

The Lord Discusses Fasting and the Proper Attitude Toward Money

Matthew 6:16-24

Matthew 6:16-24 - *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures a heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Background Notes

Most Christians would say that they love the Lord’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, but what they usually mean is that they love the Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon. But what would they say about this section of the Sermon? If we really loved the Lord’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, then we would follow the Lord’s teaching given here about money and wealth. But do we? Many Christians continue to “lay up for themselves” far more treasure on earth than they do in heaven!

So there’s a lot more to the Sermon on the Mount than the Beatitudes. In fact, if Christians used the whole Sermon on the Mount as a general guideline for living life and setting priorities, there would be a radical change in their lifestyle and value system. And that’s a challenge for all of us!

In the first half of Matthew 6 the Lord discussed three areas of piety practiced by the self-righteous Pharisees – almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The Lord showed that the Pharisees were hypocrites in all three areas. We’ve already looked at the first two of these areas – giving of alms and prayer. The third area is fasting in verses 16-18. Then the Lord moved on to discuss another important area in relationship to righteous living, the matter of the believer’s attitude toward wealth and money.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should not publicize their spiritual fasting.

Verses 16: *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”*

Believers should not publicize their spiritual fasting. The term “spiritual fasting” means abstaining from food for a period of time for spiritual reasons. (If you’re fasting for weight loss reasons, you can publicize that - if you want to!)

The Pharisees loved to fast for show – to show off their spiritual superiority! According to the Law, the people of Israel were to fast on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur (Leviticus 23). Fasting on the Day of Atonement was the only fast commanded in the Old Testament, but the Pharisees fasted much more often than once a year. Do you remember the Pharisee who fasted twice a week in the parable of Luke 18?

There’s nothing wrong with fasting for the right reasons - then or today. Moses fasted. David fasted. Elijah fasted. Our Lord Himself fasted! But the Pharisees fasted for the wrong reasons. They fasted to impress people with how spiritual they were. They put on gloomy faces and walked around looking disheveled so that people would know that they were fasting. They wanted people to think that they were fasting more intensely than they really were. They were hypocrites, and God hates hypocrisy in any area.

Are you trying to impress someone with your “spirituality” right now? Are you trying to appear more spiritual than you really are, so other believers will be impressed? Don’t be a hypocrite! The Lord said that when you fast, don’t publicize it! Your spiritual disciplines should be between you and God.

Fasting doesn’t earn our salvation and fasting doesn’t make us more spiritual. Fasting may be appropriate for special times of prayer and spiritual concern, but believers should not publicize their fasting.

2. Believers should not hoard their material treasure.

The Lord gave two commands in verses 19-20. One is a negative command and one is a positive command. The negative command is in verse 19: *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal...”* The positive command is in verse 20: *“but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

Notice, these statements are **commands**. They’re **not options** - they’re **commands**! Unfortunately most Christians disobey these two commands.

Verse 21 tells us why it's so important to obey these commands: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Suppose you were to lose all your material possessions this week - your house, furniture and car because of a fire in your home, and all your savings in a stock market crash. Everything gone! Wiped out! Would you be devastated and demoralized? You wouldn't be, if you're obeying the commands in Matthew 6:19-20.

But are we obeying these commands? I know a Christian man who becomes seriously depressed and physically ill any time the stock market drops 100 points. He's not obeying these commands! Sadly, accumulating wealth is a top priority in his life.

At one of our around-the-dinner-table family discussions some years ago, we were asking one another what we would grab first if our house caught fire, and we could rescue just one item as we escaped. Maybe you have played that game, too! Our children named our dog and their favorite earthly treasures. I said that I'd go for the file of important papers, including the deed for the house and our bank records. What do you think Margie said? She said if everyone were safely out of the house, she would try to save the family picture albums. Good choice! What would you have chosen? Think through this illustration. It may expose your true heart.

In verses 22-23, what did the Lord mean about the "good eye" and the "bad eye"? *"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

The "good eye" and the "bad eye" are illustrations. If your physical eyes are good, you see everything. If your physical eyes are bad, you're blind. You can't see properly – you're in darkness. It's the same way in the area of spiritual realities. If your motives are pure and you obey our Lord's commands about material possession, your life will be aligned properly. You will be walking in the light, and you will have clear spiritual vision and understanding.

However, if you have mixed motives about money, and you're trying to accumulate your treasure on earth and maybe some in heaven at the same time, then your spiritual eyesight is poor. Your life is confused and unfocused, like trying to walk around in a dark room. Everything you do will be off center, because your improper priorities will affect everything you do. You will not have clear spiritual vision and clear spiritual understanding.

Our money and our possessions are a crucial and defining issue in our lives.

Believers should not hoard their material treasure.

Practical Application

Don't try to serve God and money!

Why not serve both God and money? Because you can't! Verse 24: *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* *Mammon* is the Aramaic word for riches – and the English word "money" is derived from *mammon*.

Many Christians think that they can serve both God and money, but they're wrong! You simply can't do it! If you try to serve God and money, the best that you can hope for is that you will only despise the things of the Lord and not actually start to hate them. Listen to the verse again: *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* So if you try to serve God and money, the best that you can hope for is that you will only become indifferent to the Lord.

If you try to serve God and money, your loyalty will be divided. Money will always move up on your priority list - and the Lord will always move down on your priority list. **I've never seen or known of an exception** to this rule! Why? Because **the Lord gave this rule, so it's completely accurate!** There's never been any exception to this rule. If you try to serve God and money, invariably the money will its way work up the priority list and the Lord will slide down. **Money will become your master!**

This Scripture is not teaching that it's a sin to be rich. No! But it does teach us that you can't **serve** both God and money. If God makes you rich (and I wish the Lord would test me in this area – well, that's a joke, folks!) -- if God makes you rich, look at it as a test. If God makes you rich then you have a great responsibility to give your wealth away -- to use it to serve the Lord and His work on earth. And by the way - this is the only way that you can take your money with you!

Hoarding and accumulating wealth and material possessions is not a biblical option for Christians. So don't **try** to be rich! And don't even **think** about trying to **serve** both God and money! You can't do it!

Don't try to serve God and money!