

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

E. The Appointment of the Twelve Apostles and Teaching on the Mount

7. Teaching on the Mount, Part VI:

Love for God Motivates Giving and Fasting in Secret

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #073

Base Text: MT 6.1-4, 16-18 (Parallel Text: None)

The Principle:

¹ *"I command you to continue to pay careful attention that you do not practice your righteousness in front of others, in order to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

The Principle Applied to Giving

² *"So when you are giving to the needy, I command you not to announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites are doing in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, I command you not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who is seeing what is done in secret, will reward you.*

The Principle Applied to Fasting

¹⁶ *"When you are fasting, I command you not to look gloomy as the hypocrites do, for they deliberately put their misery on their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.*

¹⁷ *"But when you fast, I command you to keep oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who is seeing what is done in secret, will reward you."*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	On a Mountain in Galilee
Timeline	May, 31 AD (Month Sixteen)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	E. The Appointment of the Twelve Apostles and "Teaching on the Mount"
Title	7. Teaching on the Mount, Part VI: Love for God Motivates Giving and Fasting in Secret

COMMENT:

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In our previous readings Jesus gave six examples of the way he came to fulfill the Law by filling his disciples with God's kind of unconditional love as the basis of true righteousness. It is interesting that he stopped at six, rather than giving seven examples. Like the six stone water pots he chose to fill with wine in his first miracle, Jesus' choice of six examples from the Law was probably intended to show the incompleteness of the Law for establishing true righteousness.

Everything in the Law was good, and holy. However, no system of Law can address every situation in which people need to know how to express righteousness. Love alone can supply the motivation to do the "right" thing in every circumstance of life. Love is thus the fulfillment on the Law, and Jesus and his atoning sacrifice for sin is the way any sinner can come into perfect righteousness. By giving six examples instead of seven, Jesus was showing that HE alone is the complete (as signified by the number "seven" fulfillment of the true righteousness that the Law was pointing to all the time.

Jesus now turned to the issue of spiritual disciplines in the life of his disciples. The followers of John the Immerser had already asked a question about one of those disciplines: fasting (DJN #59). The Pharisees practiced three spiritual disciplines on a weekly basis: giving to the poor, personal prayer, and fasting. Over the passing years these disciplines came to be considered normative behavior for any God-pleasing person of faith.

However, as Jesus looked into the hearts of the people around him who were following these practices regularly, he saw a pernicious spiritual cancer destroying their validity before God. That is, rather than being motivated by true love for God, many people were giving, praying, and fasting in order to receive human praise and recognition for being so "spiritual." They engaged in these disciplines when they were sure that other folks were watching them. They were self-centered rather than God-centered in their actions.

As usual, Jesus identified the heart of the matter by teaching that our motivation for engaging in spiritual disciplines is the most important consideration. He stated the key principle in verse one by issuing a command to constantly pay close attention to our motivation when we engage in spiritual disciplines. Jesus assumed his disciples would follow him in a lifestyle of giving, praying, and fasting. The question is not whether to engage in these disciplines or not. The issue for Jesus, and us, is "why" are we doing them?

The only appropriate motivation is love for God, not what WE gain from each discipline from others, or for ourselves. Let's explore this a bit further.

Jesus said that the Father **"is seeing"** what we are doing **"in secret."** His presence is invisible to our physical eyes, yet very real, for he is in the constant process of seeing us. A Jesus follower believes this, and therefore chooses to give, pray, and fast because our love causes us to do these things for HIS pleasure--seeking his joy and delight in us as we do them for him.

Jesus also said that the Father will **"reward us"** when we engage in these disciplines for his sake. The "reward" is bringing him joy by giving him glory and honor. There is an actual, eternal consequence-- a reward-- for loving God in action. Somehow, our tiniest acts of service unto him, motivated by love, are precious to God. None of them are offered in vain, because he knows our hearts. Our love for God actually makes a difference to the King of the universe!

Maintaining our anonymity in giving is the acid test of our motivation in doing it. We will do our best to make sure that no one but God knows about our giving. Human recognition of our giving should trouble us. Our goal is to make our Father smile by the way we take what HE has first given us, and quietly pass as much of it as we can on to others in need. As Paul said: **"God loves a cheerful giver."** I Cor. 9:7. Our loving attitude toward God in our giving is what we offer him in secret.

The same principle holds true in fasting. Our righteous motivation for fasting is love for God, expressed by setting aside time from other tasks like eating, watching TV, or pursuing other pleasures, and spending that time seeking God in private prayer instead. We do not want anybody to know we are fasting other than the God for whom we do it. He **"is seeing us"** in secret as we fast. We therefore pursue our fast privately, **"in secret,"** too.

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Jesus assumed we would give, and fast as much as we are capable of. His command was to be very careful to keep our motivation rooted in love for God, to bring him pleasure. Secrecy is a practical test of our motivation, not another legalistic criteria for righteousness. It is all about a heart filled with love for God, not a hunger for the praise and recognition of people.

APPLICATION:

To what degree is your giving motivated by love for God? The greater your love for him, the more you will seek to give in proportion to your means, and the more careful you will be to maintain anonymity. How are you doing with these?

How often do you fast? The value of spending time alone with God in prayer and private worship will determine how much love you express to him through this discipline. Secrecy will be your policy. Is your private practice of fasting telling God how much you love him?