

Studies in Christianity Private Worship #3

S#1.

Fasting As Worship ?

S#2.

Text : **Isaiah 58: 1-12 ; Luke 18: 9-14**

A. We're in the process of studying what composes our private worship.

S#3.

1. When we studied our public or assembled worship, we observed a pattern.
 - a. We find no list of commands, but follow the examples of assemblies in the N.T.
 - b. However, even these examples vary so not all are composed of the same things.
 - c. Thus, even today, not all of our assemblies are the same.
2. Thus far we have observed two components of private worship.
 - a. We saw that prayer is fundamental to all worship ... public and private.
 - b. We acknowledged that we need daily times of worship to keep us close to God.
 - c. We saw that worship involved the process of meditating on God and His word.

*3. *We must remind ourselves that worship is an expression of one's heart.*

B. With this in mind we will now examine fasting as an act of worship.

S#4.

1. We will see it is not a command, but it is expected.
2. It is neither an act of righteousness nor a ritual to be performed.
3. We will research when and why Christians should fast.
4. We'll observe how fasting is done.

I. Fasting is not a command to be obeyed, but God expects it.

S#5.

A. Fasting is only commanded on one occasion in the entire bible.

1. **Lev. 23: 26** – The Lord again spoke to Moses: **27** "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. You are to hold a sacred assembly and practice self-denial; you are to present a fire offering to the Lord. (HCSB)

S#6.

2. This is the only command to fast in the scriptures.
3. Fasting (**self-denial**) was their only active participation in this sacrifice.
 - a. ALL other sacrifices had to be presented by the one offering.
 - b. On the Day of Atonement they were spectators as the High priest entered the most holy place to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat.

B. This command was made null and void by the sacrifice of Jesus.**S#7.**

1. Jesus is the High Priest of a kingdom of priests.

Heb. 2:17 – Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

2. Jesus made atonement once for all time.

Heb. 9: 12 – and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

S#8.

3. **Thus**, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and its fast is no more

C. Though not commanded in scripture fasting is assumed in scripture.

1. **Matt. 6: 16** – Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. **17** "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face **18** so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

S#9.

2. Whenever you fast, & when you fast imply that it's anticipated fasting will occur.
3. Improper fasting is here rebuked and **instruction** is given for proper fasting.
4. A **reward** is promised for proper fasting.

D. Fasting is almost a lost doctrine in our time and especially in this country, but there are numerous examples in scripture of God's people fasting.

1. **In the O.T.** ... Moses, Samson, Samuel, Hannah, Saul, Jonathan, David, Elijah, Jehoshaphat, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
2. **In the N.T.** ... John the Baptizer, Jesus, prophets and teacher at Antioch, Paul

II. Fasting is neither an act of righteousness nor a ritual to perform.**S#10.****A. The Jews thought that fasting made them righteous.****S#11.**

1. **Luke 18: 11** – The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'
2. God wants man's heart, but the Pharisees thought external acts made them righteous.
3. Today people repeat the prayers of others (**rosary**) thinking it makes them righteous.

B. They viewed fasting as an act of general piety, so the Pharisees wanted to be seen.

1. **Matt. 6: 16** – Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. S#12.
2. The Pharisees wanted others to believe they were pious.
 - a. They put **ashes** (or dust) on their heads.
 - b. They **disfigured** their faces with things that functioned like makeup.
 - c. Their two days were on market days when the most people would be in town.
- * 3. The Babylonian Talmud says of fasting : (quoting a commentator)
 - a. *“He who blackens his face with ashes shall shine in the glory.”*
 - b. The rabbi believed there would be a special place of glory for one who fasted and covered his face with ashes.
 - c. Thus, they believed that fasting was a way to deal with sin, to achieve redemption.

C. The Jewish ritual fasting is the origin of Ash Wednesday.S#13.

1. The ashes on the forehead are to signify that one is observing the fast called lent.
2. This is exactly the circumstance Jesus addressed in **Matthew 6**, etc.
- * 3. Beware of anything you do to impress someone.

D. In condemning public displays, Jesus was emphasizing that God desires hearts.**III. When and why should a Christian fast?**S#14.**A. Principle : Fasting is corollary to one’s spiritual warfare. (*not a ritual*)**S#15.

1. Fasting must be an expression of one’s heart which has been triggered by ...
2. Fasting is never done alone ... it is inexorably linked to prayer.
 - a. **Luke 2:37** – A prophetess, Anna ... **37** and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.
 - b. It’s a one way link, **i.e.**, *fasting is linked to prayer,*
but *prayer isn’t linked to fasting.*
 - c. Without prayer, there is no cause for fasting.

B. A spiritual person will know when it is an occasion to fast and pray.

1. When praying for something one strongly desires ... David for his child. S#16.

II Sam. 12: 16 – David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

(*The child bore the consequences of the parents’ sin, but not the guilt.*)

2. Fasting is associated with mourning or spiritual distress. S#17.
 - a. **Matt. 9: 14** – Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" **15** And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.
 - * b. **When will Christians fast?** From the time Jesus is taken from us until He returns.
3. Fasting is a normal response when one is lamenting.
 - a. In response to a plague of locust on Israel the prophet said fasting was appropriate. S#18.
Joel 2: 12 – "Yet even now," declares the Lord, return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; **13** And rend your heart and not your garments." ... **15** Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly
 - b. When Saul, the king of Israel and his sons were slain in battle. S#19.
I Sam. 31: 12 – ... took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. **13** They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.
 - c. Upon learning the walls of Jerusalem were torn down, Nehemiah fasted. S#20.
Neh. 1: 4 – When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven
 - * d. *It would be totally appropriate for Christians to pray and fast over the state of U.S.*
4. In times of fear when begging protection fasting will accompany one's prayers.
 - a. As Ezra journeyed toward Jerusalem he prayed with fasting. S#21.
Ezra 8: 21 – Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.
 - b. Esther asked the people to fast when she risked her life for them. S#22.
Esther 4:15 – Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, **16** "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."
- C. Fasting and prayer is an appropriate response to sin in one's life. S#23.
 1. When confronted with the consequence of his sins even the wicked Ahab fasted.
I Kings 21: 27 – It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently.

2. The prophet Samuel told Israel to repent of idolatry and they fasted.

I Sam. 7: 6 – They gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out **S#24.**
before the Lord, and fasted on that day and said there, " We have sinned
against the Lord." And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah.

3. The Saul of Tarsus (Paul) fasted after being confronted by Jesus.

Acts 9: 9 – And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

- * 4. *When one feels sincerely remorseful for sin, fasting is a natural response.*

D. A congregation should pray and fast when choosing leaders or preachers. S#25.

1. **Acts 14: 23** – When they had appointed elders for them in every church,
having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord
in whom they had believed.

2. **Acts 13: 2** – While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the **S#26.**
Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the
work to which I have called them." 3 Then, when they had fasted
and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

IV. How does one fast ?

S#27.

A. In its truest sense the word fast (nesteuo) means to abstain from food. S#28.

B. The act of abstaining is a reflection of the state of one's heart not a ritual.

1. Fasting is a very private thing.

Matt. 6: 18 – so that your fasting will not be noticed by men,

2. One must maintain his appearance and personal hygiene while fasting.

Matt. 6: 17 – when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face

C. Fasts can be for different durations. S#29.

1. Moses and Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, but those were miraculous.
2. Esther's fast was complete for three days ... no food or drink. **4:16**

D. Fasting can be from specific things, but not all.

1. Daniel fasted from all "good" food for three weeks.

Dan. 10: 2 – In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire
weeks. 3 I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth,
nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed

2. **I Cor. 7: 5** ... Abstain from sex as a way of magnifying prayers. (**Ex. 19:15**)

CONCLUSION :

A. Fasting is a matter of the heart, not an acts to be performed.

S#30.

1. Fasting should be done in secret. **Matt. 6, Luke 2**
2. Fasting can be a group activity. **Acts 13: 2-3, Jonah 3: 5, Ezra 8:21, etc.**

B. Fasting is a God-ordained way to get God's attention for doing good.

1. **Isa. 58: 4** – Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. **5 Is it a fast like this which I choose,** a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?
2. God views fasting as a way man demonstrates to God that he has humbled his heart.

S#31.

C. There is a reward for fasting properly.

S#32.

Matt. 6: 17 – But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face **18** so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

D. God expects fasting, but He does not command it.

S#33.

1. Your heart must demand it.
2. Like a spiritual barometer you will know when fasting is appropriate.

INVITATION :

Lesson Text :**Isaiah 58: 1-12**

1 Cry loudly, do not hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgression and to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God. 3 'Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?' Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard all your workers. 4 Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. 5 'Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord? 6 'Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, 10 And if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday. 11 And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. 12 Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

Luke 18: 9-14

9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."