

50 Commands of Christ ~ Lesson 3 ~ (Commands #13-17)

13. Practice secret disciplines (giving, praying, fasting)—*Matthew 6:1-18.*

What does it mean to not let your left hand know what your right is doing?

If you give in secret, who will reward you? When?

There are four elements of prayer. What are they? (Remember ACTS)

Is it realistic to fast today? In secret? Why?

14. Lay up treasures in heaven—*Matthew 6:19-21.*

How can we determine where our treasure is (and thus where our hearts are)?

What idols distract you from storing your treasure in heaven?

15. Seek first the kingdom of God—*Matthew 6:33.*

How can you seek God and God's will for your life? How can you seek His kingdom? What are your priorities in life?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this process?

16. Judge not—*Matthew 7:1-2.*

By what measure will we be judged? Is this a cliché or when we judge others do we set ourselves up to be judged in exactly the same way? Give an example.

When, if ever, should we criticize or judge someone else?

17. Do not throw your pearls to pigs—*Matthew 7:6.*

What does this really mean?

Can pigs digest pearls? What if you provide indigestible wisdom to the wrong person at the wrong time?

Might it be better to be an example and wait for an opportunity to share your faith and show the evidence of Christ's transforming power to draw in hurting people?

50 Commands of Christ ~ Lesson 3 ~ (Commands #13-17) ~ Leader's Guide

13. Practice secret disciplines (giving, praying, fasting)

Matthew 6:1-18 – 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. 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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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. 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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹“This, then, is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ ¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. ¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ 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.

What does it mean to not let your left hand know what your right is doing (vs 3)?

This is a way of teaching or emphasizing that you should not call attention to your giving. Our motives must be pure rather than giving to a charity or doing something for someone if it will benefit you in return. You should give for the pleasure of giving and as a response to God's love, not for self-glorification.

Many charities, even Christian ones, give donors “gifts” in return for contributions, things like T-shirts, hats, calendars, books, stuffed animals, clocks, etc. Some charities spend 40c or more for each \$1 donated. How does this mesh with Jesus' command? Many charities publicize the names of donors with how much they've donated. Is that okay?

If you give in secret, who will reward you (vs 4, 6, 14, 18)? When?

Many people are motivated to make a charitable donation or do what's right when you gain some recognition and praise. Another motivation is seeing the benefit that your donation or action brings to someone else. That's okay, but if that's the only reason you're giving, that's not so good. Jesus here is saying that to make sure your motives are not selfish, you should do your good deeds quietly and your giving in secret, not for some

reward. Jesus says we should check our motives in four areas: generosity (6:4), prayer (6:6), forgiving others (6:14), and fasting (6:18).

There are four elements of prayer. What are they? (Remember ACTS)

A: Acclimation (awe, praise, honor God's holy name)

C: Confession (admit you are a sinner, ask for forgiveness)

T: Thanksgiving (for all the blessings God has given you, for answering prayer)

S: Supplication (asking God for something—healing, a job, wisdom, anything!)

Is it realistic to fast today? In secret? Why?

Of course, why not? Youth groups have fasts where young people fast for some period of time and then get together for a big feast to end the fast. Examples are the 30-Hour Famine, the Source “Fast” Challenge, Give It Up, Fasting to Fight World Hunger, etc. However, Jesus here was focusing more on fasting in order to spend time in prayer. Fasting teaches self-discipline, reminds us that we can live with a lot less, and helps us appreciate God's gifts. Jesus was emphasizing fasting for these right reasons and not from a selfish desire for praise (or to raise money for some cause).

14. Lay up treasures in heaven

Matthew 6:19-21 – ¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

How can we determine where our treasure is (and thus where our hearts are)?

Perhaps we must first ask, how exactly do you store your treasures in heaven? The NIV Study Bible says “anything done in this life that has eternal value will be rewarded.” But that seems awfully amorphous and tenuous. Jesus is certainly talking about more than money, although giving money to the church and Christian charities is probably a good first step, especially if it's followed by other acts of obedience to God. Back in Deuteronomy, God tells us to “walk in my ways, obey my commands,” and here Jesus is going one step further and essentially saying, “if you do that, you will be rewarded.”

What idols distract you from storing your treasure in heaven? Or, put another way, what hinders or stops you from walking in the ways of the Lord and obeying his commands?

15. Seek first the kingdom of God

Matthew 6:33 – But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

How can you seek God and God's will for your life? How can you seek His kingdom?

“Seek first” means not only to turn to God first for help in any troubling situation, but to look to him for guidance in all aspects of your life, obey his commands, and try to fill your thoughts with his wisdom.

What are your priorities in life?

People, objects, goals, and other desires all compete for priority in your life. Some of these are from outside (friends, TV ads, sports, women, temptations) and some actually come from within you (greed, gossip, anger, desire for power, desire to succeed, desire to be praised). Any of these can quickly bump God out of first place if you don’t actively choose to give him first place in *every* area of your life.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this process?

16. Judge not

Matthew 7:1-2 – ¹“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

By what measure will we be judged? Is this a cliché or when we judge others do we set ourselves up to be judged in exactly the same way? Give an example.

Romans 2:6 – God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”

Revelation 22:12 – “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

Matthew 12:36-37 – ³⁶But I tell you that every man will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

The verses above describe the way God will judge all of us in his final judgement. However, Jesus adds in Matt 7:1-2 that if we judge other people in other ways, this type of improper judgement will also be applied to us. Things like judging someone by the color of his skin, by his lack of education, by a physical disability, by his bad habits (even though we may have similar bad habits), or just by him being different from you. Do this, and you too will be judged like this by God! Ooops.

When, if ever, should we criticize or judge someone else?

A Christian must not judge hypocritically or self-righteously. On the other hand, we do have to evaluate the character of other people—whether one is a “dog” (vs 6) or a false prophet (vs 15) or a foolish man (vs 26). Scripture often exhorts believers to “test everything” (1 Thess 5:21), evaluate carefully (John 7:24), and choose between good and evil people.

17. Do not throw your pearls to pigs

Matthew 7:6 – “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

What does this really mean?

Dogs in the street were held in low esteem and pigs were ritually unclean according to God’s law (Deut 14:8). If you touched such an animal you became “ceremonially unclean” and could not go to the temple to worship. Jesus uses t his vivid example to say that holy teachings should not be given to unholy or disinterested people. Teaching others about the kingdom of God should be given in accordance with the spiritual capacity, interest and maturity of the learner.

Can pigs digest pearls? What if you provide indigestible wisdom to the wrong person at the wrong time?

Pigs cannot digest pearls; they simply pass through and come out in their poop. That’s probably not much different than if you provide indigestible wisdom to the wrong person at the wrong time—it goes in one ear and out the other.

Might it be better to be an example and wait for an opportunity to share your faith and show the evidence of Christ’s transforming power to draw in hurting people?

Possibly, yes. But as the NIV Life Application Bible says, “we should not stop giving God’s word to unbelievers, but we should be wise and discerning in what we teach to whom, so that we will not be wasting our time.”