

Fasting For The Sake Of The Kingdom...

Part One

The Correct Attitude

Fasting is not new and is not exclusively Christian in origin. In the days of old, religious people fasted to win favour with the gods. People fast today for numerous reasons, dietary reasons, health, traditionally and some even fast annually. One of the first things the Christian must strive to do is to separate themselves from a fast that is based on misplaced motives. A correct attitude is the key to fasting correctly and successfully.

So how can a person fast in an appropriate manner? And why should we fast? The answer to these questions is realised in the person who has a healthy relationship with God. The bible says we must walk in the Spirit; which simply means the believer should conduct their life, according to the impulses of the Holy Spirit. The bible also instructs us to pray in the Spirit and informs us that the true worshipers worship in Spirit and truth. And so it is with fasting, the believer who walks in the Spirit and wants to walk that path more intimately only wishes to do this because of the Spirit's leading. Such a person would choose, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to fast in order to see this accomplished. Their correct attitude is shaped by their desire, and God makes use of their desire.

Truth Uncovered

One thing that we do find when we are fasting correctly is that things we thought were buried and or did not even exist explode to the surface. It is not uncommon to find that unwanted thoughts forcefully enter our minds that one would not usually even consider. Uncomfortable feelings, hatred, lusts, anger, heavy depression and other emotional and spiritual attacks. This is because correct fasting separates us from common sinful ties that are constantly around us which we simply take for granted (that is why it is important for us to confess both the sin we are aware of, and those we are not, to the Lord). We might be unaware of it, but when we fast correctly, we are purging ourselves from the sinful desires that are within us. And because we have now chosen and are acting on that choice to separate ourselves, we have become sensitive to ungodly things (now if we only notice these things when fasting, imagine what God sees all the time Psalm 51:3). We see how far we are from God during a fast and are compelled to rectify this.

Yes there is the external enticement to sin from the devil, but he would have no effectiveness if there were not something within us that had a mutual appetite towards his offerings. It is that craving which gives him his power. If we had no stomach, no food - as tantalising as it could possibly be, would tempt us to indulge. The problem stems from within us (James 1:14; Ephesians 4:22), we must thank God for exposing these things, and seek to deal with them immediately. It may be necessary to fast and pray specifically about these areas after they have been exposed, praying especially for the power of self-control. If Jesus' example is

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anything to go by (Matthew chapter 4), then fasting is a means for us to break the power of temptation in the power of the Spirit.

Kingdom fasting

Fasting is to abstain from food for spiritual purposes. The Hebrew word for fasting *tsuwm* comes from a primitive root - to cover over (the mouth), i.e. to fast. One way of looking at this, is to see fasting as the suppressing or denial of a natural need or pleasurable desire (in this case food), so that the spiritual desire which is inclined to God can have a more prominent role in our lives. Fasting is kingdom activity, remember the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. "...Thy kingdom come thy will be done." Any prayer that is in the Spirit (Jude 1: 20) has to be related to this prayer. Any fast that is not inspired by this purpose is in my opinion, hollow.

Separation

During a fast or possibly as a form of fasting, we may choose to separate ourselves from various things which give us pleasure, or things that do nothing to enhance the wishes of God in our lives. Denying ourselves of such things for a period, in order to spend more time and energy concentrating on God and activities that honour him. Many times after a fast we find it uncomfortable going back to the usual routine. And we should not simply adopt the attitude that says; "at last I can now indulge myself again in all the things that I've missed out on during that fast." That would be wrong, we should come out of fasting prayerfully and then try to maintain a prayerful (spiritual) life. Listening and holding onto the things God may have revealed to us during the time of dedication.

Why Fast

Understand this, there is serious power behind kingdom purposed prayer and fasting. Mehesh Chevda, a powerful brother who has committed himself to obediently follow God's lead especially in the area of prayer and fasting says. "Demons cannot stay around too long when a person fast, because fasting unto God creates a totally different atmosphere that welcomes the holy and repels the unholy. That is why demonic spirits get very uncomfortable around a person who fasts." He says that fasting is the equivalent to working out in a gym. As you fast and seek the face of God, he plants an authority within you that is recognised and feared by demonic forces.

Matt 17:19-21 "Why could we not cast him out?" 20So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." NKJV

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If we wish to be winners in kingdom terms, we do well to recognize as Paul, the usefulness of fasting and prayer (2 Corinthians 6:4-6 KJV). It seems also that Jesus expects us to fast. He said that while the bridegroom (meaning himself) was here, his friends could not be expected to fast, but a time would come when he would not be there, and what he expected of his friends which includes us, should become general practice (Matthew 9: 15).

We should take the example of Daniel. He was the most righteous man of his generation. But went down into prayer and fasting for both him-self and the nation. Confessing that they had sinned, and had departed from the ways of God (Dan 9:3-5). This shows us that we can fast on behalf of others. We are intercessors, and what we do can effect others in a positive way, causing the desired effect of deliverance and restoration.

There are numerous reasons for fasting as laid out in scripture. Some reasons include fasting in times of trouble as in the days of Esther (Esther 4:15-16). She faced the daunting task of having to approach an unapproachable king. However, after calling a total fast for three days, she approached the king and found favor (Esther 5:1-6). Ezra called a fast to get direction from God (Ezra 8:21-23). And the fast mentioned in Jeremiah, was related to the proclamation of a revelation from God (Jer.36: 6). We fast with confidence because God can and does open up our spiritual understanding through prayer and fasting. Our spiritual ears become sensitive to his voice, our eyes focus without wavering, our feet walk the path he has chosen and we feast on the Spiritual food, the living word of God.

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Part Two

A verse by verse commentary on Isaiah 58 "The Correct attitude."

Isaiah 58

1"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.

Verse one is very expressive, "shout it aloud do not hold back." In other words speak with power from the back of your throat; do not feel in anyway intimidated so that you refrain from delivering the full message. God is giving license for the complete delivery of this word; and he wants it to be heeded by everyone. "Lift up your voice like a trumpet" in other words speak loud and plain, the trumpet is a clear sounding instrument. The example of the trumpet is applied here because it seems that the people are insensible and dull. They need something to rouse them to a sense of their guilt. The message is concerning the rebellion of God's people. They practised the religion, but that was just about it. They were actually in a state of rebellion.

2For day after day they seek me out;

They seem eager to know my ways,

As if they were a nation that does what is right

And has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions

And seem eager for God to come near them.

Verse 2 shows us that these people had a form of godliness, in-fact they seek God and seem eager to know his ways, but it was only an external routine, there was no evidence of action coming from the heart, so they were missing what God really required. Some times we stress the letter, we dot the I's and cross the T's as religious people do, we do what seems right but do not understand what makes our actions correct in God's sight. And this is what was happening to the people of God, they carried out the temple duties, acknowledged the feast days, probably lifted their hands in worship, said amen at the right points and sang all the words of their hymns. But as verse three points out they were doing these things with the wrong motives (See Ezek.33: 31-32).

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3'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

Verse three shows that they expected God to intervene on their behalf, to exact judgement in their favour. They complained against God in the form of two questions: 'Why have we fasted,'..., and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' Another term for fasting in the scripture is the term to "humble the soul" or "inflict the soul (Psalm 35:13)." The bible teaches that the humble person is the type of person God blesses (James 4:6-10; Proverbs 29:23), but the proud person who is opposite to the humble, are bought down by God. Fasting humbles the whole person. We fast because we see our need for God, we are not proud assuming that we have all the answers. Moreover, we afflict our bodies because we are desperate for a divine intervention.

God's reply, which is voiced in the second part of verse three through to verse seven. Shows us that they were not truly humbling or afflicting their souls. The Hebrew word for pleasure is chephets. The meaning inferred is that on the days of fasting, instead of afflicting their souls or subjecting the flesh so that they could hear from God and become more inclined to his purpose, they were instead seeking their own pleasure. God's will it seems was not their priority.

Now this point cannot be stressed enough. Any person searching to know how to fast in a way which God approves must apply this principle. And the principle is this: God must be the priority and focus of – and during – any fast. Otherwise, we may as well call our fast a diet or tradition or something else, but not a God chosen fast. God has to be the focus of any fast in his name. In Leviticus 16:29-32 the annual fast on the Day of Atonement was to be a day dedicated completely to God. No work was allowed on that day, it was a day of denial of human pleasures. And that is where the root of our fasting should lie, self-denial for the sake of God's kingdom. The time should be devoted to God as best as possible.

This highlights obvious difficulties those who have to work and anyone who maybe studying will face when fasting within the week. But God knows our hearts; it is then up to us to work out how we can sincerely give the best we can to God, and at the same time function in our secular affairs. Our minds will be on our work responsibilities. But we should remain in a state of solemnity, disciplining ourselves, making sacrifices, not allowing ourselves to become involved in any conversation or action that will work against the spirit of our fast. And somehow setting aside specific moments where we can centre our thoughts on God, maybe every hour we could concentrate our thoughts and hearts upon the Lord.

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God commanded the prophet to shout as loud as possible, make it clear that he was not pleased with his people. Notice how God did not respond to their fasting with any benefit towards them because they sought their own pleasure and not his. Furthermore, Instead of a time of dedication toward him, they sought financial gain and treated workers in an appalling manner on this hallowed day. They seemed surprised that God had not blessed them. Which shows that it was commonly understood by all, that God rewards favourably when his people fast his chosen fast.

"They exploited their workers," means they were at that time "oppressive in demanding all that was owed to them; they remitted nothing, they forgave nothing. And still today, we likewise can be religiously diligent in all our fasting and church activities, and fail to have a heart like God's." The way we treat God's choice creation can have an affect on the way God treats us. In fasting we must adopt godly values. It is not simply breaking natural inclinations – to go without food. But we should also break any relationships, attitudes and practices that are not in line with God's. Verse 6 teaches us to keep a fast that shall be acceptable to God. "It must be such as shall cause us to unbind heavy burdens from the poor, and to lead us to relax the rigor of the claims which would be oppressive on those who are subject to us." This calls for a complete overhaul of the way we think and of our attitudes, especially when we commit ourselves to spiritual activities. If we want God's approval, then our actions towards the distressed must go before us (see the following verses for examples of what Jesus did. Jesus was a man of action and a man who cared. Matt 14:14ff; Matt 20:34; Mark 1:41-42; Mark 5:19; Mark 6:34; Luke 7:13-15).

The end result of their fasting was contention (Isa.58: 4), how could they have fallen so low if their minds and hearts were truly in line with God's? The result proves that their minds were on their own affairs and not God's. How could they have possibly expected their prayers to be heard by God? It was not, and their fast was in vain. If when we fast our motives are wrong, we likewise should not expect our prayers to be answered. (Isa.58: 5) God has not chosen a fast of form, its not about how afflicted we look during a fast, or the frequency with which we fast, but our attitude and heart in relation to God and his will especially during a fast. We have to address with honesty, our motivation for embarking on a fast.

6"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

7Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter--when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

These verses once again highlight the point of fasting. The point is to embrace God's values and willingly allow them to permeate through our lives. During the fast, our attitudes to others matters; we have to see people and life itself from God's perspective. The condition of

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our minds is what God is interested in. We fast to get ourselves in sync with what God wishes; we fast for the kingdom sake.

The Benefits of Correct Fast

8Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

9Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

10and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

11The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

12Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

#1 new life

The scripture uses the word "break forth " This means to break forth in the same way a flood would. When we fast correctly, the blessings of God will erupt like a flood into our lives. The first result mentioned when fasting in a way that pleases the Lord is that "your light will break forth like the dawn." This means new life or a new beginning. God can erase the failures and disappointments of the past, and create new life with new blessings. In Job 11:17 light and life are mentioned as something that would return to Job eradicating his present, and recreating prosperity.

#2 Healing

"And your healing will quickly appear." New flesh will grow over the wound. Because God shall apply a long bandage (Hebrew) which will procure that healing. God will heal all our past problems. That which was dysfunctional and in need of repair, shall be restored through kingdom inspired fasting. God will do this according to his word.

#3 Security

"Righteousness will go before you as an advance guard and, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard." (See also Isa.52: 12). What more security do we need? God has our front; he

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leads the way into fields of righteousness, which is his purpose. And as the cloud protected and led Israel in the desert, his Glory is behind us in the same way.

#4 Answer to our Prayers

We need to feel the emphasis from the original text for verse 9. It is God himself who will answer. When we cry for help, at once he says, "here am I." Do not embark on a God chosen fast and doubt that he will appear. In fasting we humble ourselves, we proclaim that we have a need only God can deal with. This verse shows us that he must speak into our situation. God is our father, and he wishes to help us, heal us and deliver us – Hallelujah.

#5 Clear direction

Verse 10b shows the picture of complete darkness. In the dark we do not know which direction to take. In the dark, we tend to be anxious and fretful. In the dark we dare not move. But all of a sudden, "your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." We may experience perplexities of life from time to time, but God will throw his light on each situation. The first line of the next verse agrees, pointing out that God will always guide us. The person who wants guidance, has a healthy relationship with the Lord but wants more. The person, who has a healthy relationship with the Lord, sees the need to fast. And the person who fasts, gets the answer they were looking for.

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#6 Satisfaction Guaranteed

The sun-scorched land mentioned in verse 11 implies the land, which should supply a need, falls short. This is because the activity of the sun has made it dry and barren. But even when things seem hopeless, God will satisfy the needs. This verse does not show us that things will be easy for the believer. It shows us that things will get tough. But not only will God satisfy us externally, he will also "strengthen our frame." Which means he will give us the strength inwardly and the durability to make it, just as Job did.

#7 Permanent state of Blessing

We shall be blessed on every side. Watered on the outside and water springing up from the inside. The blessings God gives us will be definite. We shall prosper because we are in his will. "The ideas of happiness in the Oriental world consisted much in pleasant gardens, running streams, and ever-flowing fountains, and nothing can more beautifully express the blessedness of the continued favour of the Almighty." Some rivers dry up when you least expect it. But the evidence of God's blessings in our lives will never dry up.

#8 Blessings of restoration

The former beauty of the city with streets and houses on it shall be restored from the foundation (Verse 12). It was because of disobedience in the first place why the city was destroyed. If they could practice obedience now, then they will experience a complete restoration. God is speaking directly to Israel in this passage. But I believe his promise is extended toward us if we are faithful. "Your people" really means those from you i.e. the next generation and the next and so on. We share in this blessing when we humble ourselves, seek his will, turning from our wicked ways. We know God will hear from heaven and heal the land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

One more point from this chapter

In verses 13 and 14, we see a similar message as found in verses 2-7 only this time it referring to the Sabbath. The significant point – is that of obedience to God and self-denial. Seeking to please God and not seeking to please ourselves. Enjoying, and treating with respect God's ordinance. Then verse 14 states "You will find your joy in the Lord..." There again is the blessings from God. All God wants is genuine commitment and obedience on his Holy day. Just as he required on the day of fasting.

The amazing thing is this: The Sabbath was a feast day and not a fast. This shows us that whether we eat or fast, whenever we approach the Lords day or a time of fasting consecrated to the Lord. How we approach and conduct ourselves on that day, matters to God. We have to lay aside our programme and get into God's programme. Denying ourselves of our pleasures,

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and seek his pleasure. We must not bring any and any offering to the Lord as Cain did. We should bring an offering that he will appreciate. How we present ourselves will be reflected in the fruit that follows. In fact as verse 13 mentions, we should delight or enjoy ourselves in him. This sacrifice should not be a period of sadness or mourning, but a period of joy – in the Lord (Neh.8: 9-10; Psalm 19:8, 126:5-6).

Epilogue

So let us enjoy our times of fasting, examining ourselves and anticipating a divine intervention by some means. This is God's business, and we are his ambassadors. Let us with violence reclaim the land. And after this fast, let us be faithful with the commission he has entrusted us with. This is our moment our day our time.

Go forward (PCF) in Jesus name!

Pastor D. Daniel.