

ML402 The Reward of Fasting

Some people fast to purge their physical bodies while others fast for spiritual rewards. This lesson focuses on the spiritual aspects of this practice based on scripture only. We begin here with something Jesus said concerning how NOT to fast:

Mt 6:16: Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

This shows that your motive should be pure. If you want to impress men, don't expect to receive anything from the Lord. If you want to impress the Father, Jesus said something about this too:

Mt 6:17-18: But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Both texts teach that pride may bring praise from man, but nothing from the Father. So then, if you have a need that only God can solve, you must put on the humble "mind of Christ" [Php 2:3-8]. If you don't, forget about fasting and eat.

Fasting is one sure way of putting on the mind of Christ. So, even if you begin a fast with an impure motive, if you fast long enough you will put on the mind of Christ. When you get hungry enough, you won't care what others think.

About the result: Jesus said that the Father will reward you if you fast in secret. But, He also said that it's the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom [Lu. 12:32]. So here's a question: "Why must you fast for what the Father takes pleasure in giving?" Doesn't the kingdom include all your needs according to God's riches in glory? [Php. 4:19].

For example, Jesus sent His disciples to cast out devils [Mt. 10:8]. Yet when they couldn't heal a lunatic He said, "... *this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*" [Mt. 17:21]. Doesn't the Father take pleasure in casting out demons and healing the sick? Again, why must we fast for what the Father wants to give us?

John's disciples fasted often while Christ's disciples ate and drank [Lu. 5:33]. The Pharisees asked why. Christ's answer teaches a basic principle, and He gave two parables that explain this principle.

Consider these points: [1] John's disciples fasted in the bridegroom's absence. [2] Christ's disciples could not fast in

the bridegroom's presence. [3] After the bridegroom departs the earth, Christ's disciples will fast even as John's disciples fast. Think about this and let the Lord give you this revelation: The purpose of fasting is to bring the presence of the Lord:

Lk 5:34-35: And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

Fasting brings the Lord's presence. His presence brings the Father, and the Father supplies our needs. Now, the two of them are synonymous, but a greater measure of His presence means a greater measure of His power.

Because His presence is the reward of fasting, there's no room for boasting; we give all glory to the Lord. Again, fasting brings the bridegroom and the bridegroom supplies the needs. Now let's consider those two parables.

Lu 5:36: No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.

In this first parable, the old garment represents the Old Man and the piece of a new garment represents a manifestation of the New Man, i.e., the blessing of Christ [Ro. 6:6; Eph. 4:24]. Thus, Christ does not provide physical needs to those walking in the pride of life. Fasting kills the Old Man that the New Man might have a more abundant life.

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. [Lu 5:37-38].

In this second parable, the wine represents the joy of the Lord via the Holy Spirit's presence [Ac. 2:13; 2Co. 3:17]. The old bottles represent non-sanctified believers. Only after the old bottles [vessels] put off the Old Man and become new bottles [flexible via humility], will the bridegroom come and fill them with His presence.

The true purpose of the fast genders a few questions. [1] When should you fast? [2] How long should you fast? [3] When your fast ends, should you compare it with that of others? There are other questions, but these are enough for now. Let's discuss these in order.

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[1] The purpose of fasting is to bring the Lord's presence so fast when you sense the need for more of His presence. You may want to feel closer to Him. Or, you may have a request that requires a greater measure of His presence.

[2] The length of your fast should be relative to how much of His presence you need. This understanding allows you to match your fast with your expectation. [You must determine this through faith because He seldom manifests His presence until the end of the fast.]

Or, you can end your fast when God has fulfilled the request you've asked of Him. In this situation, you should not forget that God supplied the need, all you did was humble your Old Man until your bottle became flexible enough for Him to increase the measure of His presence.

Daniel provides an example of this situation. God had revealed what would befall Daniel's people in the last days [Dan. 10:14]. Daniel mourned [fasted] for three full weeks [Dan. 10:1-3]. Then Gabriel appeared and explained why it had taken him so long to arrive [Dan. 9:21; 10:21; 10:4-11].

We don't know how often he prayed during the 21 days. After his last prayer, however, Gabriel brought his answer [Dan. 10:5]. Gabriel said that God heard his prayer the first day, but that the prince of Persia had withstood him until Michael came to help [Dan. 10:12-13].

That's the story; this is the point: Daniel saw a vision he didn't understand [Dan. 10:1, 14]. But he believed that if he fasted and prayed that God would send the understanding. Daniel needed someone who could give him some answers.

Twenty-one days passed before Gabriel arrived. Daniel didn't know this, but he didn't need to fast for God to hear his prayer; he needed Michael to help Gabriel get past the prince of Persia.

[3] Concerning our third question, "Should you compare your fast to those of others?" Anything related to pride is NO. The fast crucifies the Old Garment so the Spirit of the Lord's presence can fill the New Bottle.

There are times when you should share your experiences. Consider how the story of Daniel's fast contributed to this lesson. And Paul mentioned his fasts when speaking to the Corinthians about his burden of the ministry [2Co-6]. He did the same when defending himself against religious opposition [2Co-11]. Primarily, the rule is "fast in secret." The Lord will toot your horn by rewarding you openly.

Consider again the purpose of fasting. Aside from situations like Daniel's, wherein God had to send Michael to help Gabriel get past the prince of Persia, which of these needs to fast the longest?

A: Dedicated disciples who serve the Lord continually.

B: Undedicated disciples who serve the Lord part-time.