

There is a Jewish tale entitled, *If Not Higher*. It is the story of a rabbi who disappeared every Friday. Many of the villagers claimed that he could not be found because he ascended to heaven each Friday to talk to God. A newcomer to the town scoffed when he heard the local's explanation and he vowed to figure out what was going on.

So the next week the newcomer hid outside the rabbi's house. He watched as the rabbi got up early and dressed in peasant clothing. He then followed the rabbi as he went into the woods. He watched the rabbi chop down a small tree and cut it into firewood. He then followed the rabbi, who was caring the firewood, to the shack of the poorest person in the village. An old woman and her sick son gladly received the firewood and thanked the rabbi, who they thought was an anonymous woodman.

The newcomer was so moved by the rabbi's actions that he became a disciple. And anytime he heard the villagers say, "Every Friday our rabbi ascends to heaven," he would respond, "if not higher."

That tale encapsulates Jesus' message in the first part of Matthew 6. The rabbi practiced righteousness in a manner in keeping with Christ's instruction.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day were very familiar with "righteous" deeds. The scribes and Pharisees were very adamant about "righteous" behavior. They taught about doing "righteous" acts and they made sure that others knew that they themselves performed "righteous" acts.

However, Jesus called for a different righteousness. He demanded that his followers have a greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees. In the six antitheses he had addressed the "righteousness" the scribes and Pharisees taught. Now he would focus his attention on the "righteousness" the Pharisees showed.

So let's look at his instruction on righteous righteousness.

Scripture: Matthew 6:1

## I. Righteous Righteousness

### A. **Admonition**

#### 1. "Be careful"

##### a) Consequences

(1) Actions have consequences

(2) Attitudes have consequences

##### b) Conflict

(1) Does this caution conflict with Christ's command?

(a) Matthew 5:16

### B. **Aim and Audience**

#### 1. "To be seen by them"

- a) *Theomai* = theater
    - (1) Putting on a performance for man's applause
    - (2) Seeking glorification of self
  - 2. "Give glory to your Father in heaven"
    - a) Audience of One
      - (1) Practicing piety for God's approval
      - (2) Seeking glorification of God
- C. **Award**
- 1. Rewarded by man
    - a) Fickle
    - b) Fleeting
  - 2. Rewarded by God
    - a) Faithful
    - b) Forever ("in heaven")

The story is told of an old eastern holy man who covered himself in ashes as a sign of humility and regularly sat on a prominent street corner of his city. When tourists wanted to take his picture, he would throw on some more ashes to give them a better image.

Of the rabbi and the eastern holy man, who practiced righteous righteousness? Which one better fits Jesus' word of caution and commands? Which one are you? Are you seeking to glorify yourself when you **perform** righteous **acts**? Or are you living to bring God glory through righteous behavior?