

Matthew 6:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Analysis

Jesus condemns hypocrites who 'disfigure their faces' during fasting to advertise their piety. The Greek 'aphanizo' (disfigure/make unrecognizable) suggests deliberate effort to appear haggard and spiritual. Their goal was not communion with God but human admiration. Like almsgiving and prayer, fasting's value depends entirely on motive. When done 'to be seen of men, they have their reward'—present human approval exhausts their compensation from God.

Historical Context

Pharisees fasted twice weekly (Luke 18:12), often Monday and Thursday when markets were busiest, ensuring maximum audience. Disfigurement included unwashed faces, disheveled hair, and ashes—visible markers of 'spirituality' that garnered social status but masked pride.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How can spiritual disciplines like fasting be practiced for God's glory rather than cultivating reputation for piety?
2. What does Jesus' consistent condemnation of hypocritical displays reveal about God's priorities in evaluating religious practice?

Interlinear Text

Ὅταν δὲ νηστεύοντες· μὴ γίνεσθε ὡσπερ οἱ
when Moreover to fast not be as G3588
G3752 G1161 G3522 G3361 G1096 G5618

ὑποκριταὶ σκυθρωποί ἀφανίζουσιν γὰρ τὰ πρόσωπα
the hypocrites of a sad countenance they disfigure for G3588 faces
G5273 G4659 G853 G1063 G4383

αὐτῶν ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις νηστεύοντες·
G846 that they may appear G3588 unto men to fast
G3704 G5316 G444 G3522

ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν
Verily I say unto you G3754 They have G3588 reward G846
G281 G3004 G5213 G568 G3408

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 1:4 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

Luke 18:12 (Parallel theme): I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Daniel 9:3 (Parallel theme): And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

Psalms 35:13 (Parallel theme): But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.

Psalms 69:10 (Parallel theme): When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach.

Mark 2:18 (Parallel theme): And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

Acts 14:23 (Parallel theme): And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Matthew 6:2 (Parallel theme): Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Matthew 6:5 (Parallel theme): And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

2 Samuel 12:16 (Parallel theme): David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.