

Lesson 11

Receiving Honor

Introduction:

In His previous teaching Jesus talked about love. Real love is the character of God. Its nature is to do the right thing and its actions benefits others. Real love does not behave differently towards anyone, whether good or evil. And it is not based on feelings that are subject to change.

Using love as a platform Jesus in rapid-fire succession lists three loving actions that His disciples should perform: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. However, these are secondary issues. The real issue He addresses is the spirit behind the actions. Why does a person do these acts of love and from whom will he receive honor?

Scripture Reference:

The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 6:1-18

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.' For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

Anoint your head and wash your face. Jews put ashes on their heads when fasting. They put oil on their heads only for joyous occasions.

The Commands:

1. Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.
2. Do not sound a trumpet before you.
3. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.
4. You are not to be as the hypocrites.

5. Go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret.
6. Do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do.
7. Do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do.
8. Anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men.

The Lesson:

The passages of Scripture on the issues of almsgiving, prayer and fasting contain five common elements. The first element is that Jesus gives specific commands regarding each of the issues. The second element is that good deeds are being performed: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The third element is the hypocrite. The fourth is being seen by men and the fifth is that the Father who sees in secret rewards.

Jesus addresses the good deed of giving alms first. The meaning of the word alms is compassion. It is associated with giving money to the poor and should not be confused with the tithe that belongs to God. Alms could be giving directly to an individual or collected in a pooled fund to be distributed to the poor.

Jesus instructs His disciples to do their almsgiving in secret. He wants them to do it in such a way that other men do not notice. When a person receives charity from another he knows, there is always a sense of indebtedness that goes with it. When the giver is unknown to the poor, the only thanks he can give is to God.

The second instruction is to not sound a trumpet before giving alms. In Jesus' day wealthy people, who were puffed up with pride, may have actually sounded a trumpet before they gave alms making it clear to everyone that they were charitable people. The point Jesus is making is that people shouldn't announce their giving. He reinforces this thought with His next command, *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."* We know that it is impossible for the left hand not to know what the right hand is doing but the point is to be discreet.

In His discussion on good deeds Jesus draws attention to the word hypocrite. It is His first recorded use of the word. Therefore, we should gain a clear understanding of its meaning so it can be applied properly in future contexts. A hypocrite is an actor under an assumed character. He is playing a role. What you see, is not reality; it's phony.

Jesus said hypocrites could be found in the synagogues and streets. They are also found in churches and other public places. Whenever an audience gathers, their performance can be seen. They are actors performing on a public stage. And they live for the applause of men for the role they are playing.

The hypocrite is motivated by a pride that says, "See how good I am" and a desire to receive the credit for his performance. The hypocrite does his acts of righteousness out of love for himself not others.

Jesus moves on to the second good deed; prayer. He tells His disciples to get away from people. Go to the inner rooms and close the door so people can't hear you pray. The hypocrites pray publicly because they want people to think they are pious. But prayer is a private conversation between a man and his God.

The second good deed that Jesus addresses is prayer. He tells the disciples not to use meaningless repetition like the Gentiles do. Their chants and mantras are worthless. Perhaps the Gentiles think God doesn't hear well so they have to repeat themselves. Maybe He is sleeping or not listening at that moment and they have to gain His attention. Or might their motive be to weary Him with the same petition over and over so He will answer their prayer? In the book of Isaiah the prophet, chapter 65, verse 24 it says, *"It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear."*

The third good deed deals with fasting. Most people think that it means to abstain from food. However, that is not the true sense of the word. Four conditions must be met in order for something to be considered a fast. A person (1) does without something (2) that is needed or desired (3) for a period of time (4) with the express purpose of accomplishing something greater. God does want His people to fast, but according to the prophet Isaiah it's not for food.¹ The reference is Isaiah 58:6-14.

"Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' if you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell. If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

During the time of Jesus people made a great show of fasting. They wore sackcloth and put ashes on their head. People knew they were voluntarily suffering in order to gain God's favor. Jesus tells His disciples to put on a happy face not a gloomy one. The reason why is that people are able to read facial expressions.

A gloomy face indicates sadness or suffering. When people see a gloomy face they naturally ask the reason for it. The hypocrite then has an opportunity to draw attention to his humble state by exclaiming, "Oh, I'm fasting for the benefit of this or that." Men may applaud his efforts but God is dishonored. It appears that the individual's humbleness is required to move God's hand in his favor. A gloomy face also indicates hopelessness and lack of faith in God to work in a situation.

On the other hand a happy face indicates joy radiating from within. This person is full of hope and confidence that God will work in the midst of the situation. People also want to know why a person is joyous. This can give rise to the Apostle Peter's admonition to *"always being ready to*

¹ The only food fast that God declared was once each year on the Day of Atonement. (Yom Kippur)

make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

Jesus tells His disciples to do all these good deeds in secret because their Father who sees in secret will reward them. They will receive their honor, glory and applause from Him. In contrast to a hypocrite, a disciple’s motive for good deeds is based on humility. He desires to see God receive the credit. And his acts of righteousness are based on love for God and others.

Doing good deeds always require a sacrifice. In almsgiving it’s money, in prayer it’s time and in fasting it’s food or something else. The end result of doing good deeds is a reward for everyone who does them. For the hypocrite it is the applause of men and for the disciple it is treasure laid up for him in heaven.

Group Discussion:

1. Why are actors so highly regarded in society?
2. Describe an honor you received and tell how it made you feel.

The Point Of The Lesson:

Get a better reward for your good deeds.

Application:

Do a least one good deed before the next meeting and don’t tell anyone about it.