

Improper Motives

Matthew 15:8-9

Introduction: Our actions are prompted by motives. The motives that prompt our actions may be good or evil; right or wrong; proper or improper. We will discuss a few examples in the Bible for which improper motives caused people to sin though they were trying to fulfill one of God's commands.

I. Giving

A. We could be improperly motivated in our charity (Matt. 6:1-4)!

1. If we give so others will take note of our generosity, God will not take note.

2. If we give so that others praise us for our generosity, that is all the reward we will ever get.

3. Therefore, give in secret!

B. We must give from the heart.

1. To give without love does not help us (1 Cor. 13:3).

2. Proper motives will move us to give (1 John 3:17-18).

3. If we can not give cheerfully, God doesn't want our charity (2 Cor. 9:7).

C. The widow with her two pennies was praised by Christ not for what she gave but for her willingness to give all she had (Mark 12:41-44). She could have used that money to live but she gave from her heart!

II. Praying

A. We could be improperly motivated to pray (Matt. 6:5-6).

1. If we pray so others will take note of our words, God will not take note.

2. If we pray so that others praise us that is all the reward we will ever get.

B. We must pray from the heart.

1. To pray without faith will not help us (James 1:5-6).

2. Proper motives will result in an answer (1 John 3:22).

2. If we pray in disobedience, God will not hear us (John 9:31).

C. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Pharisee prayed from improper motives (Luke 18:10-14). The Tax Collector was praised not because he was sinless but because he knew he was sinful. The Tax Collector prayed from his heart.

III. Fasting

A. We could be improperly motivated to fast (Matt. 6:16-18).

1. If we fast so others will take note of our actions, God will not take note.

2. If we fast so that others praise us, that is all the reward we will ever get.

B. We must fast from the heart.

1. Fasting is what one does in mourning Christ (Matt. 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20).

2. Today, people fast for any reason under the sun. They even go as far as to dictate how one should fast as though they know what is pleasing to God separate from the scriptures. For example:

“I am calling all of you to join me in a month long prayer and fasting for her family. I am making a schedule so that at least 2 people a day are praying and fasting for Nola, the children and Jim. Fasting need not be total, unless you are called by the Lord to do this. You can choose to fast the entire month from sweets, or TV. You may choose one day for a juice fast. Maybe you could consider taking every Tuesday. Whatever you choose is fine, and I do not need to know how you fast. All I want is for Nola to be covered in prayer and the Lord work in a mighty way in her life. God is FAITHFUL!!!” [E-mail from a Brian Montgomery, 8/9/2001]

This is fasting from improper motives!

IV. Love of our brethren

A. We could be improperly motivated to love our brethren (1 Jn. 3:10-15).

1. Some brethren make a show of their love for one another. They really don't love their brethren from their heart as is demonstrated when sin enters their life.

2. Those brethren who live righteously suddenly become enemies to those who live in sin. Their righteousness makes the evil brother look bad.

B. We must love from the heart.

1. Cain would not have done any harm to his brother Abel if he loved him (Gen. 4:6-7).

2. Cain was improperly motivated to retaliate against his brother because Cain failed to please God (sinned) and Abel's righteousness made Cain look bad.

C. Our lack of love guided by improper motives can be seen in our conduct as John illustrates (1 Jn. 3:17).

Conclusion: Motives are the thoughts that cause us to act. Though we may act in a proper fashion, if we are improperly motivated we are likely wasting our time and probably caught in sin. Perhaps we can now understand Christ's words in Matt. 15:8-9. If we try to serve the Lord from improper motives we will lose our souls!