

# The Christian's Abstinence

November 29, 2020

## There is nothing sacred nor empowering in the mere act of fasting.

- *Everything in our Christian walk depends upon our personal relationship with God and our heart motive.*
- *Mere actions alone are meaningless, when there is no relationship or impure heart motives.*

*Isaiah 58:3-4 ESV*

*3 Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.*

*4 Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.*

*Jeremiah 14:12 ESV*

*12 Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.*"

*1 Corinthians 8:8 ESV*

*8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.*

## Fasting is neither a hunger strike nor spiritual superiority.

- *Fasting does not convince or manipulate God into doing what we want.*
- *The mere act of fasting, praying, reading the Bible, does not make anyone spiritually superior.*
- *Fasting is the spiritual warfare of dethroning self.*

*"Fasting reduces the power of self so that the Holy Spirit can do a more intense work within us."*

—Bill Bright, 1921-2003, Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ

*Luke 18:11-12 ESV*

*11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*

*12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'*

*Matthew 6:16-18 ESV*

*16 And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

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

*18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

## Most references to fasting in the Bible are descriptive, not prescriptive.

- *Though there may not be many prescriptive scriptures about fasting (how, when, what, how long), the descriptive references make it clear that fasting was an unspoken assumption and essential discipline of the Christian faith and life.*

*2 Chronicles 20:1-4 ESV*

*1 After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle.*

*2 Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; and, behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar" (that is, Engedi).*

*3 Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.*

*4 And Judah assembled to seek help from the LORD; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.*

*Acts 13:2-4 ESV*

*2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

*3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

*4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*

*Acts 14:23 ESV*

*23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

*2 Corinthians 6:3-7 KJV*

*3 Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:*

*4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,*

*5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings:*

*6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,*

*7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.*

*2 Corinthians 11:23-27 KJV*

*23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool ) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.*

*24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

*25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;*

*26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

## **Fasting is exercising abstinence from the flesh, which in turn can increase our spiritual sensitivity, reducing distraction, vexation and temptation.**

- Any sensory input that feeds the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life will create distraction, vexation and temptation in our spiritual life, reducing and minimizing our spiritual sensitivity, discernment and victory over the flesh.
- Any sensory input that feeds our fleshly appetites reduces our:
  - freedom from the sin in our flesh
  - our ability to hear God's voice
  - illumination and understanding of God's Word
  - faith, peace and joy
- Fasting (abstinence) does not make God's power greater, but reduces our human impedance to the flow of God's power. Fasting magnifies the spiritual sensitivity and Divine flow in our lives.
- The more you can silence the flesh the louder you will hear the spirit.
- In the age in which we live, we have far more sources of sensory input attacking us than in Biblical times and therefore a far greater need for abstinence in a wider variety of distractions.

Romans 7:19-20 ESV

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

1 Peter 2:11 ESV

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

2 Peter 2:7-9 ESV

7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked

8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard);

9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

Genesis 19:17 ESV

And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away."

1 Corinthians 7:5 ESV

5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ESV

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.

27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13 CSB

12 "Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be mastered by anything.

13 "Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will do away with both of them. However, the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Isaiah 58:6-8 ESV

6 "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

## **Fasting is an exercise and demonstration of repentance, self-denial and the humbling of ourselves before God.**

Joel 2:12-13 ESV

12 Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

13 and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

Matthew 16:24-25 ESV

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

"In 1756 The King of Great Britain called for a day of silent prayer and fasting because of the threatening invasion of the French.

The fast was ordered on Dec 2 1755 and took place on Feb 6th. The prayer began with Hosea 6:1."

Hosea 6:1 ESV

"Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up."

"On February 6, 1756 John Wesley wrote in his journal,

'The fast day was a glorious day such as London has scarcely seen since the restoration. Every church in the city was more than full and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely, God heareth prayer and there will yet be a lightening of our tranquility.'

"As a footnote, he wrote, 'Humility was turn into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion of the French was diverted.'"

From W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (eds), *The Works of John Wesley* Volume 21: *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-1765)* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p.41

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*"Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God."*  
—Andrew Murray, 1828 - 1917

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*"The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things."*

—Ole Hallesby, 1879-1961, Lutheran priest, outspoken opponent of the Nazi occupation of Norway, detained at Grini concentration camp

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*"By fasting, the body learns to obey the soul; by praying the soul learns to command the body."*  
—William Secker, died 1681, rector of Leigh, Essex, England

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*"The abstinence is not to be an end in itself but rather for the purpose of being separated to the Lord and to concentrate on godliness. This kind of fasting reduces the influence of our self-will and invites the Holy Spirit to do a more intense work in us."*

—William Thrasher, author, professor at Moody Theological Seminary

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*"Fasting is abstaining from anything that hinders prayer."*

—Andrew Bonar, 1810-1892, minister in the Free Church of Scotland

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*"If you say "I will fast when God lays it on my heart," you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you."*

—Dwight L. Moody