

“Fasting is Submission to God”

Matthew 6:16-18

Things that glorify God direct people’s attention to the Lord.

Look at Me Serve
Seeing God Shine Through

Look at Me Serve

Matthew 6:16, NKJV

¹⁶ *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

The greatest means of reflecting the glory of God in the world is when the children of God are living in submission to the will of God. A transformation must take place in a person’s life in order to exchange the selfishness of the individual in order that another’s desires can be accomplished in and through a person. God is the only One who can cause a person’s heart to deny itself and joyfully submit to the desires of God.

Jesus begins this brief passage of Scripture with “...when you fast...”. Fasting is one method of how people can make time for God to draw closer to Him. Choosing to spend time with God rather than doing some other activity can be literally seen as a fast. People who spend time with God rather than participating in another activity are fasting, denying fulfillment of their desires in order to spend time with God. The denial of one’s desires may seem like a sacrifice at first until a person comes to the realization of the benefits that come with drawing closer to God.

Jesus’ disciples did not fast at all during the time of Christ’s ministry which caused many others to question Jesus concerning this fact.

¹⁸ *The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”*

¹⁹ *And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. ²⁰ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. ²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”* (Mark 2:18-22, NKJV)

Fasting is answering the call of God to come to Him to receive all that is needed for life, joy, and peace. God said through the Prophet Isaiah,

¹ *“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,*

*Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
² Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance. (Isaiah 55:1-2, NKJV)*

Jesus is “...*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld the glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14, NKJV). Participating in fasting while Jesus was in the presence of God in the flesh would be a denial of Jesus as God in the flesh. The disciples of Christ could not get any closer to God than when they were in the presence of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus asked the question, “...*Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? ...*” (Mark 2:19, NKJV).

There would be times of fasting when Christ ascended to the Father from where He came because those who followed Him would no longer be in His physical presence. There are cares and concerns that weigh heavy upon the couple being wed and the families of the bride and groom before and after the wedding, but during the event those things are set aside to celebrate the miraculous union of a man and woman in the holy estate of marriage.

Now, Christ has ascended back to the Father and those who follow Him walk in His Spirit instead of alongside His physical presence. The lives of the followers of Christ during His earthly ministry changed twice. First, when they came to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, God in the flesh and then were reorganized. Secondly, when Christ ascended to the Father. Jesus’ followers found themselves unable to live in the manner they used to at first, but then had to add things like fasting into their lives to draw closer to God for they had walked with Him physically for a little over three years.

Believers on Christ today have never experienced the joy and pleasure of walking alongside God as those in Jesus’ day were able to enjoy. Yet, since Pentecost, all of those who believe on the name of Jesus have the privilege of His Spirit living within them instead of merely walking alongside Him physically. The change which comes over a person is something God brings about within His child, slowly and methodically transforming their minds and hearts to desire what God desires. Apostle Paul was inspired to explain it this way,

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not be partakers with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are

exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.
(Ephesians 5:6-13, NKJV)

There must be a change of lifestyle, priorities, and perspective once a person comes to recognize that God the Father has revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus. The transformation from death to life is drastic and dramatic immediately on the inside, but takes time to be seen visibly in a person's life. Things that once were acceptable and even enjoyable begin to unsettle those who have been born of the Spirit. The sin which once brought pleasure now brings discomfort and pain. Sin which attracted begins to repulse the one who has Christ living within them. Therefore, a whole new way of living must be adopted; new priorities that place value on the things God values replace the selfish longings of the sinful heart.

Jesus explained this by comparing the need for a complete life makeover by using the illustration of the new wine and old wine skins, and the results of sewing a new piece of cloth onto an old piece of cloth. The old wine skin bursts and wastes the new wine; the new piece of cloth tears away from the old cloth when it shrinks. The person who believes in the name of the Son of God for the forgiveness of their sins is a new person, *"...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV).

The light of Christ shining in the heart of the child of God exposes things that were once hidden in darkness. The Lord purposefully convicts His people of their sins while giving them the His strength to break the bonds of sin. The Spirit of God also shines light upon the subtle choices which present themselves each day. Things that were thought nothing of before, but are now are seen as temptation leading to sin. Therefore, every aspect of a person's life must come under the brilliance of the glory of God to expose sin and overthrow its authority. Those who belong to God begin to see sin for the deadly poison that it is and discover the healing power and freedom coming from submission to God.

Those who live outwardly in order to appear righteous in the eyes of people and receive praise from them Jesus says, *"...have received their reward"*. The difference between drawing closer to God privately by fasting from other activities to spend time with God transforms a person from the inside out.

The one who lives to be respected by people and gain a good reputation receive in full exactly what they longed for in their life. The person who is living before God privately will display the character of God publicly; they long to please God so whether other people respect them or not is of no concern to them. Those living for God are those who are looking for a reward that is not earthly perishable things but of eternal heavenly things which do not fade away and thieves cannot break in and steal. Jesus encourages us, ¹⁹ *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal"* (Matthew 6:19, NKJV).

Things received from people and from this creation are temporal. Earthly things will one day pass away because of the curse of sin. There are no material things a person is born into the world with. As Job expressed in his misery, ²¹ *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there..."* (Job 1:21, NKJV). The Treasure of heaven is Christ. Building up treasure in heaven is essentially learning about the One who died in order to provide atonement for sin, satisfying the wrath of God forever.

The attitude of God's children must never be directed to self, but always making sure God is coming through in all that is said and done so the name of Christ is lifted up to draw all people to Himself.

Seeing God Shine Through

Matthew 6:17-18, NKJV

¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Fasting allows a person to spend intimate time with God in private where only God sees and knows the person's intentions. Time with God out of the public eye will reveal itself by the abundant production of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of God's child. The Spirit's fruit will grow abundantly in a person's life when they are continually residing in Christ. Jesus made it clear,

⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:5-8, NKJV)

The image of the grape vine Jesus used to represent His blood provides a powerful image of what it means to abide in Him. The life that flows through the Father and now through the risen Son by the presence of the Holy Spirit is there for the specific purpose of bearing much fruit. The branch that is separated from the vine is void of the nourishment needed to bring forth its fruit. The same is true whenever God's people neglect fasting; they make no time for intimacy with God and suffer in the lack of spiritual nourishment and growth for the Spirit's fruit to develop in their lives to maturity.

Jesus said, "¹⁷ *But you, when you fast...*"; He expected His followers to participate in fasting in the same way He instructed His disciples on prayer. Jesus said, "⁵ *...when you pray...*" and more directly, "⁹ *In this manner, therefore, pray...*" (Matthew 6:5, 9, NKJV). There is only one way to build a relationship with another person or with God. Time must be spent with another in order to have a relationship with anyone, especially God. This is more than halfheartedly showing up at a gathering of God's people or memorizing facts about God; it is committing to God in a way which causes the follower of Christ to begin to take on Jesus' characteristics in the same way He revealed the Father's character in all He did.

Apostle Paul followed the example of Christ even though he did not believe on Him until after God poured out His Spirit upon all those who believed on Jesus at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Paul was inspired to write to the believers in Philippi,

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. ⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9, NKJV)

Apostle Paul urges believers to focus on and think most often about things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, good report, and anything that is praiseworthy. This is to say what ought to capture the attention and wonder of God's people are the things of God. God desires His people to be learning from the mistakes of others, imitate those who please Him, especially Christ who lived perfectly before the Father in all things. This is done best when God is given the most of a person's time in private. People inevitably become to think like those who they spend the most time with each day.

The company a person chooses to spend most of their time with will have the greatest impact upon their life. Those who are avoided or limited in the amount of time that is spent with them are prevented from having an opportunity to strongly influence them. As Paul warned the believers in Corinth by quoting the Greek author Menander of Paul's day, "³³ ...*Evil company corrupts good habits*" (1 Corinthians 15:33, NKJV). Earlier in this same letter to the Corinthian believers he quoted the Jewish proverb, "⁶ ...*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*" (1 Corinthians 5:6, NKJV).

Spending time with God's people is great, but it can never replace the need for intimate time with God personally. There is simply no substitute for time alone with God for the shaping of character and for the gaining of wisdom and knowledge to reflect the glory of God.

This also applies to what a person reads and watches as well as to people who we spend time with regularly. Reading is a great thing. There are many benefits of reading, but what is being read is crucial. The Bible must have the most reading time so that all other things a person reads can be evaluated by the eternal truth of God's Word. Fiction, mysteries, history, biographies, inspirational, and poetry can deliver a wealth of knowledge and increase a person's intelligence, yet it can also warp the thinking of individuals and breakdown truth with subtle lies disguised as entertainment or the quest for understanding.

There is no reason for anyone to know how much time is spent alone with God in prayer and Scripture reading. The time spent with God will become evident in the priorities, attitude, and speech of the person. Children of God who spend quality time with God daily will never have to tell anyone they are a follower of Christ; the presence of Christ's attitude and character will radiate from the child of God in all they do. There is a problem if people work and live alongside one another for any length of time and Christ's character is not seen in their actions and recognized in their speech.

Jesus identified this fact when He said, "¹⁸ ...*your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly*" (Matthew 6:18, NKJV). The reward of God's people is being made into the image of Jesus, "¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him*" (Colossians 1:15-16, NKJV). Clearly it is impossible

for any human being to perfectly display the Father's image as Jesus has done during His earthly ministry. Yet God calls those who love Him and that are known as His to be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 19:1).

Peter encouraged all believers in his first letter,

¹³ Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:13-16, NKJV)

In light of all that God has revealed to those who believe on the name of Christ Jesus every believer must be mindful of how they live. Exposing oneself to that which is incompatible with the Spirit of God must never be allowed to have influence over God's people. Therefore, it is important that children of God are aware of what is happening around them. Things that were once done in the flesh must not be returned to again and cause the name of Christ to be disgraced.

Apostle Paul also warns that followers of Christ cannot flirt with the things that are not of God and expect to partake of the things of the Lord as well.

¹⁸ Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? ¹⁹ What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? ²⁰ Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. ²² Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? (1 Corinthians 10:18-22, NKJV)

Israel caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the nations time after time by their sinful behavior and the influencing of the nations around them. There can be no flirting with the enemy forces and communion with God. Either God is the Lord of a person's life or He is not Lord at all. Christ will never share the throne of a person's heart or compete for the love of a person who desires to seek astrology and tarot cards for direction for decisions in life yet claim to trust in the Lord for tomorrow.

The open reward of God to those who commit themselves to intimately spending time with Him daily will be made visible in the character of Christ being seen in their behavior and speech. Christ will be revealed in the way these followers of Christ forgive as they have been forgiven; they will receive the discipline of God as a loving father corrects his beloved son (Matthew 6:14-15, 7:12). The reward of God will be demonstrated in their love for Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and be known for the way they love all those around them as they love and care for themselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

Fasting is submission to God because it is the primary method of which the child of God can become confident in who they are in Christ so they can genuinely direct attention away from themselves and onto the Lord. This is accomplished as their time

with the Lord in secret will mold and shape them to be more like Christ so that He will be more visible than themselves.

Remember the prayer Jesus has prayed for all who will believe on His name, “²⁶ *And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them*” (John 17:26, NKJV). God desires for His people to be in Him just as the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Let us therefore take time to draw closer to the Lord daily through fasting.