

Grace for Fasting- Part 3

Introduction: There is grace for the fasted lifestyle that leads us into greater desire for God and the fullness of his kingdom, which will culminate in the return of Jesus our Bridegroom God. This grace energizes wholeheartedness in the private and corporate lives of the church. The voluntary embrace of weakness becomes the doorway of experiencing God's power in our personal lives and to the world around us.

“Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven’s gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central glory.”¹ –Charles Spurgeon

I. FOUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ACTS 13:1-3.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Ac 13:1-4 ESV)

- A. This fasting was *after* Christ's coming, death, resurrection and ascension. Clearly the apostles did not think the finished work of the cross and the ministry of the Holy Spirit made fasting obsolete.

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. (Mt 9:15 ESV)

- B. This fasting was a corporate fast. Clearly the apostles did not take Jesus teaching on private fasting (Mt 6:16-18) to mean that no one can know you are fasting.

“The critical issue is not whether people know you are fasting but whether you want them to know so that you can bask in their admiration.”² –John Piper

- C. This fasting proved to be an occasion for the Holy Spirit's special guidance and direction. Clearly there is a connection between worship-fasting-prayer and the decisive leading of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the establishment of the church.

- D. This fasting changed the course of history. Clearly God chose the practice of fasting—along with worship and prayer—to be the launching pad for world missions and the expansion of his kingdom in the earth.

“It is almost impossible to overstate the historical importance of that moment in the history of the world. Before this word from the Holy Spirit, there seems to have been no organized mission of the church beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Before this, Paul had made no missionary journeys westward to Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, or Spain. Before this Paul had not written any of his letters, which were all a result of his missionary travels, which began here.”³ –John Piper

II. MOTIVES MATTER!

- A. Fasting is to be a part of our normal Christian experience. We must take careful consideration of our hearts so that we can pursue right objectives and obtain God's intended rewards.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt 6:1 ESV)

- B. Jesus warned to not let your fasting be like the hypocrites.

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Mt 6:16-18 ESV)

- C. Hypocrite is a familiar word to us all, and we associate it with someone who doesn't practice what they preach. It is the worst description you can ever be labeled with as a Christian. Who were “the hypocrites” in this passage that Jesus was referring to?

1. Hypokritēs means “actor.”⁴ This Greek word refers to the costumed performers of the theater.

- D. Why would it be hypocritical to fast and on the outside look like you're fasting? Doesn't the outside match the inside? By definition, why would it not be hypocritical to fast and pretend on the outside to *not* be fasting? The answer lies in the motives of the heart.

1. Jesus is warning about having a heart that is motivated by human admiration. Their apparent openness about fasting was deceptive of what was really in their heart. The reward that they truly sought was the praise of men.

2. To make matters worse, their deceptive desire for the praise of men is hidden with a pretense of love for God.

“The danger of hypocrisy is that it is so successful. It aims at the praise of men. And it succeeds. But that's all.”⁵ –John Piper

3. Jesus warned that no other reward remains for those seeking the praise of men.

- E. The difference in fasting Jesus wants us to understand can be simplified like this: Being seen fasting versus fasting to be seen.

- F. Fast to be seen by God! Fasting, as Jesus instructed, makes your life a landing strip for the eyes of God. And there is unmistakable reward for those who seek Him.

...And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Mt 6:18 ESV)

...whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (He 11:6 ESV)

- G. In Matthew 6, Jesus warned that our giving, our praying, and our fasting should not be done like the hypocrites. Right in the middle of this discussion is where Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, and in it he revealed right goals.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Mt 6:9-10 ESV)

- H. Remember that having the Giver is better than having the gifts. These goals are the test of having a God-oriented lifestyle of fasting:

1. God's name be hallowed.
2. God's kingdom come.
3. God's will be done on earth.

III. FASTING FOR BREAKTHROUGH.

- A. Fasting is one of the quickest ways to reveal what's truly in you and what controls you. What we trust in and what we value most are brought to the surface.

*"More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us."*⁶ –Richard Foster

*"Fasting is a way of revealing to ourselves and confessing to our God what is in our hearts. Where do we find our deepest satisfaction—in God or in his gifts?"*⁷ –John Piper

- B. In the situation of Jesus fasting in the wilderness for 40 days, his fast is both a testing and a weapon. Fasting reveals the motivations of the heart and also strikes a blow to the enemy at the same time. When we fast, we are joining with Jesus in the declaration that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- C. Of all the ways Jesus could have fought off Satan in the wilderness during his time of testing, the Spirit led him to fast.

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Co 12:7-10 ESV)

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (2 Co 11:29-30 ESV)

- D. Who will accept the invitation into this kind of spiritual violence? Everything is available to you by the Spirit, but you must actively lay hold of it.

*"Fasting is a call to voluntarily embrace weakness in order to experience more of God's power and presence."*⁸ –Mike Bickle

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered (to allow, permit) violence, and the violent take it by force. (Mt 11:12 ESV)

- E. Not only has God chosen fasting as a means of experiencing the power of God for personal breakthrough and the overthrow of ungodly appetites, it is also a means of aligning with God for breakthrough in the world around us.

At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over... Then he

continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” (Da 10:2-3, 12-14 NIV)

- F. You are called to move angels and demons.
- G. Modern history reveals powerful examples of the church fasting for breakthrough.
 1. President Lincoln officially called for days of prayer and fasting on multiple occasions throughout the American Civil War.
 2. Upon threat of a French invasion the king of Britain called for a nation-wide day of prayer and fasting.

“Fri. February 6, 1756.—The fast day was a glorious day; such as London has scarce seen since the Restoration. Every church in the city was more than full; and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth the prayer; and there will yet be a lengthening of our tranquillity.”⁹ —John Wesley

In a footnote he wrote, *“Humility was turned into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion by the French was averted.”*

3. During the Battle of Britain (Jul–Oct 1940), King George VI called for Sunday, September 8 to be a day of nation-wide prayer and fasting as Nazi Germany was attempting to invade. Prime Minister Winston Churchill identified September 15 (the following Sunday) as “the crux of the Battle of Britain.” Hitler failed to take the island of Britain.
- H. A concluding testimony of the power of fasting.

“To the honor of God alone I will say a little of my own experience in this matter. I was powerfully converted on the morning of the 10th of October. In the evening of the same day, and on the morning of the following day, I received overwhelming baptisms of the Holy Ghost, that went through me, as it seemed to me, body and soul. I immediately found myself endued with such power from on high that a few words dropped here and there to individuals were the means of their immediate conversion. My words seemed to fasten like barbed arrows in the souls of men. They cut like a sword. They broke the heart like a hammer. Multitudes can attest to this. Oftentimes a word dropped, without my remembering it, would fasten conviction, and often result in almost immediate conversion. Sometimes I would find myself, in a great measure, empty of this power. I would go out and visit, and find that I made no saving impression. I would exhort and pray, with the same result. I would then set apart a day for private fasting and prayer, fearing that this power had departed from me, and would inquire anxiously after the reason of this apparent emptiness. After humbling myself, and crying out for help, the power would return upon me with all its freshness. This has been the experience of my life.”¹⁰ —Charles Finney

¹ Bounds, Edward M. *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer: Experience the Wonders of God Through Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004. 455. Print.

² Piper, John. *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1997. 99. Print.

³ Piper. 100.

⁴ "Lexicon :: Strong's G5273 - hypokritēs." *Blue Letter Bible*. Sowing Circle. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.
<<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G5273&t=ESV>>.

⁵ Piper. 68.

⁶ Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988. 55. Print.

⁷ Piper. 57.

⁸ Bickle, Mike, and Dana Candler. *The Rewards of Fasting: Experiencing the Power and Affections of God*. Kansas City: Forerunner, 2005. 55. Print.

⁹ Wesley, John. And John Emory. *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835. 595. Print.

¹⁰ Finney, Charles. *Power from on High*. Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 2013. Kindle edition. 13 Feb. 2015.