

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 5- Luke 5:33-39**

71- The Uniqueness of the Gospel- Part 2

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Luke 5:33-39

Now as we look closely at this passage- **Luke 5:33- 39**, I want to remind you that these verses are *not* describing two separate and unrelated events, but this is actually one single thought in these seven verses that has to do with the condemnation of Pharisaical Judaism and the fact that the New Covenant is superior to the Old.

Now we need to know that this passage is *not* primarily about fasting- even as **1Corinthians 7** is *not* primarily about the length of hair or about head coverings for women. Like **1Corinthians 7**- this passage gives us a natural illustration of an eternal spiritual truth.

In **1Corinthians 7**- the Apostle Paul is teaching about male headship over women, and uses the length of hair and the customs of that day to illustrate that point. And here- Dr. Luke uses this passage in **Luke 5** to show a Roman dignitary, named Theophilus, and us- that just as Jesus did not participate in the man-made required fasts of the self-righteous Pharisees- that that is a natural example of how the New Covenant is not an "add on" to the Old, but that Jesus came to completely *replace* the Old Covenant with a New Covenant that is *vastly* better and *vastly* superior to the Old Covenant in every way.

You see, dear friends- the New Covenant brought about by the shed Blood of Jesus Christ and His sinless Life and His Bodily Resurrection- brought us infinitely *superior* Benefits that are based on infinitely *superior* Promises that are brought about through an infinitely *superior* High Priest offered by an infinitely *superior* Sacrifice than anything in the Old Covenant that was brought about by a sinful priesthood and animal blood.

And the result of the New Covenant being so superior to the Old is that at the very moment of Jesus' Resurrection- all attempts by anyone- Jew or Gentile- to hold on to the shadows and the types and the symbols and the portions of God's Truth that were given through the Old Covenant was actually sinning against the reality and the substance of the New.

So in this passage- there are three very important but simple elements that we need to look at:

1. The question, or the Inquiry- the question that's asked
2. The Interpretation, or how Jesus interprets the behavior in light of the question
3. The Illustration, or the example

So this is just three very simple points- the Question, the Interpretation, and the Example. So let's look at the question or the inquiry first of all- look again at **Luke 5:33**:

And they said to Him, “The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.”

So this is the question: *Why are You, Jesus, and Your followers celebrating the Salvation of Matthew over in that house by eating and drinking and rubbing shoulders with the worst people on earth while we are over here fasting and mourning in our required fasts that we made up and that we added to what God actually required?*

In other words- why are You, Jesus, operating outside the established parameters of our man-made religion? We Pharisees are God's men on the earth, and what we say- goes. So just who do You think You are by disrespecting our man-made rituals and our manufactured ceremonies and our made up religious activities as though You are above these things?

You see, as I told you last time- the man-made religion of Judaism calls for certain prescribed prayers and fastings that were mandatory. The Jews of that day had a daily routine of ritual prayers that were prayed at certain hours during the day. So there were certain hours of the day when these Jewish leaders stopped everything they

were doing and went into a public place and very orderly went through their prayer list.

And they did this in such a way to prove their supposed spirituality before men. Now these were required, routine, and ritual prayers which were either read or recited from memorization. So in that sense- every single one of these prayers was absolutely heartless.

But, in addition to their many ritualistic prayers- the Pharisees also had several different kinds of fasts. In fact, it was part of the Pharisaic system to fast every Monday and every Thursday of every week. You might remember over in **Luke 18**, Jesus said the Pharisee went into the temple to pray, and he was saying, *"I thank You, O God, that I'm not like this lousy tax collector, I fast twice a week..."*

So by doing that- this Pharisee was telling God how righteous he was because he fasts twice a week. So to the Jewish elite- Monday was a fast day and Thursday was also fast day.

Now the early Church tried very hard to break away from all these vestiges of that kind of Pharisaical thinking, so in the *Didache*- an early first century manual on how to practically apply the glorious Truths of the NT to our daily lives, we find that the Church encouraged people to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays rather than Monday's and Thursdays so that they could put a difference between them and the Pharisees.

But what they soon found was that *any* attempt at formalizing or making mandatory our service to God- which always must be honest and real- no matter how sincere that effort may be- is in itself a contradiction. So we are to fast today- absolutely- and if you are never led to fast it is because you are not listening very closely to God- but we are to fast today only as the Holy Spirit leads us- and not under any mandatory compulsion. But as I said earlier- whether or not we are to fast is not the main subject of what Jesus is saying here anyway.

Now from the Greek construction of this passage we can tell that the event with these Pharisees given us here in verses 33-19 occurred immediately after the event with Matthew described in verses 27-32. And so it is very likely that Matthew's party to celebrate his glorious Salvation- occurred on a Monday or a Thursday which was a fast day to these Pharisees, and that is why they said to Jesus, *"What in the world are You doing celebrating that wicked man's Salvation by eating and drinking while the rest of us self-righteous people are fasting? Don't*

You understand our man-made traditions?" Which they, of course, had deemed to be the true religion of God, as all false religions do.

Now we need to remember that God never required anybody to fast twice each week. Do you know how many fasts in the OT are commanded by God? Only one. There is only one fast that is commanded in the entire OT- just one. And it is during Yom Kippur- The Day of Atonement. That is the only fast that is commanded by God.

Leviticus 16:29&31 commands the people to fast and it uses the phrase, *"Afflict your souls,"* or in other versions it says to *"Humble your souls"*. This comes from the Hebrew word *anah*- which is commonly used to describe a time when people refrain from eating food- which is what we call fasting- a time when you are under tremendous spiritual pressure and conflict, and you push away from the table and spend the time that you would normally spend in food preparation and eating and clean up in prayer and Bible Study- agonizing over a particular thing.

There is no particular length of a fast that is mandatory- you can fast several meals, or several days, or even several weeks- depending on how God is leading you and depending on the spiritual conflict that you are in and depending on how desperate you are. God honors fasting because we have to eat to live and to go on long enough without eating- you will die. So God understands that fasting is a very powerful sacrifice that people do not take up very lightly.

But even though the length of the fast is between you and God- we must understand that fasting is a normal function of Christianity and of people who are saved. Fasting is not weird and it isn't on the fringe of cultist practices. Fasting is as normal and as mainstream and as widespread among all believers and is as common to Christians as prayer and singing and preaching and Bible Study should be. And the fact that it isn't, and the fact that most all the people who sit on the pew of the modern Church know nothing about fasting, and the fact that most people are never led to fast anymore is not a testimony to how spiritual or how sophisticated we have become- it is just another sign of how backslid and worldly and unbiblical the people of the modern Church have become.

All believers who are medically able should fast, and all believers should fast just as often and just as long as the Spirit leads. So if you do not understand fasting, or if you have never fasted before- then I

suggest that the first place to start is for you to do a comprehensive study on fasting from the Scriptures and you will see just how huge this issue is with God. But again as true as all that is- that is not the main point of this passage here in Luke.

So God commanded the people to fast only one time- on the Day of Atonement. So just what was the Day of Atonement? It was a day when you took a hard look at your own sin. A Day when you did a deep inspection of your own soul, and a day when great sacrifices were made for the whole nation, and a day when the whole nation of Israel stopped its normal course of action and everybody did a heart search of their own sin. So this was God's required fast.

And on that day- nobody ate anything- but you mourn and you grieve over your sin. And other than that- there wasn't any other required fasts throughout the entire OT. Now, that is not to say that people only fasted on The Day of Atonement- that is simply not true. People fasted all the time. So fasting was a normal way of life- even under the OT. But even though Jews fasted often- they were not *required* by God to fast on any other day other than the Day of Atonement.

For example- there were occasions under the Old Covenant when the Jews fasted over great grief. You find these kinds of fasts in **1Kings 21; Esther 4; Isaiah 58** and **Joel 1**. And these are fasts that are always associated with grief and mourning and the wrenching of the heart over some serious issue. That is a proper fast. And these kinds of fasts are never required- they're just done voluntarily when someone is so overwrought or so sad or so heart sick or so concerned to pray that they have absolutely no desire to eat.

And again we must understand just how worldly we have all become because in our day- even when there is terrible things going on and even when terrible spiritual pressure exists and even when people's lives are being destroyed - very few of God's people today feel led to fast even then.

But I do see this periodically today. I might go into a hospital and I see a young couple and their baby is in surgery and the baby's hanging between life and death. And the last thing you want to say to those people is, "Let's go to the cafeteria and get something to eat," and you can cut the tension and the anguish with a knife- it is so thick- and you will find that this troubled worried mother is sitting quietly over in the

corner weeping and praying, and you will find that she is fasting. And God Almighty sees that.

When a believer loses a loved one- a spouse, for example- when a marriage between believers is breaking apart, when a child of a believer has just been arrested for some awful crime- during times like that- there's an overwhelming grief and anguish and spiritual agony going on - and that is the time to mourn, that is the time to afflict your soul, that is the time to weep and cry out to God and examine your life and repent and that is the time to fast.

Another example would be if you have a tremendous prayer burden about a particular issue or you're praying for the Salvation of someone and it literally consumes you to the degree that you have no appetite- then you would fast.

Now listen up- because you need to hear this. There is absolutely no merit at all in fasting. And what I mean when I say that is that you're not going to earn Salvation or get extra points with God simply because you don't eat. Salvation is not earned by fasting, beloved. We are mercifully saved by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone, and not because we fast. In fact, God doesn't even acknowledge the fast of an unbeliever- it does an unbeliever absolutely no good at all to fast. Many hundreds of millions of people who follow false religions fast all the time and God doesn't acknowledge any of it. All that an unbeliever can do to get God's attention is to repent and cry to God for undeserved Mercy.

Saved people fast because they are already saved and they desire to see God move in an area that is completely in accord with God's Will- not to get saved or to try to force God to do what is against His Will. Our fasting doesn't change God's Mind about what is right or wrong or what is or is not His Will.

And there are several occasions all throughout the Old Testament when such fasts existed- when there is a grappling with something severe that takes away all desire to eat.

There were one-day fasts and three-day fasts, and there were seven-day fasts. In **Daniel 10:2&3**- there is a three-week fast. And there are several times in the Old Testament when you have a 40-day fast such as **Exodus 34**, **Deuteronomy 9** and **1Kings 19**, and even our Lord Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days in the tremendous conflict over His soul with Satan.

But there's only one single fast that was required. But what had happened in Judaism through the misguided efforts of the Pharisees was they decided that fasting looked spiritual and made them look spiritual to the people, and so they invented mandatory fasts that had absolutely nothing to do with their hearts because their hearts were utterly rotten.

The hearts of the Pharisees were all stone- in the language of Ezekiel. I mean, on the outside they looked brilliantly white- they were the cleanest and the most pure men in all Israel- but on the inside- in their hearts- which is the only place that matters- the Pharisees were all full of dead-men's bones. Jesus said that these religious professionals were all the worst kind of hypocrites- they were utterly despicable to God.

The Pharisees fasted only to be seen of men. And they determined that every Monday and every Thursday they would fast so that they could receive the praise of men. Their fasts were a source of great pride and bragging and boasting to them so that men would see them as being spiritual giants. And then as they fasted they prayed long drawn out prayers- which had no more effect than the ungodly fasts they were on.

Now during this time- in the first century in Israel- the Pharisees had three major religious expressions that they used based on their false religion of Judaism. And by the way- these three things still exist today among those that are orthodox Jews. And those three things are Prayer, Alms, and Fasting- those were the three religious expressions and they did them publicly and they did them as ostentatiously as they could possibly do them in order to parade their supposed godliness before men.

Please turn to **Matthew 6** for just a minute. This is a section of Scripture that has become known as "The Sermon on the Mount"- in which Jesus describes for all of humanity the real intent and purpose of the Law of God as given to Moses.

Now what Jesus was doing here in this Sermon was to simply restate the Law of Moses and by giving a "behind the scenes" look at not only how God expects us to behave- but what kind of heart attitude we are supposed to have as we obey. So what Jesus is actually doing here is to identify who is saved and who is lost. The perfect Standards of Righteousness portrayed in this Sermon by Jesus are utterly impossible

for anyone to live up to- which is the purpose of this Sermon. Just as the Law was a Schoolmaster to bring us to utter desperation because of our inability to live up under- so to this Sermon reflects our human inability to live perfectly and continuously Righteous.

So the net effect of this Sermon is to prove to us in an incontrovertible way that we are all wicked sinners who desperately need God's Sovereign Grace because we *cannot* and we *will not* ever live in such a way that shows that we *deserve* Salvation.

Now in this section- Jesus deals with all three aspects of 1st Century Judaism. Let's begin with "alms"- look at verses 1-4:

- 1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.**
- 2 So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.**
- 3 But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,**
- 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.**

Now let's look at the second aspect- "prayer"- by looking at verses 5-15:

- 5 When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.**
- 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.**
- 7 And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.**
- 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.**

9 Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

11 ‘Give us this day our daily bread.

12 ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]’

14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Now let's look at the third aspect- "fasting"- by looking at verses 16-18:

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.

So you can see here that Jesus utterly eviscerated the self-righteous religious bigots with this Sermon. No wonder they hated Jesus to the point of having Him murdered.

Now keep in mind that even today in modern Israel- the orthodox Jews are routinely out on the street- praying publicly just like Jesus talks about here.

So here it is on Monday or Thursday, and these Pharisees got up that morning and they put on their worst looking clothes- all shabby and torn- just rags, and they didn't comb their hair, and they threw a few ashes around so they'd look pale and worn, and they put a real gloomy face and they roamed around town so that all the people would see them, and they said, "I'm fasting! I'm fasting! I'm humiliating myself before the Lord!

And so at some point during the day- they walked by this house where Jesus and His disciples were in there celebrating the Salvation of the wicked tax collector named Levi and they began to condemn Jesus for not playing the game that they were playing. So that is the question.

And that leads us to the second point- which is the interpretation. So now that the Pharisees have asked the question- just how is Jesus going to answer? How's He going to interpret their behavior? Please look again at **Luke 5:34**:

... You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?

Now the attendants of the bridegroom are the best friends- who plan the wedding, and so, in effect- Jesus says, *"Look, you don't fast at a wedding, do you? A wedding is a celebration and when the bridegroom is there- so you don't fast- you celebrate."*

Now back in the first century in Israel- weddings often lasted seven full days. And fasting is completely out of place at this kind of celebration. Fasting was linked to mourning and sorrowful prayer, and it was only to be carried out on the Day of Atonement- where the true follower of God would sorrow over sin.

Now what is interesting is that back then there were ancient rabbinical rules forbidding people to fast at a wedding because God said you are to *"Rejoice with those who rejoice"*. **Ecclesiastes** tells us that there is a time to weep and there is a time to laugh- so fasting has its appropriate time- when it is a time of broken and grieved hearts over sin.

But Jesus said, *"You really don't get it, do you? You just don't get it. The Bridegroom is here."* Who's that? It is Jesus Himself. Now there's an old Jewish document called the "Migalot Taonit" or "The Scroll of Fasting." And that document says that fasting is forbidden in all days devoted to happy times of celebration. And the rabbis understood that.

So these people- these Pharisees, scribes, and disciples of John- they were completely out of touch with that document because they were not priests. Now the Old Testament never refers to the Messiah as a bridegroom anywhere. That is strictly a New Testament term and

it is first introduced by Jesus Himself right here. Jesus calls Himself the Bridegroom. And later on- the Apostle Paul builds on that language in his Epistles and the Apostle John builds on it even further in the Book of the Revelation.

So Jesus Christ- as the Bridegroom- takes His bride into the great bridal city- the New Jerusalem. So right here is the first introduction of the Messiah as being a Bridegroom.

But even though this term has never been used before- the analogy is crystal clear. So in effect- Jesus was saying, *"You've been waiting and waiting for the Bridegroom to come, and when He comes- you should inaugurate a great celebration. Well, I am here. And you are out of touch with that fact and so here you are fasting when you should be celebrating!"*

So it would be completely ridiculous for Jesus' disciples to fast and mourn when the long-awaited Messiah has finally arrived on the scene. In fact, the only people who would not rejoice at that moment are people who either do not enjoy the fact that the Messiah has finally come or those who never were seeking for Him to come in the first place.

Now contrast how the Pharisees were acting about the arrival of Jesus here with how Simeon and Anna acted when they first laid eyes on the baby Jesus in the Temple when He was in Mary's arms. To see this great contrast- please turn back to **Luke 2:25-38:**

25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word;

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel."

33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—

35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage,

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.

38 At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

These two old saints of God lived their entire lives under the reign of Levitical priests and animal sacrifices and the law of Moses, and they had the most to lose by abandoning Judaism and embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and master, and yet both of these people immediately understood Who Jesus was, and they immediately abandoned all that they had lived under their entire lives without any hesitation to fully embrace Jesus as the Messiah and the One to Whom all the Law pointed to.

That is why I tell you that all those who truly follow the OT will always, and in all cases, come to Jesus and embrace Him and love and obey Him or else they really do not follow the OT because everything in the OT points to Jesus and is about Jesus and is for Jesus and glorifies Jesus.

And so once again- Jesus is proving beyond any doubt here that these Pharisees were really *not* following God at all, and He is proving that they did not belong to God, and they did not love God, and they were not God's people. And they hated Him for that.

Now notice that even though Jesus agreed that His disciples didn't fast- He didn't agree that they didn't pray. Now it is true that they didn't pray the daily mandatory prayers of the scribes and the Pharisees and the disciples of John- but the disciples of Jesus absolutely did pray.

So you don't find in any of the Gospel accounts any statement that says that Jesus' disciples didn't pray- because prayer has always been and is now a way of life for God's people. Those who do not pray do not belong to God. Prayer is like breathing and God's people pray. And that is why we are one of the few Churches left in America that has a prominent night where we gather together to pray because the Father's House will be known as a House of Prayer.

But Jesus' disciples didn't fast because they *couldn't* fast and they *should not* have fasted as long as the Bridegroom was with them.

Can you just imagine what it was like for them just being with the long-awaited Messiah day after day after day? What exhilaration, what joy, what fulfillment. They had been forever forgiven; the Wrath of God was forever removed from them. These men were the poor prisoners, and the blind, and the oppressed that had been released. This was the Joy of all joys as they were in the very Presence of the Messiah of God. They were seeing His Power on an ongoing basis, they were hearing His Teaching, and so fasting during this time would have been utterly ridiculous.

But as true as this is- Jesus doesn't stop there and He goes further into this and He begins to teach something else. Please look at **Luke 5:35**:

But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.

Now this is a very interesting statement. Jesus said, "**The days will come**" So there's going to be a time in the future. And in that future time the wedding joy that the disciples are experiencing right now as Jesus is with them is going to end. Why? Because the Bridegroom is going to be taken from them. Now the word that was translated here as "taken" comes from the Greek word *apairo*, which means: *to snatch something*.

Wow! So right in the middle of this great celebration- when the Bridegroom is here, and He is Immanuel- He is with us- God is now with us- and we are rejoicing and we are correctly celebrating that He is here with us- Jesus says that right in the middle of this great celebration- the Bridegroom is going to be *apairo*, or snatched away or taken.

And this word conveys the idea of a sudden and a violent snatching away. So just what does this refer to? The death of Jesus Christ and His removal from the earth. And this is the first reference by Jesus here in Luke about His Own death.

So my disciples are all celebrating now. Leave them alone. Let them celebrate. That's appropriate. But when I am taken away- my disciples will fast and they will mourn and they will weep and they will struggle- but not now. Now is the time to celebrate.

Now normally when you think about a wedding- you have this image of life goes on- the celebration of the marriage goes on- even after the wedding. But, not here.

Here Jesus is saying that His disciples are celebrating right now and then He is going to be taken away from them and then they will stop celebrating and they will afflict their souls and they will fast. And we will find out later- probably next week- that there is a dual role that we as believers should fill now on the earth.

That on the one hand- we are to *continue* to celebrate that Jesus has come and that He *is* coming and that He has finished the Work and that our sins are forever removed from us, and we rejoice and we celebrate this Amazing Grace that has caught our falling souls, and we rejoice and we celebrate that the Just Wrath of God has been forever turned away from us and that right now- because we are truly saved- there is, therefore, now no more condemnation against us.

And we celebrate and we rejoice because as Jesus has ascended up into Heaven- He and the Father have sent back to us the Comforter Who is the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Truth Who abides with us continually and Who will never leave us, and so in *that* sense- the Church is to continue this rejoicing and this celebration just like the disciples were doing here. And this joy and this celebration is so pervasive that all through history- one of the landmarks of true Christianity is not spiritual power or earth shaking anointing or great swelling words or self-proclaimed and unaccounted super-duper power packed preachers who see angels and who hear directly from God. No, the landmark of true believers is this joy, this overwhelming sense of joy that comes from having made peace with God and knowing that our sins have been mercifully washed away.

True Biblical Christianity is all about the fullness of this joy that doesn't come because all is well in the world; it doesn't come because

your investments are secure or because you have a lots of money or safety or because you feel good about yourself or because everybody likes you or because your children don't have cavities and your dog doesn't bite. Because Christians are the most hated and the most persecuted people on earth. Trouble comes frequently to believers, and so based on that- they should be the most miserable people on earth. But they're not. True genuine born again people are the happiest and the most peaceful and the most joyful people on the planet, and this joy and this celebration comes from the knowledge that it is well with our soul.

But in another sense- even with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us- we long for the Bridegroom and we long to be reunited with Him and we long to not take this by faith forever but to actually see Him in His Glory and to never be apart from Him again. And so in *that* sense- we mourn and we weep and we afflict our souls and we fast.

And when Jesus talked this way- what was the reaction of the Disciples? They were afraid, weren't they? The OT Prophet, Zachariah said,

"Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;"

So they panicked. I mean, the Party came to a sudden and startling end- an end that none of them were prepared for or even understood. I mean, when Jesus talked about His Own death, even Peter said, "No, no, no, no, don't let it ever be that way, it can't be that way. This celebration can't end. We are enjoying You so much, Jesus; we are so glad that You are here. Please don't leave us; please don't stop this moment.

"But Isaiah prophesied,

"By oppression and judgment He was taken away."

And this is the very same idea- Messiah would be snatched away, cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due. *"Then"- Jesus says- "In that day- after I am taken from them- My people, those who follow Me, those who are disciplined by My Word, My disciples will fast in those days."*

Now after Jesus ascended up into Heaven and all through the Epistles and all throughout the centuries after the production of Scripture- ever since the Bridegroom has been taken away from us- the Church of Jesus Christ has fasted. Fasting for us today is as normal and as natural as reading the Bible or praying or taking Communion or singing hymns. For over 2,000 consecutive years - the Church of Jesus has fasted. And every major player throughout the 2,000 year history of Christianity who led the Church after the death of the Apostles from Polycarp to Clement to Justin Martyn to Ireanaus to Augustine to John Hus to John Wycliffe to Martin Luther to John Calvin to the Puritans to Charles Spurgeon all said the very same thing about this- since the Bridegroom has been taken from us- we are to fast. And yet in our day- fasting has fallen by the way side.

There are people in Church today who have been in Church for years and who claim to be saved, and yet they have never one time saw the need or understood the joy and the beauty and the wisdom and the power of afflicting their souls and mourning and weeping between the porch and the altar and fasting.

Fasting is so little done and so little taught today that entire generations of believers can read the Bible and yet never make the connection between what Jesus and the Apostles say, and then actually going on a fast themselves. And the result is that many today don't even know how to fast and how to go about fasting before the Lord.

Now time will not permit me to get into this too deeply here- but suffice it to say that fasting is when you don't eat. When you push away from the table and purposely refrain from eating for a particular length of time. And whatever length of time you fast- God will honor that time, and God will respect it because God made us that we must eat to live. So any sacrifice in this area is honoring to God.

I would like to commend to you a website that you can turn to for help in the area of fasting and to which you can go for help in many other areas of learning about Biblical Christianity and that is www.monergism.com. This is an excellent site that has tapes and sermons and mp3 files that you can download- most of it is free, and it is trusted and reliable information about how to overcome the lusts of your flesh, the lusts of your eyes, and the pride of life. That's www.monergism.com.

True genuine fasting occurs when you are so burdened over a particular issue or when there is great spiritual conflict going on in your life and you know in your heart that you should not eat. So you take the time that you would normally spend in food shopping, and food preparation, and in eating and in cleanup, and you spend that time in prayer and Bible Study.

Now several years ago a sweet man came up to me as I was preaching about fasting and he said, *"Brother Blair, I want to fast- but I can't."* And I said, *"Well, why can't you fast?"* and he said, *"I try to fast but every time I fast- I get weak and I break out in cold sweats and I feel dizzy and so I can't fast."*

And I looked at him and said, *"But that is the normal way your body acts when you don't eat. Everybody gets like that when they fast"*. And he said, *"You mean it's normal to get weak when you don't eat?"* And I said, *"Sure it is. You are starving your body when you fast and your body doesn't like it one little bit."*

So he fasted and he found out that he was more able to get his flesh under control and that his obedience grew as he fasted.

Now if you are under a doctor's care- you should check with him before you fast- but please don't use the fact that you get weak as an excuse not to fast- because everybody gets weak when they fast.

Now keep in mind that just like everything else in the modern Church- fasting has been perverted and twisted until in some areas- it doesn't even resemble what the Bible talks about. But there is a definitive passage about fasting that we need to know so please turn with me to **Isaiah 58**:

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.

13 “If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure And speaking *your own* word,

14 Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Let's come and pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.