who **labour in the word and doctrine**.” (I Tim 5:17)

“Labour” sounds like work, doesn’t it? I am to **labor in the word and doctrine**—that means **studying and learning and teaching God’s Word**.

And God commands me as a Pastor to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.” (II Tim 4:2).

And Colossians 3:23 reminds me that I am to do whatever I do to the best of my ability: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;”

Putting those 3 together, I am to do my best to learn and preach the Word of God to feed the flock of God. To do anything less than my best would be to disobey God!

But is it possible that while **striving to do my best** to preach the Word of God that I fall into the devil’s trap of doing it for the **wrong reason**—to have the **praise of men**? Yes, it is **very possible**—and one of the things I battle! I want to do well—and I try to do well—but my motive has to be for God to be praised—not me!

--No Pastor—or evangelist—is immune to the sin of pride. In fact, I believe Satan works overtime on Pastors because they are **susceptible** to pride—and Satan knows it!

--I remember reading about a well-known preacher who was invited to another church to preach. Upon arriving at the church, he saw his name on the church’s outdoor announcement board. He walked into the church and there were posters and flyers with his picture on it. And he thought to himself, “Wow—I must be really something!”

--But loving the praise of men is not something that **just Pastors** are tempted with. My guess is that most of us at one time or another have seen song leaders...or musicians...or both—who have had an “air of flare” that certainly seemed to indicate their desire to be praised by men!

What about you? **Why do you** do what you do? Do you do it so **God** gets praised—or for **you** to get praised? Although we are all tempted by pride in different areas, let’s not lose sight of the fact that we are all tempted!

Let’s consider next...

2. The reward of wrong motive

What is the reward for doing right if your motive is the praise of men?

A. No eternal reward from the Father

Notice again vs 1. Jesus spells it out, doesn’t He? ‘If you do good works for the wrong reason, you won’t have a reward from your Father in heaven.’

What does that mean? Does it mean you won’t be **allowed into** heaven?

No; it means you won’t be **rewarded** for those things you do for your own glory!

--You won’t hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” because you weren’t a faithful servant—you were trying to **steal praise** that belonged to God for yourself!

--And the rewards that you **could have had** will be burnt up. We see that in I Corinthians 3.

I Cor 3:13-15 “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. ¹⁴If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall **receive a reward**. ¹⁵If any man’s work **shall be burned, he shall suffer loss**: but he **himself shall be saved**; yet so as by fire.” He shall be saved—if he has Christ—but his rewards will be lost!

B. A “temporary” reward from men

Jesus doesn’t say you will have **no reward**—He says you will have **no reward “of your Father** which is in heaven.” He goes on to say that you will be rewarded **by men**.

--We see that in the end of vs 2 “Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”

--We see the same words in the end of vs 5. **What** is their reward? The praise of men!

They will get the reward that they wanted!

--How long does the praise of men last? **Maybe** for your lifetime, but usually **not even close** to that long. It won’t be long before they find a “cooler” Recruiter...or a better preacher...or a more dramatic piano player—and they will stop praising you and praise someone else instead.

The praise of men is fleeting at best, yet we value it so much!

Lastly, let’s consider...

3. The remedy for having the wrong motive

So what do you do if God **convicts you** about seeking the praise of men instead of the praise of God?

The same things we do—or at least should do—when God convicts us regarding any other sin:

A. Repent of the wrong motive

We need to call it what it is—sin—and **stop** doing it. **Jeremiah 45:5a** “And seekest thou great things for thyself? **seek them not...**”

Proverbs 20:6 “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?”

The implication, of course, is that we are unfaithful if we proclaim our own goodness!

I wonder if we really understand how **horrible it is** to love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

--First, it is **promoting a lie**. It is suggesting something that is not true. Twice in this passage—in verses 2 and 5—Jesus calls them hypocrites. Why? Because they were **pretending to be** something they weren’t. They were **pretending to love God** and serve Him when the truth was that they **loved and served themselves**.

--Second, as was mentioned earlier, it is **stealing from God**. Anything that we **give to God** came from God in the first place. The same can be said **regarding abilities**—they are gifts from God. **I Cor 4:7** “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” How can we take credit for that which has been given to us? To do so is to steal praise that belongs to God.

--Repentance isn’t just about forsaking a certain sin—there is also a need to ask God for forgiveness.

I John 1:9 reminds us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

To repent of the wrong motive—and ask God for forgiveness—is still only half of the remedy. We need to not only stop having the wrong motive, we also need to...

B. Refocus on the right motive

What is the right motive? Please turn to I Cor 6:19-20.

I Cor 6:19-20. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore *glorify God* in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”

Flip the page to **I Cor 7:23** “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.”

I Cor 10:31 “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the **glory of God**.”

Ephesians 3:20-21 “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, ²¹ Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

That needs to be our focus, doesn’t it—to bring glory to Him! He created us...and bought us with His blood to serve Him...and gifted us to serve Him... so the glory belongs to Him—not us!

PRAY

So what would God have us do in light of His word this morning?

1. First, be honest about your motive. Why do you do what you do? Do you serve to be praised by men—or do you serve to bring glory to God?

2. Consider this—there is something worse than serving God for the praise of men! What is it? Serving God to ***earn your way to heaven!*** We cannot work our way into heaven—and God spells that out numerous times in His Word.

Romans 3:20 “Therefore by the deeds of the law **there shall no flesh be justified** in His sight...”

Romans 3:28 “Therefore we conclude that a man is **justified by faith** without the deeds of the law.”

Eph 2:8-9 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift of God:** ⁹**Not of works,** lest any man should boast.”

3. One more thing I believe God would have you do and it is this—pray for your Pastor!