
Fasting that Delights God!

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Matthew 4:1- 4; 6: 1- 4; 16-18; 9:14-17

Objections to Fasting

Asking me to write about Fasting is like asking a dog to walk on two legs. The dog can do it, but he cannot do it very long nor can he do it very well. I am a person who does not like to skip a meal, who thinks a good buffet is a good way to worship God because He bestows us with blessings. At the same time, I value the importance of Fasting. Having practiced Fasting off and on for many years—sometimes even dreading to start it and thankful when it was over—I learned a few things I wish to impart to you. I discovered that each time I Fasted, it gave me focus and steadfastness in His Word. I learned that what I thought I needed, I really did not need. I learned that His Word is my food. I learned that my “secret” life with God, which is my personal devotions and disciplines that I do not “show off” to others, builds me deeper and closer to Christ. I learned that Fasting is important and needs to be a part of my spiritual life—and perhaps yours, too!

A lot of Christians, including myself way back, think that Fasting is not for us because Jesus’ disciples did not Fast in His presence. Also, Jesus seemed to put Fasting down by confronting those who practiced it. Although Jesus often taught on Fasting (Mark 2:18; Luke 2: 37), and He, Himself, Fasted (Matt. 4:2), He did not insist on it. He confronted the Jewish leaders for making remarks about His disciples not Fasting. The reason they did not? Because Jesus was with them, so, what was the point! He then said they could Fast when He was gone. We have to look at the context and precepts of Scripture and not try to rationalize our wrong views. I had to realize Fasting was for me. I hope you do, too.

The passage most people use to say it is OK **not** to Fast is Matthew 9:14-15. This passage continues the narrative of Matthew’s feast. The Pharisees were not the only ones surprised to see Jesus among tax collectors and sinners; John the Baptist’s disciples were also dumbfounded. From their perspective, Jesus was feasting while they were Fasting—quite a contrast for what is perceived to be piety. They assumed Jesus and His disciples would do as they did, and practice piety by being separated from the world. John preached passionately, with power and conviction, demanding repentance and Fasting, and then withdrew (Matt. 3:1-11). Jesus also preached with power and conviction, and about repentance as well, yet came through willing to meet others where they were. Jesus did not leave the people; He went to them, continually ministering to them, giving us an example of what we are to do. He modeled Fasting, but did not demand it (Luke 4:2; Matt. 6:16-18). Consequently, a lot of Christians take this passage to mean we do not have to Fast. But, is that the point?

Fasting was considered a proper expression of humility and penitence, as well as devotion. Most religious leaders over-did it by being showy and pretentious with their pious, fraud-like devotions. Their behavior showed their pride and contempt, the opposite of true devotion. Although Moses, Elijah, and Jesus would Fast for periods up to forty days, Jesus did not attach much significance, in His teaching and ministry, to Fasting. He was more concerned with attitudes and motivations than what was done on the outside. Fasting is important, and a great way to draw close to our Lord in faith and maturity, as long as it is done with reverence and obedience, free of hidden agendas, and not used as an attention-gathering device (Matthew 6:16-18).

The word *Bridegroom* gives a picture of the biggest feast in those days, a wedding, and contrasts that to the dinner party where Jesus was. Jesus refocuses their attention to His mission. A wedding feast would last seven days or more. During such festivities, a Fast would be considered as rude. It would distract from the purpose of the wedding, because Fasting was associated with sorrow. Being in mourning would also be inappropriate, as well as heavy labor. If a death occurred, or a job needed to be done, the wedding was put off until the right time. If Jesus was Fasting with John's disciples, as He was most likely invited or assumed to, He declined. Had He accepted, He would not have been able to do His mission. Jesus was not saying Fasting was wrong, rather, that it has a significant place, and that place was not at this time.

Jesus does say, "*then they will fast.*" Fasting was a means to enable one to draw close to God. God is incarnate, and was in their very presence. It would have been foolish for them to Fast, since Jesus was right there. Here is another testimony to Jesus' Godhood. Although not overt, it is very much implied. Jesus recognized the importance of Fasting, and said there would come a time when they would Fast. Since the *Bridegroom* would not be there in person, they would Fast in order to draw closer to Him in spirit and devotion (Acts 13:2; 14:23). There are times when we should Fast, too!

The point? Christ is the Bridegroom who invites us, from our old *skins* and tattered lives, to His feast of eternal life. All we could ever do is hope for a patch for our frayed lives; yet, such a patch would never re-clothe us well. Our wine skins are old, and about to burst; our clothing is in shreds. He gives us the wine of His blood, renews our skins, and clothes us in His righteousness. Jesus wants us to know that when and where is important, and being appropriate is important. But most of all, He wants us to know that the Kingdom of God has arrived, and this is a time for celebration and feasting. There will always be times of Fasting!

For us, as Christians, there are occasions when Fasting is proper, and a needed thing to do. Jesus' timing and place was to teach, model, and build relationships. If Jesus had withdrawn to Fast, meaning drawing His attention to God, and not seeking the attention of others to Him, Jesus could not have won Matthew, or influenced his friends for the Gospel. It would be the same if we acted as some monks do, by total withdrawal from the world. We cannot reach out to others if we are locked in a monastery of our own piety. Nor can we advertise our personal holiness, as it would be

pretentious and meaningless. There is a time to **Fast**, there is a time to **grow**, and there is a time to **do**. Each one prepares the way for the other. If there is no piety or devotion in your life, you cannot reach out effectively. If all you do is reach out, how can you grow in Christ effectively? We must know when to feast with the Bridegroom, where and what to pour our wine into, and how to clothe ourselves in distinction, compassion, and love. If we sow the wrong thing on our spiritual and ministry walk, all we will accomplish is to snatch ourselves away from God's plan, and the opportunities He has for us.

Why Should I Fast

When you take a look at our Western culture, with fast food places on almost every corner and countless opportunities to eat whatever you wish, even a committed Christian might never consider Fasting. Yet, one of the classic, Christian aspects of growing deeper in the faith is Fasting because it opens us up before our holy God. Our minds are cleared to seek Christ without distractions and interruptions; therefore, we can have our sin revealed, experience His precepts, see our disobedience, and feel remorse so we will repent. We can channel our behavior away from ourselves and toward Him. Even though we may feel distraction with our stomach aching and growling, we can more easily pour ourselves out to the Lord. But, believe it or not, as a person who loves food, rarely do I feel hungry when I am Fasting!

John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus, *Why do we?* (Matt. 9:14-17) It is a natural, human reaction to feel somewhat let down when you have earnestly done something good, then see someone who did not do it receive the credit. Perhaps you may say, *why bother, why try, or, I will just give up.* Perhaps John's disciples were so caught up in their pursuit of piety they forgot why they were being pious. The battle here was over what was pious. It seemed that Jesus and His disciples were acting foolishly, while John's disciples were acting righteously. But, they who would criticize did not see the big picture, what was really going on. They could not see who Jesus was, what His mission was, or what He was really doing at the home of Matthew, an admitted sinner. He was fulfilling His mission by bridging the gap, building relationships, seeking the lost, and inviting them to the real feast to come (Luke 19:6-9). We need to see Jesus for who He is and respond to Him. We are not to be discouraged, feel we are not pious or good enough to try, or see others so sanctimonious that we feel we could not match up to them, so why try. We are to try anyway and regardless of others who may seem to do it better because we are not responsible for them, only for ourselves. We are to respond and do what He has called us to do. We are not in competition; we are in relation to one another (Zec. 7:9; Mal. 2:10; John 5:44; 13:34-35; Rom. 2:10-16; 13:8; 14:13; 15:17)!

Jesus starts the passage in Matthew 6:16-18 by saying, "when you fast," He is assuming that we will be Fasting and is telling us that Fasting is important. He did not say, *if* you Fast! The main reason I should Fast? Because God loves us, and He called us to! So, out of the gratitude for what He has done for us, we should strongly desire to do as He has called on us to do. We, on the other hand, keep accumulating our sins, and refusing to acknowledge or deal with them. Sin blocks our relationship to God. His work on the cross covers us in righteousness, but our sins are still there, and we still

have to work them out (Lam. 1:18-20; Psalm 51: 1-17; Luke 15:17-21; John 16:7-11; Acts. 2:37; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 2; James 5:16; 1 John 1:8-10). Fasting is the way we best deal with our sins, learn about ourselves and others, and grow in our walk with Him.

Let's look at some of the main reasons.

Fasting Fosters Humbleness before God

I am a history buff. I can spend all day reading history and even watching the History Channel on cable, which is the only reason why I have cable TV. (I would even have a Ph.D. in it if there was something I could do with it, but there is not. Not that having a Ph.D. in Theology has put bread on the table, because it has not. So, a Ph.D. in Theology is another good reason to Fast, because you will not have enough money to buy food anyway.) Humors aside, many great men of history were Fasters.

George Washington, America's prime revolutionary leader and first President, prayed and sometimes Fasted before each battle as a General, and before each important meeting while President. After he won the Revolution against the British, he proclaimed a national day of Fasting and repentance. He realized that as a General, and as the early Americans sought to make him a king, pride could easily skulk into his life. To keep pride away and remain a faithful leader, he had to repent, and repentance was best done while Fasting. He knew his will. The people in his command sought to elevate him, but his goal was to lift Christ up. He also knew that to win the battles against the British, he had to take lives and do things contrary to his faith, while also requiring this of his men. He knew that he and his men needed to repent.

We must be the Christian who lifts our Lord up, and never be the person whose life is all about "me!" God is the One who is to lift us up; when we try to lift ourselves up, we become prideful, the quintessential thing that God hates the most! Fasting has a way of removing the pride of "me" and thus humbles us before the Lord (Ezra 8:21-23; Psalm 35:13; 69:10)!

Fasting Fosters Repentance

In Jesus time, following the Mosaic Law meant that the Jews were required to Fast at least once annually, which they did. Fasting was a part of their culture and mindset, something that has disappeared from ours. Jesus' earthly disciples Fasted along with their fellow Jews during the *Day of Atonement* (Lev. 16:29-31). This was a Fasting of contrition, which means coming before God, having remorse for one's sins, seeking His forgiveness, pledging repentance, and doing penance (following the requirements of the Law for atonement, such as sacrifices of food or animal), and not doing them (sins) again. Paul followed this *law*, as depicted in Acts 27:9!

God's desire is for us to draw near to Him. He paves the way for our sanctification, but, it is up to us to make that journey. He will not force it on us. Fasting is

a venue to help make it happen with real, authentic devotion and sacrifice (Neh. 9:1; Jer. 36:9; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12).

One of the most dramatic instances of Fasting in the Bible is when an entire county, about to be judged by God, Fasted, recognized their sin, and repented. God called a prophet named Jonah to preach to them. Jonah knew of the wickedness of the people of Nineveh, and he also knew of God's grace. He knew if he went to Nineveh and preached to them, they could possibly repent, and he, for whatever reasons—personal hurt, or maybe prejudices—did not want them to be saved. So, he ran. God caused a storm as Jonah tried to escape by ship; the sailors tossed him overboard as soon as they discovered that Jonah was the cause. God ironically showed His mercy to Jonah—who was running—because God is merciful. God sent a whale to rescue Jonah, a whale which is the principle deity of the people of Nineveh—more irony. Jonah submitted, with some more grumbling, and went to Nineveh. He preached and the people turned to God, and His judgment was belayed.

The narrative of Jonah is a story about the power of Fasting, both to help recognize our sin and to spur on repentance. We can learn that we need not fear God, as He is all knowing, and He knows our sin. So, what is stopping us from telling God what He already knows? Our pride! Release your pride and you will find wonders as you are able to grow closer to Him! You will be unable to do this unless you smash your sin.

Sin is anything that takes us away from drawing closer to God, or creates a counterfeit or replacement of God. Repentance surrenders your will as you throw out your sins and refocus on Christ as the Lord of your life (Isaiah 58:6-11).

Fasting Fosters Prayer

Fasting focuses us upon the things that are important, and prayer is the number one important thing in our spiritual growth. How does Fasting do this? Fasting focuses our attention; it keeps us away from distractions so our prayers are more intense, sustained, attentive, and real (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Acts 13:1-3; 14:21-23).

When we Fast with others, we can collectively be focused and become likeminded, entrenched in His Word. Togetherness in prayer equals powerful spiritual synergy (Matt. 18:19-20). If you lead a church or organization and you have trouble making decisions, or have disunity, Fasting, along with prayer will do you wonders. I learned this several years ago when I was on staff with Campus Crusade and Bill Bright was just starting to discover Fasting, himself. He challenged the rest of us to do so, too. We followed with some kicking and grumbings; however, we became much more focused and used by God because of Fasting (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23). If I had elders or board members in my church who were arguing, unfocused, or off track, I would call a day of Fasting and prayer. When they agreed to this, we became unified and powerfully used by God. When they refused, I knew it was time to find another church, and shake the dirt off my feet.

We should Fast and persist in prayer whenever we are truly seeking Him and His help, just as is modeled in the Scriptures (Luke 18:1-8). Such situations would include difficult temptations, when sending out missionaries, when choosing leaders, seeking the start of a new ministry or direction, or a serious illness of a loved one, to name a few. Individuals, a small group, or the entire congregation can practice Fasting.

Real, authentic Christian formation is developed when we give up the rights to ourselves, and hand over our will to Christ. In so doing, we begin to understand what is important in life, and experience true freedom, as the chains of slavery formed by our self-willed actions and thinking are broken. We become transformed and renewed by what He has done, which works more deeply and more powerfully as our devotion increases, and we become more aware of whom we are in Him and become better used by Him!

Authentic Fasting Will Never Draw Attention to Self

In the passage of Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus sternly warns of abusing Fasting by using it for a *show and tell* game to draw attention to oneself. This behavior misses the real purpose, which is drawing close to God, and seeking His will for one's life and church. This passage is in the context of pleasing God, where Jesus places Fasting in the ranks of prayer, spiritual commitment, and trusting Him, making it a vital, if not paramount component of spirituality, and of growing deeper in Christian formation/spiritual growth.

Further in this passage, Jesus tells us to *put oil on your head and wash your face*. Sounds strange to us...should we dump cooking oil on ourselves? Actually, this means to clean yourselves, and to stay kept and groomed, so as not to draw attention to yourself. The purpose in Fasting is to draw attention to Christ and His glory. *Anointing your head* in this context was the daily routine of hygiene. The Jews did not shower or bathe as we do (which was not a daily routine in western culture until the early 20th century, and still is not in most parts of the world), but put olive oil on themselves, then scraped off the sweat and dirt. This kept them clean, and their skin smooth and sunburn free in their hot climate. Anointing can also mean rejoicing (Psalm 23:5; 45:7; 61:3; 104:15)! We are to do this willingly and joyfully!

When we glorify ourselves, we accomplish nothing! The Jews put ashes on their heads and wore *sackcloth* (from the Hebrew *sak*, a coarse cloth similar to burlap, dark in color, and usually made of goat's hair—a very cheap and itchy material) when Fasting. They did this to show their piety and reverence; however, it was usually a show, with no real meaning under that itchy material. They sat in the public areas so all those walking by would feel sorry for them and think that they were pious. So, when Friday evening or Saturday came, these people attained honor and respect in the temple (Zech. 7:1-14). But, it is a good bet that their hearts were not in it! That is why Jesus was so harsh with them. It was a show and pretence; they were only faking to glorify themselves. We need to understand how heinous this is. Why? Because it elevates us as the ones to receive glory and not God (Isaiah 58)!

To be authentic in Fasting, Jesus called us to maintain our regular appearance, as Fasting should never be done in a pretentious or showy way. Be sincere in your heart, not with your garments and looks! This way we are keeping our faith authentic, and the focus upon Christ as our Lord.

The Pharisees, as well as their disciples, Fasted twice a week to prove their status and devotion to God before the public (Luke 18:12). They did it for false and misleading reasons. Remember, God seeks the heart, and deeds done through sincerity and honesty, not those for the purpose of self-promotion. The Pharisees then added many more regulations on top of the Law. In so doing, they were trying to earn God's favor by ostentatious displays, but with no heartfelt meaning behind them. Our faith needs to be practiced honestly and from our heart, never for personal gain or pretentious reasons.

Isaiah challenged the Jews, prior to their captivity, and maintained that their Fasting was empty of purpose, pretentious, vain, and not pleasing to God (Isa. 58), just as Jesus does in Matthew. Isaiah further expounded that because of their pious, fraudulent behavior, they corrupted themselves, and that justice and virtue became absent in the land where God's love and rule was to be shown to the world. Such decadence led to their seventy-year captivity under the Babylonians. We have to realize how important being authentic with our faith is, and Fasting is a good place to keep it real.

This passage also sets out to proclaim the true lasting motivations for our daily pursuits of giving, praying, and Fasting, extending to other pursuits in the coming chapters (Matthew 6: 16-18). These motivations for rewards will show how we exhibit our piety before God and people. Such motivations can either glorify God or become of hypocritical contempt to God, as well as ridicule and shame for the Church. Jesus calls us to righteous giving, that of giving to others in order to please God. We are not to seek to please ourselves, and certainly not others. When we only seek the praise of others, our giving becomes fuel for selfishness, and God is not glorified. Our reward will only be the momentary praise, and a much greater reward will become lost due to our misplaced motivations. God will not reward us twice, so, we must choose which reward we want—one from feeble temporary people, or one from the Great, Eternal God.

Do not do your charitable deeds before men. Jesus is affirming the positive value of such deeds. But, He also warns that they must be done with the correct, proper attitudes and motivations. Classic Judaism states that our motivation for performing good deeds should not be for gaining rewards from others. Rather, we should wait for our reward in Judgment. Jesus affirms this classic teaching, and challenges the teachers of the Law to uphold it. They, of course, did not, as they proclaimed elaborate displays and speaking to draw attention to themselves when they gave, the opposite of what they taught (Tobit 12:8, Jewish Commentary Text)!

We are not to exhibit righteousness solely to be seen by others! This does not mean to avoid all or any practice of righteousness (Matt. 5:16). Rather, it is to avoid doing things JUST to be recognized and self-glorified. We cannot secure praise for God when we are trying to secure praise for ourselves! The consequences for our misplaced motivations are that we miss our real and true reward, which is far richer, better, and more lasting than temporary human praises. What we do in secret will be made known to God, and even to others, if God so desires (Eccles. 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Submission to God is more crucial and essential for life and faith than personal agendas. If not, we are the *Hypocrites*. This word literally means *acting*, or an *actor* in a play. It is one who claims to have a relationship with God, and to be following His precepts, while actually doing the opposite. The ancient actors did this by holding up masks to proclaim their part in the play and their expression of feelings, while their real feelings were hidden. The hypocrites in the Church seek themselves, and their agenda, under the façade of being a Christian. Sometimes, their evil is so ingrained in them that they do not even realize they are hypocrites, as Jesus points out in Matthew, chapter 23.

Remember, Jesus taught His disciples to have a righteousness that exceeded that of the Pharisees, meaning they must be real in their faith, and in their walk in Christ (Matt. 5:20)! The Scribes and Pharisees were practicing the art of hypocrisy—not righteousness! Jesus does not pay any attention to the people who say one thing and do another, nor does He pay attention to misplaced motivations or religious gab and gossip! Is He paying attention to you?

Who Fasted and Why?

- In the Old Testament, the Jews Fasted to seek God's help in threats or times of war (nation in general), when loved ones were sick (David), in seeking God's forgiveness for themselves and their nation (Ahab, Daniel), and in seeking God's protection and His will (Ezra). Just look up the term, *Fasting*, in a concordance and observe the abundance of references (Lev 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7; Psalm 69:10; Acts 27:9)!
- Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all Fasted for 40 days! The Bible records that Fasting was not just for the super leaders, rather it was practiced by most, such as during the Judges (Deut 9:15-18; Judg. 20:26; 1 Kings 21:27). (The absolute Fasts of Moses and Elijah had divine assistance—Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8).
- Israel Fasted at Bethel, in the war against the Benjamites at Mizpah, and in the Philistine war (Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam 7:6).
- In the book of Ruth, the Jews Fasted when they heard that Haman had tricked the king into wiping them out (Esther 4:3-16).

- David Fasted for Saul and his friend Jonathan, and wept for both his son while he was dying, and for his enemies (2 Sam. 1:12; 2 Sam. 12:16-23; Psalm 35:11-13).
- Daniel Fasted for Israel (Dan. 9:3-5).
- Fasting accompanied prayer, devotion to God (Psalm 35:13), penance (1 Kings 21:27), and seeking God earnestly (2 Sam. 1:12).
- The effects of Fasting with prayer, when it is real and heartfelt, is that it humbles us (Psalm 35:13), disciplines and corrects our wrong behaviors and our thinking (Psalm 69:10), and even though we have grace, I believe when we are humble, God is more likely to respond to our prayers. (Ezra 8:21-23)!
- In the New Testament, Fasting was practiced when one was faced with temptations (Jesus), in serving the Lord and beginning a new ministry (Antioch), and, when selecting and appointing elders (Matt. 4:1-2).
- John the Baptist Fasted regularly as a testimony to piety that was real, heartfelt, and pointed to God, not to himself (Matt. 3:11).
- Paul listed Fasting among other things that proved he was a minister of Christ (1 Co 11:1; 2 Co 11:23-28).
- The early church practiced Fasting as they further sought God's Will, drawing them deeper into His presence (Acts 13:2-3; 14:21-23).
- To strengthen our faith (1 Cor. 9:27; 6:13 20; Rom. 13:14)
- To consecrate ourselves before God (Psalm 69:10; Matt. 5:4; Acts 13:3; 14:23)
- For understanding and wisdom (Dan. 9:2,3,21,22; 2 Cor. 11:27; Acts 27:21-24)
- To have God hear our pleas (Jer. 29:13,14; Ezra 8:23; John. 4:8,31-34)
- To change God's mind, as in to change us (2 Sam. 12:16, 22; Jonah 3:5, 10)
- To plead for others (Isa. 49:24; 58:6)
- For physical health and healing (1 Sam. 30:11-15; Psalm 35:13; 3 John 2)

These are but a few examples; see a concordance for many more!

How to Fast

A Fast was often for one day, from sunrise to sunset, and after sundown the Jews and early church would eat. This format is still practiced by many Middle Eastern

Cultures today (Judges 20:26; 1 Sam 14:24; 2 Sam 1:12; 3:35). To start off your spiritual discipline of Fasting, take it slow and easy. Here are some practical suggestions if you have never Fasted before, or if you need a better plan.

Start slowly, and only Fast for brief periods of time, such as one meal, then two, then a whole day. For example, I usually have dinner the night before around 6pm, then skip breakfast and lunch and have a light dinner at 6pm. I just did a 24 hour Fast! Seek the advice of a physician if you plan to Fast for more than one day. Drink plenty of water – 8 to 10 - 8 oz. glasses of filtered water, never soft drinks! If your stomach is getting upset, eat a slice or two of whole grain bread to absorb your stomach acid. You may do a “juice” Fast, and drink small amounts of vegetable and fruit juices. This is not only very healthy, but it will have the same devotional effect. In the Liturgical Churches (Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran), they do a Lenten fast for 40 days, to give up one or more items they like. For me it was chocolate and coffee. This, too, is a good way to have a prolonged time of abstaining from what you like in order to focus on what God likes (Dan. 10:2-3).

We can Fast for a variety of reasons—for our health (it cleanses toxins from your body), as an expression of grief and sorrow, or to gain self-control—all of which are good, and Biblical. But, remember, the primary reason is to express our devotion and service to God (Col. 2:20-23).

Some people do not even drink water when they Fast. However, this is very unhealthy. Do not do this! Some do what is called *ascetic* (severe) Fasting that was meant to wear themselves down, as some Monks did in the Middle Ages. This is unbiblical and dangerous. Remember, Fasting is meant to draw one near to God. Thus, if it is only for show, or only to keep one away from pleasures, but with no purpose behind it, it is empty and foolish!

When you are Fasting, keep yourself busy. Go about your regular routine, with the exception of exercise. Lay aside time to be in prayer. Take a look under the hood of your will, life, relationships, motivations, goals, desires, and God's call (Jeremiah 14:10 - 12). Use this time to work on your relationship with Christ by reading His Word and praying. Do it with joy (James 1:2)!

Do not break your Fast with a big meal; rather, end it gradually with small amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables. Just as you began gradually, you need to slowly and gradually begin to eat fresh vegetables and fresh fruits. Remember, the purpose for Fasting is to humble oneself in the presence of God, seeking His Will with a prayerful attitude! For the early church, Fasting also meant removing oneself from any pleasure—even their work in some cases. Hence, it could be manipulated to enable one to avoid responsibilities! So, be wise and always consider your motivations!

Should Christians Fast today? The answer is a big, YES!!! Remember that Jesus Himself Fasted (Luke 4:1-2)! He then assumed His disciples would Fast, as He said *when*, not *if* (Matt. 6:16-17; 9:14-15)! When Fasting is done properly, it will glorify

and please God! Fasting includes and energizes prayer, and the seeking of God's will (Matt. 17:20-21)! Fasting was, and still is, an important way to engage an uncluttered mind in prayer, as Fasting, when done properly, will remove most, if not all distractions from your mindset.

Fasting and prayer are serious matters! Both involve going before a Holy God! Fasting must be taken seriously and prayerfully; it must never be a ritual, but rather a heartfelt seeking of God's will and glory in one's own life and in the life of the church! A sign of real Fasting and prayer is when repentance and obedience are evident; if not, you may be performing a ritual for show (Isa. 58:3-9; Heb. 11:6).

There will be times when you will go through stress and confusion in your Christian walk. You may not see a way to get yourself out of it, and you may even feel hopeless. You need to realize that He is in control, and this confusion is temporary. He may be taking you through this journey so your eyes can be more on Him and less on yourself. Prayer and Fasting can be effective tools in seeking His will, as Fasting will supercharge your prayer life, and reboot your spiritual growth. We can better understand what God wants of us, even when we are in spiritual confusion! (2 Chron. 20:3-4).

More verses on Fasting: Deuteronomy 9:9-29, 10:1-11; Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 17:5-7; 2 Chronicles 20:1-29; Esther 4-8; Ezra 8:21-23,31; 10:6, 10:10-11; Daniel 1:8-17; 10:2-3; Joel 1:13-14, 2:12,15,18-27; Matthew 3:4; 4:1-3; Luke 2:36-38; Acts 9:7-19; 10:30-31; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Cor. 7:5; 11:1, 23-28; 2 Col. 2:20-23; 6:4-10; 11:23-28

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