

Biblical Paradoxes Series

Do good works in public or in secret?

A well-known philanthropist in the area helps a lot of people. He has feeding schemes, orphanages, retirement homes, offers hospitality, and much more. When looking at everything that he does everyone would surely consider him to be a saint. However, when getting to know him personally, we discover that he's a narcissist - a person who has an excessive interest in or admiration of themselves. When new people meet him, he loves telling them about all the good work that he's doing. We wonder how much he helps others out of a compassionate heart, and how much out of self-absorption and the praise of people.

Matthew 6:1-4 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

1) Doing good works in secret

- Matthew 6:1 Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.
- The key point to doing our good or righteous works in secret is so that we should not boast about something that is meant only for God and not for others.
- Jesus highlights three works that we should rather do in secret
 - Giving to the needy
 - Matthew 6:3-4 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.
 - Prayer
 - Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
 - Fasting
 - Matthew 6:17-18 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen.
- Obviously, charitable organisations give to the needy in public, and churches expect their members to come to public worship services and prayer meetings, and fast corporately as churches.
 - So, what did Jesus mean by doing these in secret where only God would see us doing them, and not publicly?
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 6: 1
 - Matthew 6:1 Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.
 - He wasn't opposing the doing of good works publicly, but He opposed the doing of them to be seen by others – to draw attention to yourself
 - If we can't stay humble when doing them publicly, then it's better for us to do them in private

2) Doing good works in public

- Matthew 5:14-16 You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- Jesus isn't contradicting Himself. Here He's telling us to be what God Has made us to be – the light of the world – and to let that light shine in the darkness of the world.
 - In contrast to wanting the world to see us for the good we're doing, Jesus highlights the purpose of us doing good deeds in public as to glorify our Father in heaven
 - It's all about God and not about ourselves.
 - This takes humility as we do whatever God has given us to do and we aren't concerned about getting the glory for it. We are only concerned about the glory of God
- Besides our good deeds glorifying God, they are also examples for others to follow
 - 1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
- Good works are works of faith that bear testimony of a transformed life in Him
 - Our transformed life is the life and light of Christ that radiates from us to the world

3) It's a matter of heart attitude

- Our attitude should be as John the Baptist
 - John 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less.
- It's a contrast between pride and humility
 - Pride wants to do everything in public to be seen by all
 - Humility does good works in public out of a real heart of compassion for those they're serving and to be an example for others to follow in a life of righteousness leading to the glory of God
 - Pride likes to boast about their good works
 - Humility quietly does what needs to be done in public, and will do it privately if necessary
 - Pride wants the praise and rewards of people
 - Humility wants the praise and rewards of God
- Whether it be in the community or in church, we need to check our attitudes to why we do what we do
 - Our works of service and ministries could be nothing more than acts of pride if we are only doing them to gain personal recognition
 - Our prayer and fasting can be acts of pride if we go around telling people how much we pray and fast to get pats on our backs
 - The way we pray or lift our hands in worship could be true dedication to God, or acts of pride
- Many times, our motives are only known by God, but that is all the more reason to check our hearts before Him to keep us humble
 - One indication is whether we would do something in public if the same thing could be done in private where only God knows about it.