

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository
Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew**

46- The Kingdom of Heaven and Its Citizens- Part 26
Secret Purity and Public Hypocrisy- Part 9

Church March 26, 2023

Matthew 6:1-24

1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

2 "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

3 "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

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

18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

There are two *titanic* Questions that are *dominant* throughout the Bible- that are utterly *Unimportant* to the lost World. These are the two *most important* Questions in the Universe- but they are either entirely *ignored* or they are greatly *minimized* by everybody and everything in our World. And those two Questions are:

1. How can wicked rebels escape God's Damnation?
2. How can God be glorified in EVERYTHING?

... nothing else even comes close to these two Issues in Importance. And that is why these two Issues fill the pages of every Book in the Bible. Another Way these Issues could be worded is:

1. What has to happen so that the Soul of Man is not *eternally* lost?
2. What has to happen so that God and the Fame of His Name is not *belittled*?

The current “*World- Order*” teaches us many things. It teaches us how to fight against AIDS; and how to fight Mosquitoes and the Disease they bring. It warns us about Sunstroke; and Smoking; and Drunk Driving; and Pollen; and Depression; and Rape; and Fire; and Theft; and Internet Scams; and Cholesterol and Pollution. Yet this “present evil World” has deemed any Effort to fight against the belittling of God; and any Effort to keep our Soul from being eternally damned- to be completely Inconsequential.

And that means that the smartest people on the planet; the most industrious people on earth; the most successful people on earth are passionately committed to things that are, at best, second-rate Issues- in comparison to the Glory of God and the Salvation of our Souls.

And to prove this is true- not a single Newspaper or Magazine has a single Article about either of these Issues. And while there are many Agencies that are a part of our Local; State; and Federal Governments- that are involved in every minutia of our Lives- there is not a single governmental Agency that is concerned about those two Issues that matter the Most.

But one day- that will change. When King Jesus comes back- the eyes of the entire World will be opened; and the sinful Obliviousness to what will then be seen to be so obvious- will so stun the World; and we will have no Explanation for the Way we lived our Lives in America. How God and His Glory and the eternal Condition of the human Soul could have ever been a “Non-Issue” will be absolutely Inexplicable then. It will boggle the mind as we stand before our Judge.

And this is why we are called, “**Aliens and Strangers**” (1Peter 2:11). We don’t fit in with this World. We are deeply concerned about the Things that matter the Most to God- while we are almost totally Unconcerned about the Issues that seem to *dominate* those who don’t love and who don’t serve the Lord.

So, we must understand what Matthew understood- that what Jesus is preaching in this Sermon- matters to God. And that means that they also matter to those, who, by virtue of the Miracle of the New Birth, have become “**Aliens and Strangers**” and who live Lives that run “*Counter-intuitive*” to the people of the World.

And as we *continue* to examine what Jesus is teaching here in this part of what we call, the “*Sermon on the Mount*”- we see that Jesus is addressing four Topics:

1. Giving to the Poor (verses 2-4)
2. Praying (verses 5-15)
3. Fasting (verses 16-18)
4. Wealth (verses 19-24)

So, Jesus is teaching that the *new* people; of the New Covenant- who

will inherit this *new* “Kingdom of Heaven”- will have the Attributes that He talks about here. Another way of understanding this is to remember what Jesus said back in **Matthew 5:20**:

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

... so, the Attributes and Characteristics that Jesus illustrates in this Sermon are what that “*surpassing Righteousness*” looks like.

Now today, I want to focus again on what Jesus taught in verses 16-18 when He said,

16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

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

18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

... which is talking about the Subject of “*Fasting*”.

And last time, I told you that what Jesus taught here *causes* us to ask several Questions like:

- *What* is “Fasting”?
- *How* and *When* should Believers Fast?
- *Why* did Jesus teach this?

Now last time I told you that Fasting is the Result of having a spiritual “Hunger” that is divided into two parts:

1. A Holy Grief
2. A Blessed Hope

So, Fasting consists of these two Parts:

- Part of Fasting says that we have come to recognize that our Longing for God has been compromised because our Desire to savor all that this Life offers to us- has grown so strong (a holy Grief)

- The other side says that our Appetite for this World is temporarily lost precisely because our Longing for God is so intense (a blessed Hope).

And today- I want to go *deeper* into this and tell you that Fasting *proves* the presence of; and fans the flames of; this “*Hunger for God*”. Fasting is the *Intensifier* of spiritual Desire; and the faithful *Enemy* of the fatal Bondages to the supposed “*innocent things*” of this fallen World that we studied last time. In other words, Fasting is the exclamation point at the end of this sentence:

This is how much I long for You, O God!

Now at first glance- you would think that those who commune the *most* with God would be the *most* Satisfied; and would be the *least* Hungry. After all, that’s the Way the natural World works. When we do something continually- we tire of it; we become bored with it; and that is because we have become satisfied with it. So, it serves to reason that, those who regularly turn aside from the Pleasures of this Life and spend time in God’s Word; and God’s Presence- should be those who are the *most* Satisfied with what they have; and who would sense NO reason to Fast.

But when we speak of our Lord- we are talking about an *inexhaustible* Fountain and an *infinite* Feast- so, that is NOT how this works with the “**Things of the Spirit of God**” (1Corinthians 2:14). When it comes to Prayer and Fasting- the very opposite is true. Those who feed *often* on the “*Bread of Life*”- crave Him even *more!* And those who drink “*Living Water*” the *most*- thirst for it *more than ever!*

When the Reality of the finished Work of Jesus Christ really begins to take hold on you- you begin to linger near the “*River of Life*”. And then you miss it when you are away. When you eat the “*Bread of Heaven*”- you never get Full or Satisfied or Finished- you only get Hungrier. The more Satisfaction you experience from God- while still in this world- the *greater* your Desire for the next world- is. CS Lewis said,

“*Our best ‘Havings’ are ‘Wantings’*”¹

... in other words, the Value of what we possess- is determined by the Intensity of us *wanting* it.

¹ CS Lewis, *Letters of CS Lewis*, ed. WH Lewis (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1966), p. 289.

And the first Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem was very good at showing us a “*Spiritual Principle*”- that one thing leads to the next- either for “Good” or for “Evil”.

James 1:13-16

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Here, James teaches that Death is the result of Sin being birthed. And Sin is “birthed” as a Result of Lust being enticed and conceived. And Lust is enticed as a result of the person being Tempted. And that means that Lust is *already* residing inside the individual’s unredeemed Flesh. And so, Temptation is satan simply giving us the Opportunity to “do” (Sin) what we “*already want to do*” (Lust) in the first place. So, the Equation looks like this:

Indwelling Lust + Opportunity (Temptation)= Sin= Death

But as terrifying as that is- the *opposite* is just that glorious.

2Peter 1:3-11

3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge,

6 and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness,

7 and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.

8 For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither

useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins.

10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

... or as Jude said,

Jude 20&21

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

... or as the Apostle Paul wrote,

Romans 8:5-13

5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,

8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh —

13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

So, the *more deeply* you walk with Jesus- that “*Closeness*” does NOT satisfy you- it merely begins a “*spiritual Chain- reaction*” that grows more Intense and consumes *more* of your Thoughts and Desires.

So, the *closer* you get to Jesus- the *hungrier* you are for Him. And the more *Homesick* for God you get. And the *more* your Homesickness for God grows- the *more* you want all the Fullness of God; And the *more* you want to be finished with Sin; And the *more* you want the Bridegroom to come back; And the *more* you want the Church revived; and purified with the Beauty and Value of Jesus; And the *more* you seek for a Great Awakening to God’s Reality in the darkest parts of the City; And the *more* you want to see the Light of the Gospel go to the ends of the earth; And the *more* you want to see all the false Worldviews surrender to the Truth of Scripture; And the *more* you want to see every Pain erased; and all Tears wiped away; and Death finally destroyed. And the *more* you long for every Wrong to be made Right; And the *more* you look to see the Justice and the Grace and the Spirit of God to fill all the earth as the Waters cover the Sea!

If someone, who lays claim to be saved, does not desperately long for the manifestation of the Glory of God- it is certainly *not* because they have eaten *too much* from the Meat that never perishes; and they are now full. It is only because they have gone so long without tasting and seeing that the Lord is Good- that they have become satisfied with *not* eating Him.

When our Souls are stuffed with the “*petty things*” that are passing away- there is no room for feasting on the “*great things*” that are Eternal. The American Episcopal Pastor of the 19th Century, Phillips Brooks said,

“The more we watch the lives of men, the more we see that one of the reasons why men are not occupied with great thoughts and interests is the way in which their lives are overfilled with little things”²

But God did not create us to be satisfied with “*little things*”. God gives saved people a normal and natural Appetite for Himself- Whose Vastness and Magnificence cannot be measured. But that “*Appetite for God*” can either be *genuinely* enflamed- or it can be *artificially* appeased- depending on what we feed it. But that godly Appetite can only be genuinely enflamed when it is fed with the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ. So, when we feed that Appetite with

² Phillips Brooks, *Fasting (a sermon for Lent)* in: *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons* (New York: EP Dutton and Company, 1881), p. 207

colorful sugary “junk-food” from the World- that Appetite is NOT enflamed at all- it is *artificially* appeased.

Now there is a 1st Century Document that *almost* made it into the “*Canon of Scripture*” called, *The Didache* (Greek: *Teaching*). And the only reason it is not in our Bible today is because whoever wrote it said in the Preface that it was *not* inspired. But it *reads* and *sounds* like Scripture. And even though this Document is not inspired- it is instructive as to how believers were taught in the early Church. One verse goes like this,

“Let not your fasts be with hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.”³

Now this sounds strange. What difference does it make which Days a believer fasts? But the “*Hypocrites*” that the Didache refers to are the Jews- who held on to the 1st Covenant and who categorically rejected Jesus. So, back in the 1st Century after the Resurrection- it was common for Jews to fast twice a week- on Mondays and Thursdays. And that is why the unsaved Pharisee of **Luke 18:12** referred to that Tradition.

But the reason I gave you this quote from the Didache was NOT so that you would fast two days each week. I simply wanted to show you that when New Testament believers- who trust in Jesus- fast- they are holding to a *Continuity* with the Old Testament- while at the same time- operating in total *Discontinuity* with those 39 Books- at the same time!

For example, when we investigate- we find that the Old Testament *commanded* the Jew to worship God between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday (The Sabbath). And there was terrible Judgment from God that was promised to those that didn’t submit to that. But because God raised Jesus from the Dead on “the first Day of the week”- Christians now gather together in Corporate Worship on the “*Lord’s Day*” (Sunday). And that is *why* the Apostle John said this in **The Revelation 1:10a**:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day...

And we too are “*in the Spirit*” when we obey the *superior* New Covenant and gather together on the “*Lord’s Day*” (Sunday) to worship God rather than try to maintain the Command of God under the *inferior* 1st Covenant and gather on “*the Sabbath*” (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday).

³ *The Didache*, VIII, quoted from *The Apostolic Fathers* (Loeb Classical Library), translated by Kirsopp Lake (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1970), p. 321

So, there is both “*Continuity*” (we continue to gather to worship God) and “*Discontinuity*” (we gather on Sunday rather than the Sabbath) between the Jew and the Christian. For example, there is “*Continuity*” between the Jew and the Christian in that we admire and love and honor and strive to obey the Teachings of the Old Testament. So, we believe that the Old Testament is fully Inspired and therefore entirely Inerrant and Infallible.

But there is that *unique* “*Discontinuity*” between the Jew and the Christian in that we also believe that the *superior* New Covenant; the final, full and completed Revelation of God in the New Testament makes *some* parts of the Old Testament completely obsolete- NOT because they are Wrong- but simply because in, by, and through Jesus and His finished Work- those parts have been *fulfilled!*⁴

So, Christianity is NOT a “*stand-alone Religion*”. Christianity is the very SAME Religion of the Old Testament- that has been fulfilled! And so, we work hard to NOT obey the parts of the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled. In fact, we believe and teach that obeying those parts of the Inspired Old Testament that have been fulfilled either in Jesus *personally* or in His finished Work- would actually be sinful!

We worship the one, true, and living God by gathering together on the Lord’s Day. But we also worship the Lord Jesus Christ as well as God the Holy Spirit. And we strive to worship God- in His blessed “*tri-Unity*”- *every single Day!*

Likewise, Jewish Custom was that the Jew fasted on Mondays and Thursdays- and so, back in the 1st Century, New Testament believers were encouraged to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. And again, this was to show both a rock-solid “*Continuity*” with the Past along with an equally rock- solid “*Discontinuity*” with the part of the Past that has been fulfilled.

So “*Yes!*”, New Testament believers in Jesus fast. But “*No!*” we do NOT fast *exactly* as the Old Testament believer did. Nor do we fast for the same Reasons as they did- precisely because they were looking *forward* to the Messiah Coming; while we look *back* at the fact that He has already Come and He Lived and Died and Rose again! But we also look forward to His second Coming as well. And this shows that there is both the “*New*” along with the “*Old*” in our Fasting. So, New Testament believers accept the Old Testament Concept of Fasting- but we allow our Fasting to be *unique; set apart; distinct-* or “*Holy*” from the Fasting taught in the Old Testament.

Now simply changing the Day is *not* what makes Fasting a Christian Concept in and of itself. Nevertheless, Christian Fasting *is new*; it is utterly *unique* and *distinct* from Old Testament Fasting- in *Why* we fast; and in *What* we hope to accomplish by our Fast.

⁴ Like animal sacrifices; Temple Worship; the Levitical Priesthood; and the Sanhedrin Court

And it is in this “*Uniqueness*” that we see that the single most important Teaching about Fasting in the New Testament- found in **Luke 5:33-39** that says:

33 And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink."

34 And Jesus said to them, "**You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?**"

35 "**But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.**"

36 And He was also telling them a parable: "**No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.**"

37 "**And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined.**"

38 "**But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.**"

39 "**And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good *enough*.'**"

Here Jesus speaks very clearly and directly about the Issue of Fasting- and asks these two Questions:

1. Is Fasting a distinctly Christian thing to do?
2. And if so- how?

Fasting is *uniquely* Christian- but it is *not* Obvious

Usually when Christians fast today- they will go to an Old Testament Passage like **Isaiah 58:3-14** to justify it. But with all due respect to that Old Testament Passage- that is True and Inspired and Inerrant- the Prophet wrote that BEFORE Jesus came and died and rose again. So, there are Issues that were *vital*ly important to Isaiah that have been completely *fulfilled* in Jesus Christ and should have NO Importance at all to the New Testament Believer. So, when Jesus said,

... new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

... He is telling us that we CANNOT put the “**new Wine**” of a New Testament Practice (Fasting) into the “**old wineskins**” of an Old Testament Truth. Why?

Jesus said, “**the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined**”. So, there MUST be New Testament Truth that backs up *why* the Christian today fasts. It is simply NOT enough to use a 1st Covenant mentality to justify a New Covenant Practice. And that is why there are so few people today- who go into any detail about Fasting.

But first of all- we must understand that Fasting is practiced by every major Religion and human Philosophy in the world. And in our day- Health experts also recommend Fasting as a way to lose weight and become healthy. But to them- Fasting is defined like this:

The deliberate Abstinence from Food for Religious, Cultural, Political, or Health Reasons.

Fasting is a Practice found in all Societies and Cultures- throughout all Centuries. Even non- religious people fast (some regularly) for Political and Health reasons. So, I ask five Questions:

1. Why should Bible believing Christians join in with this pagan parade of Asceticism?
2. Even if it is true that believers fasted who operated under the inferior Revelation of the Old Covenant- would it then not also be true that Fasting would cease since God has now given His full and completed Revelation in the New Covenant?
3. Is it reasonable to put the “new wine” of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ into the old “wineskins” of the human effort of Fasting?
4. Does not the finished Work of Jesus Christ in His sinless Life; and on the Cross; and in His Resurrection along with the ongoing dwelling of the Holy Spirit mean that the dead and raised Lamb is so powerfully among us that the dominant Response by the Believer should be Celebration rather than Mortification?
5. Is there not great Danger that the Triumph of Fasting over the Flesh’s Appetites will simply lead to Pride and Self-reliance?

So, it is not at all obvious that Fasting is a *uniquely* Christian thing to do. But if it is- then we need to see *how* Fasting relates to the “*Center*”. And the “Center” is what I call,

The ultimate Triumph of Christ in living Sinlessly; dying as a Propitiation; rising Victoriously; and reigning over all the Universe for the Salvation of God’s elect and the Glory of His Father

... so, how does Fasting for the Believer relate to Jesus Christ and His finished Work?

The Prevalence of Fasting in the Old Testament raises the Question of whether this Practice belongs with New Testament Believers at all. Does something done by people walking in Shadows and in Types and in Symbols have Validity with people living on this side of the Coming of the Messiah and the appearing of the Kingdom of Heaven? Jesus said this in **Luke 11:17-20**:

17 ... Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house *divided* against itself falls.

18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.

19 "And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? So they will be your judges.

20 "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

... and when the Pharisees asked Him about the Coming of the Kingdom, Jesus replied:

Luke 17:20&21

20 ... The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;

21 nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or, 'There *it is!*' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.

... so, in *that* sense- the long- awaited Kingdom has *already* come in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ.

This is the "*Mystery of the Kingdom*" that Jesus had in mind when, in **Mark 4:11&12**- He said to His disciples:

11 ... To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,

12 so that *WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN.*"

This was a stunning New Reality in the world that was described by George Ladd, the Professor of Exegesis at Fuller Theological Seminary in the early 20th Century:

“The New Truth, now given to Man by Revelation in the Person and Mission of Jesus, is that the Kingdom which is to come *finally* in apocalyptic Power as foreseen in Daniel, has in fact, already entered the world in advance, in a hidden form- to work secretly within and among men.”⁵

So, I ask again: Does Fasting belong in the Church- in the New Kingdom people- whom God is assembling from all the peoples of the world? Well, Keith Main doesn't think so. In his book, *Prayer and Fasting: A Study in the Devotional Life of the Early Church*- Main said this:

“Thus far... we have suggested that the joy and thanksgiving that marks the prayer life of the New Testament is a sign of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. Fasting is no longer consistent with the joyous and thankful attitude that marks the Fellowship”⁶

Main's Position is strengthened even more when we see that- apart from the four Gospel Records- Fasting is almost invisible in the New Testament. Main says,

“[Fasting] ceases to be an issue within the Church... Paul, following the lead of Jesus, deliberately diverted the disciples attention away from fasting and any form of food asceticism and into prayer, service, and toil on behalf of the Kingdom. Missionary work served as a corrective and counterpoise not only to apocalyptic dreaming but also to the outworn and overworked custom of fasting.... A sense of Life Eternal is ever breaking in upon us. The believer marches to the sound of music from a different world! And it is exceedingly difficult to reconcile the Risen Christ with fasting forms.”⁷

So, is Main correct? Is the Fact that Fasting is barely mentioned throughout the New Testament Epistles a Sign that it has been done away in the finished Work of Christ? Is it true that the joyful Presence of the Kingdom of God and the glorious Ministry of the Spirit of Christ *nullifies* the Relevance of Fasting in the Christian Church? If so, why did Jesus say, “**When you fast...**” It is Questions like this that makes **Luke 5:33-39** so important to us.

And that Importance is increased even more when you consider that in the Apostle Paul's Letters- “Food” is celebrated as something “Good” and

⁵ George Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 225

⁶ Keith Main, *Prayer and Fasting: A Study in the Devotional Life of the Early Church* (New York: Carlton Press, Inc., 1971), p. 84

⁷ Ibid pp. 54, 60&61

“Asceticism” is treated as a “weak Weapon” against fleshly Indulgence; and the Practice of “eating and drinking” are regarded as “Nonessential”- except as they express Love and Contentment in the Lord.

The Goodness of Food

1 Timothy 4:1-5

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

3 *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;

5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

Here the Apostle warns that in “**later times**” (later than when he wrote this), very bad people who have been deceived themselves will seek to deceive others partly by advocating that they abstain “**from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth**”.

Some, like Keith Main, say that this shows that Fasting is outdated. These people teach that this Passage shows that Paul is warning us *against* the sort of Asceticism that exalts Fasting in such a way that the Goodness of God in giving us the Gift of Food is *overlooked* or *distorted*.

The Weakness of Asceticism

And then when Paul pondered the Value of harsh Measures for the fleshly body- he cautioned the Colossians that such Disciplines are of very *limited* Benefit; and can even stir up carnal Pride as they subdue carnal Appetites.

Colossians 2:20-23

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”

... then he asks a Question:

Colossians 2:22

(which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

... and then he gives an Answer:

Colossians 2:23

These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

This is a strong Warning against any and all simplistic Views of Fasting that would dare to think that simply not eating will *earn* a guaranteed spiritual Benefit.

But Fasting has never been that simple. “**Severe treatment of the body**”, Paul said, may in fact simply puff up that person’s Self-Righteousness and the Result of this would be that the person would be measurably *worse off* from Fasting. CS Lewis saw this Danger and said,

“Fasting asserts the human will against the human appetite- the reward being ‘self-mastery’- and the danger, ‘pride’. Involuntary hunger subjects appetites and wills together to the Divine Will and furnishes an occasion for both godly submission and exposing us to the danger of rebellion. But the redemptive effect of suffering lies chiefly in its tendency to reduce the ‘rebel- will’. Ascetic practices which, in themselves, strengthen the will, are only useful insofar as they enable the will to put its own house (the passions) in order, as a preparation for offering the whole man to God. They are necessary as a means; but as an end, they would be abominable. For in substituting will for appetite and stopping- they would merely exchange the ‘animal self’ for the ‘diabolical self’. It was therefore truly said that ‘only God can mortify’”⁸

So, what we should take away from all this is that the true Biblical Mortification of our carnal nature is NOT simply a matter of Denial and Discipline- else all those who exercise either Denial or Discipline or both would be Holy- and manifestly they are not. Killing our carnal Urges so that we may live with Abandonment to the Joy of this Radical Love in Jesus Christ is an ongoing,

⁸ CS Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 112

internal Matter of us genuinely finding *more* Contentment in Jesus than we do in anything else- including food- including even Life itself!

Psalm 63:3

Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You.

Neither Eating or Not Eating Are Essential

The Apostle Paul regarded both eating and not eating as a matter that is non-essential in itself- but which gains Value as it expresses Love and a superior Satisfaction in God. That is why he told the saints at the Church in Rome,

Romans 14:3-6

3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

Now while it is true that this Passage does not address Fasting per se- the Principle is the same. “Eating and not- eating” or “Fasting and not Fasting” can both be done “**for the Lord**” and those who do either can both “**give thanks to God**”. And that is why he said,

... Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

... or as Paul said in **Colossians 2:16:**

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink ...

... because...

1Corinthians 8:8b

... food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

... therefore,

1 Corinthians 6:12

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

