



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Special Study:

## THE POWER OF SCRIPTURAL FASTING Matthew 6:16-18

**“Moreover when ye fast”**. The first word, ‘moreover’ implies that our Lord ranks the next subject, fasting, with almsgiving and praying. Our Lord says, **“when** (not if ) **ye fast”**. He teaches us that we shall fast and we ought to fast. He had said, **“when thou doest thine alms”** and **“when thou prayest”**, now He says, **“when ye fast”**. In each case, He emphasized, **“Be not as the hypocrites are”** (Matthew 6:2,5,16). The practice of the hypocrites had rendered their almsgiving, praying and fasting unacceptable to God. They missed the promised reward of almsgiving, the divine response to prayer and supernatural power of fasting because of their hypocrisy and superstition.

The practice of hypocrites, doing a good thing with wrong motives, should not make true believers abandon a scriptural, powerful, profitable responsibility and privilege. Fasting, joined with prayer and faith in God has always been the practice of God’s people in solemn or sorrowful periods in their lives. In times of personal crisis or national calamity, God’s people have always sought supernatural help and divine intervention through prayer and fasting. And whenever this has been done with a heart that wholly leans on God and fully trusts in Him, He has always responded favourably. **“And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly”** (Matthew 6:3,4, 6,17,18).

### THE PRACTICE OF PURPOSEFUL FASTING

Matthew 6:16a; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 1:2-4; Esther 4:1-3,16; Matthew 9:14,15; Acts 10:1-6, 30,31; 2 Corinthians 6:1-5; 11:27.

From the examples of fasting in Scripture, we learn a lot on believers’ fasting. Individuals and groups of people fasted at special times of exceptional gravity or danger, when they find themselves under some heavy burdens from which they need to be free. Such fasting was often an expression of deep humiliation before God, a demonstration of utter helplessness and a cry of absolute dependence on God. Such fasting was not a response to any command from God to fast but a voluntary and spontaneous act of seeking God’s help when they were overwhelmed by serious, perplexing problems.

From Scripture, we learn that fasting is deliberate abstinence from food for the purpose of prayer and devotion to God. Generally, in the Scripture, the abstinence from food is for a day, from morning till the evening, or a few days (Joshua 7:6; Judges 20:26; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:16; Acts 13:1-3; 14:23). Fasting is not to be done to the point of impairing our health or injuring our body (Acts 27:33-36). Missing some meals is not necessarily fasting but could be self-denial and endurance in times of need or persecution (2 Corinthians 6:4,5; 11:26-28). A deliberate, purposeful devotion to God in prayer and fasting yields mighty, supernatural results.

### THE PORTRAYAL OF PRETENTIOUS FASTING

Matthew 6:16; Luke 18:11,12; 1 Kings 21:5-13; 2 Samuel 12:7,13-23; Zechariah 7:4-6,7-13; Isaiah 58:1-7; Jeremiah 14:10-12; Zechariah 8:18-23.

The hypocrites stain every good thing they try to do with the sin of seeking the praise of men. Their righteousness, their almsgiving, their praying, their fasting, like the Pharisees’ are all done **“to be seen of men”**, that is, to attract attention to their supposed spirituality. **“All their works they do for to be seen of men”** (Matthew 23:5). The heart of the sinner, the backslider, the hypocrite is so depraved that what is meant to lead us to humility before God is turned to a means of pride and self-exaltation before men.

Hypocrites today, like the Pharisees of old, advertise their fasting and make public what should have been kept secret between their souls and God. They manifest a hypocritical expression of superficial religion to give a false impression of

their spirituality. The Lord has warned us against hypocrisy in fasting and in every other thing we do. We are to do all things for God's glory, not for the promotion of self. The fasting of hypocrites, whose main purpose is pride and desire to win the praise of men, is abomination in God's sight. God hates hypocrisy in whatever we do. ***"Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God"*** (Luke 16:15; 18:9-14).

## **THE POWER OF PROPER FASTING**

Matthew 6:17,18; 17:19-21; 1 Samuel 7:3-6,7-13; Jonah 3:5-10; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 1:4; 2:1-8; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4, 14-25; Joel 2:12-29; Acts 9:9-22; 13:1-5,6-12; 14:21-23.

Proper fasting with prayer of faith is mighty and powerful in its awesome effect. The believer is yet to see the awesome power of faith, prayer and fasting. What seems impossible in the affairs of men becomes possible and extraordinary things happen as God responds to the prayer and fasting of the righteous. Personal problems are solved, powerful enemies are conquered, imminent judgment is averted, yokes and curses are broken and destroyed, families, cities and even nations are delivered, demons and evil spirits are cast out and their captives are set free, the expectations of the wicked are disappointed, miracles happen and the Holy Ghost moves in extraordinary power, mighty revivals with great harvest of souls are experienced unhindered, uninterrupted, unrestricted as faithful believers and the righteous fast and pray. In these last days, as we face overwhelming challenges, individual believers, led by the Holy Spirit can arise to seek the Lord and experience the untapped power of prayer and fasting.

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