What’s Done in Secret

July 5, 2020

*Matthew 6:1 – “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.”*

*Matthew 6:3-4 – “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

*Matthew 6:6 – “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.”*

*Matthew 6:17-18 – “But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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 sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Without a doubt, we live in a culture that values an outspoken voice. We have created multiple platforms for people to openly speak their mind and share their stories and experiences. In many cases, that’s not a bad thing. It’s AWESOME to be able to share encouragements and joys with other people!

However, sometimes we use these platforms for other purposes. We like to use them to defend our own point of views and explain why we feel we are right and others are wrong. We use them to stretch the truth. In some cases, we use these platforms to show off all the “good things” we are doing – to build up our pride and ego or to make others feel bad they aren’t doing the same things.

In reading these verses from Matthew 6 (and a few others!), we find that the opposite is necessary for a positive, personal relationship with God. Instead of telling other people about all the good things we do, we are to keep those moments between us and God. When giving to other people, we don’t have to tell our friends or enemies or social media strangers how much good we did for the world today – God knows every single action and will value the heart behind what’s done in secret.

We don’t often see benefit in things done in secret. Usually, when something like that is done secretly, there is little benefit to yourself. In this case, that’s the point. The purpose of prayer, fasting, giving, and other disciplines like these is not to display them like a badge for others to congratulate or be impressed by. They are meant to build up a personal relationship between oneself and God. The reward we find in disciplines done in secret is a deeper, more intimate connection with the God we so desperately need to connect with.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

1. Have you ever had a secret you shared with someone? Or did someone have a secret they shared with you? Was that secret kept? If it wasn’t, how did that make you feel? If you revealed a secret someone shared with you, how do you think that made others feel?
2. Why do you think God wants giving, prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines to be done in secret? What reward does He give?
3. When these spiritual disciplines are done in view of others, or for the benefit of others (instead of in secret), Jesus says that these people have received their reward in full. What do you think that means? What is that reward?
4. In all of these things, there is a “hidden” element of simplicity behind doing things in secret. In other words, we find that if we don’t try and put on a display for others, our actions tend to be more genuine and less gaudy. What do you think the value of simplicity is to the life of a Christian?
5. These words in Jesus’ message was almost in direct opposition to the ways the Pharisees behaved. What examples do you see or know of in the rest of the gospel of the Pharisees acting in these ways?
6. What is your motivation for acts of spiritual discipline? Why do you think this was important for Jesus to address, and for Matthew to include in the sermon on the mount?