

Matthew 6:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

Analysis

The command to 'anoint thine head, and wash thy face' when fasting instructs maintaining normal appearance rather than advertising spiritual discipline. This doesn't forbid corporate fasting or times when fasting may be public (Acts 13:2-3), but condemns self-promoting displays. The principle is that fasting should be 'unto the Lord' (Romans 14:6-8), not to impress observers. Maintaining normal appearance removes the temptation to pride and ensures proper motive.

Historical Context

Anointing the head with oil and washing the face were normal grooming practices in ancient Palestine. Jesus instructs fasters to appear as on any normal day, keeping their spiritual discipline private between themselves and God, contrary to Pharisaic practice of conspicuous 'suffering.'

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How can spiritual disciplines be practiced in ways that guard against pride and self-promotion?
2. What does the instruction to maintain normal appearance while fasting teach about the heart versus external religion?

Interlinear Text

σὺ	δὲ	νηστεύων	ἀλειψαί	σου	τὴν	κεφαλὴν	καὶ	τὸ
thou	But	when thou fastest	anoint	thine	G3588	head	and	G3588
G4771	G1161	G3522	G218	G4675		G2776	G2532	

πρόσωπόν σου νίψαι
face thine wash
G4383 G4675 G3538

Additional Cross-References

Ruth 3:3 (Parallel theme): Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.

Ecclesiastes 9:8 (Parallel theme): Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

2 Samuel 12:20 (Parallel theme): Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.