

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 80- Hungering for God through Fasting- Part 1 What is Fasting?

Church December 17, 2023

Matthew 9:14-17

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

15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.

17 Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Today we begin to examine what the Apostle Matthew recorded in this Passage what Jesus taught about Fasting. And in order to do that- there are at least four Questions that need to be asked and answered:

1. What is Fasting?
2. Is Fasting *Biblical*?
3. Do Believers in the New Covenant *Need* to Fast?
4. What are Some Reasons to Fast?

1. What is Fasting?

Fasting is one of the "*Means of Grace*"¹ that God has given to His

¹ Bible Study (both Personal and Corporate); Prayer (both Personal and Corporate); Godly Fellowship; Baptism; the Lord's Table (Communion); Giving; and Service to Others are the other Gifts of God's Grace that equip and empower the Believer. Collectively, they are the "*Spiritual*

people to strengthen them- *spiritually*- so they may “*walk this World in White*”².

In a nutshell- Fasting involves NOT *doing* something; or NOT *engaging* in something (usually NOT eating Food)- for a certain amount of Time; for a specific Purpose. The Concept of Fasting is found in every major Religion and, recently, has become part of the Health Industry- *especially* in this Country. Fasting is found, *primarily*, in the Old Testament- but it will be my Job to convince you that Fasting is also a New Testament Truth as well.

Every major Old Testament saint fasted. Jesus fasted. The Apostles fasted. And Fasting has been a treasured part of the Christian Church for over 2,000 years.

Fasting was given to help us combat a very serious Threat to both our Faithfulness and Usefulness and Obedience to God. And that Threat is called, “*Worldliness*”³.

Now “*Worldliness*” is a term used to describe the Phenomenon that living in a broken and fallen World; while being constantly bombarded with the “System” of this Life- wages War against the Believer by feeding our Tendency to be “*fleshly Minded*” as opposed to being “*spiritually minded*”. The Apostle Paul *infallibly* wrote about this in **Romans 8:1-13:**

- 1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**
- 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**
- 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,**
- 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**
- 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**
- 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,**
- 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not**

Disciplines” that God uses to impart His Grace to us when we avail ourselves of them on a consistent Basis. They are also called the “*Means of Grace*”.

² The phrase, “*Walk this World in White*” is included in the Hymn, “*Send the Fire!*” written by William Booth (Founder of the Salvation Army) in 1884 which talks about Christians living in a sinful and fallen world- while maintaining their Godliness. (attached)

³ See Sermon, “*Whatever Happened to Worldliness?*” by Blair Bradley; 2006

**subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,
8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

The Language that the Bible uses to describe the ongoing Struggle between the faithful Believer and the lost world System- is the Language of War. So, the Goal is NOT to reach an equitable Peace with the World. Nor is it to try to find “Common Ground”. The Goal of the Believer is to kill; starve; fight against; and defeat the ongoing “Pull” that this fallen World has on our Flesh.

And God used the Apostle John (and others) to warn us about the Seriousness and great Danger of “*Worldliness*” in **1John 2:15-17**, where he said:

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

... so, those three Things:

1. The Lust of the Flesh
2. The Lust of the Eyes
3. The boastful Pride of Life

... help us to “*set our Affections*” (love) on this present, evil “*World*” that

John warned us NOT to love.

And keep in mind just how real and serious this is from what Johns said at the end of verse 15:

... If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

... because if the “Love of Father” is NOT in us- we are Lost; we are NOT saved; and we are headed for Hell!

We need to always keep in mind that our *redeemed* Souls are *encased* in an *unredeemed* Body. God washed our Soul- NOT our Flesh. And that is *why* our Bodies, *periodically* get sick; it is *why* we have various *dysfunctions* and *malfunctions* in our Bodies; it is *why* we die; and *why* our Bodies go to the Ground and decay. But it is also *why* Christian Salvation is NOT completed- until our saved Souls are *re-united* with a glorified Body- at the Resurrection.

So, as our *unredeemed* Body dwells in a fallen World- that is *dominated* by satan; and a “System”⁴ that operates in *hostile* Opposition to God and His Ways.

So, there is an ongoing Struggle (War) that rages between the Believer being “*spiritually Minded*” as opposed to being “*fleshly Minded*” (Worldly/worldly Minded). So, we are pulled between “two Opinions”; “two Philosophies; two Voices”; and two “world-Views”.

And that Struggle reveals to us where we really are- *spiritually* speaking. And that Revelation *produces* in us an *ongoing* and *holy* Grief in the Heart of ALL genuine Believers- over the Knowledge of their own indwelling Sin; along with the Fact that their Flesh is *attracted* to the “System” of this fallen World.

So, in His Mercy- God gave His people the “*Gift of Fasting*” to help us in this ongoing Struggle.

And that means that the *Origin* of Fasting is found in a deep seated “*Longing for God*” that God the Holy Spirit *produces* in all those who have truly experienced the Miracle of the New Birth.

Now the English words, “*Long/Longs/Longing*” come from a Hebrew word (*chaka*; Strong’s #2441) which means: *to wait with Desire*. So, Fasting denotes a Desire to *wait* for God; a Desire to *see* God; a

⁴ The world’s “System” refers to the Ways of Life that have been developed by sinful rebels that dominate our daily Lives. This System is *summarized* by the Apostle as, “**the Lust of the Flesh; the Lust of the Eyes; and the boastful Pride of Life**”. And while these three things are NOT all that is in the World- they *represent* the sinful System by which this world operates.

Desire to be *near* Him; and to *touch* Him; and to be touched *by* Him. It is us *desiring* God- “*longingly*”. Read what the Prophet wrote about this “*Longing*” from **Isaiah 30:18-26**:

18 Therefore the Lord longs [waits with Desire] to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long [desire longingly] for Him.

19 O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.

20 Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, *He*, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher.

21 Your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

22 And you will defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing, *and* say to them, "Be gone!"

23 Then He will give *you* rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground, and bread *from* the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous; on that day your livestock will graze in a roomy pasture.

24 Also the oxen and the donkeys which work the ground will eat salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork.

25 On every lofty mountain and on every high hill there will be streams running with water on the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.

26 The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times *brighter*, like the light of seven days, on the day the Lord binds up the fracture of His people and heals the bruise He has inflicted.

[Clarification added]

... so, we could understand the Concept of “*Longing for God*” as a “*Desiring of God*” or a “*Hungering for God*”. And that means that underneath it all- Fasting is the holy Response that Believers make when we sense that the World has had a greater Effect on us than is wise- and we are in need of a “re-setting” of our Focus and Priorities on God. In other words, we are “*Hungering*” or “*Longing*” or “*Desiring*” for God. So, the great Paradox is that God’s people *stop* eating Food (Fast) because they are “*hungering*” for God. Our Lord Christ said this from **Matthew 5:6**:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

... so, the Holy Bible teaches that there are two Ways we can be “Blessed”:

1. When we “hunger” (and thirst) for Righteousness (**Matthew 5:6**)
2. When we “long” for God (**Isaiah 30:18**)

... and this type of “*holy* Hungering/Longing” is divided into two Parts:

1. A *holy* and *ongoing* Grief over indwelling Sin in Us
2. A *wondrous* Hope

1. A *holy* and *ongoing* Grief over *indwelling* Sin in Us

Romans 7:14-25

14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.

17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand

I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

The great Reformer, Martin Luther, taught that Believers “make War” against three Foes on this earth and in this Life:

1. The World
2. The Flesh
3. The Devil

1. The World

The “*World*” that Luther had in mind was *NOT* the *created* World that God made over which He said was, “**Very Good**” (**Genesis 1:31**). And it also wasn’t the people in the world- not even the sinful people. Sinful people are our Mission Field. The “World” that Luther had in mind was the world “*System*” that operates in *hostile* Opposition to God as articulated by the Apostle John in **1John 2:15-17**.

2. The Flesh

Jesus said that there were three things that appeal to our unredeemed Flesh that actually have the Ability to “**choke the Word**” so that it becomes unfruitful in our Lives:

1. The sinful (worldly) Pleasures of this Life (**Luke 8:14**)
2. The deceitfulness of Wealth (**Mark 4:19**)
3. The desires for “other Things” (that seek to replace God as our Treasure (**Mark 4:19**))

3. The Devil

The devil that Luther was referring to is satan- the fallen arch-Angel, “Lucifer”. Satan was “**thrown down to the earth**” out of Heaven for his Rebellion (**The Revelation 12:9**); “**like lightning**” (**Luke 10:18**); and now he is very angry and goes over all the earth and “**prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**” (**1Peter 5:8**). And so, satan tempts God’s people to sin against God. And James told us in **James 1:13-16**

that the way that satan tempts a person is by him being “**carried away and enticed by his own lust**”.

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

So, we see here that while satan CANNOT *make* or *force* anyone to sin against God- he CAN and he DOES *tempt* us to sin. Yet what satan uses to tempt us is NOT something *he* posses but something *we* posses. James said it was “*our own Lust*”.

Now in the Bible- *especially* in the New Testament- the words, “*Lust*”; “*Desire*”; “*Want*”; even “*Love*”- all come from the SAME root word. So, in Reality, those words are simply different Manifestations of the SAME thing. And what makes them holy or unholy is whether we activate them for God (and other people) or Sin and Self.

That means that we should NOT simply seek to “kill” or even “minimize” our Loves; Desires; and Wants. God made us to be loving Creatures that should ENJOY God- NOT merely know Him and obey Him. So, the Goal in Salvation is NOT to merely take us to Heaven- but to restore the Love that Man had with God before Adam sinned. So, what we should do- is to *convert* those God- given Affections so that they attach to God rather than this World.

And that is why the first Pastor of the Church in Jerusalem (James) taught that the “Lust” (Desire/Want) that satan touches when he tempts us- is ALREADY *in us* to begin with. It is in our *unredeemed* Flesh and came to us a part of the Fall. So, the Lust that satan connects with when he tempts us- is OUR OWN Lust that is attached to this Life. It is part of our Flesh that was NOT transformed by the Miracle of the New Birth.⁵

So, “Temptation” is really nothing more nor less than satan presenting us with an Opportunity to do or to act out- something that

⁵ The New Birth gave us new, spiritual Life and transformed our fallen Nature. But it did NOT transform our Flesh (Body). That is *why* the current Body that we have now CANNOT go into Heaven; and will die; and rot in the Ground. And it is also *why* God has promised to give us a *glorified* Body in the Resurrection.

our fallen Flesh *already* wants to do anyway.

So, when saved people periodically fall into the Snare of these Things- it brings about a “holy Grief” *within* them. And the Believer *grieves* over several things including:

- That they are not more spiritual
- That that they fall into Temptation too easily
- That they don’t resist the devil more effectively
- That they are far too worldly
- That they sin far too much

So, part of the “*Longing for God*”; part of wanting to be “*closer to God*” that *precipitates* both our Desire and Need to Fast- is a “*holy Grieving*” over our own Failures; Weaknesses; Sins; Temptations; and Hindrances.

2. A *wondrous Hope*

But on the *opposite* End of the Scale of that “*holy Grieving*” lies a “*wondrous Hope*”- that we can gain spiritual Strength; Insight; and Stamina by *temporarily* “pushing away” from the Traps; Snares; Temptations; and Idolatries that plague us when our bellies are full and satisfied with what this Life affords to us. And that “*blessed Hope*” is what *compels* us to “push away” from the Table and our many Engagements with this fallen World and to “get alone” with God.

And this Part of Fasting is why God blessed the ancient Jew with certain “*Holy Days*” that were the very *opposite* of their “*Feast Days*”. So, originally, “*Holy Days*” were Times that were set aside for the Service of God and served as a “*Means*” to help the Believer *temporarily* “disconnect” from this World and its Ways and “re-connect” with God. Sadly, over the years- “*Holy Days*” became *contaminated* with this World’s System and became “*Holidays*”- which today have only faint traces of their original Intent.

The same thing happened when God’s people would take “*Sabbaticals*”- which were “*seasons of Rest*” of various lengths- where the Believer would “get away” from the daily “hustle and bustle” of this Life and fast and pray and draw near to God. But, over Time- those “*Sabbaticals*” morphed into what we now call, “*Vacations*”- which have

little or no *spiritual* Benefit.

So, true biblical Fasting consists of these two Parts:

1. The Part of Fasting that says that we have come to recognize that our Longing for God has been *compromised* because our Desire to savor all of this Life has grown so strong (the *holy* Grief)
2. The Part of Fasting that says that our Appetite for this World can be *temporarily* suspended because our Longing for God is so intense (a *wondrous* Hope).

But there is a Paradox about the Christian Life because God tells us to do two things that seem to be *contradictory* on the surface. *First*, in **Luke 19:13b**, Jesus tells us to:

Do business with this until I come back.

Jesus told us to “*do business*” with the lost, pagan World- until He comes back. And the phrase, “**do business**” in this verse comes from a Greek word (*pragmateuomai*; Strong’s # 4231) that means: “*to be doing*”; “*to be busy*”; “*to occupy*”; “*to trade or traffic in the Affairs of this Life*”; “*to do business*”. In other words, we are to “*Occupy*” on this earth and trade or traffic with the World and its people (sinful and saved) until Jesus returns. In other words, Jesus said, “*I’m leaving, but you stay here and make a Life for yourself; and carry out My Will in this fallen hostile World until I come back to get you*”.

So, we are to live our Lives- *publicly*. We are to “*rub shoulders*” with the Lost. We are to “*do our Good Works*” in a Way that the Lost can see them and glorify our Father (**Matthew 5:16**).

So, in order to obey Jesus- we have to work on our Jobs; pay our Bills; buy Food; go to Doctors; build houses; create Businesses; raise Children; and interact with human Government, etc.

But the “*Gravity*” of all these things can drag us down so that we become more and more a part of this World. And, over time, that causes our Relationship with God to grow stale; and hurried; forced and joyless. And in extreme cases- occupying on this earth can even drown out and consume the Believer until he stops praying; stops reading the Bible; stops fellowshiping with other Believers; stops giving to God; and, finally, stops going to Church altogether. And when that happens-

the normal Testimony of their daily Life has more to do with the fallen world System than it does of a genuine Believer. And people in that Condition cease even trying to live their Lives to the Glory of God.

But thanks be to God that He has provided a Cure for the spiritual Disease of “Worldliness”. And *part* of that Cure is Fasting. And so, we are told to, *periodically*, “get away”; or consciously “pull away” from the Causes that drag us down; and that hold us close to this fallen World- and we are to fast and pray.

But sadly, because so little is taught today about Fasting- most people- even in the Church- know *nothing* about *how* to escape the “*gravitational Pull*” of the World and so, they rarely, if ever, avail themselves of those wondrous Gifts that God gave- called, the “*Means of Grace*”. And the Result is that the “*Abundant Life*” that Jesus promised ALL Believers- becomes just a *distant* Hope that is never actually realized.

But just about the Time we get a Handle on Fasting because of that “*holy Grieving*”- we read this in **2Corinthians 6:14-18**:

14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

... which seems to completely *contradict* the Concept of “*Occupying*” (Doing Business) which, in turn, seems to contradict Fasting out of that “*holy Grieving*”.

But we know that there are NO Contradictions in the Bible. But there *are* Paradoxes and Mysteries that we have to struggle with- in order to understand. And that’s NOT simply “splitting hairs”.

Paradoxes and Mysteries may appear, at first, to be blatant

Contradictions. But as we grow in both the Knowledge of God and our Love of Jesus Christ- we are enlarged with more and more Information that helps to solve the Mysteries and Paradoxes.

But which Command do we obey? Do we “*do Business*” with the lost World OR do we “*separate*” from the World? This is where Church History comes in handy- because we are NOT the first Generation of Believers who have run up against this Paradox.

For over 1,000 years immediately after the Apostles died- the Church entered into a Phase called, “*Monasticism*” or “*Asceticism*”. This was when the Leaders of the visible Church taught that “getting away” from the World and its Temptations and Obligations was the very “Height” and “Zenith” of Spirituality and Godliness and Christianity.

So, people from every walk of Life sold all their Belongings and moved into Communes- usually in far off Places- and spent all their Time Fasting; Praying; Singing; and studying the Bible. And it was glorious! The World is sinful- so, what Believer wants to be involved with that?

But as Time went on- the people who were involved in that Phase- noticed something. Not only did the Church have little or no Effect on the Sinners of the world- their own Families drifted away from God as well. So, even though the people who engineered this Disaster thought it was great- Monasticism and Asceticism is now correctly seen as something that Believers may do- PERIODICALLY- but NOT as a *total* and *permanent* Way of Life.

Of course, it is MUCH *easier* to pray when you are alone. Of course, it is MUCH easier to get with God- when you are by yourself or surrounded with ONLY people who are on the same Page as you. When you *eliminate* all of the various Problems that people have and create- your own individual Life becomes much easier; better; and more spiritual.

But how do you raise Children in that? How do you marry a Wife? How do you obey Jesus and go into all the World and preach the Gospel to every Creature in that Framework? How do you engage and confront civil Magistrates with “holy Indictments” calling them to repent; fear God; and to rule wisely- in that kind of setup? The Answer is- you don’t. And neither did those who were caught up in what was a *noble* Effort but which proved to be entirely unworkable on a permanent Basis.

The Answer is that God’s people are to do BOTH. We are to

“occupy” and “do business” with the world. And at the SAME TIME- we are to also, “Come out from their midst and be separate”. So, we are to be

“IN” the World and yet not become a part “OF” the World

Now that is a great Slogan that many people have espoused over the years. But it is whole lot *easier* to simply *repeat* the Slogan than it is to actually *do* it. My Observation (NOT my Condemnation) from being in the Church for over half a Century-is that MOST EVERYBODY who tries this- fails at doing both! I, personally, have failed at doing both- much *more* often than I have succeeded. And yet I read what my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ prayed in **John 17:14-17:**

14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.

16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

So that is what we are told to do. But *HOW* are we to do both things? How do we live in this world and yet not become affected by what goes on in the world? For example, how do you work hard to make money to support your Family; pray that God will bless you; and make a Way for you; and then rejoice when God does that; and then *continue* to rejoice as God continues to bless- AND AT THE SAME TIME- maintain a Life that is free from loving money and entrapped by Covetousness? At what point did you cross over the Line from the good and godly and spiritual Aspect of working hard to provide for your Family- into lusting for more of this world’s Goods? It is truly walking a Tightrope.

Because, many times, we don’t even see the Line- until *after* we have crossed it. Sometimes we don’t sense that we have already lost our Hunger for God- until AFTER many Compromises and wrong Decisions have been made- because all that we are *consumed* with- are the Blessings from God; and our earthly Responsibilities as His people living in a fallen World.

And I have also noticed that the people who lay claim to actually

be doing both- have very little in the form of Teaching and practical Examples- to show the rest of us how it is done.

This is why I have personally “*hammered out*” what I believe is a Concept that might help with obeying both of these *seemingly* contradictory Commands:

God is NOT only pleased when I actually *obey* both sides of this Paradox. He is also pleased when I value His Commands enough to *struggle* to obey.

I DON'T always accomplish what God wants from me. But I try. I *want* to. And the REASON I want to obey and try to obey- is because I love God; and I believe His Commands are Good and Worthwhile. And I love God- because I am saved. And so, I have come to believe that God's Commands are not only the Way I can honor God- but they are also the Path to *fullness* of my own Joy as well.

So, I believe with every fiber of my Being that obeying God is *absolutely* the very BEST thing that anyone can ever do. And that is my ultimate Goal. But I also believe- with just as much Energy and Passion- that the Fact that I am willing to struggle with the Paradoxes I find in the Bible- on a day-to day Basis- glorifies God as well. And so, even though I may fail at faultless Obedience- I am still glorifying God “by” and “through” and “in” that Struggle.

And I believe that- because I wouldn't struggle at all- if I wasn't already in “*Union with Jesus*”. And that Reality *compels* me to *try*- to *struggle* to obey. And it helps me to know that I am NOT a complete Failure- even when I fall short.

Beloved- one of the *primary* Weaknesses of the Old Covenant- was because it was based on human Performance. Human beings simply CANNOT obey God- without some level of Fault. And that Failure at perfect Obedience is NOT a matter of how much Effort we put forth. It is a Fact of what our “Humanity” is. And that is why not a single soul, who lived under the Old Covenant attained faultless Obedience. NOT Moses; NOT David; NOT Isaiah; and NOT Daniel. No human born of Woman obeyed God's Law perfectly EXCEPT JESUS! And that *indisputable* Fact is why we NEED Jesus!

So, if all the New Covenant is- is a different set of Commands- that I have to obey- flawlessly- or else it doesn't count- then I'm no better off now than they were then. In fact, the New Covenant becomes

a CURSE to me- if it requires my faultless Obedience- because what the New Covenant commands and requires is infinitely HARDER than what God required under the Old.

The Old Covenant *primarily* managed our *outward* Behavior; while the New Covenant deals with the “heart Condition” that is *behind* the outward Behavior. So, if the ONLY Way I can please God is through *perfect* Obedience- then the New Covenant has been nothing but an abject Failure. Because there is NOT a single human- born of Woman- who has lived under the New Covenant- that has obeyed it without Flaw. NOT Paul; NOT Peter; NOT John; NOT Augustine; NOT the Puritans; NOT Jonathan Edwards; NOT John MacArthur; and NOT you and me.

Thanks be to God- that Jesus obeyed God’s Law- PERFECTLY! And we are forgiven and made Righteous by trusting in Him *personally*- and in His flawless Obedience! And then armed and empowered with the third Person of the Trinity dwelling continually in us; armed and empowered with Jesus interceding at the Right Hand of the Majesty; armed and empowered with 66 inspired; infallible; and inerrant Books; armed and empowered with the Guidance and Wisdom from 2,000 years of godly Teachers and Preachers; and armed and empowered with the Knowledge of 6,000 years of human Existence- my Desire and Ability to Sin and Compromise and fail God- has been greatly REDUCED!

But even then- Sin is so *pervasive*; and such an *engrained* Reality in my Flesh- it will NEVER be completely *eliminated* until I am with God in Heaven! And that is one of the Reasons God gave us the Gift of Fasting!

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.