

Who Knows All Our Secrets?

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body." (Ephesians 4:25)

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices..." (Colossians 3:9)

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ... They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." (John 17:14, 16)

"If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:6-7)

Disciples of Jesus are commanded to speak the truth in love. Christians must *"put off falsehood and speak truthfully"* to each other, our fellow *"members of one body."* Those in the body of Christ are taught to *"not lie to each other"* as such things are *"practices"* of our *"old self."* Therefore, honesty is fundamental to loving *"one another."* In light of this, the disciples of Jesus in our lives, in our ministries, those mentoring us and *"over us in the Lord"* (1 Thessalonians 5:12) should know our "secrets."

There is a distinction between disciples, members of the body, and those that are *not* in the body of Christ. There are those that are *"in the world"* and there are those that are *"not of the world."* We are called to be *"in the light"* as people of the light, belonging to God. It is this *"walking in the light"* that grants us *"fellowship with one another."* The scriptures draw this line between those who are lost and in the dark and those who are saved and in the light in many different additional ways. If someone is a member of the body of Christ, we are commanded to speak truthfully to them in love, put off falsehood, and we are not to lie to them. This is walking in the light and ensures we have fellowship with them.

There is a marked difference between how people of the light's shrewdness and people *not* of the light – those “of this world” – and their “shrewdness.” *“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”* (Luke 16:8) We cannot act like this “*dishonest manager*” with each other for we are “*the people of the light.*” It is expected that “*the people of this world*” will be “*dishonest*” and manipulative, concealing their motives – even behind their kindness. If we are the people of the light, we must not be shrewd in the same way. Therefore, this begs the question, how then are the “people of the light” to be shrewd, yet “less shrewd” than the people of this world?

First, to understand what it means to be “shrewd” as “people of the light” we must look at Jesus. Second, we must look at what we’d consider a “good example” of a disciple. Then we must consider why they were “shrewd” or “secretly” acting, what they were concealing, and what their intentions were. Lastly, did they lie or “act in secret” from their fellow disciples?

Why Would Jesus Act In Secret (Shrewdly)?

“In his defense Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.’ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:17-18)

As soon as Jesus Christ made his teachings and identity known, the Jewish leaders wanted to murder him. Jesus’ intentions on *acting “in secret”* in the start of John 7 before the festival were because the “*Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.*” (John 7:1) However, Jesus’ teachings and identity were already well known. Jesus did not change his message nor did he reveal some new plan or intention. What Jesus taught before John 7 and after hiding himself from murderers until the right time in John 7 did not change. This is why Jesus could say “*I have spoken openly to the world,*” Jesus replied. “*I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.*” (John 18:20 NIV)

Who did Jesus act in secret from? Those who were seeking to murder him. What did Jesus keep secret in his teaching or intent? Nothing. Jesus “*said nothing in secret.*” His message

and plans did not change and there was no “big reveal” of some kind scheme or division or “new teaching.” The LORD kept right on preaching what he’d already been preaching for the second half of the festival. Certainly, none of Jesus’ disciples were “surprised” by some sudden change of ministry direction...because no such drastic change occurred!

Why Was Joseph of Arimathea A Disciple Secretly (Shrewdly)?

“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away.” (John 19:38)

We have already established that Jesus hid himself from those that wanted to murder him. Certainly, the same groups that plotted for and demanded the brutal murder of Jesus would have shown no quarter to Joseph. Therefore, Joseph treated his would-be murderers *shrewdly*. Interestingly, Pilate knew exactly what Joseph was doing, his intention, and his actions. Additionally, disciples of Jesus knew that Joseph was their brother in Christ – else, why write about it here? Joseph did not hide his discipleship from disciples! This is an example of righteous shrewdness. The questions are who is Joseph being shrewd with, why is he being shrewd, and what is his goal with this shrewdness?

Joseph, like Jesus, was hiding himself from those who (would likely) murder him. Like Jesus who told his brothers (in John 7) plainly why he was waiting to reveal himself at the festival, Joseph told Pilate plainly his intentions by asking permission for Jesus’ body himself. As to “why” Jesus and Joseph “acted in secret?” Both Jesus and Joseph faced death should they be exposed. What about their “intentions?” Jesus’ intent was to wait until the opportune time to continue to preach what he’d been preaching all along when the attendance at the festival would be its greatest. Joseph’s intent in this moment was to make sure he could care for Jesus’ body and give it proper burial. Both of their actions were very encouraging for all the disciples as they were inspired by Jesus’ preaching and Joseph’s kindness.

Should A Disciple “Act In Secret” (Shrewdly) Today?

So today, when is it permissible to be shrewd and “*act in secret*” or to be a disciple “*secretly*?” What can we glean by looking at these two examples? First, we know both of them were under threat of death. Secondly, we know that both of them spoke plainly to other parties about their plans and what was going on. Jesus told his physical brothers (and his *disciples*) why he was not acting in public – *yet*. Joseph of Arimathea had to get permission from Pilate himself (risky) and the *disciples* certainly knew Joseph was their brother, else it could not be noted in the scripture! Thirdly, both Jesus and Joseph had righteous and plain intentions that served God’s purposes. Jesus’ intention was to maximize the impact of his message, the same one he’d been preaching all along. Joseph intended to give Jesus a proper burial and serve the LORD in a very meaningful way. Neither of these moments of shrewdness brought about great “surprises”, consternation, and/or division between *disciples of Jesus*.

We have disciples today in foreign missions fields where shrewdness just like these two examples is necessary and the right thing to do. For example, the brothers and sisters that are in mainland China and in the predominantly Muslim nations need to be disciples in secret until they know that the people they are reaching out to will not report them to the authorities. At some points, people have given death threats to leaders in our movement. As such, those leaders “acted in secret” and moved about discreetly and notified the authorities. In these cases, the disciples – the members of the Body – are not the ones who are treated with shrewdness. Neither Jesus nor Joseph hid their intent from *disciples* – otherwise, how could it have been recorded?

In any case, we see that when Jesus and Joseph of Arimathea were under the threat of death, they “*acted in secret*.” Therefore, we can conclude that when someone *who is not a disciple* wants to murder us, we too can act shrewdly towards *them*. However, we cannot conceal matters and be shrewd with “*the people of the light*” or “*each other*” as “*we are all members of one body*.” Furthermore, many disciples refused to back down and hide their discipleship and so they were arrested and imprisoned. History and the scriptures show many died

because of their testimony and admission of Jesus' Lordship. Jesus himself died because of his teaching and preaching that he was the Son of God. Therefore, we too should expect that our admission of discipleship very well could *eventually* lead to our own death! Lastly, we must consider the intent and impact of what we are doing *"in secret"* and who we are keeping secrets from. May it be said of us that we are speaking to one another as if speaking *"the very words of God."*

"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:11 NIV)

When Are Disciples Of Jesus Commanded To Act In Secret?

"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 6:3-4 NIV)

Giving to the poor. We are to never "announce it with trumpets" and make a spectacle of it. Give to the poor with God as our focus, knowing that as we give "in secret" he sees all, and he will reward us! God wants our hearts to be pure when giving to the needy! We must take heed, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 gave with the wrong motives. God exposed them through Peter, and then God struck them both dead for their impure motives. Certainly, a pure heart when giving to the needy is a matter of life and death!

"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 6:6 NIV) And *"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."* (Matthew 6:16 NIV)

Praying and fasting. God sees what is done in secret, and he rewards us accordingly. Our

personal prayer life and our fasting should not be for boasting or a show of our “spirituality.” Clearly, God wants us to maintain a level of personal and deep connection with him. God also wants us to show him, not others, that we are fasting – as it is our entreatment for his will! True fasting is detailed in Isaiah 58, and even there God warns about the temptation to make a “show” of fasting *“Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes...”* (Isaiah 58:5) God wants fasting to change our hearts so we *“lose the chains of injustice”* and *“break every yoke!”*

It’s clear that keeping our giving, prayer, and fasting a secret is important in our walk with God. There are some things God wants only for him and our private, personal, relationship with him. Furthermore, it is clear that we are not to lie to each other, but in the case of the threat of death, we may choose to be shrewd with those who are *of the world* or *intend* to kill us. We are not to keep the truth from each other. Neither Jesus nor Joseph lied to disciples, nor did they “surprise” people with some new agenda or teaching. Jesus *“said nothing in secret.”* (John 18:20) Therefore, neither should we.

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” – (Ecclesiasties 12:13-14)