



World Christian Fellowship

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How Not to fast? Matthew 6:16-18

Matthew 6:16-18, *“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. ¹⁷But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so 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.*

Matthew 6:1-4, deals about Hypocrisy on giving.

Matthew 6:5-15, deals with Hypocrisy in prayer.

Matthew 6:16-18, deals with Hypocrisy in fasting.

The Pharisees and the scribes and the Jews were involved in many, many fasts. Very common part of their religious system. It needed to be corrected.

We must understand what fasting is all about?

Fasting in the church of Jesus Christ is a little understood factor of religious or spiritual experience.

Fasting is a very popular but that is not to be confused with what the Bible is teaching us about fasting.

Food then provides

- Sustenance,
- Enjoyment, and
- fellowship.

Every meal that we eat is a gift from God.

There is only one compulsory fast from one end of Scripture to the other, just one. It was a general public national fast.

God said, on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, that one day a year when sacrifices of the nation are given for the sins of the people for the year past.

Leviticus 16:29-31, *“This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. ³⁰For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before*

the Lord. ³¹It is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.

On that day from sunrise to sunset, you will fast, Yom Kippur. That is the only fast ever given as compulsory by God in the entire Scripture.

But notice it is a fast connected with a deep mournful spirit in confessing sin. Now that ought to give you a hint of what fasting is all about.

Fasting is inextricably connected to a great sense of spiritual anxiety. A time in that case of confession of sin and seeking forgiveness at the hand of God.

In fact, the Jews went so far as to say on the Day of Atonement, “it is forbidden” – says the Talmud – “to eat, to drink, to bathe, to anoint oneself, to wear sandals or to engage in conjugal intercourse.” Even the little children on the Day of Atonement couldn’t eat. These little children had to learn that that was to be a prescribe fast. They had to learn it when they were young so they would maintain it when they became older.

Now, beyond that the Bible never commands a fast. The New Testament never commands us to fast.

1. The principle of fasting.

Fasting is total abstinence from food.

Stop eating for no good reason, because then several things are going to happen. If there's nothing else in your mind, you are going to go nuts not eating and you lose the whole import of the fast.

There is a reason to humble yourself in that manner.

There is a reason to deny yourself in that manner.

There is a reason to inflict yourself in that manner and the reason is a consuming one.

So that fasting is almost not something you choose to do, but something you cannot avoid.

It is common in the New Testament.

At least 30 times and more, the word ***nēsteia*** or a form of that word is used in the New Testament, so it was very common then.

The Pharisees have twisted and perverted it.

The Chinese for years, for centuries loved to eat and it is not unusual for a Chinese dinner to consist of 40 courses. When

we get Chinese food in bits and pieces of all kinds of assortments. This was traditional.

There is no place in the world, nor has there ever been a period in history where people have so indulged themselves with food as we do in our society. There are restaurants all over the place.

2. The period of fasting.

People have discussed and debated how long a fast should be?

So that in his lifetime there were fastings.

Different kinds,

Different times,

Different reasons, and

Different purposes.

Day fast:

Twice a week:

7 Day fast:

21 Days Fast:

So, the times and the length of times are varied depending on the situation in each given element.

3. The priority of fasting.

V 16, "When you fast."

V 17, "When you fast."

Two things:

Jesus assumed this would happen.

Jesus doesn't say stop fasting or fast.

Matthew 9:14-15, *Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast ¹⁴often, but Your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.*

Jesus said this is not the time to fast, because we can't mourn.

To what then is fasting connected?

To mourning.

People who say, "Oh I fasted, and I had such spiritual sensitivities. I fasted and I rose to such spiritual heights."

No!

Fasting is a response, not an inducement to something.

Jesus says, we don't fast because there is nothing to fast about.

4. The provocation for fasting.

a) Lamentation

Fasting is a result of lamentation or sorrow.

Some people think that fasting is sort of a ticket to blessing.

There are some people who fast because they expect direct and immediate results from it. The penny in the slot view. You put your penny in the slot, then you pull out the drawer and you have your results.

That is their view of fasting. If you want certain benefits, they say, fast. If you fast, you get the results. But fasting is not a spiritual gimmick.

It isn't going to produce spirituality any more than food produces carnality. We even eat at the Lord's table. The love feast was an act of spiritual worship. Food isn't carnal and no, food isn't spiritual. That is not the point. There is no merit in a fast unless that fast is a provoked fast for reasons of the heart.

Illustration:

When the plague hit, the people of God had a fast.

Joel 1:14, *Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord.*

When Nehemiah heard the word that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, his heart was broken.

Nehemiah 1:4, *So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

David, when his enemies became ill, fasted.

Psalms 35:13, *But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.*

David, when Abner died, fasted.

2 Samuel 3:35, *And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, "God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!"*

David says Abner is dead and God strike me down if I can't fast one day in mourning, sorrow, and lamentation over that misspent and wasted life.

Some of these people were fasting out of lamentation over personal calamity and some were fasting out of lamentation over the calamity of somebody else. Not just a friend, but an enemy even. David not only wept when his friend died and fasted, but even when his enemies were ill.

When David's child by Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, was struck with a terrible and fatal disease.

2 Samuel 12:16, *David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.*

If a child of mine was struck with a fatal disease and the life of that little one was hanging in the balances and I didn't know from moment to moment whether that child would draw another breath, I would be prostrate before God on behalf of the child I love and I would be ill advised to take any food because I wouldn't want any food.

Your body even responds to the anxiety of your heart.

The Hebrews used to talk about the fact that the emotions were felt in the bowels. That's why the Bible tells you about the bowels of compassion or the bowels of mercy. The heart was the mind to the Hebrew because the Hebrew always saw something physical.

Because anxieties in the mind always affect the stomach!

Don't force them to do that. When they have a preoccupation between themselves and God and they are lifting to God a prayer from their heart for the sorrow that's there, they should have that right to be un-intruded on with food.

They don't need to eat.

They need not to eat, because they're carrying that anxiety like David did.

God's people fasted at the death of Saul.

God's people fasted at the death of Jonathan.

So sometimes the lamentation was very personal.

Sometimes they lamented over someone else, a friend.

Sometimes over an enemy.

Sometimes over a whole group of people that were killed.

Such lamentation, they were so exercised that there was a loss of appetite. The body reacts to the mind's anxieties and food is the furthest thing from their hearts desire.

Fasting is almost a very natural response to the heart and the soul of anxiety that comes in the midst of a mourning or sorrowing time.

We identify with it when it comes to our own life or our own family. It's very difficult for us to mourn like that when

somebody else is in trouble. It's very hard for us. But you must realize in that society, things were very closed in. People knew people and it was a small world. Everything affected everyone.

Since the world that we live in has opened so much, we can't even be concerned about one tragedy before we are bombed with another one and then another one.

We know so much about so many people who are sick and about so many tragedies that in order to protect our emotions from turning us into basket cases, we eventually grow callous. It is a defence mechanism.

Jesus Christ,
who knew everything there was to know,
who understood every suffering there was to suffer,
who could gather up all the sufferings of every human being,
who ever lived into His omniscient heart?
That same Jesus can sit over the city of Jerusalem and tears can run down His face, can stand beside the grave of Lazarus and weep for one person who died.

But we don't know that in our world anymore. We are too callous, too insensitive.

I don't doubt that if your child was sick, you would fast.
Do you fast when your friend is sick?
Do you fast when your enemy is sick?

Do you fast when a tragedy comes because it so deeply grieves your heart to see people cast into hell without Christ?

What is your reaction?

We would fast more if we were sensitive to things that ought to be concerns of ours. So, fasting came as a result of lamentation. The body reacts to the heart's anxiety and sorrow by removing the desire for food altogether.

b) Protection.

Protection is another thing that caused fasting in the Bible. There were times when people were in such severe danger that their fear forced them to fast. They couldn't eat, they were too scared. They were so afraid they couldn't eat. They knew that their only protection and deliverance was God.

They would fast and they would literally cry out to God under severe danger and severe trial knowing that their only deliverance would come from Him. They were sheer filled with fear. There was no room for food.

2 Chronicles 20:3-4, *And Jehoshaphat feared, and set [to](#) himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord.*

The Israelites can't win. And out of sheer fear they go without food as they cry out to God that God would deliver them.

Esther, the lovely Jewess who had reached the place of favour with the king Ahasuerus and then found out that Haman had developed a plot to slaughter all the Jews.

Esther said tell my people that I will go to him, and I will put my life on the line and if I perish, I perish, but I will go in behalf of my people. The people were afraid, and the Bible says they fasted. Fear, knowing that there is only a resource in God's protection.

Ezra is about to lead the people out of the Babylonian captivity. As he approaches the journey, he has a most interesting approach.

Ezra 8:21-23, *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. ²²For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." ²³So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.*

They were leaving Babylon and we stopped, and we had a fast. We might afflict ourselves. It is self-denial, self-affliction before our God.

Why?

We didn't know how the right way to get from Babylon to Jerusalem. We're carrying a mass of people and we didn't know the right path that our children could cross that desert, that our children would be safe.

Because they were brigands, highwaymen, robbers, thieves, wild animals, and enemies and those who hated Israel. So, they were fearful. They were fearful for the right path, and they were afraid of crossing that desert with their little children and with all the substance that they had.

Ezra says I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on our way and I didn't want to ask the king.

Why?

Because we told him already the hand of God is upon all of them for good who seek Him. But His power and His wrath are against all of them who forsake Him.

Ezra says that I must do my theology. I told the king God will protect the righteous. We are going to be all right king. Now as I get out here, I am a little afraid. I can't go back and say to the king, I know God is on our side, but could you give Him a little assistance, because that would be a discredit to the character of God.

So, I cannot depend on the king even though he is somewhat sympathetic. I will depend on God.

Again, a time of fear, anxiety, where fasting was very much a response that could be understood.

c) Humiliation.

On the Day of Atonement, according to Leviticus 23, the reason they were to fast to confess their sin.

They were too fast in confessing their sin.

Humiliation and confession.

In all our lives there's been times like this when we have sinned against the Lord.

We have been so deeply troubled by our sin, we have been so overwrought by our sin, we have been so disturbed by what

it's done in our hearts that we cannot eat, that we cannot think of food, but that we pour our hearts to God.

David sinned such a great sin, such a heinous sin.

When he had not confessed his sin, but still held it in, it says that his life juices dried up. He was aching from head to toe. He was sick. He could not eat, he could not sleep, he could not exist.

Then David says when I confessed my sin it was as if all that flood went out from me and I was whole again. There have been those time in our lives when our hearts overwrought with our sinfulness and we have done something that defiles God. We come before God, and we are pleading for that cleansing. Even though it's already provided for us there must have the healing that occurs when we empty ourselves of that evil thing.

There were many times when God's people confessed sin. Fasting was part of it because they didn't stop to eat. Food was the furthest thing from their mind.

What they hungered for was the joining together of a severed fellowship with God.

Psalm 35:13, *But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.*

The people at Nineveh repented of sin at Jonah's preaching and they fasted while they confessed.

Daniel prayed to God, and he confessed the sins of his people and fasted.

Saul of Tarsus was smitten on the Damascus Road, fell into the dirt, rose from that place. The Bible says that in confessing his sin and turning to the Lord, he fasted for three days.

Acts 9:9, *And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

Samuel went to the people asked them to confess their sin.

1 Samuel 7:6, *So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.*

Ahab, that evil man, that evil king, was finally confronted with judgment. He was told that the judgment of God was against him for his abominable activities in following the idols.

1 Kings 21:27, *So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.*

He put sack cloth on his flesh. He fasted and he lay in sack cloth and he went softly. He lost that air about him.

He wasn't throwing his weight around.

He was poking around very softly, very quietly.

He was a crushed broken man who lost all sense of need for physical food, but he fasted in the contrition.

Do you know that God actually rewarded that man for true repentance even though he had lived a vile and wretched life?

1 Kings 21:2-298, *And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ²⁹“See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”*

Ezra 10:6, *Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.*

Transgression is a cause for fasting.

The distress again is so deep, the anxiety so far down in the human spirit that fasting isn't forced. It flows out of a need to focus on a right relationship with God. The physical vanishes.

d) Revelation.

This is a tremendous truth in the Bible. At times when God's people were either going to receive God's word or proclaim God's word, we frequently see a fast.

Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."*

When you are right at the moment of receiving the word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, that's when you best know that man does not live by bread. There's a tremendous thing in Scripture that occurs when someone is receiving God's revelation.

Daniel 9:1-2, *In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—²in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He*

would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Now Daniel was reading Jeremiah and he got a little idea that God was going to perform something over a period of 70 years, but he hungered to know the fullness of this.

Daniel 9:3-4, *Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. ⁴And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,*

Then Daniel goes through this confession and so forth. He is hungering for God to see him as a pure heart and reveal His word.

Daniel 9:21-23, *yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, ²¹being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. ²²And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. ²³At the beginning of your supplications the ²³command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:*

Daniel fasts and prays, and the angel says all right Daniel God has heard you, God has seen you, and God is going to give you the word.

In verse 24, he gets the most incredible revelation of the 70 weeks of Daniel that we know lays out the theme of the prophetic history of the world. In anticipation of a revelation from God, he fasted in order that he might better understand the words of Jeremiah.

Daniel 10:1-3, *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision.²In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. ³I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.*

On another occasion when God was to give him a great revelation, he fasted again.

Now fasting to receive the Word of God is simply this. If you fast, it doesn't mean you are going to get the Word of God. It means that when you are so consumed with seeking a revelation from God or seeking to understand what God has

revealed, you have no thought of food until you come to know and understand what it is that God's word says.

There are many times in my own life and experience where I find myself consumed to understand the revelation of God, where I am working and studying and taking it in and thinking and meditating and pouring over the Word of God to the point where I cannot stop for a meal, where I cannot eat.

You cannot allow yourself to be intruded by physical food when you are hungering for the living bread.

When was the last time you were so intense in Bible study that you never let food interrupt it?

Acts chapter 10, Peter was praying and fasting when he saw a vision to go to the Gentile Cornelius with the gospel.

Exodus chapter 24, Moses had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and God gave him His holy law.

There are many occasions in the Bible where in the midst of a seeking heart, where food is no concern. God's word is revealed, when we set those things aside and we pour our hearts into the understanding of the Word of God.

The reason many people don't understand the Bible is because so very often they don't go to the Bible with the intensity that it takes to really comprehend it. But it's there if you are willing to mine it out. Sometimes you might have to skip some meals and your heart will want you to do that.

Not only is there fasting in connection with revelation received, but with revelation given.

There seems to be a fasting associated with the preaching or teaching of the word.

Paul saying "in fastings often."

Our Lord fasting 40 days and 40 nights and then He begins His preaching ministry.

He drew Himself into the presence of God and He was calling on God to pour that message through Him. He understood the seriousness of it.

The point of intensity is so extreme in the proclamation that it overrules physical appetite. I would far rather eat after I preach than ever before I preach because I cannot enjoy the food.

e) Condemnation.

The thing that has driven people to fasting is condemnation, the fear of divine judgment. The fear of divine judgment, not only for themselves, but for others.

There are some sinners in this world that ought to fast and pray. There are Christians in this world who ought to fast and pray on the behalf of some sinners in this world. We don't care that much.

In Jonah, we have an illustration of this.

In Jonah chapter 3, the message was given to the people of Nineveh that God was going to judge them.

What was their response?

The people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast. They poured out their hearts. They were afraid of the judgment of God.

We don't have enough of that today.

If you go around preaching the judgment of God, people get mad at you.

The people that get mad at you aren't the unsaved, but those who are the saved. They say you don't have any love.

If somebody's going to die and perish and go to hell, I think the loving thing to do is to warn them, don't you?

But we don't really care about the lost the way we should. When was the last time you skipped a meal because you were so exercised in your spirit over our nation which is condemned to hell without Christ?

Over our world, over your neighbours, over somebody you know and love.

When's the last time you had a sense of condemnation, the urgency of anxiety over doom that's going to come to those without God?

Nineveh at least had the sense to fast and pray, so fearful were they of the Word of God.

They said when Jonathan Edwards used to preach sometimes people were so afraid, they would shake from head to toe and they would shiver and they could not eat, nor could they sleep. The fear of divine judgment forces fasting.

f) Selection.

When the time came in the early church for calling special people to special tasks in spiritual leadership, fasting was a part of it.

Acts 13. Nothing is more important, beloved, than the leadership of the church. The biggest problem in the church is leadership. If the leadership is right, the church is right. If the leadership is wrong, the church will go wrong.

When the early church went about to select leadership and ordain people and set them aside for the gospel ministry and to use them for God's purposes. it was no easy matter.

It was not done flippantly or frivolously.

It was not done politically.

They didn't select people because people liked them.

They didn't select people because they were afraid not to, because they had a power base in the congregation.

They selected people with prayer and fasting.

Acts 13:1-3, *Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*

Is it any more important than than it is now to send the right missionaries?

If it was a task then that demanded such intense prayer that they fasted, is it any less for us?

Is the church any less significant today than it was then?

Is it any less the reflection of Christ now than then, less the ministry of the spirit now than then?

The answer is obviously no.

We consider the leadership of this church; it should be with such prayerful intensity that we literally are not even involved or interested in those things of the mundane life. That God would give us the right elders. That God would ordain the right people and send them out from us. Not just those who wish, but those who deserve by God's grace and calling to be sent.

Acts 14:23, *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

When we send out a missionary, it's as important is if we were sending them out of the book of Acts. When we ordain an elder, it's as important as if they were ordained by Paul and Barnabas themselves. These things demand prayer and fasting. Selection of the right people is a priestly service offered to God with prayer and fasting.

g) Direction.

There are times in the Scripture when people who sought direction, sought it with such deep anxiety that they fasted.

In **Genesis 24** it is, when the servant was to find a bride for Isaac, he was so concerned that God would show him the right lady that he fasted and prayed.

Paul said “in fastings often.”

In fastings often, in watchings often.
He was fasting while he was watching.

The unfolding of the will of God, such an intense desire. Some of you face critical decisions, who to marry, where to go to school, where to work, how to handle your family, whether to stay here or move to another place, where to use your spiritual gift, where to serve the body of Christ.

How are you handling it?

Is there such a deep intensity in your heart, that fasting is a corollary to that intensity.

- Lamentation,
- Protection,

- Humiliation,
- Revelation,
- Condemnation,
- Selection, and
- Direction.

You should fast with such intensity not only in things regarding yourself, but those regarding others and even your enemies.

Fasting is consecration to God which sets me apart to God so alone, so singly in a spiritual struggle that there's no need for food.

Key to everything.

Fasting is always linked with prayer.

Prayer is not always necessarily linked with fasting.

- You can pray without fasting.
- You cannot fast without praying.

I have covered every Scripture in the Bible regarding fasting.

I find no times where fasting is without praying.

Fasting then is not an end but is a consequence to a spiritual struggle that draws us into the presence of God.

The man who prays with fasting is giving heaven notice that he's really in earnest. That he will not give up, that he won't let go until God blesses.

What about when you pray?

Do you pray unattached to this world so consumed in the presence of God?

Fasting is an affirmation of intense prayer.

Prayer is always linked with fasting.

True fasting always comes out of a pure heart.

If your heart isn't right, your fasting is a sham.

5. The problem with fasting.

You don't have a pure heart.

You are not really fasting as a corollary to intense prayer and spiritual struggle. Your heart isn't right.

That is exactly the problem of the scribes and the Pharisees. Their hearts were not right. Their fast was a mockery. There was no legitimate prayer concern.

You will not pray with real intensity unless you have a pure heart. You cannot have a real fast unless you have that real intensity.

So, it all begins with your heart. If your heart is totally consecrated to God, if your heart is totally weaned away from the world, if your heart is totally pure as it ought to be, then it will issue in true prayer, in great agonizing prayer and the corollary will be fasting.

But the problem is fasting is so easily falsified for the sake of spiritual demonstration.

Beware of anything in your life that you do to make an impression on somebody. That's a borderline problem.

Don't fast for an impression.

V 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.*

They wanted themselves to look really bad when they were fasting so everybody would know they were in a spiritual mood.

They would cover their faces with ash to make it look it pale and wan and gaunt.

Jesus says don't do that.

They disfigure their faces, to cause to disappear. They just completely covered themselves with this. So, it was so obvious they were putting on their demonstration.

The real issue is they do it in order that they may appear unto men to fast.

When your heart calls for a fast, if you are really consecrated to God, then you are moving into God's sphere of blessing.

But remember don't make a public display out of it and don't do it to impress somebody.

Then you have crossed the line.

You have done it for men.

When you say, "I am fasting. Well, you have your reward. You just got it. I know you are fasting. You are paid in full. God owes you nothing.

That's not the kind of fasting God's after. Don't do it for the sake of men. Don't decorate your face with ashes for the sake of men so people can see how spiritual you are.

V 17, *But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,*

The anointing is an oil that they used.

In fact, this anointing is talked about in Ruth, in 2 Samuel, Matthew 26, Luke 7 talks about it.

The Jews used to anoint themselves with an oil. It was kind of like to keep their skin from getting too chapped in the heat in the hot part of the world they lived in.

It also had an aroma to it which would make them a little more fragrant because deodorant was not in existence in those days. Even in our society it's a welcome thing. You can imagine what it was like that society.

They would anoint themselves with a rather fragrant oil. This was a way they prepared themselves and were dressed. This is something God expects and anticipates.

We should take care of ourselves. You are not more spiritual when you look bad. When you don't wear your makeup and you look nasty and people say, "must be spiritual." No.

If you, do it to be seen of men, if you are trying to appear spiritual, you have your reward.

On the other hand, Jesus is saying get your oil on, comb your hair, wash your face, put on a little makeup, look like you always look. Just be normal.

You see the Lord is after an inward thing and God.

V 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.*

Because He lives in that secret world that no man knows will see the reality of that fast.

God is the only one who needs to know because He's the only one who gives a real reward.

How do you instruct people about fasting?

You can tell them that they ought to fast.

Don't parade that you are fasting.

We must do it without pretence.

Look normal, fix yourself up, be bright-eyed, positive, and carry yourself as you would at any other time.

God will see the fast and He's the only that really matters.

Conclusion:

Zechariah 7:4-5, *Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, ⁵"Say to all the people of the land, and to the*

priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me?

What a question?

God says you know all those years when you fasted all the time, all those fasts you had?

Did you think you did those to me?

Did you think those were pleasing fasts?

Did you think those were fasts that I accepted any more than when you ate and drank?

Zechariah 7:6-7, *When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? 'Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?'"*

God says, do you think that was an acceptable fast?

Should you not have been obedient to the word of the prophets?

In other words, behind the fast there must be the believable righteous life to make the fast legitimate.

Zechariah 7:9-10, *“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. ¹⁰Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.’*

When you get your heart right and you start living a life of obedience to the Word of God, then you will have a real fast. A fast that I accept because it comes out of a true heart.

Isaiah 58 is a confrontive statement.

They had fasted and thought themselves to be so good because they did.

Isaiah 58:3-4, *‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ “In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. ⁴Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.*

Business as usual. You are not fasting for Me.

Isaiah 58:5, *Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord?*

Just because you do it on the outside. Just because you have got the ashes and the sack cloth and the bull rush and you are bowed down and your hearts are evil.

Isaiah 58:6-7, *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?*

Isn't the fast that I want the fast that issues from a righteous life that's lived in obedience to God's divine truth?

This is the fast God wants out of a pure heart.

The promise for fasting.

Isaiah 58:8-11, *Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;*

You shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ “If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the

noonday. ¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

God says do you really want to be blessed?

Fast, but fast out of a true, pure, obedient heart.

People, we are right back to where we start in this.

You are right back to the Beatitudes again.

If your character is right and your life is right, sometimes in your prayers there will be such intensity for one thing or another that fasting will be a very natural corollary to prayer.

In those times of great intensity, God will honour and bless not because you fasted but because your heart was so pure your fast was a chosen fast.

God blesses that kind of heart.