

Matt 6:16-18 – Fasting

Introduction

1. A most neglected passage and practice of the Christian Life
 - a. Jesus assumes His disciples will fast
2. Pastor Al Martin's Reasons Why Christians Do Not Fast
 - a. Reaction against the abuses of Rome
 - i. Used as merit to obtain righteousness from God
 - b. Ignorance of the whole counsel of Scripture
 - c. Ignorance of Christian History
 - i. We base normality on our own experience apart from the historical movements of Christians through the ages
 - d. We live in an affluent society that promotes self-indulgence over self-denial, like fasting
 - i. Our society loves pleasure more than God
 - ii. The god of culture is the belly (**Philippians 3:17-19**)

Key Thought: Jesus teaches us what heavenly righteousness looks like and what hypocritical righteousness looks like, in relation to fasting. Fasting is a hunger for God and His pleasure, not a hunger to be recognized and praised by men. Christians seek to hunger for God, and therefore practice the spiritual discipline of fasting.

A Biblical Foundation & Theology Of Fasting

1. The theme verse for the Sermon on the Mount: *Your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees* (**Matthew 5:20**)
 - a. Jesus lays out what this Christian righteousness looks like
 - b. The Jews used the law as an external thing anyone could do
 - c. Jesus lays out what Christian righteousness looks like, done only in the strength of God, through Christ
2. Chapters 5-6 – An exposition of the Law of God by God Himself
 - a. Jesus uses antithetical statements to emphasize the truth of the Law: *You have heard it said, but I say to you...*
 - b. The Lord further explains heavenly righteousness versus hypocritical righteousness, beginning with a warning (**Mt 6:1**)
 - i. Focus on Three Spiritual Disciplines: Giving, Praying, Fasting (with an interlude on prayer – The Lord's Prayer)
3. Fasting in the Old Testament
 - a. One Day (Yom Kippur) commanded by the Lord – **Lev 16**
 - i. This command was serious – one could be exiled from the land if they did not follow the command (**Lev 23:27-29**)
 - b. Many other fasts that took place
 - i. Nehemiah 9 – for the nation
 - ii. Ninevites fast after Jonah's preaching
 - iii. Daniel fasts to remain set apart for God, undefiled (**Ch 9**)
 - iv. Job fasted as he grieved (**Job 6:6-7**)
 - v. Esther asked Mordecai to tell the nation to fast

4. Fasting in the New Testament
 - a. Jesus in the wilderness fasted while tempted (**Mt, Mk, Lk**)
 - b. 84 year old prophetess, Anna, fasted in the temple mount
 - c. Saul of Tarsus fasted three days after he was converted
 - d. Two fasts in Acts 13: One to seek after God, and the other to send out Barnabas and Paul on their missionary journeys
 - e. Church fasted to choose pastors and elders (**Acts 14**)
 - f. Paul disciplined his body in order to serve the Lord by preaching the Gospel (**1 Corinthians 9:25-27**)
5. Fasting is a faithful act of self-denial used to curb the appetite for the world, but not to mortify the deeds of the flesh
 - a. Fasting is a gift of grace to faithfully hunger for God
 - b. Fasting is a test to see if Christ is real to you (**1 Cor 6:12-13**)
6. Fasting is a spiritual discipline, but it can be abused
 - a. Paul warned against making Christian piety into a self-righteous act, asceticism, and not a true hunger for God (**Col 2**)
 - b. Fasting is not coinage that earns God's grace: It's gift of God
A grace to be used as Christ instructed, to hunger for God

Hypocritical Fasting (vv 16-17, Isaiah 58:2-8)

1. *When...* not if – this is not a conditional clause: Jesus assumes if you follow Him, you will fast (**see Mat 9:14-15**)
2. *Gloomy* – Sad, Sullen (Greek: *Scoothropoi*) – a pained face
 - a. Neglecting the outward appearance in order to make a show, earn the praised of others for outward religious deeds
 - b. Ironic Play On Words: *They destroy (disfigure) the face so that they can shine* – “look so miserable, you must be holy”
3. *Anoint your head and wash your face*
 - a. An Issue with this Teaching: Isn't hypocrisy covering up what you truly are? What about washing the outside of the cup? (**See Matt 23:25-26**) Hypocrisy is about the heart!
 - b. The actions of the Pharisees said they hungered after God, but their hearts' desire was to be admired and approved of
4. *They Earn their Reward* – Good job from the lips of men
5. The Lord's Response to Abuse of false piety (**Isaiah 58:2-8**)

Heavenly, Holy Fasting (vv 17-18)

1. It is not obvious – clean up! Look presentable!; It is the intention for people not to know
2. The Goal: Be seen by God in secret – a test for the reality of God in our lives – does having an audience of One bring satisfaction?
3. He rewards you – How? By answering the prayers you prayed in the Lord's Prayer, for one... *Fasting comes right after praying...*
4. Why do you fast? God's grace led you to do it; God gives grace to do difficult things and rewards you for the grace He gave to accomplish it