

"The Danger of Hypocrisy"

Part 20

Matthew 6:1-18

Introduction: For the past two weeks we have been looking at the subject of fasting because in our study of the Sermon on the Mount we have come to Matthew 6:16-18.

Notice Matthew 6:16-18

Here in these verses Jesus assumes that His disciples will fast at certain times in their lives. We can see this in the words which Jesus used. Notice what He said to His disciples, "When ye fast" and "When thou fastest". He did not say "if" but He said "when" so therefore we can see that He assumed they would fast. Now if there would be a time for His disciples to fast then there should be a time for us to fast also.

So, in our study we have been searching the Scriptures to learn about the subject of fasting because in our verses here in Matthew we get no details on fasting. Really in order to find information on the subject of fasting we have had to search many passages. I would like to use that thought to help you to see something that will be very helpful. Many times one passage will not give to us all the information which we need on a subject as we read the Bible. God has not placed in His Word "categories" so that we can go to one passage and get all we need. He has inspired the writers in a way that we must search the Scriptures in order to understand the deep things of His Word. He has done this so that we will search the Scriptures and the more we search the more we find.

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Proverbs 2:1-5

¹ *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;*

² *So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;*

³ *Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;*

⁴ **If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;**

⁵ *Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.*

One of the key passages to help us to understand fasting is found in Matthew 9.

Matthew 9:14-15

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

¹⁵ *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**.*

Here in these verses we can see that fasting is connected with "mourning" and with "longing". There is only one fast which was ever commanded in the Scriptures and that was on the Day of Atonement when Israel was to fast from sunrise to sunset. This also was connected with "mourning" and "longing" for the Day of Atonement was

the day when the sins of the people were to be confessed and the sacrifice for their sins was offered and if this was done in the proper spirit they would 'mourn" over their sin and "long" for a day when they would be free from sin.

Two weeks ago in our study we started looking at the occasions for fasting which are found in the Bible and this is what we are going to continue with tonight.

I. Occasions for Fasting

1. Sorrow

We looked at this in our previous study. As we search the Bible one of the occasions for fasting was a heart full of sorrow.

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,

² 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.

³ 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.

*⁴ 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,*

2. Fear

Ezra 8:21-23

²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

²² For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

²³ So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

3. Brokenness

Nehemiah 9:1-2

Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

4. Longing for knowledge

Daniel 9:1-3, 20-23

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;

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² *In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.*

³ *And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:*

²⁰ *And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God;*

²¹ *Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.*

²² *And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.*

²³ *At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.*

This now brings us to another occasion for fasting and the last one on our list.

5. Important choices

Let me take you to a passage where two men were needed and called by God into the mission field. But before the church sent them out they took some time to be sure it was all of God. Now the early church knew the importance of spiritual leadership and so they wanted to take as much time as was needed to be 100% sure Paul and Barnabas were the men God desired.

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:19-23

¹⁹ And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

²⁰ Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

²¹ And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

²² Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

²³ And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

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The early church was so careful when it came to placing men in places of leadership because they knew that those under the leadership would never rise above their leaders and so they needed men who were growing in their spiritual walk and they needed men who could lead but above everything else they needed that men God had chosen and called for the positions.

Application:

Before I make an application here there is something we need to keep in mind about every occasion we have looked at for fasting; those who fasted did not fast so as to get something from God. That is not Biblical fasting. They fasted because they were so consumed with the occasion before them they had no desire for food. They were more concerned with reaching God's throne than they were sitting down at a meal. In the present occasion we are looking at about important choices the early church did not fast to get an answer from God but they fasted because they were so consumed with finding the proper leadership they had no desire for food. The fast really shows us how much emphasis they placed on spiritual matters. The fast is a manifestation of the heart when it is done in the proper spirit. No one can just proclaim on a certain day there will be a fast. The occasion must be right and the heart must be right. Now when I look at how the early church fasted before they made a choice for leadership then it makes me consider how flippant we can be in our choices within the church today. I believe there is also an application for choosing a wife or a husband. There are choices in life that are not to be taken lightly and we should be consumed with getting direction from God. I want you to notice the words of Abraham's servant when he stood before Laban in the midst of his search for a bride for Isaac.

Genesis 24:33

³³ *And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, **I will not eat**, until I have told mine errand. And he said, *Speak on.**

So, with all of what we have looked at the past 3 studies we can see there are occasions when fasting should be a part of our lives. Now let us get back to our text in Matthew 6.

Notice Matthew 6:16-18

When we do have an occasion to fast we are to keep it to ourselves. We are not to come in to the church with our hair ruffled and our faces twisted up due to hunger pains but we are to clean up, comb our hair and let our fasting be between us and God. I find it very interesting there is a reward for fasting if it is done in the proper spirit. But if we fast and make it known to those around us there is no eternal reward.

Conclusion:

As we close out this study there is a question I want to consider along with some answers to the question.

Why do we not see this in the church today? I want you to consider 2 possible answers to this question;

- 1. Maybe the lack of fasting is part of the falling away which Paul spoke of. Since true Biblical fasting is a manifestation of the heart possibly the heart of many believers has grown cold. Here is what Paul said about the falling away.**

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

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Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

² That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

*³ Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, **except there come a falling away first**, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;*

Now notice what can happen to believers.

Revelation 3:14-15

¹⁴ And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

*¹⁵ I know thy works, that **thou art neither cold nor hot**: I would thou wert cold or hot.*

2. The church is consumed with earthly cares instead of spiritual needs.

I believe the lack of fasting within the body of Christ today is a sign of the church being consumed with the appetites of the flesh instead of being controlled by the Holy Spirit. Let me show you a passage that will support this very thought. Let us look closer at the church of Laodicea. This church can be seen as a prophetic picture of the condition of the church when Jesus returns. It was a literal church but it can also be seen as prophetic.

Revelation 3:14-20

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14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Let us use all of this and do a close examination of our own personal lives.

James 1:26-27

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

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²⁷ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Two basic points manifest God's love in the heart:

1. Compassion
2. Separation

Many have the second and even parade their separation for all to see but they lack the compassion which under the proper circumstances will drive us to fast.