

Good Deeds

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You know, I've done a lot of REALLY GOOD deeds lately and I'd LOVE to tell you all about them on Facebook, so that you can read about them and then express your undying appreciation with lots of "likes!"

And why would I do this? Because, after all, in the Sermon on the Mount, we read:

*"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, **let your light shine before others**, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).*

So, of course, I want you all to see my good works, which is why I'm shining my spotlight in your eyes. But, I hope, you and I both know that something is wrong with my attitude, right? Because, just a little while later in Matthew, still in the same sermon, Jesus goes on to say:

***Beware** of practicing your righteousness **before other people in order to be seen by them**, for then you will have **no reward** from your Father who is in heaven. [2] Thus, when you give to the needy, **sound no trumpet** before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, **do not** let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be **in secret**. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:1-4).*

Do you sense a conflict within these verses? On the one hand, we're supposed to let our light shine **before others**. On the other hand, if our left hand sees the light shining from the right hand, then **beware!** It COULD be construed that there is a conflict here.

Intellectually, of course, we know that the two are **NOT** in conflict, since they both came from Jesus and we **ALSO** know that God is **NOT** the author of confusion — "*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace*" (1 Corinthians 14:33a).

So how are we to act, ensuring our light shines to illuminate the path for others and yet keeping our righteousness hidden so as NOT to be seen? And what is "our light?" How is it that we are like light?

Think of the sun. (Ensure you are wearing your mental sunglasses!). In the morning, it rises and provides light for the world all day long and then sets at night. If we go out at night, we might see the moon. And there is light from the moon but that light is REFLECTED light. The source of the light is still the sun, which is shining on the moon and then being redirected towards us.

When Christ was in the world, He provided direct spiritual light, just like the sun provides direct light during the day. Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world*" (John 8:12). And, as Christ contemplated leaving this world, He said, "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14). Now that Christ is no longer in the world, the spiritual moon, the church, shines, but not with its own light. It shines with the REFLECTED light of Christ.

So OUR light is a reflected or derived light. It does not originate from us. And yet...

- "...for at one time you were darkness, but **now you are light** in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).
- "...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them **you may become partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (2 Peter 1:4).

Somehow our incorporation into the body of Christ allows us, to some extent, to **be** light. All of it, of course, deriving from Christ. But perhaps not all is merely reflected.

And this is where Jesus points out the danger. Once you are flying high, filled with righteousness and good deeds, it is too easy to fall into the trap of practicing your righteousness before others **to be seen by them**. Note the wording in **Matthew 6:1**: “...***IN ORDER*** to be seen by them.” We are **not** to keep an accounting of our good deeds, nor recount them at office parties or basket dinners or post them on FB or bask in the glow of our own goodness. Just do them, forget them, follow God and move on.

The true believer gives and serves to please whom? To please God. You mean God and Martha Quidnunc over there? No. Just “*your Father who sees in secret.*”

Doing good deeds for one another is a Christian virtue and acts as that beacon on the hill to give hope to those who wander in darkness. But even as we are called to love one another by helping where we can with the gifts that we have been given, we must guard our eyes from wandering away from those we are helping to those who observe us.