



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 13
Matthew 6:1: Topic 13.0

Study By
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Greek NT

6.1 Προσέχετε [δὲ]
τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ
ποιεῖν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀν-
θρώπων πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι
αὐτοῖς· εἰ δὲ μή γε,
μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε παρὰ
τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς
οὐρανοῖς.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

»Hütet euch, eure
Frömmigkeit vor den
Menschen zur Schau zu
stellen! Denn dann habt
ihr keinen Lohn mehr von
eurem Vater im Himmel
zu erwarten.«

NRSV

Beware of practicing
your piety before others
in order to be seen by
them; for then you have
no reward from your Fa-
ther in heaven.

NLT

Take care! Don't do
your good deeds publicly,
to be admired, because
then you will lose the re-
ward from your Father in
heaven.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

What is piety? The phrase “a pious Christian” is so uncommon these days that one would need to explain its meaning before the phrase would be understood by most people.² The Bible doesn't contain either a Hebrew or a Greek word that exactly corresponds to this Latin derived English word ‘piety.’ Since the time of German mysticism and the pietistic movement in the middle to late 1800s especially in the Schwabish Alps of central Europe, the term both in English and its German equivalent ‘Frömmigkeit’ have fallen out of use in most religious circles.³ Yet this pietistic movement itself has exerted substantial continuing influence on several Christian denominations into our day.

Thus a clear understanding of what Jesus is talking about in connection to the history of pietism in modern western Christianity is very important. For not only do we need to understand biblical piety, we also need to be able to sharply critique modern expressions of supposed piety by biblical standards. Our modern ‘post modern’ society has adopted some of the most bizarre ideas of piety imaginable. This study is intended to provide some foundation for reaching both of these objectives.

Historical Context:

The concept of piety was a hugely important tradition in the Judaism of Jesus' day.⁴ With the system of religious legalism put in place by the ‘scribes and Pharisees’, one's approval before God both now and in eternity depended entirely upon the quantity of piety achieved by the individual Jew. The Old Testament expressions of love for the Law of God such as in Psalm 119 (cf. vv. 97, 113, 163, 165) were extended and applied to piety as intense ritual observance that demonstrates the genuineness of the individual's devotion to God. In scribal Judaism, as also in later rabbinic Judaism by the second century AD, piety was clearly devotion to God as marked by observance of the Torah of God. It focused on the outward keeping of the Law of Moses as interpreted and applied by the scribal leaders of Judaism. Since the Law of Moses overwhelmingly touched only on actions by individuals, attention was therefore centered on the actions of the pious Jew in adherence to the Law. Through their intricate blending of interpretation and application of the scripture, scribal Jewish leaders developed a massive system of rules and regulations concerning devotion

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the ‘then’ meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the ‘now’ meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²Merriam-Webster online dictionary: ‘piety’: Etymology: French *piété* piety, pity, from Old French, from Latin *pietas*-, *pietas*, from *pius* dutiful, pious
Date: 1579

1 : the quality or state of being pious: as a : fidelity to natural obligations (as to parents) b : dutifulness in religion : devoutness

2 : an act inspired by piety

3 : a conventional belief or standard : orthodoxy

³As an example of this, the NIV translation uses the English word ‘piety’ only three times in the Bible; the NRSV only 4 times; the HCSB only twice..

⁴For a detailed treatment of the concept of piety in the ancient world see my lecture “Frömmigkeit in den urchristlichen Gemeinden” (English translation: “Piety in Primitive Christianity”) at cranfordville.com.

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to God and how to express it.

It should be noted that not all Jews of the first century accepted these teachings about religion and how to express one's devotion to God. The vast majority of Jewish peasants paid little attention to these ideas. They, instead, sought to express their love for God in simple expressions of religious sacrifice at the temple and in brotherly love on a day to day basis. Their religious devotion centered around family and the worship of God in the home, occasionally in the synagogue, and then periodically at the temple in Jerusalem. This brought down upon them the wrath of the scribe and Pharisees who condemned them as "sinners" no better than the despised tax-collectors. But these were the people who most clearly sensed the presence of God in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Although no precise equivalent term for piety existed in ancient Greek several Greek words touch on various aspects of piety. Some of those terms surface in the pages of the New Testament, although the apostolic writers of the New Testament tended to shy away from extensive use of the terminology in favor of describing the concept from a distinctively Christian perspective and thus avoiding many of the false associations with either Jewish or Greco-Roman ideas of piety, which were connected to the terminology.

Three Greek key terms closely connected to piety in the ancient world, which surface in the New Testament, are εὐλάβεια,⁵ εὐσέβεια⁶ and θρησκεία.⁷ A careful analysis of their use in the New Testament reveals a tendency toward one particular set of terms by each New Testament writer. All of these terms have a lot of religious 'baggage' coming out of the Greco-Roman traditions of piety.⁸ This is most likely the reason for the limited use of the terms in the New Testament. By describing the contents of piety from a distinctly Christian view point, the writers then have little need for 'loaded' labels⁹ that would be subject to

⁵The noun εὐλάβεια is found twice in Hebrews: 5:7, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His **piety**" (NASB) and 12:28, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with **reverence** and awe;" (NAB). The verb form εὐλαβέομαι shows up in Heb. 11:7, "By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, **respected** the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith" (NRSV). The adjective form εὐλαβής is found only in Luke 2:25, "Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and **devout**, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him" (NRSV).

⁶The noun εὐσέβεια is found in 1 Tim. 2:2, "for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all **godliness** and dignity" (NRSV); 1 Tim. 6:3, "Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with **godliness**," (NRSV); 2 Tim. 3:5, "holding to the outward form of **godliness** but denying its power" (NRSV); 2 Pet. 1:3, "His divine power has given us everything needed for life and **godliness**, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (NRSV); 2 Pet. 3:11, "Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and **godliness**," (NRSV). The verb form εὐσεβέω surfaces only in 1 Tim. 5:4, "If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn **their religious duty** to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight" (NRSV). The adjective form εὐσεβής is found in 2 Pet. 2:9, "then the Lord knows how to rescue the **godly** from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment" (NRSV). The adverb form εὐσεβῶς also shows up in 2 Tim. 3:12, "Indeed, all who want to live **a godly life** in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (NRSV); and Titus 2:12, "training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and **godly**," (NRSV).

⁷The noun θρησκεία shows up four times in the New Testament, twice in James 1:26-27, "26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their **religion** is worthless. 27 **Religion** that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." (NRSV); Acts 26:5, "They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our **religion** and lived as a Pharisee" (NRSV) and Col. 2:18, "Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and **worship** of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking," (NRSV). But the verb θρησκεύω does not surface. The adjective θρησκός is found in James 1:26, "If any think they are **religious**, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless" (NRSV).

⁸The Roman tradition largely identified piety as virtue, as is reflected in the Wikipedia article on Pietas: "*Pietas* was one of the Roman virtues, along with *gravitas* and *dignitas*. *Pietas* is usually translated as "duty" or "devotion," and it simultaneously suggests duty to the gods and duty to family - particularly to the father (which is expanded to duty to the community and duty to the state thanks to the analogy between the family and the state, conventional in the ancient world - see, for example, Plato's *Crito*). Virgil's hero Aeneas embodies this virtue, and is particularly emblematic of it in book II of the *Aeneid* when he flees burning Troy bearing his father, who carries the household gods, on his back."

⁹Note the following 'definitions' provided in the Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. Some fifteen categories of religious practice in topics 53.1-53.15 are identified:

53.1 θρησκεία, ας f; εὐσέβεια^a, ας f; θεοσέβεια, ας f: appropriate beliefs and devout practice of obligations relating to supernatural persons and powers—'religion, piety.'

53.2 δεισιδαιμονία, ας f: a set of beliefs concerning deity, with the implication of corresponding behavior—'religion.'

53.3 δεισιδαίμων, ον: pertaining to being religious—'religious.'

misunderstanding.

The term employed by Matthew in 6:1 for translating the Aramaic expression of Jesus' original words is τὴν δικαιοσύνην ποιεῖν, which literally means "to do righteousness." The phrase is considerably more Jewish oriented and without Greek or Roman heritage. The nature of the expression is more natural to the issue of piety as Jesus will contrast it to between the Jewish practice and His Christian way in 6:2-18. The pattern is found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Gen. 18:19¹⁰; Psalm 106:3¹¹ and Isaiah 56:1¹², as well as in 1 John 2:29¹³; 3:7¹⁴; 3:10¹⁵; and Rev. 22:11¹⁶, reflecting also the Johannine slant on Christian piety.

Literary Aspects:

As is always true, grasping the literary aspects of this verse are absolutely essential to proper understanding of Jesus' words.

Literary Form:

The genre of 6:1 is essentially that of a warning. The introductory expression Προσέχετε sets up this warning in a commonly used Greek structure. Used some 24 times in the New Testament, eleven of these instances follow the pattern found in Matt. 6:1 where an admonition is issued to the reader.¹⁷ The literal meaning is "to set one's mind" on something with careful attention to it. By paying careful attention, one becomes cautious and alert to possible negative aspects in whatever the mind focuses on. By using this warning Jesus puts his readers on alert that something negative is going to be discussed and thus they should pay very close attention so that clear discernment between the positive and negative will be possible.



- 53.4 δικαιοσύνη^C, ης f: observances or practices required by one's religion—'religious observances, religious requirements.'
- 53.5 εὐσέβεια^B, ας f: behavior reflecting correct religious beliefs and attitudes—'piety, godliness.'
- 53.6 εὐσεβής, ἑς; εὐσεβῶς; θεοσεβής, ἑς; ἱεροπρεπής, ἑς; θρησκός, ὄν: pertaining to being devoted to a proper expression of religious beliefs—'devout, pious, religious.'
- 53.7 εὐλαβέομαι^A; εὐλάβεια, ας f: to show reverent regard for—'to reverence, reverent regard for, reverence.'
- 53.8 εὐλαβής, ἑς: pertaining to being reverent toward God—'reverent, pious.'
- 53.9 ἱερός, ἄ, ὄν: pertaining to being appropriate for the expression of worship and reverence—'holy.'
- 53.10 ἀσεβέω; ἀσέβεια, ας f: to live in a manner contrary to proper religious beliefs and practice—'to live in an ungodly manner, godlessness.'
- 53.11 ἀσεβής, ἑς: pertaining to living without regard for religious belief or practice—'ungodly.'
- 53.12 ἐθελοθρησκία, ας f: a set of religious beliefs and practices resulting from one's own desires and initiative—'self-imposed religion, religion thought up by oneself.'
- 53.13 λειτουργέω^B; λειτουργία^C, ας f: to perform religious rites as part of one's religious duties or as the result of one's role—'to perform religious duties, to carry out religious rites.'
- 53.14 λατρεύω; λατρεία, ας f: to perform religious rites as a part of worship—'to perform religious rites, to worship, to venerate, worship.'
- 53.15 ἐμβατεύω: The meaning of ἐμβατεύω, which occurs only once in the **NT**, namely, in Col 2.18, is obscure. It may mean more or less literally 'to set foot upon' or 'to enter' or possibly 'to come into possession of.' It may also mean 'to enter into' in the sense of to go into detail in treating a subject, but it seems more likely that ἐμβατεύω in Col 2.18 is a technical term derived from the mystery religions, and it could be interpreted in the phrase ὁ ἐώρακεν ἐμβατεύων as meaning 'who enters the sanctuary which he saw in ecstasy' or 'taking his stand on what he has seen in the mysteries.'

¹⁰Gen. 18:19 (NRSV): For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by **doing what is right** and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

¹¹Psalms 106:3 (NRSV): "Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly **do what is right**."

¹²Isa. 56:1 (NRSV): "This is what the Lord says: 'Maintain justice and **do what is right**, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.'"

¹³1 John 2:29 (NRSV): "If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who **does what is right** has been born of him."

¹⁴1 John 3:7 (NRSV): "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who **does what is right** is righteous, just as he is righteous."

¹⁵1 John 3:10 (NRSV): "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not **do what is right** is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."

¹⁶Rev. 22:11 (NRSV): "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who **does right** continue to **do right**; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

¹⁷Cf. Matt. 6:1; 7:15; 10:17; 16:6; 16:11; Luke 12:1; 17:3; 20:46; 21:34; Acts 5:35; 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:13. There are the places where the imperative form of the Greek verb is used, and thus carry the meaning of a warning. .

Additionally, 6:1 serves as a *kēlāl*, as Davies and Allison describe:¹⁸

Mt 6:1 is to be labelled a *kēlāl*, that is, a general statement of principle that heads a section consisting of various particular cases (*pērāṭōt*; cf. *m. B. Qam.* 8:1; *m. ḤEd.* 3:1; *b. Hag.* 6a–b; *Daube*, pp. 63–6). Compare the structure of Gen 5:1–32; Lev 18:1–23; Ecclus 3:1–9; 1QS 3:13–4:26; *Barn.* 18–20; and especially Mt 5:17–48.

Literary Setting:

The literary context of verse one is critically important to understand, in part before false literary settings have been set up by some older translations, especially in the English Bible tradition.

First, what the literary setting *is not*. The King James Version of the Bible is a major contributor to this false understanding by its rendering of 6:1–4 as follows:

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms¹⁹ before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, 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 their reward. 3 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 which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

In its dependence upon the Latin Vulgate, which followed later less reliable manuscript copies of the New Testament,²⁰ it translated not the original wording of the Greek text with τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν, but rather the later altered reading τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην ὑμῶν, ‘your alms giving.’ By this failure the impression is given that verse one is only connected to verses two through four. But such is simply not the case.

Clearly the weight of manuscript evidence favors the reading τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν, which sets up an entirely different contextual understanding. The phrase refers to the general practice of piety in a Jewish context. As such, then, verse one is the foundational introduction to the discussion of three significant aspects of Jewish piety in Jesus’ day: almsgiving (vv. 2–4), prayer (vv. 5–15), and fasting (vv. 16–18). Structurally the framing of this declaration highlights what the disciples are to be careful about, as the discussion below on Literary Structure illustrates. With this foundational thought structure placed on the table for the readers, Matthew will then interpret Jesus’ words on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting on the basis of this beginning structure.

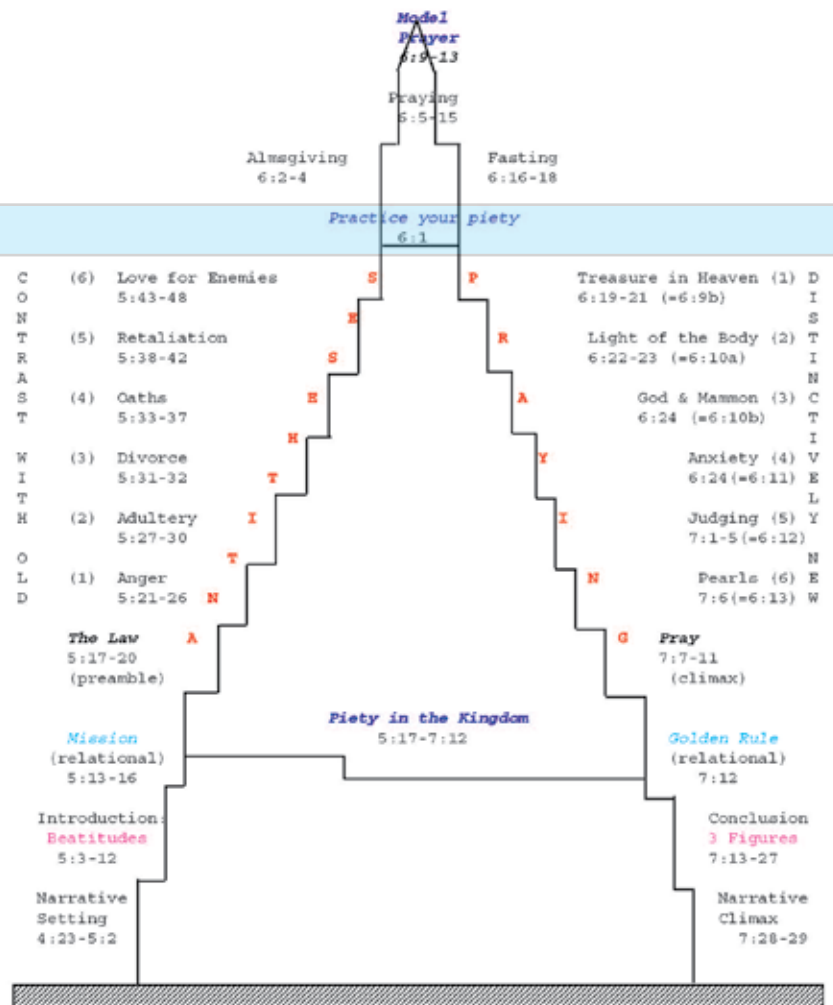
Additionally, the literary setting for 6:1 in connection to 5:48 is important. From the previous study

¹⁸W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 575.

¹⁹alms: or, righteousness

²⁰Compare: “a. δικαιοσύνην, *lit.* “righteousness.” The majority of (late) MSS (L W Z Θ f¹³ TR sy^{p,h} mae) have ἐλεημοσύνην, “almsgiving,” perhaps by the influence of v 2. \aleph^1 sy^c bo have δόσιν, “giving.”” [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 136.]

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Leoin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, “Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

on 5:48, we learned of the climatic role of this verse to the larger unit of 5:17-48. In the six contrastive declarations of 5:21-47, Jesus placed discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven in strong contrast to the way the Law of Moses was typically understood in his day. Ultimately this points to an entirely different kind of 'righteousness' being essential for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven than that expressed by the scribes and Pharisees.²¹ In 6:1, Jesus continues that emphasis on the alternative righteousness required for entrance into the Kingdom. This time the focus is not on failure to understand the Law of Moses properly. Instead, it is on how the religious leaders expressed their piety to God through their religious system of legalism. It is no accident that the Greek word for righteousness, ἡ δικαιοσύνη, is used in both 5:20 and 6:1, thus linking these two concepts closely together. The tone of this section is much more directly accusatory and condemnatory of the pietistic style of the religious leaders.

Literary Structure:

The block diagram of 6:1 is helpful to understanding how the ideas are structured.

6:1 And

63 **beware of practicing your piety**
 before men
 in order to be seen by them.

And
 if not so

64 **you have no reward**
 with your Father in Heaven.

In statement 63, the admonition (Προσέχετε) defines the object as the practice of one's piety (τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν). It is not to be done within two boundaries: 1) "before men" [ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων], and 2) "in order to be seen by them" [πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι αὐτοῖς]. The inner connection between these two boundaries is important, and will be treated below. Also important is to note that Jesus does not forbid the practice of piety. Rather he affirms it, but insists that it must be done properly. The elaboration in vv. 2-4, 5-15, and 16-18 will make this abundantly clear.

This admonition is sharply reinforced by the clear warning in statement 64. The 'if-clause' (εἰ μὴ γέ) assumes non-compliance with the admonition. The consequences of non-compliance are spelled out in the main clause: μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε. No positive acknowledgment comes from the most important source: παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, the Father who is in Heaven.

Exegesis of the Text:

Admonition: "beware of" (Προσέχετε).

As discussed above under **Literary Form**, the use of Προσέχετε calls upon the readers (you - plural verb form) to focus their attention on the upcoming discussion in order to clearly detect the negative aspects of that discussion. The use of the Greek present tense imperative verb form stresses this as a continuing responsibility, rather than an occasional one. We as disciples must constantly be on guard that our devotion to God be proper and not slip into the negative pattern of the Jewish leaders. The nature of the verb admonition, as well as the subsequent warning about non-compliance (cf. statement #64), stresses the crucial importance of this caution. Some highly important issues are at stake, and failure to take them seriously will lead to spiritual disaster.

Practice of piety: "practicing your piety" (τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν).

The translation language used by Matthew for the idea of piety expressed by Jesus originally in Aramaic underscores the outward expression of inward devotion to God. The Matthean concept of righteousness (ἡ δικαιοσύνη²²) is important to what Jesus is describing here. Unlike Paul who understood righteousness essentially as the center of God's character and being that was then given to believer's in their conversion thus making them righteous and therefore able to approach God, Matthew sees in righteousness the older Jewish tradition of 'right actions' But in contrast to the righteousness of the

²¹See. 5:20, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (NRSV), and 5:48 "Be then complete in righteousness, even as your Father in heaven is complete" (BBE).

²²See Matt. 3:15; 5:6; 5:10; 6:1; 6:33; 21:32 for the Matthean instances. The word shows up 92 times in the Greek New Testament with 8 instances in Matthew. The term is especially prevalent in the Pauline writings of the New Testament, and particularly in Romans (34 instances).

'scribes and Pharisees' (cf. 5:20), this righteousness must have an entirely different motive and thus a different character, as the three examples of almsgiving, prayer and fasting illustrate. The righteousness that God will accept is defined in Matt. 7:21-23 simply as those who 'do the will of God' (ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς).

Also important to Matthew's view is that righteousness must be expressed. To be sure, it is an inner attitude of desire and commitment to please God. But for righteousness to be righteousness it must 'concretize' itself in specific actions carried out with proper motive. Non-action means no righteousness.

Boundaries: "before men in order to be seen by them" (ἐμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι αὐτοῖς). This specification of boundaries lies at the heart of the difference between the righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders and that of disciples in the Kingdom. W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison summarize the matter well:²³

δικαιοσύνη is not to be done before others in order to be seen by them. True piety is not for show. Right deeds must be accompanied by right intention (cf. the rabbinic *kawwānā*, as in *b. Meg.* 20a). The Father in heaven rewards only those whose motives are pure, who care not for what others think but only for what is right before heaven. The key is intention. Even a good deed brings no reward if it springs from the desire for self-aggrandizement. One must rather seek to bring glory to the Father in heaven (cf. 5:16, which in no way contradicts the present passage, as Augustine, *De serm. mont.* 2:1:2, rightly argued). The pride of show is a malignant growth on religion which leads to counterfeit goodness. One must always remember that 'the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (1 Sam 16:7). God sees what goes on in the dark, even within hearts, and that is what matters (cf. Eccles 17:15; 23:19; 39:19). Recall Boethius, *de Consolatione* 1:4: 'For as often as a man receives the reward of fame for his boasting, the conscience that indulges in self congratulation loses something of its secret merit'.

Proper motivation for doing what is right is key to the Kingdom righteousness taught by Jesus in 6:1-18. Why we do what we do is just as important as what we do.

The tragic reality is that later on Christianity lost sight of this central principle of Jesus. A second century manual of Christian living called *The Didache* in 8:3 simply declares in comment on Matthew's text:

And let not your fastings be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and the fifth day of the week; but do ye keep your fast on the fourth and on the preparation (the sixth) day.

The inner motive for righteous deeds has been replaced with a focus on outward actions. The difference in the piety of Christians and Jews (i.e., 'the hypocrites') is that the two groups do their piety on different days of the week. Thus Christian piety practiced in this manner had no more value before God than that of the scribes and Pharisees. Neither reflect genuine piety. This remains true in our day as well.

Warning: "And if not so, you have no reward with the Father in Heaven" (εἰ δὲ μή γε, μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς). The warning follows the admonition and contains stern reminders that failure to follow the admonition entails serious spiritual loss. Jesus makes the situation unmistakably clear. Inner motive leading to proper pietistic expression is essential if one expects the Father's approval and blessing. Anything less means no approval from the Heavenly Father.

The idea of 'reward' (μισθὸν) is fairly common in Matthew; cf. 5:12, 46, 6:2, 5, 16; 10:41, 42; 20:8. H. Preisker describes well the concept in the gospels:²⁴

The concept of reward is important for Jesus. Yet God rewards as a father, not as a judge (Mt. 6:1ff.; 25:34). He demands obedience, but the reward far exceeds what is deserved, and it is thus a matter of divine generosity rather than human merit. This lifts the concept out of the sphere of calculation. In Mt. 20:1 ff. the equal treatment of the laborers shows that reward is not according to achievement but according to the prodigality of love. Lk. 17:7ff. makes it plain that the concept of merit is totally repudiated. The promise of the kingdom to children in Mk. 10:15 strengthens this thought. God alone is good (Mk. 10:18), and this means that like children we must simply let the kingdom be granted to us. In Jesus the kingdom has already broken into time and it catches up the disciples in its living power, so that their moral actions are not autonomous achievements that deserve a reward but manifestations of a divine power that moves on to future fulfilment. For Jesus, disciples stand under the eyes of a holy God and owe obedience to him, but salvation is God's own work and in his generosity God grants to receptive hearts a reward which finds in the kingdom its commencement and consummation. The concept of reward is thus taken up into that of the kingdom as the divine glory undeservedly

²³W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 575.

²⁴Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985), 599. S.V. "misthós [reward], misthōō [to hire], misthios [day laborer], misthōtós [hired hand], misthapodótēs [rewarder], misthapodosía [reward, retribution], antimisthía [reward, penalty]" by H. Preisker.

received.

Thus we are not practicing piety in order to achieve merit from God. Rather it is a generous God who observes true piety and rewards it with His blessing both now and in eternity. Improper practice of piety brings no such blessing from the Heavenly Father.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

1) How religious, that is, pious, are you?

2) What motivates you to serve God?

3) Why will God be able to bless you in your service to Him?

4) How important is human praise to your service to God?

5) Why do you expect to find reward on the day of Judgment?