

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

How Should Believers Give to the Needy, Pray, and Fast?

Wednesday, March 5 at 11:00 & 7:00

Ash Wednesday – 2014

Our Free Meals at 12 & 6 begin next Wednesday!

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Today, *as we begin the 2014 Lenten Season*, we know who Jesus is—*God in the flesh*, and we know what He did—*He gave up everything to remove our sins!* He didn't simply ♦stop eating His favorite food or ♦skip His favorite TV show; instead:

- He looked at us—*on our way to the lake of fire!*
- He looked at His desire—*not wanting to endure excruciating physical and spiritual pain!*
- He looked at His Father's will—*wanting Him, God's only Son, to pay the ultimate price for everyone!*

Now, *looking back*, we can only begin to imagine *the torture Jesus endured for us*; over and over again, He kept saying "no" to His human desires and "yes" to His Father's will.

Now, *as we proceed through this Season of Lent*, let us remember †our Savior, †what He endured for us, and †the forgiveness we have received by grace through faith in Him. Then, let us say "no" to our sinful desires and "yes" to God's will for our lives!

In today's sermon Jesus addresses three short topics: ♦giving to the needy, ♦praying, and ♦fasting. Jesus will tell us †how to proceed and †how to receive a reward from our Father in heaven!

1. **No Showing Off:** ¹ "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." // Jesus wants us to think about WHY we do what we do; are we genuinely trying to help those in need **OR** are we trying to impress those who might witness our good deeds? Dr. Kretzmann wrote: "...the good works shall be seen and speak for themselves, but...the doer [should] be kept entirely in the background." (NT I:31)
2. **The Wrong Way to Give to the Needy:** ² "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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. // Jesus said: Don't do "as the hypocrites do..." They are actors, *putting on a show*; they are *not* giving for the benefit of the needy, but "to be honored by men." What they want is what belongs to God! Instead, Jesus is calling us to act *so that God is glorified* – not like hypocrites who act *for their own glorification!*
3. **The Right Way to Give to the Needy:** 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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." // Since one brain controls both the left and the right hand, *is it possible to hide an action done by one hand from the other hand?* By no means! Yet Jesus is calling us to be *as secret as we possibly can* in giving to others. Dr.

Kreztmann wrote: “The works shall shine brightly, but the donor shall remain hidden to all but God...” (Ibid.)

4. **The Wrong Way to Pray:** ⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.” // Again, hypocrites are actors; *they are not genuine!* Therefore, *on purpose*, the Pharisees prayed in the *most public places*. When they did so, some people praised them, honored them, and looked up to them. They may have felt good about themselves, *but that was the full extent of their reward!*

5. **The Right Way to Pray:** ⁶ “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” // Prayer is a conversation with God, *which flows from a saving relationship with God!* Through Jesus, *God is our Father!* Therefore, He invites us to ♦go to a private place, ♦close the door, and ♦bear our soul to Him. In the process, *He will hear us and He will bless us!*

6. **The Wrong Way to Fast:** ¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.” //

a. Fasting in the Bible:

- i. Upon hearing bad news, Nehemiah “mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” (Neh 1:4 NIV)

- ii. At the time of Esther, upon hearing very bad news, “there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing.” (Est 4:3 NIV)

- iii. When others were ill, David wrote: “I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.” (Psalm 35:13 NIV)

- iv. While Daniel was in the lion’s den, “the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting...” (Dan 6:18 NAS)

- v. In the NT, while “worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit” gave important instructions. (Act 13:2 NIV)

b. Fasting to show off: Jesus warned: *Don’t do it!*

7. **The Right Way to Fast:** ¹⁷ “But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” // Fasting is a *private way* to ♦express our sorrow for sin, ♦turn our thoughts to God, and ♦focus on our Savior! *So no one else should know and God will bless us!*

Conclusion: During this 2014 Lenten Season and always, let us be: †compassionate—*secretly helping those in need*, †prayerful—*talking to God in secret*, and †repentant—*sorry for our sins and trusting in Jesus!*

And all God’s people said: **Amen!**