

The Blessings of Fasting

Acts 13:1-3

By Phil Kayser

When people look at a passage on fasting like this one, they frequently don't see it as applying to themselves. They will read the passage and believe it. But they don't apply it. After all, we don't live in the first century. We aren't leaders of the church. We certainly aren't prophets and apostles. And so the prayer, fasting and power that resulted are also discounted.

But I think Luke was writing to indicate that fasting was a regular part of the church's ministry. Now I'm not going to mandate that you fast any more than I am going to mandate that you enjoy a good desert at our house. But you are gypping yourself when you fail to enjoy both. And I will say that if you have not fasted in the last year, you have robbed yourself of incredible blessings. You are the poorer for it.

The great Presbyterian theologian, Charles Hodge said, "All eminently pious persons have been more or less addicted to this mode of spiritual culture." (Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, p. 263) Why would they be more or less addicted to fasting? Because, says Hodge, they know something about the power that fasting has to bless us in our Christian walk. I recently read a book on fasting that documented incredible things that God has done through fasting. People who have had zero success in kicking an addiction to a drug like cocaine have had the cravings completely removed after a few days of total fasting. Others have testified to how God has infused their prayers with heightened faith after a period of fasting. Others have spoken of healings that have come into their body after a week or two of fasting. He pointed to a number of people who were under weight finally gaining weight for the first time after a week of fasting. Very fascinating. But there are so many blessings that accrue through fasting that Jeremy Taylor said, "He who would recount the benefits of fasting, might just as well, in the next page, attempt to enumerate the benefits of medicine." And his point was that they are too many to put on one page. Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Owen, Flavel and many, many others have joined the testimony of Scripture in saying that there is a close, close connection between fasting and spiritual victory. And you might say, "But that doesn't make any sense. I can't see any cause and effect relationship." But let me tell you a secret. The physical is not the only component of this cause and effect universe.

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There is a cause and effect relationship in the realm of the unseen that powerfully impacts our lives, and *fasting has a relationship to this unseen world*. I could preach on a number of topics from these first three verses. This is one of the most referenced passages on cross cultural missions because it is the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys, and because of the diversity of the leadership, and the uniqueness of Antioch in Paul's missionary journeys. This is a wonderful passage on the subject of the call of God in a person's life. If we analyzed the historical situation in Antioch we would find that this small church had an influence worldwide that was far more powerful than Jerusalem had. And so there are at least some principles about how to be a church of influence. But I think that at the heart of all those other lessons is the lesson found in verse 2 – **they ministered to the Lord and fasted...** So that's all I'm going to talk about today. We're not going to even address the other subjects.

I. The Context of this fasting & prayer

**A. Converted, justified, and baptized in the Spirit
believers who were fasting (contrast this with Is. 58:3;
Zech. 7:5-6). Fasting is compatible with grace.**

We are going to look first of all at the context of this fasting because we can get ourselves into legalism if we do not. And the first thing that I want to point out is that the ones who were fasting were already believers who were secure in God's grace. In fact, God does not accept the fasting of an unbeliever. Isaiah 58 speaks of people who tried to gain God's favor through fasting, and it didn't work. They complain about it. They say, “**Why have we fasted, and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?**” (Is. 58:3). That whole chapter gives incredible promises of what fasting will produce. But it also tells about things that will make our fasting utterly ineffective. So if you have tried fasting and have seen no positive results, try reading Isaiah 58 as a diagnostic tool. But as you read through that chapter, you will look in vain for evidence that we need to fast in order to try to gain God's favor. It's very important to realize that it is only through the merits of Jesus that we can find favor with God and power with God. But once we are justified (declared righteous because Christ's righteousness has been legally given to us and our sins have legally been given to Christ), God's grace must continue to govern every discipline that we do and makes those disciplines acceptable to God. But apart from grace, fasting is useless. And for that matter, eating is useless because it is not done

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for God's glory, but is of man, through man and to man. It is the very

opposite of Christian fasting. God tells the Jews in Zechariah 7:5-6, **When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me – for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?** Until you are converted and justified, fasting will achieve nothing and feasting will achieve nothing. Even as a *Christian*, we cannot gain God's favor through fasting. We fast out of a sense of God's favor and out of a desire to glorify Him.

But point A also means that fasting *does indeed have relevance* to those who are secure in God's grace. It is not legalistic. These men were converted, justified, Holy Spirit baptized believers. They saw nothing in conflict between fasting and grace. And indeed it is grace that enables fasting and every other discipline to become (as Romans 11:36 words it) **of Him and through Him and to Him**. That should be the goal of our fasting. So that's the first contextual clue: these are believers and fasting is appropriate for grace-filled believers.

B. After Pentecost (v. 1; see misinterpretation of Luke 5:33-35; Matt 28:20; cf Matt 15:32; Mark 9:29; John 4:32; 2:17; Ps. 69:10; 2 Cor. 11:27)

The second obvious contextual marker is that Acts chapter 13 comes after Acts chapter 2. And the reason I make such an obvious statement is that there are many people who think that the church doesn't need to fast after Pentecost. They get to that conclusion from a misreading of Luke 5:33-35. You might as well be familiar with this passage since it is the most frequently marshaled objection to fasting in our day.

Luke 5, beginning at verse 33. **Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?" And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."**

And you might think, "Wow! Why would they use that verse? It seems to *call* for fasting in our age." But here's the argument that they use: They say that the days when the bridegroom is taken away is not now but is a reference to the three days that He would be in the grave. But once Pentecost happens, Christ comes to His people through His Spirit, and from that point on Jesus words are true when He says, **Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age**. If Christ is with us, and if He has promised to The Blessings of Fasting (Acts 13:1-3) • Page 4

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never leave us nor forsake us, then this can't be the time of fasting. They say fasting is only intended when the Bridegroom is taken away. But he *is* with

us. And so, there is a certain logic to their argument.

But let me give you five reasons why that is a fallacious argument.

First, when did Jesus make the promise: **Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age**”? He made it *before* Pentecost, right? Specifically 10 days before Pentecost. He didn’t say, “Once Pentecost come, lo I am with you.” Question: In what way was Jesus absent in the grave that He was not absent for those ten days? It doesn’t make sense.

The second reason is that Jesus and the disciples did indeed fast during His ministry on earth. So He is not talking about a total absence of fasting, even if their claim is true that the bridegroom is not absent now.

Third, it appears that Jesus was contrasting the disciples infrequent fasting with frequent fasting in the future. John fasted often; they didn’t. But the implication is that in the future they would fast often just like John did. Since Christ and the disciples did do *some* fasting, such a contrast does not make sense for the three days that He was in the tomb. They had fasted that long before. Christ began His ministry with a fast; the disciples and Christ fasted for *three days* in Matthew 15. There is no contrast *there*, right? Christ indicated in Mark 9:29 that the reason He could cast out that demon was because He had been in prayer and fasting. He said, **This kind can come out by *nothing* but prayer and fasting**. Notice how absolute that is. That implies that Jesus had been fasting. Jesus refused food in John 4:31-32. They fasted on the Day of Atonement each year as mandated by God’s law. John 2:17 quotes Psalm 69:10 as being the words of Christ – **the zeal of your house has eaten me up**. Well, let me read you the rest of that sentence in (which is also the words of Christ): **Because the zeal of your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting...** Apparently Jesus had been fasting when He wept over Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. And so that contrast simply does not hold up. There is no contrast between the infrequent fastings throughout His ministry and three days of fasting in the tomb. They fasted many more days than those three days. That just doesn’t make any sense.

The fourth problem with this view is that the absence that Jesus had while in the tomb was not as to His Godhood, but only as to His manhood. He was not gone as to His Godhead. If He ever ceased to be omnipresent at any time, He would cease to be God. So He was only taken away as to His manhood. He was in the grave. They couldn’t see Him. But the next question is obvious. In what sense is Christ with us now? It obviously is

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not as man. We don’t see His body. If Christ’s human body was omnipresent, He would no longer be man; He would no longer be in every

point like us, except without sin. Orthodoxy holds that as to His manhood, Christ is locally in heaven on His throne. As to His Godhood, he is omnipresent. So Christ is absent from us now in the same way that He was absent in the grave – He was physically absent. Therefore, this text actually becomes a strong proof text that the church will engage in fasting throughout this present age. And of course that interpretation is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. They fasted some during Christ's ministry. They fasted often later. For example, in 2 Corinthians 11:27 Paul says that he was **in fastings often**.

C. Condoned by church leaders, teachers and prophets (v. 2-3)

The fifth reason this is fallacious is actually point C – and that is that these leaders obviously didn't interpret Luke 5 the way some modern antinomians do. They obviously thought fasting continued to be appropriate for the church. And if it was appropriate in Acts 13, fifteen years after Christ's death, there is no logical reason why it is not appropriate today. So, it was justified saints who fasted, they did it after the death of Christ, it was condoned by church leaders, teachers and prophets. They had the mind of Christ on this.

D. Done by a group, not just solo (vv. 1-3; compare wrong interpretation of Matt 6:16-18)

But a fourth thing that the context teaches us is that it was done by a group, not just solo. Some people think that fasting is inappropriate if others know about it. And they appeal to Matthew 6. Matthew 6:16-18 tells people who are tempted to be proud about their fasting to go fast in secret. That's a great exercise to crucify our pride. Christ was addressing wrong motivations. If the only time you fast, pray or do charitable deeds is when others see you, you have wrong motivations. Christ was saying that at least some of your prayers need to be in private where nobody sees it. At least some of your fasting and charitable deeds need to be in private. But this does not rule out some public fasting, charity or prayer. And I bring this up because this group of prophets who had the mind of Christ were engaging in some prayer and fasting that others could see. That is a defacto interpretation of Matthew 6. In their mind, Christ was not giving an absolute principle, but a remedy for crucifying wrong motivations.

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E. Was the occasion of the Spirit's guidance (v. 2; see Ex. 33:18; 2 Chron. 20:3; Joel 1:14; 2:12; 2:15 with 2:28-32; Acts 13:2; 10:30)

A fifth contextual factor that is significant is that this fasting was the occasion of the Spirit's guidance. Verse 2 says, **As they ministered to the**

Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said... I put it under context because we can't manipulate God to do anything with our prayers and fastings. But it is frequently in the context of prayer and fasting that God delights in giving guidance, and He delights in giving other manifestations of the Spirit. Let me give you some examples.

In Exodus 33 Moses longed to see more of God's glory, and it was in the context of fasting that God showed him more and more of his glory. There were other times when God poured out His Spirit in revival in the Old Testament, and frequently you see that the people had afflicted their souls with fasting. My favorite revival is that under Jehoshaphat, and it says, **"Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."** (2 Chronicles 20:3). When Rehoboam, and Hezekiah longed for a fresh visitation of God's Spirit in their land, what did they do? They humbled themselves in fasting.

Arthur Wallis points out the close connection between the three calls to fasting in the book of Joel and the subsequent prophesy of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius was preceded by four days of fasting. If you long for a fresh visitation of the Spirit's power and glory in our midst, if you with Paul desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, then like Paul God may stir you up to be in fastings often.

Bruce Hunt, one of our missionaries in Korea, relates absolutely miraculous changes that came over Christians' lives through prayer and fasting. Charles Spurgeon said, "our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."

F. Accompanied the sending out of missionaries (vv. 3-4; see 14:23)

The final contextual issue that we see is that verse 3 shows that even after the Spirit has guided them to exactly who should be sent out as missionaries, they called for a further fast. They saw the setting of these missionaries apart as being so important, that they chose to prolong the fasting that they were already doing. This stands in such stark contrast to the ordinations that are done today. In the PCA you see officers being elected

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and ordained without so much as a prayer meeting. It's just business as usual. But look at chapter 14:23. It says, **And when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord....** These are the kinds of contexts that call for fasting.

Obviously this passage does not give us an exhaustive list, but it does give us a representative list. If you want more teaching on this, I've got an outline

that you can study and several books that you can read.¹

II. The Purpose of this fasting and prayer

A. It ministered to the Lord (v. 2; see Luke 2:37; Rom. 11:36; Ps. 25:14)

But let's move on to Roman numeral II. Luke does explicitly give two purposes for fasting. The first purpose is in verse 2. **As they ministered to the Lord and fasted...** Notice that this is a Godward focus. The word for "ministered" is a word used of Old Testament priests. You might not think of our prayers and fastings as ministering to the Lord, but they do. They are every bit as significant as the sacrifices that the Old Testament priests offered up. Luke 2:37 speaks of aged Anna as one who **served God with fastings and prayers night and day**. She served God with fastings and prayers. Now there may not be a lot that we can do, but we can fast and pray, and Luke 2 says that God will receive this as service.

And you might wonder, "How in the world does it serve God and serve His purposes?" Let me give you some hints. I would say that it serves God by fulfilling God's purpose that all things submit to Him, glorify Him and depend upon Him. Romans 11:36 gives the purpose of the universe – **For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever**. When we fast, we are denying ourselves in order to focus on God. We are making ourselves realize how weak and dependent and needy we really are. We are humbling ourselves. We are destroying the idolatry of the stomach. All of those things drive us deeper and deeper into God's purpose for the universe. But this in turn makes us receptive to what God has for us. When we humble ourselves, God lifts us up. When we put Him first, He makes us first. When we abandon our own agendas, He opens our eyes to

¹ I especially recommend John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997); David R. Smith, *Fasting: A Neglected Discipline* (Norwich: Rule Book, Hughs & Coleman Ltd, 1954). Wesley L. Duewel, "You Can Deepen Your Prayer by Fasting," in *Touch the World Through Prayer* (Zondervan/Francis & Taylor: Grand Rapids, 1986). Wesley L. Duewel, "Jesus Said They Would Fast," and "Fasting Strengthens Prayer" in *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* (Zondervan/Asbury Press: Grand Rapids, 1990). Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, "Fasting," in *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

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His agendas. Psalm 25:14 says, **The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant**. And so (ironically) ministering to the Lord makes us most ministered to. When Moses ministered to the heart of God in prayer and fasting God gave him revelation, showed him His glory, and drew Moses into deeper relationship. When Anna ministered to God with prayer and fasting God gave her guidance and blessed her. And the same was true in this passage. God is interested in both the outflow and the inflow from the lake of our lives. And

we will find that we will never be able to out give God. But fasting is one of the ways that we minister to His heart.

B. It went hand in hand with intense prayer (v. 3)

The second purpose is that fasting transforms our prayers and causes *them* to grow. Verse 3 says, **having fasted and prayed...** Twelve times the Bible puts the words fasting and prayer together, but the concepts are placed together much more frequently. Fasting needs *prayer* to keep it from degenerating into a man-centered exercise. But prayer needs *fasting* if it is to grow. They feed off of each other. Andrew Murray once said, “*Prayer needs fasting for its full growth*. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand... with which we let go of the visible.”

And it does this in a number of ways. Over and over the Scripture says that fasting humbles us before our Sovereign God. Since God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, it means that fasting ushers us into the supernatural. He gives more grace to the humble. Thirdly, it increases our faith. Fourth, it realigns our priorities. Fifth, it transforms our prayer motives from selfish to God-centered prayer motives. Sixth, Calvin said that fasting creates a greater ardency and fervency in prayer and worship.² Matthew Henry agreed. He said, “[Fasting] is a means to curb the flesh and the desires of it, and to make us more lively in religious exercises...” In fact, Wesley Duewell points out that the effects flow both ways. He says, “Fasting can deepen hunger for God to work. Spiritual hunger and fasting have a reciprocal power. Each deepens and strengthens the other. Each makes the other more effective. When your spiritual hunger becomes very deep, you may even lose the desire for food. All of the most intense forms of prevailing prayer... can be deepened, clarified, and greatly empowered by fasting.”³ To me this is an incredible benefit of fasting. And it shows the graciousness of God. While God resists the proud, He loves to pour out His

² “serious and ardent affection and persevere in it.” (Institutes IV.XII.15,16)

³ *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, p. 188.

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bounties upon those who humble themselves in fasting. It doesn’t earn God’s favor; it receives God’s favor. There is a big difference between those two. Fasting does not earn God’s favor by is a means of faith receiving God’s favor, blessing and empowering. So those are the primary two purposes: to make us more God-focused and to make our prayers more effective in connecting with God.

III. The result of this fasting and prayer

A. Guidance (v. 2; see Ezra 8:21-23)

Well, if all that we have said is true, we would expect to see some hints in this passage of the positive results of fasting. And I think there are

two that are hinted at. Verse 2 is not explicit, but it is a hint that guidance comes through fasting. **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.”** Throughout the ages God's people have sought God's guidance through fasting. And if you have an issue that you are puzzled over, I would encourage you to take off a couple of days, go off by yourself and pray with only your Bible and some water. Ezra 8:21-23 says,

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us [There's this result of fasting – “to seek from Him the right way for us”] **and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.”** [He opened His big mouth and *now* he was *forced* to trust God and it scared him. Verse 23] **So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.**

Why did they fast? He says, **to seek from Him the right way for us.** It was guidance they needed. You may be stepping out into uncharted territories and you are just as nervous as they were. Well, there are many Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments that speak of God's guidance and direction clearly coming after a time of prayer and fasting. Judges 20 has all Israel fasting as they *inquired of the Lord* what they ought to do about the horrible iniquity in Benjamin. So, guidance

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B. Power and blessing (vv. 3ff; for some specific examples, see separate outline – see also Psalm 35:13; 1 Cor. 9:27; Ps. 69:10; Isaiah 58; Dan. 9:3 with 9:20-27; 10:3 with 10:12-13,20-21; Matt. 4:1-11; 17:18-21; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 9:1 with 9:40-42; 10:19; Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 9:25-27)

The second result of this fasting that is hinted at is power and blessing. The reason I say that this is hinting at a second result is that the fasting in verse 3 is not to seek guidance. They already know who is supposed to go out into missions. God already gave them guidance. This is now a new fast and a new result. They are now fasting to seek God's blessing upon this huge and scary task that now lies before them. And it's a

good thing. In verses 4-12 you see them up against a powerful sorcerer who withstood them. You see a government official coming to faith in Christ. Barnabas and Paul are going to face many challenges and potential pitfalls in their ministry, and they know that they need to fast and pray for God's power and blessing.

Let me outline some of the ways in which fasting brings God's power and blessing to bear in our lives. First, it aids us in the mortification of our sinful desires. Mortification means "putting to death." When you fast because of sin and you pray for victory over a given sin you are in effect saying what Job said, **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.** You are proving that you really believe what Job said there. Lord, I would rather go hungry than to let this sin get me again.

Some other benefits: David said, **I humbled myself with fasting** (Psalm 35:13). Isn't that an interesting result? Pride is almost impossible to conquer; yet here is a Scripture that says that fasting has the power to crucify pride. Paul said, **But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified** (1 Cor. 9:27). Fasting is a means of disciplining the body and keeping its desires under control. Many authors have testified to the relationship between gaining control of the urge to eat and beginning to have less and less temptations sexually. One person said, "The beneficial results of the fast are felt first in the sexual sphere. I have easily verified the connection established by the Ancients between the first two 'principal vices,' gluttony and lust, and consequently between the corresponding disciplines: fasting and chastity." Pure Life Ministries makes this an essential element of their successful program of getting porn addicts out of their sexual bondage. Anyway, this author goes on, "It will surprise no one if

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I confess that I am subject to anxiety and irritation, sadness and nervousness, to say nothing of vanity, touchiness or envy... The habit of fasting effects a profound appeasement of all these instinctive movements."4 Fasting is a spiritual aid to subduing all sinful desires and so David said, **I chasten myself with fasting.** (Psalm 69:10. One version had it, "I mortify myself with fasting." I die to self and become alive to the Spirit."

Many verses testify to the power that fasting gives us over demons. (Dan. 9:3 with 9:20-27; 10:3 with 10:12-13,20-21; Matt. 4:1-11; 17:18-21; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 9:1 with 9:40-42; 10:19; Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 9:25-27 Turn with me to Daniel 10. This chapter records a terrible battle that went on in the land of Persia. Only it wasn't a physical battle. It was a spiritual battle between demons and angels who were fighting over the region of Persia. Let's cut into the middle of the story at verses 10-13

Then suddenly a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

The angel said that this intense spiritual warfare was going on because of two things: 1) Daniel's prayer and 2) Daniel's humbling of himself. The phrase "to humble yourself" is a synonym for fasting in Hebrew and if you will look at verse 3 you will see that this is exactly what Daniel had been doing for that whole three week period that the warfare had been going on. He said, **I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.**

What's three weeks? Twenty-one days – the same number of days for the warfare. And that fasting made his prayers effective and ushered him into a victorious battle against the demon prince who was over Persia. There is a book called *Power Through Prayer*.⁴ But an even more appropriate title

⁴ Adelbert de Vogue, quoted by Piper on page 205.

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would be *Power through Prayer and Fasting* since those two concepts seem to go hand in hand throughout the Bible.

You are probably all familiar with the time when the disciples couldn't cast out a demon. They tried and tried and they were unsuccessful. Well Christ comes along, casts out the demon, and that prompts the disciples to ask, **"Why could we not cast him out?"** [Why could you do it and we couldn't do it? Christ's answer was not that "Well, I'm divine and you're not." He expects that they should have been doing like He did. The only clue He gives to them as to the difference between *His* power and *their* power is fasting.] **So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."**

Mark 9 indicates that there are some spiritual battles with demons that you simply will not win if you neglect this exercise of fasting. We need to do it and we need to teach it to our children. If Christ the perfect man needed fasting in his warfare with Satan, how much more so do we? And by

the way, that instructs us that fasting is not needed simply because we are sinners. Probably the most intense spiritual battle with Satan that ever went on in the history of mankind was a battle waged by the perfect Man Jesus, and it lasted for 40 days in the wilderness. We are all familiar with the four last temptations, but Luke 4:2 tells us that Christ was tempted by Satan for the full forty day period, and thus the forty days of fasting. There are some spiritual battles that you simply will not be able to win if you do not resort to this humbling discipline. And don't think this is just Phil Kayser talking.

Thousands of saints have testified that fasting works. It really works.

I've already quoted Charles Hodge. He said, "All eminently pious persons have been more or less addicted to this mode of spiritual culture." (Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, p. 263) In fact, once you experience more extended periods of fasting for one or two weeks of nothing but water, you love it. There is a power there that was previously absent.

Isaiah 58 gives a long summary of the benefits of godly fasting. And we will end with this passage. Here are the results of a God-centered fasting:

God says, **Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you: the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." ... Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.** Isn't that incredible? Let me summarize the

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benefits. Answered prayer, guidance, spiritual healing, spiritual satisfaction and refreshment, spiritual strength and vigor and prosperity. And those may seem like exaggerated claims, yet godly saints all down through history have testified to the tremendous spiritual vigor that fasting has brought into their lives. That's why Christ says, **your Father who sees in secret will reward you.** That is the promise of a God who cannot lie. I hope you do not neglect this spiritual discipline. Amen

Children of God, I charge you to take seriously the spiritual tool of fasting. And may it bring you the blessings and power of Isaiah 58. Amen. © Copyright 2007 by Phillip G. Kayser. Permission is granted to all readers to download, print, and distribute on paper or electronically any Sermons, provided that each reprint bear this copyright notice, current address, and telephone number, and provided that all such reproductions are distributed to the public without charge. They may not be sold or issued in book form, CD-ROM form, or microfiche without prior permission.

Phillip G. Kayser • Dominion Covenant Church • 307.N 41st Ave. Omaha, NE 68131 • 402.934.3300

The Blessings of Fasting

Acts 13:1-3

By Phil Kayser

When people look at a passage on fasting like this one, they frequently don't see it as applying to themselves. They will read the passage and believe it. But they don't apply it. After all, we don't live in the first century. We aren't leaders of the church. We certainly aren't prophets and apostles. And so the prayer, fasting and power that resulted are also discounted.

But I think Luke was writing to indicate that fasting was a regular part of the church's ministry. Now I'm not going to mandate that you fast any more than I am going to mandate that you enjoy a good desert at our house. But you are gypping yourself when you fail to enjoy both. And I will say that if you have not fasted in the last year, you have robbed yourself of incredible blessings. You are the poorer for it.

The great Presbyterian theologian, Charles Hodge said, "All eminently pious persons have been more or less addicted to this mode of spiritual culture." (Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, p. 263) Why would they be more or less addicted to fasting? Because, says Hodge, they know something about the power that fasting has to bless us in our Christian walk. I recently read a book on fasting that documented incredible things that God has done through fasting. People who have had zero success in kicking an addiction to a drug like cocaine have had the cravings completely removed after a few days of total fasting. Others have testified to how God has infused their prayers with heightened faith after a period of fasting. Others have spoken of healings that have come into their body after a week or two of fasting. He pointed to a number of people who were under weight finally gaining weight for the first time after a week of fasting. Very fascinating. But there are so many blessings that accrue through fasting that Jeremy Taylor said, "He who would recount the benefits of fasting, might just as well, in the next page, attempt to enumerate the benefits of medicine." And his point was that they are too many to put on one page. Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Owen, Flavel and many, many others have joined the testimony of Scripture in saying that there is a close, close connection between fasting and spiritual victory. And you might say, "But that doesn't make any sense. I can't see any cause and effect relationship." But let me tell you a secret. The physical is not the only component of this cause and effect universe.

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There is a cause and effect relationship in the realm of the unseen that powerfully impacts our lives, and *fasting has a relationship to this unseen world*. I could preach on a number of topics from these first three verses. This is one of the most referenced passages on cross cultural missions because it is the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys, and because of the

diversity of the leadership, and the uniqueness of Antioch in Paul's missionary journeys. This is a wonderful passage on the subject of the call of God in a person's life. If we analyzed the historical situation in Antioch we would find that this small church had an influence worldwide that was far more powerful than Jerusalem had. And so there are at least some principles about how to be a church of influence. But I think that at the heart of all those other lessons is the lesson found in verse 2 – **they ministered to the Lord and fasted...** So that's all I'm going to talk about today. We're not going to even address the other subjects.

I. The Context of this fasting & prayer

A. Converted, justified, and baptized in the Spirit believers who were fasting (contrast this with Is. 58:3; Zech. 7:5-6). Fasting is compatible with grace.

We are going to look first of all at the context of this fasting because we can get ourselves into legalism if we do not. And the first thing that I want to point out is that the ones who were fasting were already believers who were secure in God's grace. In fact, God does not accept the fasting of an unbeliever. Isaiah 58 speaks of people who tried to gain God's favor through fasting, and it didn't work. They complain about it. They say, “**Why have we fasted, and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?**” (Is. 58:3). That whole chapter gives incredible promises of what fasting will produce. But it also tells about things that will make our fasting utterly ineffective. So if you have tried fasting and have seen no positive results, try reading Isaiah 58 as a diagnostic tool. But as you read through that chapter, you will look in vain for evidence that we need to fast in order to try to gain God's favor. It's very important to realize that it is only through the merits of Jesus that we can find favor with God and power with God. But once we are justified (declared righteous because Christ's righteousness has been legally given to us and our sins have legally been given to Christ), God's grace must continue to govern every discipline that we do and makes those disciplines acceptable to God. But apart from grace, fasting is useless. And for that matter, eating is useless because it is not done

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for God's glory, but is of man, through man and to man. It is the very opposite of Christian fasting. God tells the Jews in Zechariah 7:5-6, **When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me – for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?** Until you are converted and justified, fasting will achieve nothing and feasting will achieve nothing. Even as a *Christian*, we cannot gain God's favor through fasting. We fast out of a sense of God's favor and out of a desire to glorify

Him.

But point A also means that fasting *does indeed have relevance* to those who are secure in God's grace. It is not legalistic. These men were converted, justified, Holy Spirit baptized believers. They saw nothing in conflict between fasting and grace. And indeed it is grace that enables fasting and every other discipline to become (as Romans 11:36 words it) **of Him and through Him and to Him**. That should be the goal of our fasting. So that's the first contextual clue: these are believers and fasting is appropriate for grace-filled believers.

B. After Pentecost (v. 1; see misinterpretation of Luke 5:33-35; Matt 28:20; cf Matt 15:32; Mark 9:29; John 4:32; 2:17; Ps. 69:10; 2 Cor. 11:27)

The second obvious contextual marker is that Acts chapter 13 comes after Acts chapter 2. And the reason I make such an obvious statement is that there are many people who think that the church doesn't need to fast after Pentecost. They get to that conclusion from a misreading of Luke 5:33-35. You might as well be familiar with this passage since it is the most frequently marshaled objection to fasting in our day.

Luke 5, beginning at verse 33. **Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?" And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."**

And you might think, "Wow! Why would they use that verse? It seems to *call* for fasting in our age." But here's the argument that they use: They say that the days when the bridegroom is taken away is not now but is a reference to the three days that He would be in the grave. But once Pentecost happens, Christ comes to His people through His Spirit, and from that point on Jesus words are true when He says, **Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age**. If Christ is with us, and if He has promised to

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never leave us nor forsake us, then this can't be the time of fasting. They say fasting is only intended when the Bridegroom is taken away. But he *is* with us. And so, there is a certain logic to their argument.

But let me give you five reasons why that is a fallacious argument.

First, when did Jesus make the promise: **Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age**? He made it *before* Pentecost, right? Specifically 10 days before Pentecost. He didn't say, "Once Pentecost come, lo I am with you." Question: In what way was Jesus absent in the grave that He was not absent for those ten days? It doesn't make sense.

The second reason is that Jesus and the disciples did indeed fast during His ministry on earth. So He is not talking about a total absence of fasting, even if their claim is true that the bridegroom is not absent now. Third, it appears that Jesus was contrasting the disciples infrequent fasting with frequent fasting in the future. John fasted often; they didn't. But the implication is that in the future they would fast often just like John did. Since Christ and the disciples did do *some* fasting, such a contrast does not make sense for the three days that He was in the tomb. They had fasted that long before. Christ began His ministry with a fast; the disciples and Christ fasted for *three days* in Matthew 15. There is no contrast *there*, right? Christ indicated in Mark 9:29 that the reason He could cast out that demon was because He had been in prayer and fasting. He said, **This kind can come out by *nothing* but prayer and fasting.** Notice how absolute that is. That implies that Jesus had been fasting. Jesus refused food in John 4:31-32. They fasted on the Day of Atonement each year as mandated by God's law. John 2:17 quotes Psalm 69:10 as being the words of Christ – **the zeal of your house has eaten me up.** Well, let me read you the rest of that sentence in (which is also the words of Christ): **Because the zeal of your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting...** Apparently Jesus had been fasting when He wept over Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. And so that contrast simply does not hold up. There is no contrast between the infrequent fastings throughout His ministry and three days of fasting in the tomb. They fasted many more days than those three days. That just doesn't make any sense.

The fourth problem with this view is that the absence that Jesus had while in the tomb was not as to His Godhood, but only as to His manhood. He was not gone as to His Godhead. If He ever ceased to be omnipresent at any time, He would cease to be God. So He was only taken away as to His manhood. He was in the grave. They couldn't see Him. But the next question is obvious. In what sense is Christ with us now? It obviously is

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not as man. We don't see His body. If Christ's human body was omnipresent, He would no longer be man; He would no longer be in every point like us, except without sin. Orthodoxy holds that as to His manhood, Christ is locally in heaven on His throne. As to His Godhood, he is omnipresent. So Christ is absent from us now in the same way that He was absent in the grave – He was physically absent. Therefore, this text actually becomes a strong proof text that the church will engage in fasting throughout this present age. And of course that interpretation is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. They fasted some during Christ's ministry. They

fasted often later. For example, in 2 Corinthians 11:27 Paul says that he was **in fastings often**.

C. Condoned by church leaders, teachers and prophets (v. 2-3)

The fifth reason this is fallacious is actually point C – and that is that these leaders obviously didn't interpret Luke 5 the way some modern antinomians do. They obviously thought fasting continued to be appropriate for the church. And if it was appropriate in Acts 13, fifteen years after Christ's death, there is no logical reason why it is not appropriate today. So, it was justified saints who fasted, they did it after the death of Christ, it was condoned by church leaders, teachers and prophets. They had the mind of Christ on this.

D. Done by a group, not just solo (vv. 1-3; compare wrong interpretation of Matt 6:16-18)

But a fourth thing that the context teaches us is that it was done by a group, not just solo. Some people think that fasting is inappropriate if others know about it. And they appeal to Matthew 6. Matthew 6:16-18 tells people who are tempted to be proud about their fasting to go fast in secret. That's a great exercise to crucify our pride. Christ was addressing wrong motivations. If the only time you fast, pray or do charitable deeds is when others see you, you have wrong motivations. Christ was saying that at least some of your prayers need to be in private where nobody sees it. At least some of your fasting and charitable deeds need to be in private. But this does not rule out some public fasting, charity or prayer. And I bring this up because this group of prophets who had the mind of Christ were engaging in some prayer and fasting that others could see. That is a defacto interpretation of Matthew 6. In their mind, Christ was not giving an absolute principle, but a remedy for crucifying wrong motivations.

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E. Was the occasion of the Spirit's guidance (v. 2; see Ex. 33:18; 2 Chron. 20:3; Joel 1:14; 2:12; 2:15 with 2:28-32; Acts 13:2; 10:30)

A fifth contextual factor that is significant is that this fasting was the occasion of the Spirit's guidance. Verse 2 says, **As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said...** I put it under context because we can't manipulate God to do anything with our prayers and fastings. But it is frequently in the context of prayer and fasting that God delights in giving guidance, and He delights in giving other manifestations of the Spirit. Let me give you some examples.

In Exodus 33 Moses longed to see more of God's glory, and it was in the context of fasting that God showed him more and more of his glory.

There were other times when God poured out His Spirit in revival in the Old Testament, and frequently you see that the people had afflicted their souls with fasting. My favorite revival is that under Jehoshaphat, and it says, **“Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.”** (2 Chronicles 20:3). When Rehoboam, and Hezekiah longed for a fresh visitation of God’s Spirit in their land, what did they do? They humbled themselves in fasting.

Arthur Wallis points out the close connection between the three calls to fasting in the book of Joel and the subsequent prophesy of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius was preceded by four days of fasting. If you long for a fresh visitation of the Spirit’s power and glory in our midst, if you with Paul desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, then like Paul God may stir you up to be in fastings often.

Bruce Hunt, one of our missionaries in Korea, relates absolutely miraculous changes that came over Christians’ lives through prayer and fasting. Charles Spurgeon said, "our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."

F. Accompanied the sending out of missionaries (vv. 3-4; see 14:23)

The final contextual issue that we see is that verse 3 shows that even after the Spirit has guided them to exactly who should be sent out as missionaries, they called for a further fast. They saw the setting of these missionaries apart as being so important, that they chose to prolong the fasting that they were already doing. This stands in such stark contrast to the ordinations that are done today. In the PCA you see officers being elected The Blessings of Fasting (Acts 13:1-3) • Page 7

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and ordained without so much as a prayer meeting. It’s just business as usual. But look at chapter 14:23. It says, **And when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord....** These are the kinds of contexts that call for fasting.

Obviously this passage does not give us an exhaustive list, but it does give us a representative list. If you want more teaching on this, I’ve got an outline that you can study and several books that you can read.¹

II. The Purpose of this fasting and prayer

A. It ministered to the Lord (v. 2; see Luke 2:37; Rom. 11:36; Ps. 25:14)

But let’s move on to Roman numeral II. Luke does explicitly give two purposes for fasting. The first purpose is in verse 2. **As they ministered to the Lord and fasted...** Notice that this is a Godward focus. The word for

“ministered” is a word used of Old Testament priests. You might not think of our prayers and fastings as ministering to the Lord, but they do. They are every bit as significant as the sacrifices that the Old Testament priests offered up. Luke 2:37 speaks of aged Anna as one who **served God with fastings and prayers night and day**. She served God with fastings and prayers. Now there may not be a lot that we can do, but we can fast and pray, and Luke 2 says that God will receive this as service.

And you might wonder, “How in the world does it serve God and serve His purposes?” Let me give you some hints. I would say that it serves God by fulfilling God’s purpose that all things submit to Him, glorify Him and depend upon Him. Romans 11:36 gives the purpose of the universe – **For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever**. When we fast, we are denying ourselves in order to focus on God. We are making ourselves realize how weak and dependent and needy we really are. We are humbling ourselves. We are destroying the idolatry of the stomach. All of those things drive us deeper and deeper into God’s purpose for the universe. But this in turn makes us receptive to what God has for us. When we humble ourselves, God lifts us up. When we put Him first, He makes us first. When we abandon our own agendas, He opens our eyes to

¹ I especially recommend John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997); David R. Smith, *Fasting: A Neglected Discipline* (Norwich: Rule Book, Hughs & Coleman Ltd, 1954). Wesley L. Duewel, “*You Can Deepen Your Prayer by Fasting*,” in *Touch the World Through Prayer* (Zondervan/Francis & Taylor: Grand Rapids, 1986). Wesley L. Duewel, “Jesus Said They Would Fast,” and “Fasting Strengthens Prayer” in *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* (Zondervan/Asbury Press: Grand Rapids, 1990). Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, “Fasting,” in *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

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His agendas. Psalm 25:14 says, **The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant**. And so (ironically) ministering to the Lord makes us most ministered to. When Moses ministered to the heart of God in prayer and fasting God gave him revelation, showed him His glory, and drew Moses into deeper relationship. When Anna ministered to God with prayer and fasting God gave her guidance and blessed her. And the same was true in this passage. God is interested in both the outflow and the inflow from the lake of our lives. And we will find that we will never be able to out give God. But fasting is one of the ways that we minister to His heart.

B. It went hand in hand with intense prayer (v. 3)

The second purpose is that fasting transforms our prayers and causes *them* to grow. Verse 3 says, **having fasted and prayed...** Twelve times the Bible puts the words fasting and prayer together, but the concepts are placed together much more frequently. Fasting needs *prayer* to keep it from degenerating into a man-centered exercise. But prayer needs *fasting* if it is to

grow. They feed off of each other. Andrew Murray once said, "*Prayer needs fasting for its full growth*. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand... with which we let go of the visible."

And it does this in a number of ways. Over and over the Scripture says that fasting humbles us before our Sovereign God. Since God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, it means that fasting ushers us into the supernatural. He gives more grace to the humble. Thirdly, it increases our faith. Fourth, it realigns our priorities. Fifth, it transforms our prayer motives from selfish to God-centered prayer motives. Sixth, Calvin said that fasting creates a greater ardency and fervency in prayer and worship.² Matthew Henry agreed. He said, "[Fasting] is a means to curb the flesh and the desires of it, and to make us more lively in religious exercises..." In fact, Wesley Duewell points out that the effects flow both ways. He says, "Fasting can deepen hunger for God to work. Spiritual hunger and fasting have a reciprocal power. Each deepens and strengthens the other. Each makes the other more effective. When your spiritual hunger becomes very deep, you may even lose the desire for food. All of the most intense forms of prevailing prayer... can be deepened, clarified, and greatly empowered by fasting."³ To me this is an incredible benefit of fasting. And it shows the graciousness of God. While God resists the proud, He loves to pour out His

² "serious and ardent affection and persevere in it." (Institutes IV.XII.15,16)

³ *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, p. 188.

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bounties upon those who humble themselves in fasting. It doesn't earn God's favor; it receives God's favor. There is a big difference between those two. Fasting does not earn God's favor by is a means of faith receiving God's favor, blessing and empowering. So those are the primary two purposes: to make us more God-focused and to make our prayers more effective in connecting with God.

III. The result of this fasting and prayer

A. Guidance (v. 2; see *Ezra 8:21-23*)

Well, if all that we have said is true, we would expect to see some hints in this passage of the positive results of fasting. And I think there are two that are hinted at. Verse 2 is not explicit, but it is a hint that guidance comes through fasting. **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."** Throughout the ages God's people have sought God's guidance through fasting. And if you have an issue that you are puzzled over, I would encourage you to take off a couple of days, go off by yourself and pray with only your Bible and some water. Ezra 8:21-23 says,

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us [There's this result of fasting – “to seek from Him the right way for us”] **and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him."** [He opened His big mouth and *now* he was *forced* to trust God and it scared him. Verse 23] **So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.**

Why did they fast? He says, **to seek from Him the right way for us.** It was guidance they needed. You may be stepping out into uncharted territories and you are just as nervous as they were. Well, there are many Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments that speak of God's guidance and direction clearly coming after a time of prayer and fasting. Judges 20 has all Israel fasting as they *inquired of the Lord* what they ought to do about the horrible iniquity in Benjamin. So, guidance

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B. Power and blessing (vv. 3ff; for some specific examples, see separate outline – see also Psalm 35:13; 1 Cor. 9:27; Ps. 69:10; Isaiah 58; Dan. 9:3 with 9:20-27; 10:3 with 10:12-13,20-21; Matt. 4:1-11; 17:18-21; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 9:1 with 9:40-42; 10:19; Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 9:25-27)

The second result of this fasting that is hinted at is power and blessing. The reason I say that this is hinting at a second result is that the fasting in verse 3 is not to seek guidance. They already know who is supposed to go out into missions. God already gave them guidance. This is now a new fast and a new result. They are now fasting to seek God's blessing upon this huge and scary task that now lies before them. And it's a good thing. In verses 4-12 you see them up against a powerful sorcerer who withstood them. You see a government official coming to faith in Christ. Barnabas and Paul are going to face many challenges and potential pitfalls in their ministry, and they know that they need to fast and pray for God's power and blessing.

Let me outline some of the ways in which fasting brings God's power and blessing to bear in our lives. First, it aids us in the mortification of our sinful desires. Mortification means “putting to death.” When you fast

because of sin and you pray for victory over a given sin you are in effect saying what Job said, **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.** You are proving that you really believe what Job said there. Lord, I would rather go hungry than to let this sin get me again. Some other benefits: David said, **I humbled myself with fasting** (Psalm 35:13). Isn't that an interesting result? Pride is almost impossible to conquer; yet here is a Scripture that says that fasting has the power to crucify pride. Paul said, **But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified** (1 Cor. 9:27). Fasting is a means of disciplining the body and keeping its desires under control. Many authors have testified to the relationship between gaining control of the urge to eat and beginning to have less and less temptations sexually. One person said, "The beneficial results of the fast are felt first in the sexual sphere. I have easily verified the connection established by the Ancients between the first two 'principal vices,' gluttony and lust, and consequently between the corresponding disciplines: fasting and chastity." Pure Life Ministries makes this an essential element of their successful program of getting porn addicts out of their sexual bondage. Anyway, this author goes on, "It will surprise no one if

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I confess that I am subject to anxiety and irritation, sadness and nervousness, to say nothing of vanity, touchiness or envy... The habit of fasting effects a profound appeasement of all these instinctive movements."”⁴ Fasting is a spiritual aid to subduing all sinful desires and so David said, **I chasten myself with fasting.** (Psalm 69:10. One version had it, "I mortify myself with fasting." I die to self and become alive to the Spirit."

Many verses testify to the power that fasting gives us over demons. (Dan. 9:3 with 9:20-27; 10:3 with 10:12-13,20-21; Matt. 4:1-11; 17:18-21; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 9:1 with 9:40-42; 10:19; Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 9:25-27

Turn with me to Daniel 10. This chapter records a terrible battle that went on in the land of Persia. Only it wasn't a physical battle. It was a spiritual battle between demons and angels who were fighting over the region of Persia. Let's cut into the middle of the story at verses 10-13

Then suddenly a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your

words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

The angel said that this intense spiritual warfare was going on because of two things: 1) Daniel's prayer and 2) Daniel's humbling of himself. The phrase "to humble yourself" is a synonym for fasting in Hebrew and if you will look at verse 3 you will see that this is exactly what Daniel had been doing for that whole three week period that the warfare had been going on. He said, **I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.**

What's three weeks? Twenty-one days – the same number of days for the warfare. And that fasting made his prayers effective and ushered him into a victorious battle against the demon prince who was over Persia. There is a book called *Power Through Prayer*.⁴ But an even more appropriate title

⁴ Adelbert de Vogue, quoted by Piper on page 205.

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would be *Power through Prayer and Fasting* since those two concepts seem to go hand in hand throughout the Bible.

You are probably all familiar with the time when the disciples couldn't cast out a demon. They tried and tried and they were unsuccessful. Well Christ comes along, casts out the demon, and that prompts the disciples to ask, **"Why could we not cast him out?"** [Why could you do it and we couldn't do it? Christ's answer was not that "Well, I'm divine and you're not." He expects that they should have been doing like He did. The only clue He gives to them as to the difference between *His* power and *their* power is fasting.] **So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."**

Mark 9 indicates that there are some spiritual battles with demons that you simply will not win if you neglect this exercise of fasting. We need to do it and we need to teach it to our children. If Christ the perfect man needed fasting in his warfare with Satan, how much more so do we? And by the way, that instructs us that fasting is not needed simply because we are sinners. Probably the most intense spiritual battle with Satan that ever went on in the history of mankind was a battle waged by the perfect Man Jesus, and it lasted for 40 days in the wilderness. We are all familiar with the four last temptations, but Luke 4:2 tells us that Christ was tempted by Satan for the full forty day period, and thus the forty days of fasting. There are some spiritual battles that you simply will not be able to win if you do not resort to this humbling discipline. And don't think this is just Phil Kayser talking.

Thousands of saints have testified that fasting works. It really works. I've already quoted Charles Hodge. He said, "All eminently pious persons have been more or less addicted to this mode of spiritual culture." (Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, p. 263) In fact, once you experience more extended periods of fasting for one or two weeks of nothing but water, you love it. There is a power there that was previously absent. Isaiah 58 gives a long summary of the benefits of godly fasting. And we will end with this passage. Here are the results of a God-centered fasting: God says, **Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you: the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." ... Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.** Isn't that incredible? Let me summarize the The Blessings of Fasting (Acts 13:1-3) • Page 13 benefits. Answered prayer, guidance, spiritual healing, spiritual satisfaction and refreshment, spiritual strength and vigor and prosperity. And those may seem like exaggerated claims, yet godly saints all down through history have testified to the tremendous spiritual vigor that fasting has brought into their lives. That's why Christ says, **your Father who sees in secret will reward you.** That is the promise of a God who cannot lie. I hope you do not neglect this spiritual discipline. Amen

Children of God, I charge you to take seriously the spiritual tool of fasting. And may it bring you the blessings and power of Isaiah 58. Amen.

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 5-13-2007

If you are under medical supervision, you should not fast without the doctor's permission. Generally speaking there should be no fasting unless under medical supervision if any of the following are true of you: **pregnant, diabetes, hypoglycemia, underweight, glycogen-storage disease, emaciated, cancer, TB, AIDS, kidney failure, liver disease, anemia, congestive heart failure, sepsis, or cancer.** Check with your doctor if you have a condition not mentioned to get his opinion. Because of imbalance, I prefer to deal with **anorexics and boulemics** very carefully, and don't recommend that they go on an unsupervised fast. You should not make an **infant** fast, and ordinarily, it is not wise to have children fast more than one day (unless it is a Daniel fast). You should also drink plenty of water when you are fasting. If you are doing a total fast beyond one week, it would be wise to do some research, even if you are healthy. Unfortunately, the medical field has complicated things with wildly different opinions on the benefits of fasting. Some

medical research has shown great benefits, and some has concluded that any fasting is dangerous and should not be engaged in. Just as there was unwarranted dogmatism in the 80's of who could get AIDS, medical science has changed it's dogmatic conclusions 180 degrees around on a whole host of issues such as sodium, wine, eggs, various medicines, etc. Obviously medical science is not infallible, so any time it contradicts the Bible, we can safely ignore it. Long before medical science discovered health problems from lack of salt, I dogmatically said that a no-salt diet for a long period is not healthy, and I based it on the infallible words of Christ in Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34 (see also Job 6:6; Ezra 6:9; Matt 5:13; Col. 4:6). Obviously overdoing anything can be bad for you (see for example on salt – Deut. 29:23; Ezek. 47:1; references to the dead sea, etc). But whether it is fat, wine, meat or other issues allowed in the bible, moderation is the key. So even with medical supervision, I would tend to get a second opinion. A lot of medical authorities are not currently in favor of fasting. But don't be turned off from fasting simply because of the prejudice of a doctor against it. Do research. Having said that, I still encourage you not to do total fasts if you have the conditions mentioned above. There are several alternative fasts that are available, and which could be recommended by the doctor.

But the chief dangers in fasting are

1. Ignoring what God's Word has to say about the subject. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4 – said to Satan who was tempting Jesus to break his fast).
2. Extremism (such as was shown by the king of Nineveh when he even made the animals to fast – Jonah 3:7-8).
3. Hypocrisy (1 Kgs 21:9-14; Jer. 14:10-12; Matt. 6:16; Luke 18:12)
4. Ritualism (Is. 58:3-4; Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33; 18:22)
5. Selfishness (Is. 58:3-4; Zech. 7:4-7)
6. Pride & a judgmental attitude toward those who don't fast (Matt. 6:16-18; Luke 18:12; Rom. 14)

Some have wondered what the benign side effects of fasting are. Though not everyone gets these, you can count on at least one or more of the following side effects.

1. Migraine headaches can sometimes develop in the early stages of fasting (especially if you have been overdoing it on caffeine, sugar or other carbohydrates). These are typically withdrawal symptoms. The fast can be a great cleansing from toxins and occasionally the initial stages will show some of these toxins coming out.
2. Bad breath begins to develop on longer fasts as toxins are being removed from the body. Brush your teeth three times a day. You can also have strange body odor on prolonged fasts, so shower.
3. You can get dizzy or lightheaded or even have diminishing sight for a few seconds if you get up quickly from bed or from sitting. This is normal and involves blood draining from the head. The solution is to get up more slowly (although I get up quick and just don't worry about it – it goes away in seconds). This is to be distinguished from the loss of consciousness that hypoglycemics can have (quit your fast if this is happening) or from the permanent loss of vision that those starving themselves can sometimes get. (Never go beyond a two week total fast without medical advice.) And underweight person (no body fat) should not do a longer fast without consultation with a doctor.
4. Fatigue, weakness of body, sluggishness can be experienced. But often people feel much better after the first three days. Though some prefer to fast on a vacation, I prefer to enjoy my vacations. So even when I was working in strenuous jobs, I would fast and just put up with the feelings of weakness. Once the body realizes that it needs to feed off of fat, this tends to diminish (but not completely).
5. Most veteran fasters have found that their thinking is worse in the first three days and very, very sharp in the later days.
6. Occasionally (rarely) on a long fast (two weeks or more) there will be one day where you might throw up bile. Yucky, but if you rest, it will likely go away. Quit anytime there is repeated throwing up over a two day period. It might be an indication of something else going on that needs to be checked on. I don't ordinarily recommend that people do long fasts without medical consultation and doing a lot of research anyway.

Guidelines on breaking a fast:

1. If your fast is for more than two days, do not go back onto solid food for your first meal. It won't hurt you, but you might throw up. Sip some vegetable juices, chicken or beef broth, or pure fruit juices. I prefer to avoid the fruit juices because of the way it makes the sugars rush into the body. But if you gradually ease into regular eating it will go much better.
2. Don't drink lots of sugar drinks or eat sugar laden foods right away. This is hard on the pancreas, and if repeated enough times could send you into hypoglycemia.
3. For sure don't binge. That destroys the self-control that you have been seeking to develop. Eat smaller meals. Your shrunken stomach will thank you.

Other issues

1. If you go on a long Daniel fast, make sure that you are getting plenty of nutrients. It is especially important that you get all the amino acids if you are not eating meat. Beans and rice will give the combination needed. Depending upon what you are eating, it may also need to be supplemented with vitamins and minerals.
2. Don't try taking multivitamin/mineral supplements during a total fast. You will vomit. Minerals just do not sit well on an empty stomach. Of course, if you are the exception with a galvanized steel stomach, go for it.
3. Fasting is not a great way to lose weight. People tend to get the weight back on if they don't adjust their diets afterwards. The main reasons for the fast should be spiritual. Read one of the recommended books in the Sermon that can be downloaded from www.DominionCovenantChurch.com.