

## I. Cultivating a Hunger for God, Matthew 6:1-18 (vv. 16-18) and Acts 9:1-11 (v. 9).

A. “And seeing the multitudes, He [that is Jesus] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated *His disciples* came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:” (Matt. 6:1-2).

1. WD Thomas Hodges said, “The text is a part of Christ’s most excellent Sermon on the Mount, (after he had spent a whole night in prayer), to his newly elected Apostles; a kind of ordination sermon.”
2. Fasting... to abstain as a religious exercise from food and drink.
3. “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.” (Matt. 6:16-18).

### B. In Acts 9:1-11, The Murderer Converted

1. Verse 9 is to be noted: “Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” (Acts 9:3-9).
2. Conversion to God, submission to God and self-denial, is accomplished by the Christian to cultivate a hunger and thirst for God alone.

## II. The Doctrine of Fasting from the Texts

### A. What is Fasting?

1. Fasting is a negative act, for a positive outcome.
2. It is vitally linked to humiliation before God.
3. The aim of fasting is that the soul would be afflicted.
4. What fasting is not:
  - a) Fasting is not a human invention.
  - b) Fasting is not famine.
  - c) Fasting is not temperance.
  - d) Fasting is not the means by which a man is made more holy.
  - e) Fasting is also not something done every day as the three legs to the spiritual chair of personal devotions in bible reading, godly meditation and prayer are to be done.
5. What is fasting?
  - a) Fasting is a specific form of self-denial before God.
  - b) It is a putting off of something in this present life which is regularly used for the Christian’s life and happiness.
  - c) Fasting is done from the help and comforts of this life.
  - d) Not all Christians, then, will receive the same benefit from this as everyone else.
6. There are various kinds of Natural fasting.
7. There are various kinds of fasting found in the Bible.
  - a) The first fast was in the garden of Eden.
    - (1) *God told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2:17.*
  - b) Later, in the Mosaic Law, we find that certain foods were not to be eaten by Israel as a religious theocracy for various reasons.
    - (1) *“Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves,” (Lev. 11:4).*
  - c) Biblical fasts are from all manner of food; from bread and water, so far as health will allow (2 Sam. 3:35; Ezra 10:6; Dan. 10:3; Est. 4:16; Acts 9:9).
  - d) “For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the children of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.’” (Exo. 33:5).

(1) *Laying aside things like this from their regular use is a sign of humility and an affliction of the soul.*

(a) *Est. 4:1-2; Jonah 3:5-6.*

(b) *“My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.” (Psa. 35:13).*

e) Many people in Scripture fasted from a good night’s sleep.

(1) *“David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.” (2Sa. 12:16).*

(2) *“Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; Wail, you who minister before the altar; Come, lie all night in sackcloth,” (Joel 1:13).*

f) Some people in Scripture are directed to fast from pleasure.

(1) *Husbands and wives for a time are to fast from intimacy, to give themselves to prayer and fasting.*

(a) *1 Cor. 7:5.*

## 8. Various Biblical Examples of Fasts connected with Prayer

a) Fasting and prayer occasioned public calamities,

(1) *2 Sam. 1:12 – when Saul and Jonathan were dead*

b) Afflictions and sickness

(1) *Psa. 35:13, David fasted.*

c) For Dangerous and Perilous situation

(1) *Daniel in the Lion’s den in Dan. 6:18, Darius fasted.*

d) For Approaching danger,

(1) *Esth. 4:16 and the eradication of the Jews by Haman*

e) For the ordination of ministers

(1) *“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:3).*

(a) *Of the disciples, at the time of the consecration of Barnabas and Saul to the ministry, Acts 13:2, 3.*

f) For a demonstration of humiliation to God

(1) *“And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.” (Deut. 9:18).*

g) For understanding the Word

(1) *“You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at my instruction, the words of the LORD, in the hearing of the people in the LORD’S house on the day of fasting. And you shall also read them in the hearing of all Judah who come from their cities.” (Jer. 36:6).*

h) It was a habitual practice by those who professed to love God

(1) *by John’s disciples, Matt. 9:14;*

(2) *by Anna, Luke 2:37;*

(3) *by Cornelius, Acts 10:30;*

(4) *by Paul, 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27.*

(5) *Even by hypocrites who pretend to love God such as the Pharisees, Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 18:12;*

i) It could be prolonged.

(1) *For three weeks, by Daniel, Dan. 10:2, 3;*

(2) *Forty days by Moses, Exod. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9, 18.*

(3) *Forty days by Elijah, 1 Kin. 19:8.*

(a) *These two, unable to fulfill fasting’s proper duty, were bested by the King of Glory in the wilderness even with assaults and temptations by the devil.*

**(i) Forty days by Jesus, Matt. 4:2; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-2.**

j) Fasting is most often used in light of humiliation, repentance and the affliction of the soul.

(1) *In prayer for himself and his adversaries, the Psalmist, Psa. 109:4, 24.*

- (2) *Of Ezra, on account of the idolatrous marriages of the Jews, Ezra 10:6*
- (3) *Of Nehemiah, on account of the desolation of Jerusalem and the temple, Neh. 1:4.*
- (4) *Of the Jews, when Jeremiah prophesied against Judea and Jerusalem, Jer. 36:9;*
- (5) *Of Daniel, on account of the captivity of the people, with prayer for their deliverance, Dan. 9:3.*
- (6) *The Ninevites, when Jonah preached to them, Jonah 3:5-10.*
- (7) *By Paul, at the time of his conversion, Acts 9:9.*

## B. What is the Purpose or Goal of Fasting?

1. It surrounds having more of God than just having things that God can provide; *cultivating a hunger for God. Two things:*
  - a) It surrounds spiritual power and enablement in the Spirit to pray effectively.
  - b) It surrounds the coming of the Kingdom.
    - (i) ***Jesus spoke about the war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.***
      - (a) ***“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Mat. 17:21).***
        - (i) Spiritual Power needed to overcome such things imbedded deep within.
      - (b) *This is why fasting is called in Scripture, afflicting the soul.*
        - (i) ***“Why have we fasted, they say, and you have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls” (Isa. 58:3).***
        - (ii) ***Tertullian said, “Fasting is a work of reverence towards God.”***
2. Secondly, the Coming of the Kingdom and Fasting are connected.
  - a) “But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” (Mark 2:20).
  - b) Fasting is an expression of the soul’s desire for Christ to return.
  - c) An interesting note, such fasting is also critically attached to *preaching*.
    - (1) *“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:2ff).*
      - (a) *““Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Mat. 9:38).*
        - (i) ***Spiritual power is enabled through fasting in even in sending preacher to preach.***

## C. Consider, then, the Divine Directives of Self-Denial

1. Self-Denial and Self-Control are specifically tied to this idea of fasting.
  - a) “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (Jam. 4:8-10).
  - b) “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:33).
  - c) “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1Co. 6:20).
  - d) “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27), Paul says.
  - e) Gal 5:23, “self-control” being a fruit of the Spirit.
    - (1) *Fasting cultivates that self-denial.*

## D. Cultivation of Contentment with God and Discontentment with the World

1. “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” (Gen. 15:1).
2. “Now godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Tim. 6:6).

## E. Fasting is Critically Attached to Prayer

1. James Ussher, "Unto such extraordinary prayers is annexed a holy fasting *or feasting*, the one, to further our zeal in petition; the other in thanksgiving."
  - a) "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17).
  - b) Fasting makes prayer more effectual.
    - (1) *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* (Jam. 5:16).
    - (a) *Add fasting to that.*
2. During the great awakening, Jonathan Edwards said, "I should think the people of God in this land, at such a time as this is, would be in the way of their duty, to do three times so much at fasting and prayer as they do."
  - a) "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Mat. 17:21).
    - (1) *"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."* (Mark 9:29).
3. There are myriads of Biblical Examples of Fasting and Prayer linked together.
  - a) Ezra, "So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer." (Ezr. 8:23).
  - b) David, "My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart." (Psa. 35:13).
  - c) Daniel, "Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes." (Dan. 9:3).
  - d) Paul, "that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer;" (1 Co. 7:5).

## III. The Application of the Text

### A. Evidences of the Converted Christian in Secret Fasting and Prayer.

1. Robert Leighton said, "Fasting, which is a necessary help of Prayer, unclogs and frees the wings of the soul to fly to heaven."
2. John Brinsley called *fasting* the feathers glued onto the arrow to allow it to hit its mark.
3. Richard Sibbes, "There are some kinds of miseries, some kind of calamities, some kind of sins, that will not be overcome, and which God will not deliver the church from, but by fasting and prayer."
4. "Labor to afflict your souls for sin; meet God with weeping and supplication; clothe yourselves with humility, lie in the dust, cover yourselves with shame; loathe and abhor yourselves in his sight for your iniquities, mourn for your own sins, and for the great dishonors of his Name by the sins of others. And seek the Lord, both for yourselves, and for his church." Thomas Vincent.
  - a) The hypocrite does many strenuous religious exercises.
    - (1) *They read, pray, fast, are found in church, seem to be Christians, but they do things from a wrong motive of not self-denial, but of vain-glory.*
    - (2) *"I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."* (Luke 18:12).

### B. Preparation to Fast and Pray

1. He wants you to humble yourself
  - a) Humility pleases the Sovereign God.
    - (1) *Isaiah 66:2, "poor and of a contrite spirit..."*
    - (2) *"blessed are those who mourn."*
    - (3) *Tobias Crisp, "Our spirits are like wild heifers to any service, especially to such a self-fomenting exercise, as a fast; they will be rising and kicking even at the fore-thought of it, and grumble at the tediousness of it; and certainly we shall find them very sullen and lifeless at it, if we do not provoke our souls to it before hand."*
    - (4) *One of Edwards' resolutions that he read weekly, was this:*
      - (a) *#20 Resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.*

- b) “I will rise now,” I said, “And go about the city; In the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love.” (Sol. 3:2).
- c) “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Col. 3:1-4).  
*(1) Hypocrites ask for forgiveness without ever doing anything to kill that which they seem to want to be delivered from.*
- d) “Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone.” (Hos. 4:17).  
*(1) God leaves the sinner in his sin and the sinner has no idea that God has left.*
2. “and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Matt. 6:18).
  3. “But the fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering, faithfulness, self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23).
  4. “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Phi. 2:13).
  5. “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2Co. 12:10).
  6. “that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.” (1 Peter 4:11).
    - a) Fasting is an offering of emptiness to God in hope that God will fill you up in Jesus Christ for his glory.  
*(1) That is the glory Christ receives from those who cultivate a hunger for God.*