

FASTING AND PRAYER

One of my favorite scriptures is

2 Chronicles 7:14 (KJV) *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

We will see today that when we come to the Lord, reflecting on the conditions of this verse, that God will show up every time.

In today's teaching I would like to talk about, what is fasting and how does it relate to prayer? This will be a two-part teaching as there is much information that needs to be given and I want to make sure you grasp it all without overloading you in one teaching.

As Christians, we have all heard from time to time about fasting. Even the secular world has gotten on the bandstand with regards to fasting. Yes, there are many reasons for fasting, and I hope to cover those today, while brings a better understand as to why we fast and how it goes hand in hand with prayer.

So, the question one might ask is "How do I fast?" That is a good question, as you do not hear a lot about fasting from a spiritual point of view today. Since most people know something about prayer, it may be a good idea to begin by pointing out the parallels between fasting and prayer.

Jesus in Matt. 6, while bringing the 'Sermon on the Mount', spoke first about praying and then about fasting. We see that He used similar language in talking about both subjects. First, we can pray

as individuals, and second, we can pray as a group. Group prayer is commonly called a prayer meeting and or corporate prayer. Individual prayer is that time we pray in our closet, alone with God. The same can be said of fasting. There is group fasting where we come together for that purpose and individual fasting that is done by ourselves.

Then we are familiar with two kinds of prayer: regular which is at a set time each day, and special times of prayer when the Holy Spirit leads us to focus on a special need that is in addition to our regular time of prayer. The same can be observed with fasting. Fasting should be a regular part of our disciplined, Christian walk. However, we will find those times when the Holy Spirit leads us to give additional emphasis to fasting.

Then the question should be asked if all Christians should fast?

As we examine the Bible, the history of Israel, and the early church, it becomes clear that fasting was a regular part of the life of God's people. We see in the Old Testament that Israel was required by God to fast collectively at least once a year on the Day of Atonement as well as other occasions. We have records of individuals who fasted: Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, as well as many of Israel's kings who led their people in fasting.

In the New Testament, we see the early church fasting together in groups for special needs. This was done as they sought guidance in the calling of leaders for the ministry in the church. It has also been found in early church history, that the church regularly fasted two days each week.

If you found yourself being called into the ministry for the Methodist under John and Charles Wesley, it was expected that you would spend every Wednesday and Friday until 4:00 P.M. fasting. Wesley regarded it as an absolutely normal part of any Christian minister's life and discipline.

So, I would guess one can say that fasting along with prayer should be a vital part of every Believer's life today as it has been in the past. The Scriptures clearly reveals it is God's will that we fast. Then how do I prepare to fast? One must prepare one's heart and mind for a fast. I fast with an attitude of positive faith: it is God's will for me to fast and I will be blessed when I fast according with His will. I can know it is God's will because it has been revealed in His Word as seen in

Matt. 6:17-18, But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; That you appear not to men to fast, but to your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly.

It is clear to see that Jesus did not say, if you fast but *when you fast*. I do not need to seek an answer from Heaven if I should fast, it has been made clear that I am to fast, and in so doing, with the right motives, will be rewarded by my Father for do so. This is a clear promise, however, if I choose not to fast, the conditional blessing will not come.

In Heb. 11:6 we see some principles for approaching God and seeking anything from Him.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Here I am told how to approach God, with faith and there is no other way in which I can approach Him. Now when I come to God in faith, I *must believe that He is*, that He exists, and that He will reward me if I *diligently seek Him*. That means if I diligently seek God, He will reward me and that is guaranteed. Now He may not reward me the way I think He should, but that does not negate the fact if I diligently seek Him, He will never fail to reward me. That is the assurance we have in His Word.

What are the promises to those who fast? Isaiah tells us in chapter 58 starting with vs. 8 & 9 and then 11 & 12.

8) *Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your health shall spring forth speedily: and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of Jehovah [the LORD] shall be your rear guard [rearward].*

9) *Then shall you call, and Jehovah [the LORD] shall answer; you shall cry, and He shall say, Here I am. If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedly [vanity];*

11) *And Jehovah [the LORD] shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and give strength [make fat] to your bones: and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*

12) *And they that shall be of you shall build the ancient ruins [old waste places]: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.*

Now let us take a look at the promises that are ours if we fast according to the will of God.

- Light
- Health
- Righteousness
- Glory
- Answered prayer
- Continual guidance
- Satisfaction
- Refreshing
- Work that endures
- Restoration

Here are ten benefits that any Christian will receive simply by fasting accordingly to God's will, having a positive attitude of faith that we are following the Scriptures teaching on fasting, that we are obeying the revealed will of God, and that He will reward us according to Isaiah 58. I do not know about you, but I can sure use these promises in my life.

We also need to have a right attitude toward our own bodies. Some look at the body as just a temporary thing while they are here on this earth. They cannot wait for their heavenly body, with none of the limitations this earthly one has. Let us look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 to see what Paul tells us about this body.

19 What? Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [Ghost] which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?

20 For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus died on the cross, the redemption that His blood bought was not just for our spirits and our souls, but also for our bodies. He bought the whole package and this temple [our bodies], is where the Holy Spirit resides. Jesus has no other body on this earth other than ours. We are His physical presence in the earth today. We can build all the churches, temples, and places of worship to God however, He only dwells in one place and that is in this body that Christ redeemed with His blood (Acts 7:48)

Taking care of these bodies I believe is especially important to God. If we fail to keep them maintained properly, how will we be able to do all that God has called us to do? Fasting can be an important part of this maintenance when done properly, as we will see.

Paul gives us further instructions about this body in Romans 6:13.

Neither yield you your body parts [members] as instruments of unrighteousness to sin: but yield yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your body parts [members] as instruments of righteousness to God.

My body is not my own and its various body parts are intended to be instruments or as the Greek says, weapons made for war, that our God can use. They do not belong to us, they belong to God, and we are to fully give ourselves to Him, for His pleasure and use.

A note of caution needs to be inserted here. When fasting one must take into consideration the physical aspects. If you have certain types of physical problems or you are taking regular

medications, you should consult your physician for advice about whether you should fast. There are some who will simply not be able to fast, the fast that is called for according to the Word of God. If you are one of those, you will need to go before the Lord and ask Him to lead you in this matter. Some say you can fast other things in place of food and water, however, you need to take that to God and let Him lead you. We who are healthy and able to fast can stand in for those who physically cannot.

Now I want to address the purpose of fasting. We see from Scripture that there are many good reasons to fast. I want to address just a few for this teaching.

The first can be found in Psalms 35:13 where David said *I humbled my soul with fasting*. Here we see David said I humbled my soul, not God humbled my soul. This is an act of our self-will and self-choice. God will not humble us for He has told us to do it ourselves. Jesus spoke of this in Matt. 23:12,

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled [abased]; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

I must make the choice. It is up to me and no one else. I can choose to be humbled [abased] and exalt myself or do I want to be exalted, then I need to humble myself. And there is not better way than through fasting.

The second motive for fasting is to come closer to God. James tells us in 4:8

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

It should be our desire to be close to God, for when we are we will be able to clearly hear His voice.

The third motive for fasting is to understand God's Word more clearly. When we deny ourselves through fasting and spend that time in His Word, God will give us a greater, deeper understanding and revelation of it by His Holy Spirit.

The fourth motive for fasting is finding God's will and direction for our lives. We can see an example of this with Ezra when he offered up a fast in chapter 8 v. 21

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of A-ha'va, that we might humble [afflict] ourselves before Elohim [our God], to seek of Him a right way for us , and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

I can testify that when we humble ourselves, fast and pray, that God is faithful to come through with the answer every time and I know He will do the same for you. The problem is that many times we get the cart before the horse and get ahead of God, instead of waiting patiently for His instructions.

Another reason for fasting, is one that I have used many times and it is for healing. We saw this in the reading of Isaiah 58:8 where God told us, our health shall spring forth speedily or swiftly. The Lord has healed me of many things over the years when I went to Him with a humble heart, in faith believing, through fasting and prayer.

I am reminded of the preamble of Jesus' earthly ministry where He fasted 40 days and nights in preparation to do God's Work

here on earth. This equipped Him to withstand the temptations of satan and to heal the sick and bring deliverance to those possessed by evil spirits. This was seen in Matt. 17:21 where Jesus rebuked the demon in the son of the man who brought him to His disciples, who could not 'cure' him. Jesus said,

However this kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting.

There will be times when this is the only way we will see victory. If we humble ourselves, come in faith believing, with fasting and prayer, we will see the answer come. And we know that it will come because His Word tells us so.

A sixth reason to fast is when we need God to intervene in a time of crisis. There are times when circumstances arise where there is no way for us to handle them on our own. But God! When times and circumstances look bleak, we can know from the Word of God and history that when we humble ourselves before God, gather together to fast and pray, God will show up.

One amazing account is found in 2 Chronicles 20, where we see King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah between a rock and a hard place. A vast army of several nations has come against them and when the report came to King Jehoshaphat, he was afraid and turned to seek Jehovah and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. All Judah gathered, to ask help of Jehovah, the king prayed in the presence of the people, in the court of the LORD's house and Jehovah showed up! The Word of the LORD came forth and said, *BE Not Afraid Nor Dismayed*, for tomorrow, go, stand, and see the salvation of the LORD!

Their enemies turned on each other and when it was finished it took Judah three days to gather all the spoils of the battle. They never raise a sword, spear, or bow but only offered up songs of praise and the LORD of Armies [Host] defeated their enemies for them. *Praise Jehovah; for His mercy endures for ever!*

The final one for this study is a fast to interceded and pray on behalf of others. I believe this is a weapon that is under used in the saving of souls for the kingdom of God. Are we willing to make a personal sacrifice, to do something that will cost us to see the lost saved, whether it be of our own families or the world. There have been numerous testimonies over the years of this working. Most of the great revivals that saw a great move of God started through fasting and prayer. Do we want to see a new and powerful move of God? Are we willing to pay the price to see that happen? If so, I would encourage you to keep a journal of these times with dates so you can refer back to them as God come through and answers those prayers.