

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 6:1 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Matthew 6:2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Matthew 6:4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Giving, prayer, and fasting are three great spiritual disciplines Christians can and ought to practice.

Jesus is going to discuss each of them in that order. His order may be suggested by the fact that, in their services, they gave before praying, while fasting was an entirely private matter.

In keeping with the general tone of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will be interested more in your inward motives than the activities themselves. It is always your heart-life that is of interest and importance to the Lord.

The giving mentioned in this passage is translated **charitable deeds**. In context it is alms for the poor. Jesus assumed that His followers would aid the poor in their distress.

Jesus wasn't forbidding receiving a public offering. His words **before men** have to do with the motive of our giving. We have a good example of this in the Book of Acts. Barnabas gave before men and it was from a pure heart with clean motives. Ananias and Sapphira were a different story entirely!

You could give privately and still have a poor motive. I've known folks who give unsolicited gifts only to get angry if they are not thanked or in some other way acknowledged.

You are giving as you are led by God in order to please Him by your obedience. Your future **reward** is not itself the motive as much as being pleasing to the Lord.

Having expressed giving from poor motives, Jesus described it from pure motives.

Matthew 6:2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

I have heard that the offering containers in the synagogues had a kind of **trumpet**-shape. They had a bowl on top, then a narrower neck that opened to the container below. When you put coins in you could thus make a great deal of noise as you dropped one coin at a time.

That may or may not be true. I rather think Jesus was exaggerating. He was portraying giving to receive glory from men as if you went around with trumpeters who sounded every time you made an offering.

Hypocrite literally means behind a mask. It was used of actors who often held up a mask before their faces to establish their character. Jesus was describing giving to receive glory from men. You were acting as if you were spiritual, but in the drawing of attention to yourself you draw it away from God.

In the streets refers to stopping to help beggars. **Glory from men** is all you can expect. It is a paltry **reward** to be thought well-of by mere men when you could be pleasing God.

Matthew 6:3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Probably a proverb, in the context of doing charitable deeds, it implies a secrecy about deeds of kindness rather than acting to impress others. This was not an unknown practice, for the Jews had what

was called "the Chamber of the Silent" for those who for some reason wanted to be completely anonymous in their giving.

Some commentators say that once it was the tradition of the Jews to give in this secret way but that the Pharisees had brought it out into the open as an act of righteousness that should be seen of men. If so then Jesus was suggesting a return to the original practice of giving in secret.

Again I would note that it is not therefore necessary to secretize our giving! In Acts the disciples came and gave alms openly and publicly. It is the motive, not the method, that is crucial.

It is your own left hand that is not to know what your own right hand is doing; it is not the other person's. The expression may simply mean that we are to avoid all scheming or planning for our own advantage in human attention. One does not give with strings attached. One gives in complete trust when the gift is in the spirit of love, and gives for the good in the experience itself rather than for personal benefits resulting from the gift.

Matthew 6:4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

The great motivator for your inner heart motives is the constant realization that your **Father sees** you **in secret**. I'm a pretty careful driver. I usually come to a complete stop. But I will admit I come to a more abrupt and longer stop if I see a cop!

In the case of your Father in Heaven, it's not so much out of fear of punishment as it is joy to please Him. Nevertheless He sees you in the secrets of your heart and its motives.

When will you be rewarded **openly**? Certainly in the Judgment of Jesus Christ; maybe in this life, too.

What difference does it make what other men think of me? Let's focus more on the Judgment Seat when you will stand before the Lord and His angels.

Giving... praying... fasting. Most of us need to return to these basics. We might be stressing one or two over another. We might be deficient in all three!

We might even talk our way out of them. For example: It is popular among evangelical intellectuals to try to prove that fasting is not a New Testament discipline at all.

Jesus said **When**, not **If!** **When you give...** **When you pray...** **When you fast...**

These are the things we ought to be doing on a regular basis. Do them from the heart to bring glory to God.

