

## **Lesson # 4 on Fasting – The Difference between True Christian Fasting and False Christian Fasting.**

The real difference between true Christian Fasting and False Christian Fasting is that true Christian fasting is done unto God and in relation to Christ's kingdom's advance in our hearts and in the world, rather than to be seen by men.

All of our fasting being taken notice of by God flows out of Christ's having fasted in relation to our salvation, and His having obeyed perfectly and having fulfilled completely the law of God on our behalf. It is imperative, however, that when we do fast that we remember to fast unto God rather than to be seen by men.

Matthew 6: 16-18 – “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance.” “For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.” “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

Psalm 69: 7-15 Psalm 109: 21-24 Fast when your heart is wounded and needy and because you know that the Lord is good and will take notice of you in regard to the things that you are asking for in prayer.

Psalm 69 is a psalm of David where he was facing a particularly difficult situation in his life. When you wait upon the Lord and when you do not see the answers to your prayers, you may want to couple this waiting with fasting. This psalm also applies to Christ's sufferings leading up to, and upon the cross. Both Christ and David chastened their souls with fasting. Christ had no sins that he needed to deal with as David did. But He righteously afflicted His soul with fasting in order to be able to bear our sins and reproach in the time leading up to His sufferings on the cross for us.

I want you to turn over with me to Isaiah Chapter 58. These verses will show us the difference between true Christian fasting and false Christian fasting; the difference between those who are going through the motions of ritual and those who God is really regarding in their fasting. “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” “Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God.” “They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God.” “Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen?’ “Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?” “I the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers.” “Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness.” “You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.” “It is a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul?” “Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes?” “Would you call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord?” “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” “Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.” “Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am’”.

Leviticus 16: 29 - The perpetuity of this institution: It shall be a statute forever. It must not be intermitted any year, nor ever let fall till that constitution should be dissolved, and the type should be superseded by the antitype. As long as we are continually sinning, we must be continually repenting, and receiving the atonement. The law of afflicting our souls for sin is a statute forever, which will continue in force till we arrive where all tears, even those of repentance, will be wiped from our eyes. The apostle observes it as an evidence of the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices to take away sin, and purge the conscience from it, that in them there was a remembrance made of sin every year, upon the day of atonement, Heb\_10:1-3. The annual repetition of the sacrifices showed that there was in them only a faint and feeble effort towards making atonement; it could be done effectually only by the offering up of the body of Christ once for all, and that once was sufficient; that sacrifice needed not to be repeated. (Matthew Henry)

Leviticus 23: 27 -The day of atonement was to be observed as a day of sacred rest, to be spent wholly in reflection upon and humiliation for the sins of the preceding year. A day of fasting: the body, as well as soul, must be afflicted, as both share in guilt; and the whole day, from even unto even, must be spent in those exercises of deep abasement, which answered the institution. Note; (1.) They who feel the burden of sin, will be careful to beat down the body, as well as to humble the soul. (2.) Solemn seasons for the review of past transgressions, cannot but have a blessed effect upon the heart. (3.) When we would afflict our bodies with fasting, there should be real abstinence in respect to all kinds of meat. To keep a fast on rich fish, and high sauces, is ridiculous mockery, instead of a holy fast. (Thomas Coke)

Psalms 35: 13 – “With his prayers he joined humiliation and self-affliction, both in his diet (he fasted, at least from pleasant bread) and in his dress; he clothed himself with sackcloth, thus expressing his grief, not only for their affliction, but for their sin; for this was the guise and practice of a penitent. We ought to mourn for the sins of those that do not mourn for themselves. His fasting also put an edge upon his praying, and was an expression of the fervour of it; he was so intent in his devotions that he had no appetite to meat, nor would allow himself time for eating.” (Matthew Henry)

You can see here that verse 9, David by faith is determined that his soul would be “joyful in the Lord, and rejoice in His salvation.” His confidence was that there was none like the Lord; that the Lord would deliver him from the schemes of wicked men; those who were too strong for him.

1 Samuel 1: 7 – Hannah wept and did not eat because she could not have children and her rival taunted her about it.

Zechariah 7: 3-5 – Fasting was not being done unto God and eating and drinking was done for themselves

Zechariah 8: 19 -But the Prophet seems to allude to what he had before taught when he indirectly taunted the Jews, because they were too anxious about keeping fasts, while they neglected the main things. But the simple meaning is, that if the Jews really repented and sincerely sought to return to God’s favor, there would be an end to all their miseries, so that there would be no need of fasting.

We must also remember that the design of fasting is this, that those who have sinned may humble themselves before God, and go as suppliants before his throne, that they may confess their sins and condemn themselves. Fasting then is, as it were, the habit of criminals when they desire to obtain pardon from God; for Christ says, that there is no fasting at marriages and during festal days. (Mat\_9:15.) We then see that there is here promised a restoration which was

to put an end to every former cause of sorrow among the people; not that these fasts of themselves displeased God, for they were appointed, as we have said, for a good purpose — that the people might thus exercise themselves in acts of piety, and also stimulate and support their hope till the time of their deliverance; but Zechariah pursues what he had begun — that God was now plainly reconciled, for he favored his people, and proved this by the blessings he bestowed.

2 Samuel 12: 16 – David fasted for the life of the little child that he had conceived in his sin with Bathsheba. The Pulpit Commentary says: He went, not into the sanctuary, which he did not enter until after the child's death, but into some private room in his own house. There he remained, passing his nights stretched on the ground, and fasting until the seventh day. His fasting does not imply that he took no food during this long interval, but that he abstained from the royal table, and ate so much only as was necessary to maintain life. Now, what was the meaning of this privacy and abstinence? Evidently it was David's acknowledgment, before all his subjects, of his iniquity, and of his sorrow for it. The sickness of the child followed immediately upon Nathan's visit, and we may feel sure that news of his rebuke, and of all that passed between him and the king, ran quickly throughout Jerusalem. And David at once takes the position of a condemned criminal, and humbles himself with that thoroughness which forms so noble a part of his character. Grieved as he was at the child's sickness, and at the mother's sorrow, yet his grief was mainly for his sin; and he was willing that all should know how intense was his shame and self-reproach. And even when the most honourable of the rulers of his household (Gen\_24:2), or, as Ewald thinks, his uncles and elder brethren, came to comfort him, he persists in maintaining an attitude of heart stricken penitence.

Esther 4: 16 - Fasting is in itself a prayer

“It is remarkable that nothing is here said about prayer, but fasting was in itself a prayer; for it was not a form put on from without, but the natural expression of the inner emotion, and as an application to God, it is to be explained much as we do the touching of the Saviour by the woman, who in that way sought her cure. Words are signs, just as fasting is a sign. That which is essential in either is genuineness. God does not look to the words themselves, any more than He does to the fasting in itself. He has regard only to that which the soul expresses, either by the one or through the other. The touch of the soul of the woman went to the Master's heart through her touching of His garment with her fingers; and the yearning of the soul of Esther, through her fasting, made its appeal to Jehovah, even though she did not breathe His name.” (W. M. Taylor, D. D.)

John Gill says: “...and fast ye for me; that is, pray for her, that she might have courage to go in to the king, and meet with success; for prayer was the principal thing, fasting only an accessory to it, and as fitting for it, and expressive of affliction and humiliation of soul.”

Ezra 8: 21

Daniel 10: 2-3

Jonah 3: 6-8

Matthew 17: 14-21