

Countercultural Character

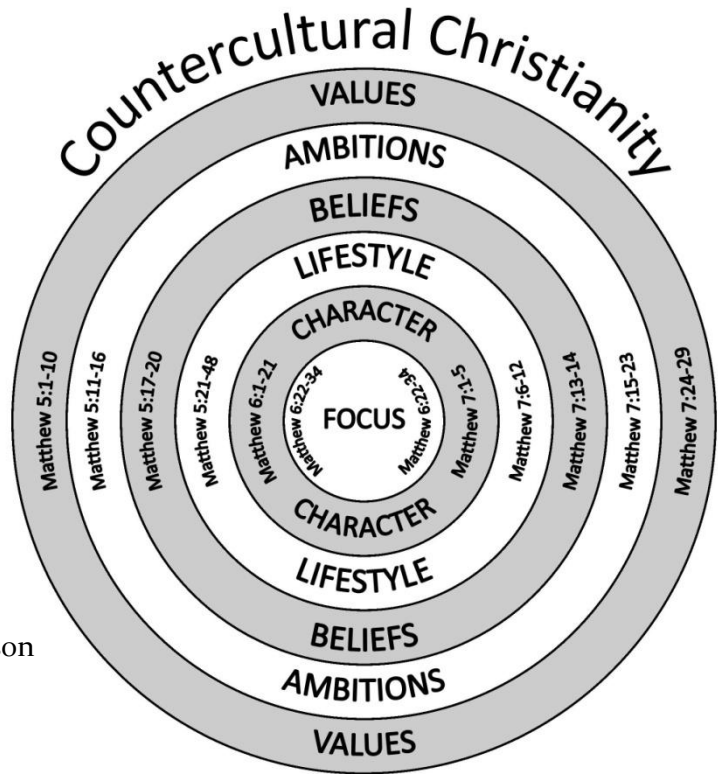
Matthew 6:1-21

What are some of the issues that Jesus dealt with here in Matthew 6?

- Generosity – 6:1-4
- Prayer – 6:5-15
- Discretion in Fasting – 6:16-18
- Treasures/Desires – 6:19-21
- Commitment/Devotion – 6:22-24
- Anxiety/Worry – 6:25-34

What issue is Jesus dealing with in Matthew 7:1-5?

- Being judgmental.
- This is an issue of a person's character.
- A person of countercultural character will not be like the person described here.



When we look at our Countercultural Christianity diagram, what do we notice about these passages?

- The first four of these issues deal with a person's character.
- The last two deal with the focus of a person's life.

Anonymity in Generosity (6:1-4)

How does Jesus describe the philanthropists of His day?

- He called them hypocrites—from the secular Greek (ὕποκριτής) meaning “an actor, stage player” and in Biblical Greek meaning “a dissembler, pretender, hypocrite.”¹
- They did good things to be seen by others.
- If this is their attitude, the Bible says that they have already received all their reward for their good deeds.

¹ Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5273&t=KJV> accessed March 24, 2019.

How does Jesus describe generosity that is countercultural?

- Do not draw attention to yourself.
- Do not seek the praise of others for what you have done.
- Matthew 6:3-4 conveys the idea that giving “should be so secret that the giver readily forgets what he gave. In this way he demonstrates true righteousness before God and not before people, so God in turn will reward him. One cannot be rewarded, as the Pharisees expected, by both man and God.”²
- This type of giving has no strings attached!

Considering this teaching about anonymity in giving, how should this affect tributes made to donors (i.e. everything from having one’s name on a building to a donation sticker in a book)?

- [Allow time for people to answer from the audience.]
- I don’t have a final answer for this issue, but it definitely makes me think.
- In general terms, I think there is a difference between someone naming something in honor of someone’s generosity and a person’s gift being contingent upon appropriate homage being given for the gift.
- We must not forget who owns all that we have and for whom our gift is being given.
- Simply put... It’s not about us!

Humility in Prayer (6:5-15)

How does Jesus describe people who prayed in public in His day?

- He again refers to these individuals as hypocrites.
- Jesus is describing “the practice of prayer, which the Pharisees loved to perform publicly. Rather than making prayer a matter between an individual and God, the Pharisees had turned it into an act to be seen by men—again, to demonstrate their supposed righteousness. Their prayers were directed not to God but to other men, and consisted of long, repetitive phrases (Matt 6:7).”³

How does Jesus describe a counter-cultural attitude in prayer?

- Prayer that is pleasing to God should be:
 - Done privately.
 - Authentic communication with God, not “empty phrases” that sound good but mean nothing to you.

² *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* 32.

³ *TBKC* 32.

- To the point, not incessant babbling.
- Jesus gave them a model to follow, not a verse to regurgitate.

Based on Jesus' model prayer, what things should we include in our prayers?

- Recognition of God for who He is.
- Pray for God's will to be accomplished in and through you.
- Pray for God's provision for your daily needs.
- Pray for forgiveness and the grace to forgive others.
- Pray for deliverance from the temptations that we will face.

Discretion in Fasting (6:16-18)

Once again, Jesus refers to hypocrites here in 6:16—this time He is referring to their appearance and disposition when fasting. What is fasting and what is its significance?

- Fasting is “going without food or drink voluntarily, generally for religious purposes. Fasting, however, could also be done for other reasons. It was sometimes done as a sign of distress, grief, or repentance.”⁴
- “Fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh, but the Pharisees were glorifying their flesh by drawing attention to themselves.”⁵

How does Jesus describe a counter-cultural attitude when fasting?

- Essentially, Jesus told them to not let anyone know when they were fasting.
- In fact, he said that they were to wash their face and comb their hair and act outwardly like everything was normal.
- Then, and only then, will your fasting reap the reward you are seeking.

Discernment in Judging (7:1-5)

For the fourth time in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to hypocrites in 7:5. The word “hypocrite” occurs only 18 times in the ESV—13 of those occurrences are found in the Gospel of Matthew.

⁴ *Nelson's Student Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 80.

⁵ *TBKC* 32.

For what is Jesus referring to hypocrites in this section?

- He was calling them out for their judgmental attitudes.
- With His rhetoric in 7:3-4, Jesus made it clear that they were holding others to a higher standard than what they themselves were willing to live by.

How does Jesus describe a counter-cultural attitude toward judging?

- We ought to be concerned first with our own problems and issues.
- “This passage does not teach that judgments should never be made; Matthew 7:5 does speak of removing the speck from your brother’s eye. The Lord’s point was that a person should not be habitually critical or condemnatory of a speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye when he has a plank—a strong hyperbole for effect—in his own eye. Such action is hypocritical... Furthermore, when seeking to help another, one must exercise care to do what would be appreciated and beneficial.”⁶

Treasures of the Heart

All of these character issues that we have found here in Matthew 6 & 7 are issues of the heart. Jesus drills down on this topic in Matthew 6:19-21.

Understanding the context surrounding these verses, what is Jesus trying to teach us about the treasures of our hearts?

- We are presented with two choices in these sections—we can live according to the world’s standards or we can choose to live counterculturally.
- Here is 6:19-21, Jesus summarizes all of these character issues and boils it down to one main issue—where is your heart?

What does Jesus say about treasures on earth and about treasures in heaven?

- If we store up treasures here on earth, they will only be temporary. These treasures will either be stolen or destroyed.
- Treasures stored up in heaven will not meet the same fate. If we focus on the eternal while here on the earth, it will have eternal value.
- Finally, the location of our treasure is determinative of the focus of our hearts!

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⁶ TBKC 33.