

Morning Sermon July 12, 2020
"When You Fast ..." Matthew 6:16-18

I think it is quite telling that Jesus includes "fasting" in His sermon on the Mount. One of the reasons He does include it is because it represents an extreme! Part of the Apostle Paul's defense of his own ministry included a reference to "fastings often" -

²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 2 Corinthians 11:27 (NKJV)

This was, in the Apostle Paul's case, true proof of a life really lived wholeheartedly for Jesus Christ and God the Father, a life enabled and empowered by God's Holy Spirit!

Such a life is one that glorifies God!

Faking such a life, what Christ is talking about here, may fool men, but does not fool God!

I. "When" not "if" you fast, note fasting an inevitable part of the Christian life -

¹⁶ "Moreover, when you fast,... Matthew 6:16 A

Why is fasting an inevitable part of the Christian life?

1. Because our Lord Jesus Christ tells us it is -
2. Because circumstances requiring fasting will surely come -
 - A. Times when Jesus Christ is not physically present -

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁵ And 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. Matthew 9:14-15 (NKJV)

Bridegroom joyous times are not times for fasting -

- When Christ was physically present on earth

- When Christ's spiritual presence is gloriously obvious to the point even non-believers are respecting that presence ...
- Jesus warned His disciples of difficult times they would face after He left them -

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. John 15:18 (NKJV)

B. Particularly difficult demons (demonic forces) require fasting -
²¹ However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Matthew 17:21 (NKJV)

C. The start of a new / important ministry, job, event should start with fasting -

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ⁴ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Matthew 3:16-4:2 (NKJV)

- Jesus always had the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit's coming upon Jesus at the baptism of John represents His anointing for ministry as the Christ!
- Despite being able, prepared and empowered like no other man. Jesus still needed to fast 40 days at the beginning of His ministry!

3. Some will say, "but pastor, I cannot fast..." for various health reasons ...

A. No, specific frequency of fasting is required -

¹⁷ pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV) Is required! Fasting without ceasing, is NOT REQUIRED!

B. If your doctor told you to fast the night before a medical procedure or surgery would you do it? Give the same respect to Christ!

II. How not to fast -

¹⁶ ... 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. Matthew 6:16 B (NKJV)

1. Not hypocritically, like a play actor, putting on a fasting show

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A. A sad countenance – **Of a sad countenance** (σκυθρωποι [skuthrōpoi]). Only here and Luke 24:17 in the N. T. It is a compound of σκυθρος [skuthros] (sullen) and ὄψ [ops] (countenance). A.T. Robertson “Word Pictures in the New Testament”

B. A disfigured face – an intentionally made “face”

C. The fasting appearance – looking starving or hungry ...

D. Their reward – the applause of men for being so pious, so willing to sacrifice!

2. There is a great temptation to put on Christian show:

A. Acting, not preaching, practicing emotion

B. Acting while fasting, faking, exaggerating starving!

3. There are other ways to mess up fasting or even prayer –

A. Ignoring God’s Word –

⁹ One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. Proverbs 28:9 (NKJV)

B. Being mistaken about God’s truth –

¹² And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³ Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”

¹⁶ So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Acts 23:12–16 (NKJV)

- These were zealous men
- These men were WRONG!

C. Not being doers of God’s Word –

58 “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. ³ ‘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. ⁴ Indeed 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. 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? ⁶ “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? ⁷ Is 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? Isaiah 58:1–7 (NKJV)

III. How to fast (positive) -

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

1. Look nice, not starving!

2. Go to God in secret, just like before with prayer -

⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Matthew 6:6 (NKJV)

3. This does not mean fasting always has to be secret –

A. Often you cannot help people knowing

B. Sometimes there are public, proclaimed fasts -Jonah 3

C. My own experience with fasting, reasons for fasting –

- My own experience good and bad
- Reason #1, 2, ... Closeness to God, revival, spiritual battles
- Dieting, and the so-called “Daniel Fast” diet – Daniel 1:15
- Fasting and finances, James Boice’s illustration
- Review: Jesus warning against a fake “Christian” show!

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