

## A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

### XLV. The Sermon On The Mount: False And True Righteousness J. Christ's Righteous Practices In Contrast To Unrighteous Practices 1. Righteous Versus Unrighteous Almsgiving (Matthew 6:1-4)

#### I. Introduction

- A. Christ's great Sermon on the Mount provided valuable insight on God's true righteousness, what Israel's religious leaders greatly lacked as seen in their dead traditionalism.
- B. To illustrate the contrast between the unrighteous practices of the Pharisees with truly righteous practices, Jesus gave six illustrations, with the first illustration regarding the issue of almsgiving in Matthew 6:1-4. We study this passage for insight, application and edification (as follows):

#### II. Righteous Versus Unrighteous Almsgiving, Matthew 6:1-4.

- A. Almsgiving was a practice under the rule of the Mosaic Law, but it had been perverted by the Pharisees:
  - 1. In Matthew 5:7 earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had pronounced a blessing on those who were "merciful, sympathetic" (*eleemon*, Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 249) to others in material need. Accordingly, "(t)he giving of alms" to the impoverished "was designed to be a display of mercy," making "it possible for the giver to demonstrate the love of God by meeting the need." (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 1991, p. 182)
  - 2. However, "(t)he Pharisees had perverted the showing of mercy by using it to demonstrate their piety to impress men with their liberality. This was so prevalent that beggars sought to station themselves at the approaches to the temple so that they might receive alms from the Pharisees as they entered." (Ibid.)
  - 3. Jesus thus directed His hearers to purify the practice of almsgiving from the sin of self-centered pride that the godly characteristic of sympathetic mercy might be truly upheld in the practice, Matthew 6:1-4:
    - a. Christ warned that the donor should not advertise his giving before others to be seen of others with the intent of feeding his pride by advertising his generosity before onlookers, for such a motive was not rewarded by God in heaven, Matthew 6:1.
    - b. For this reason, they were not to donate to the poor by sounding a trumpet before them like the hypocritical Pharisees did in the synagogues and the streets to receive the praise of the onlookers, for their reward is merely the praise of the onlookers without any reward from God, Matthew 6:2.
    - c. Rather, one who gave to the needy was figuratively not even to let his left hand know what his right hand did in giving, meaning that donating "should be so secret that the giver readily forgets what he gave" (*Bible Know. Com., N. T.*, p. 32; Matthew 6:3-4a).
    - d. Such truly righteous giving was seen by God the Father in heaven in secret, and He Himself would openly reward such a donor, Matthew 6:4b.
- B. However, giving in the Early Church was also initially perverted, and God severely punished it, Acts 5:1-11:
  - 1. A believer named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and keeping back part of the proceeds, they brought the rest of the money to the apostles while pretending to give it all, Acts 5:1-2.
  - 2. This act followed the significant donations of other believers, especially that of Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, who sold property on Cyprus and brought its proceeds to the apostles and laid it at their feet, Acts 4:34-37. As a Levite, Barnabas lived off of the tithes of Israel, being directed by the Law to have no land inheritance by which he could do business for his income (cf. Numbers 18:20-24), so for him to have acquired property had come at great financial frugality on his part. Thus, his sale of that property and his gift of its proceeds to the apostles was an act of great liberality that everyone readily acknowledged!
  - 3. Ananias and Sapphira thus wanted to impress their fellow believers by doing what other landowners and Barnabas had done, so they pretended to give all of the sale of their land while giving only part of it.
  - 4. For lying to the Holy Spirit, Ananias and Sapphira were put to death by the Lord, Acts 5:3-11. They could have refrained from selling the property, and they could have held back part of the proceeds (Acts 5:4), but instead they **lied** about what they had given **to impress others**, and God severely disciplined them for it!

***Lesson:*** Christ directed that the righteous showing of mercy in our donations requires that we purge our motives and actions of giving with selfishness that we might truly express compassion on the recipients of our donations.

***Application:*** May we show truly selfless compassion to the needy in our giving to meet their needs.