

## "The Danger of Hypocrisy"

### Part 18

#### Matthew 6:1-18

**Introduction:** Before we get started tonight we need to take some time and do a review of the context of Matthew 6:1-18. In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus is warning about the danger of hypocrisy in three different areas of the believer's life.

1. **Giving** - This is addressed in 6:1-4
2. **Praying** - This is addressed in 6:5-15
3. **Fasting** - This is addressed in 6:16-18

The religious leaders of Jesus day were giving, praying and fasting for all the wrong reasons. They were giving so that they would be seen of men and at the same time would be seen as spiritual. They were praying in crowded public areas so as to be seen by men and again it was for the purpose of being seen as spiritual. The very same motive was behind their fasting also. They would disfigure their faces and give the appearance that they were suffering greatly because of their fasting but it was all for the purpose of being seen as spiritual.

Jesus said the same thing about these religious leaders three times.

#### Matthew 6:2

*<sup>2</sup> Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

#### Matthew 6:5

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<sup>5</sup> *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

### **Matthew 6:16**

<sup>16</sup> *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

Let me tell you what this means to us. If we give to be praised of men, if we pray to be praised of men and if we fast to be praised of men then there is absolutely no spiritual worth in any of it.

Now I know that we understand giving and I know that we understand praying but I am not so sure we understand fasting. So our next several weeks will be focused upon the subject of fasting and when we are finished I am sure you will have a better understanding of Biblical fasting. In many churches today the subject of fasting never comes up but then in other churches there seems to be a constant practice of fasting. Some of you here may have never really thought about fasting and just pushed it aside as something which was done in Jesus day or in the Old Testament and maybe you have the opinion that it is not to be a part of the believer's life today and you feel as though there is no spiritual value in it. Maybe others of you do fast on certain occasions.

So we must ask the question to begin with, "Is fasting to be practiced by the church?"

### **Notice Matthew 6:16**

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The second word of this verse seems to answer our question. Jesus did not say, "If you fast", but He said, "When you fast". Therefore, when I read this I first of all see that our Lord assumed that His followers would fast at certain times. So therefore, I understand that fasting should be a part of my Christian life.

## 1. Understanding Fasting

In the Bible fasting means to completely abstain from food. But that in itself does not tell us what fasting is all about so we must search the Bible to understand the meaning behind fasting. First of all we need to know that the fasting in the found in the Bible was not for the benefit of the body. I say this because there are many today who teach the need to fast for health reasons and there may be some health benefits in fasting but that is not what we find in the Bible.

### 1. Fasting does not make us more spiritual.

#### Luke 18:9-14

<sup>9</sup> *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

<sup>10</sup> *Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

<sup>11</sup> *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

<sup>12</sup> **I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.**

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<sup>13</sup> *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

<sup>14</sup> *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

The Pharisees fasted twice a week and they were far from spiritual.

### **Romans 14:17**

<sup>17</sup> *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

### **2. Fasting is always connected with the proper attitude.**

This will be very important to remember as we go through this study on fasting. Now we need to look at a few verses to see the attitude which is always connected with fasting.

### **Matthew 9:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> *Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?*

<sup>15</sup> *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*

These verses are so important when it comes to understanding the attitude which always is connected with fasting. The attitude is really twofold:

**a. Sorrow**

**b. Longing**

When John's disciples asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast He explained there was no reason for sorrow but there would be when He was gone and then they would fast. So from this we can understand that fasting is connected with sorrow and with longing because the disciples would long to be with Him once more.

Therefore, the proper attitude for fasting is sorrow and longing. Now when I understand this I also understand that there is a time for fasting. For believers to get together and say they are going to fast without the proper attitude is not Biblical fasting.

**3. There is only one fast ever commanded in the Bible.**

The only fast which God ever commanded was a 24 hour fast on the Day of Atonement. Let us notice what Moses wrote concerning the Day of Atonement.

**Leviticus 16:29-31**

*<sup>29</sup> And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:*

*<sup>30</sup> For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.*

*<sup>31</sup> It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.*

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You notice that I have bolded and underlined the phrase "ye shall afflict your souls" because this was a reference to the 24 hour period of fasting. This was the time when the sins of the nation would be atoned for and so on this day there would be no eating of food from sunrise to sunset. Now because it was the day in which Israel's sins would be confessed and atoned for this would also be a day of sorrow as the sins were confessed. Therefore, the attitude of sorrow can be seen in this text.

Now, because this is the only fast that is required in the Bible we must understand that Jesus never commanded His disciples to fast but it was understood by Jesus they would fast. That thought tells us fast is voluntary and it is between the believer and God. It happens when sorrow and longing fill the heart.

So if fasting has a place in the life of the believers today then what are the occasions for fasting?

## **II. The Occasions for Fasting**

### **1. Sorrow**

Sorrow is a cause for fasting and we can look at some passages which will help you to better understand this.

In the book of Joel there is a fast that was proclaimed when the crops of the land were hit by drought and disease.

#### **Joel 1:10-14**

*<sup>10</sup> The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.*

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<sup>11</sup> *Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished.*

<sup>12</sup> *The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.*

<sup>13</sup> *Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God.*

<sup>14</sup> **Sanctify ye a fast**, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

In Joel's day there was both **sorrow**, because of the conditions and **longing**, for the kingdom age which would restore the earth back to what it used to be before sin entered the world.

In Nehemiah 1 we find a fast when Nehemiah heard the news from the city of Jerusalem.

### **Nehemiah 1:1-4**

*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,*

<sup>2</sup> *That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.*

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<sup>3</sup> *And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.*

<sup>4</sup> *And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,*

Here again we see sorrow and longing. Nehemiah's heart was broken because of the people in Jerusalem and he longed to see God move in a way that the wall would be rebuilt.

David fasted when the baby which he and Bathsheba had was struck with sickness.

## **2 Samuel 12:16-20**

<sup>16</sup> *David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.*

<sup>17</sup> *And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.*

<sup>18</sup> *And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?*

<sup>19</sup> *But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.*

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*<sup>20</sup> Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.*

David even fasted when his enemies were afflicted and they were suffering.

### **Psalm 35:11-14**

*<sup>11</sup> False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not.*

*<sup>12</sup> They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul.*

*<sup>13</sup> But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: **I humbled my soul with fasting**; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.*

*<sup>14</sup> I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.*

### **Conclusion:**

Next week we will see more occasions for fasting but as I close I want to focus upon the occasion of sorrow.

We have all been in a situation when we were so consumed with sorrow and the last thing on our mind was food. We just wanted time with God to pour out our heart to Him with the matter at hand. That is the fast we are talking of here. We were feeling the very same sorrow which those of the Old Testament felt.

Have you ever noticed when someone is in this state of sorrow there is always someone who comes along and says they must eat something?

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They claim if they don't eat they will become sick. I say let them alone. They don't need to eat they need time in their sorrow to focus upon God. When I have been in these very times I did not want to eat I just wanted to be in touch with my Lord. If I did eat something it was like eating gravel because I could not enjoy it. When the person who is fasting is ready they will find food to eat but if someone you know is so consumed with sorrow over a condition they are facing let them have their time with God. David, Nehemiah, Joel and many others would not eat because they were so consumed with sorrow and they survived. They were so exercised in their spirit they did not desire to eat.

There is one more thought I want to share before we leave this study. David fasted when his enemies suffered and also when his family suffered. We have sorrow over those close to us but when is the last time you sorrowed because someone outside of your circle suffered? When is the last time you said no to food because someone you heard of was unsaved and they were dying?

We have become so desensitized because our world is so open. We hear of one tragedy after another and on the television and computers we are confronted with graphic news every day. It is rare we are exercised in our spirits to the point of fasting because of someone out of our circle is suffering.

Fasting does not get your prayers answered quicker but fasting does show the sensitivity of our hearts. It really shows us how far we are from having the mind of Christ. Jesus knew everything and yet had a heart full of compassion for all people.