The Question:

In *Matthew 5:16*, Jesus tells us to let our light shine before others. Yet in *Matthew 6:1*, He warns us not to do our good deeds before people to be seen by them.
At first glance, this might seem like a contradiction. So, are we supposed to do good works publicly or not?

The Context Matters

Let’s read both scriptures carefully, starting with Matthew 5:14–16:

> *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.”

Here, Jesus is calling believers to live lives that reflect God's righteousness and love. The purpose of our "light" is to reveal God's goodness to the world. It's not about self-promotion, but about shining with the character of Christ (see Philippians 2:15 – "shine among them like stars in the sky").

Then we read Matthew 6:1–2, where Jesus says:

> *Matthew 6:1–2*
> "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."

This is a warning against pride and hypocrisy. The issue is not doing good in public, but doing it with the wrong motive—seeking personal glory rather than God's.

These verses are not contradictory but complementary. Jesus is

addressing two different heart attitudes:

- In Matthew 5, He is encouraging a life of visible, active faith that draws people to glorify God.
- In Matthew 6, He is warning against doing good deeds with the intention of receiving human praise.

According to biblical theology, intent matters as much as action. God sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), and righteousness without humility is empty (see Isaiah 64:6 – *“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* when done in pride).

Paul echoes this in 1 Corinthians 10:31:

> “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

True Christian living involves actions that point upward to God, not inward to ourselves.

An Example from Scripture: Herod’s Mistake

In Acts 12:20–23, King Herod made a public address that impressed his audience. The people shouted, *“This is the voice of a god, not of a man!”* Herod accepted their praise instead of giving glory to God.

> *Acts 12:23*
> “Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”

This shows how seriously God takes misplaced glory. Good works or talents that bring glory to self instead of God are not righteousness—they are rebellion masked in good behavior.

Let Your Light Shine—For God’s Glory

There’s no contradiction between Matthew 5:16 and Matthew 6:1 when we understand the key principle:

> *Visibility is not the issue. Motivation is.*

If your goal is to glorify God, then let your light shine boldly! Do good, speak truth, serve others—so that people may see Christ in you.
But if your goal is to glorify yourself, even a good deed becomes a spiritual trap.

We are called to reflect God’s light, not create our own spotlight.

So, ask yourself regularly:

- *Is this about making God known, or making myself known?*
- *Would I still do this if no one saw it but God?*

If it’s about God’s glory, go all in. If it’s about your own, repent and refocus.

> *Colossians 3:17*
> “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

(The Lord is coming!)

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