

## Grace for Fasting- Part 2

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Introduction: What is to be the universal heart cry of all Christians?

***And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:7-8 NIV)***

There is a heart cry that is directly connected to the return of Jesus Christ. The unending cry for justice in Luke 18 will lead us to the revelation that Jesus *is* justice. His glorious return to the earth, as King and Judge will answer the cry of hearts longing for him.

The final words of the Bible are the promise of Jesus, “Yes, I am coming soon,” and the response of the church, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” This is not a coincidence. This promise and response sums up the whole Bible.

Many Christians *neglect* to fast because they fail to see the benefit in their spiritual lives, while others *refuse* to fast because they see it as an old system of belief that has no place in the life of believer under the new covenant. This study will reveal that fasting is a historical and vital part of connecting Christians with the blessed hope of Christ’s return (Tit 2:13).

### I. FASTING WAS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

- A. Fasting is a part of nearly every religion on the earth. For Israel fasting was instituted by God as a way to humble oneself, repent of personal and corporate sin and as a means of consecration from ungodly, worldly influence. This begs the question: Is Christianity merely following the pattern of countless other religions? While fasting is not unique to Christianity, it is distinct.
- B. Jesus *did not* abolish the practice of fasting upon his first coming. In fact, he expected fasting by declaring, “When,” *not if*, “you fast.”

***“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:16-18 NIV)***

- C. Fasting was an important practice of the apostles in establishing the direction and leadership of the early church.

***Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Ac 13:1-3 NIV)***

***Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (Ac 14:23 NIV)***

***But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness (watchings), in fastings... (2 Co 6:4-5 NKJV)***

*Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often...in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often (watchings), in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness... (2 Co 11:27 NKJV)*

*“There is concern in the hearts of many for the recovery of apostolic power. But how can we recover apostolic power while neglecting apostolic practice?”<sup>1</sup> –Arthur Wallis*

- D. Some have asked why the New Testament doesn't speak more of fasting if it was so important. History reveals that the early church universally embraced the practice of fasting.

*And let not your fastings be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second (Monday) and the fifth (Thursday) day of the week; but do ye keep your fast on the fourth (Wednesday) and on the preparation (the sixth- Friday) day.<sup>2</sup> (Didache- Christian teaching manual dated mid to late 1<sup>st</sup> century)*

- E. It is interesting that the early church was living with the expectation of Christ's return sooner rather than later—in fact, in their own lifetime. Fasting was universally embraced and directly connected with the hope and longing of Jesus' second coming. There are two generations in the history of the church in which a majority of Christians live with a belief that Jesus is returning soon—the first century generation and the current generation. Not surprisingly, the practice of fasting is currently experiencing resurgence among God's people.

## **II. NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN FASTING MUST BE CONNECTED TO THE PRESENT REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

- A. We no longer grieve over personal and corporate sins that are merely “passed over” for a time. We now have the full revelation of atonement through Jesus Christ. Our sins are no longer passed over or covered. They are completely removed as far as the east is from the west. Our once sin-stained garments can now be made white as snow.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rm 3:21-26 ESV)*

- B. Fasting is not made obsolete for the Christian. Instead, it reaches its highest form by connecting us to the present reality of the kingdom of God.

*“The great, central, decisive act of salvation for us today is past, not future. And on the basis of that past work of the Bridegroom, nothing can ever be the same again. The Lamb is slain. The blood is shed. The punishment of our sins is executed. Death is defeated. The Spirit is sent. The wine is new. And the old fasting mindset is simply not adequate.”<sup>3</sup> –John Piper*

- C. Fasting can be seen as the future-oriented counterpart to the past-oriented feast of the Lord's Table. In communion, we remember what he has done, and all our faith rests on that finished work. Communion is truly a thanksgiving feast. In fasting, we look forward to the coming promises not yet fulfilled as we hunger for greater revelation and manifestation of him. The longed for kingdom is both present and future.

*...the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Co 11:23-26 ESV)*

- D. The most important scripture in the New Testament concerning fasting is Matthew 9:14-17. Jesus described "new fasting" as a new patch that cannot be put on an old garment and as new wine being put into a new wineskin. This new fasting was directly connected to the revelation of Jesus as our bridegroom.

*Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." (Mt 9:14-17 NIV)*

- E. The only other time Jesus referred to himself as "bridegroom" was in reference to himself returning at the end of the age (Mt 25:1-13). Clearly Jesus thinks of himself as being gone for more than just the time in between his arrest and resurrection.
- F. The present reality is that Jesus is currently away. Some refuse to acknowledge Jesus' absence as though it somehow violates their faith that he dwells within us and never leaves us. These people also commonly hold a low view or complete disregard for fasting. However, scripture specifically describes the present age of the church in these terms.

*The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. (Mt 9:15 NIV)*

*... I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (Jn 16:4-7 NIV)*

*We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Co 5:8 NIV)*

*I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Php 1:23-24 NIV)*

*“The church still awaits the midnight cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him’ (Mt 25:6). It is this age of the church that is the period of the absent Bridegroom. It is this age of the church to which our Master referred when He said, ‘Then they will fast.’ The time is now!”<sup>4</sup> –Arthur Wallis*

- G. There is an ache and cry created by the reality that Jesus is both here and yet not fully here. This cry comes from a hunger for greater intimacy that can only be satisfied by his full return.

***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” (Jn 14:1-4 NIV)***

*“The almost universal absence of regular fasting for the Lord’s return is a witness to our satisfaction with the presence of the world and the absence of the Lord. This is not the way it should be.”<sup>5</sup> –John Piper*

*“It will be a fasting and praying church that will hear the thrilling cry, ‘Behold, the Bridegroom!’ Tears shall then be wiped away, and the fast be followed by the feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb.”<sup>6</sup> –Arthur Wallis*

### III. FASTING RELEASES THE CRY, “OUR LORD, COME!”

- A. The cry of the early church was “Maranatha,” which means, “Our Lord, come!”

***If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! [maranatha] (1 Co 16:22 ESV)***

- B. In the same way the Hebrew word “amen” was preserved without change in almost every language of the world, so too “maranatha” was preserved from its original Aramaic. It was the universal cry of the early church.
- C. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). The maranatha cry mirrors the disciple’s prayer for the kingdom to fully come. These two things are not merely peripheral concerns. They are central to the beliefs and culture of the body of Christ.

*“The Bridegroom left on a journey just before the wedding, and the Bride cannot act as if things are normal. If she loves him, she will ache for his return.”<sup>7</sup> –John Piper*

- D. Being content with the current state of the world and its influence on our lives will result in a lack of fasting. We don’t fast when we are satisfied. Feasting at the table of the world causes our spirit to become dull. Being full of the world will prevent us from realizing our *lack of hunger* for God and the *absence of longing* for our Bridegroom’s return.
- E. The Bridegroom fast helps end our affair with the world and causes our hearts to burn with desire for the one to whom we have been betrothed. Our only response can be, “Come quickly!” It turns our attention to eternal matters and our focus to the greater fulfillment that we have not yet experienced.

*“Fasting is the exclamation point at the end of ‘Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus!’”<sup>8</sup> – John Piper*

- F. Fasting is NOT intended by God to be something we hate. It is a gift meant to tenderize our hearts and bring great change in our lives. Fasting is NOT an expression of emptiness. We fast not because *we haven't* tasted his presence, but because *we have* and can't be satisfied until the final consummation of our faith—the blessed hope.

***Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Ps 34:8 NIV)***

- G. The true heart response of the one who has tasted the goodness of the Lord is, "I want more!"
- H. Consider that Anna's life of worship, prayer and fasting was in response to only seeing a small Old Testament fraction of what New Testament believers know of Christ. Those who look for and long for Christ's coming will see more than others see.
- I. Refuse to live as though the promise of reward in Mt 6:17-18 is untrue!

***...and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:18 NIV)***

***Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Ti 4:8 NIV)***

*"The Holy Spirit's final emphasis before Jesus' Second Coming will be on the intimate relationship between Him and His Bride. John described the Church as being in deep unity with the Holy Spirit at that time, saying and doing what the Spirit is saying and doing. The Holy Spirit will have revealed the Church's core identity. Instead of being called the 'Church,' she will have completely assumed her identity as the 'Bride' and will be fully participating in the bridal longing for the Bridegroom to 'come,' to return."<sup>9</sup> –Mike Bickle*

- J. The declarations of Jesus and the words of scripture concerning the end of the age and his second coming (the Day of the Lord) are not to be taken as empty promises. The heart that is disconnected from these realities is left to cope with nothing more than self-help strategies and concealed disappointment. The heart that is connected and longing for him endures the test of time, runs with perseverance, dares to do great exploits and finishes well. And there WILL BE a generation on the earth that gets to usher in the return of Christ!

<sup>1</sup> Wallis, Arthur. *God's Chosen Fast*. Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 1968. Kindle edition. 23 Jan. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "The Didache." *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (translation J. B. Lightfoot)*. Web. 22 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lightfoot.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Piper, John. *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1997. 42-43. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Wallis.

<sup>5</sup> Piper. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Wallis.

<sup>7</sup> Piper. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Piper. 89.

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<sup>9</sup> Bickle, Mike, and Dana Candler. *The Rewards of Fasting: Experiencing the Power and Affections of God*. Kansas City: Forerunner, 2005. 12. Print.