

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 81- Hungering for God through Fasting- Part 2 What is Fasting? Part 2

Church January 07, 2024

Matthew 9:14-17

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.

17 Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Now as we begin the new Year of 2024- the Lord has laid it upon my Heart to begin the Year with a mini-series of Sermons concerning the "*Means of Grace*" called, "*Fasting*". And, in God's Providence- it just so happens that the Subject of Fasting is next in line in our verse-by-verse "Journey" through the **Gospel of Matthew**. So, I can kill two birds with one stone. I can *continue* our expository "Journey" through **Matthew** and I can take the Subject of Fasting as a "stand-alone" Series of Sermons. So, we can have the best of both worlds.

Now you may recall back on December 17th- I began this Series about Fasting by looking closely at the Passage that Brother Vern just read to you. And those four verses will constitute the Foundation of this entire Series. Today we begin to examine what the Apostle Matthew recorded in this Passage what Jesus taught about Fasting. And I have divided this Sermon Series into four main Parts:

1. What is Fasting?
2. Is Fasting *Biblical*?

3. Do Believers in the New Covenant *Need* to Fast?
4. What are Some Reasons to Fast?

1. What is Fasting?

Recently, there has been a literal Explosion of Information about Fasting- because of what people teach are health Benefits to what they call, “*Intermittent Fasting.*” And “*Intermittent Fasting*” is basically about two Issues:

1. Delaying Breakfast
2. What to eat at Breakfast

With Intermittent Fasting- the individual *prolongs* the Time in between his *last* Meal of the previous Day and the *first* Meal of the next Day. So, for example, an individual may go 12-20 hours in between the Time he ate his *last* Meal and the *next* Meal. But *regardless* of when a person eats his *first* Meal of the Day- that *first* Meal is called, “*Breakfast*”- because that is the Meal that he used to “*break his Fast*”. So, if his *last* Meal ended at 7pm and he goes 18 hours of not eating anything (the bulk of which is taken up with Sleep)- his *first* Meal of the next day- the Meal with which he breaks his Fast (Breakfast)- would be 1pm on the next Day. So, technically, he “fasted” or went without food for 18 hours.

And so, he eats his *first* Meal of the Day at 1pm. And then he eats again at 6pm. And then he fasts for 18 hours until 1pm the next Day. And this Routine continues for a certain time-Frame.

And Intermittent Fasting has taken the Health Industry by storm. And it is supposed to help you lose weight; and get into a more- healthy Life- style. So, in this Scenario- people engage in that kind of Fasting for Health reasons. And that’s fine.

But that is NOT what I’m talking about in this Sermon Series. I am talking about Fasting for *spiritual* Reasons- NOT *health* Reasons. I am talking about *purposely* “pushing away from the table” for a set amount of Time to avail ourselves of one of the “*Means of Grace*”¹ that God has given to His people to strengthen them- *spiritually*- so they may “*walk this World in White*”².

So, in a nutshell- Fasting involves NOT *doing* something; or NOT *engaging* in something (usually NOT eating Food)- for a certain amount of Time; for a

¹ Bible Study (both Personal and Corporate); Prayer (both Personal and Corporate); Godly Fellowship; Baptism; the Lord’s Table (Communion); Giving; and Service to Others are the other Gifts of God’s Grace that equip and empower the Believer. Collectively, they are the “*Spiritual Disciplines*” that God uses to impart His Grace to us when we avail ourselves of them on a consistent Basis. They are also called the “*Means of Grace*”.

² The phrase, “*Walk this World in White*” is included in the Hymn, “*Send the Fire!*” written by William Booth (Founder of the Salvation Army) in 1884 which talks about Christians living in a sinful and fallen world- while maintaining their Godliness. (attached)

specific Purpose. Now I don't want to *minimize* the various Ways that people have fasted in the Past. Some fast by setting the Television aside for 30 Days. Others set aside all Technology for a set time Frame. And that is good and fine; and it is very helpful. But this Series will focus on fasting by not eating Food for a certain Time.

Now it is important to know that the Concept of Fasting is found in every major Religion. Buddhists fast; Hindus fast; Jews fast; and Muslims fast. But Christians also fast and that is what I will concentrate on.

Fasting is found, *primarily*, in the Old Testament- but it will be my Job to convince you that Fasting is also a New Testament Truth as well. But it is important to know that every major Old Testament saint fasted. And then, in the New Testament we see that Jesus and the Apostles fasted. So, fasting is not strange or weird. Fasting is as normal as Prayer. And in the Bible- fasting was engaged in on a regular Basis. So, even if you have never fasted- Fasting has been a treasured part of the Christian Church for over 2,000 years.

And Fasting was given to help us combat a very serious Threat to both our Faithfulness and Usefulness and Obedience to God. And even though that Threat is very serious and very dangerous- it is almost completely unknown by the vast "sea of people" who make up the modern Church. And that Threat is called, "Worldliness"³.

"Worldliness" is a term used to describe the Phenomenon that living in a broken and fallen World; while being constantly bombarded with the "System" of this Life- wages War against the Believer by feeding our Tendency to be "*fleshly Minded*" as opposed to being "*spiritually minded*". The Apostle Paul *infallibly* wrote about this in **Romans 8:1-13**:

- 1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**
- 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**
- 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,**
- 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**
- 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**
- 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,**
- 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not**

³ See Sermon, "Whatever Happened to Worldliness?" by Blair Bradley; 2006

**subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,
8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

What I hope you notice here is that the Language that the Bible uses to describe the ongoing Struggle between the faithful Believer and the lost world “System”- is the Language of War. So, the Goal is NOT to reach an “equitable Peace” with the World. Nor is it to try to find “Common Ground”. The Goal of the Believer is to kill; starve; fight against; and defeat the ongoing “Pull” that this fallen World has on our Flesh.

And God used the Apostle John (and others) to warn us about the Seriousness and great Danger of “*Worldliness*” in **1John 2:15-17**, where he said:

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

... so, those three Things:

1. The Lust of the Flesh
2. The Lust of the Eyes
3. The boastful Pride of Life

... cause us to “*set our Affections*” (Love) on this present, evil “*World*” that John warned us NOT to love.

And keep in mind just how real and serious this is from what Johns said at the end of verse 15:

... If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

... because if the “Love of Father” is NOT in us- we are Lost; we are NOT saved; and we are headed for Hell!

We need to always keep in mind that our *redeemed* Souls are *encased* in an *unredeemed* Body. But God washed our Soul in the New Birth- NOT our Flesh. And that is *why* our Bodies, *periodically* get sick; it is *why* we have various *dysfunctions* and *malfunctions* in our Bodies; it is *why* we die; and *why* our Bodies go to the Ground and decay; and it is why our fleshly bodies *CVANNOT* enter into Heaven. But it is also *why* Christian Salvation is NOT completed- until our saved Souls are *re-united* with a glorified Body- at the Resurrection.

So, as our *unredeemed* Body dwells in a fallen World- that is *dominated* by satan; and a “*System*”⁴ that operates in *hostile* Opposition to God and His Ways.

So, there is an ongoing Struggle (War) that rages between the Believer being “*spiritually Minded*” as opposed to being “*fleshly Minded*” (Worldly/worldly Minded). So, we are pulled between “two Opinions”; “two Philosophies; two Voices”; and two “world-Views”.

And that Struggle reveals to us where we really are- *spiritually* speaking. And that Revelation *produces* in us an *ongoing* and *holy* Grief in the Heart of ALL genuine Believers- over the Knowledge of their own indwelling Sin; along with the Fact that their Flesh is *attracted* to the “System” of this fallen World.

So, in His Mercy- God gave His people the “*Gift of Fasting*” to help us in this ongoing Struggle.

And that means that the *Origin* of Fasting is found in a deep seated “*Longing for God*” that God the Holy Spirit *produces* in all those who have truly experienced the Miracle of the New Birth.

Now the English words, “*Long/Longs/Longing*” come from a Hebrew word (*chaka*; Strong’s #2441) which means: *to wait with Desire*. So, Fasting denotes a Desire to *wait* for God; a Desire to *see* God; a Desire to be *near* Him; and to *touch* Him; and to be touched *by* Him. It is us *desiring* God- “*longingly*”. Read what the Prophet wrote about this

“*Longing*” from **Isaiah 30:18**:

⁴ The world’s “*System*” refers to the Ways of Life that have been developed by sinful rebels that dominate our daily Lives. This System is *summarized* by the Apostle as, “**the Lust of the Flesh; the Lust of the Eyes; and the boastful Pride of Life**”. And while these three things are NOT all that is in the World- they *represent* the sinful System by which this world operates.

18 Therefore the Lord longs [waits with Desire] to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long [desire longingly] for Him.

... so, we could understand the Concept of “*Longing*” for God as an intense “*Desiring*” of God or a “*Hungering*” for God. And that means that underneath it all- Fasting is the holy *Response* that Believers make when we sense that the World has had a greater Effect on us than is wise- and we are in need of a “re-setting” of our Focus and Priorities on God. In other words, we are “*Hungering*” or “*Longing*” or “*Desiring*” for God. So, the great Paradox is that God’s people *stop* eating Food (Fast) because they are “*hungering*” for God. Our Lord Christ said this from

Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

... so, the Holy Bible teaches that there are two Ways we can be “Blessed”:

1. When we “hunger” (and thirst) for Righteousness (**Matthew 5:6**)
2. When we “long” for God (**Isaiah 30:18**)

... and this type of holy “*Hungering/Longing*” is divided into two Parts:

1. A *holy* and *ongoing* Grief over indwelling Sin in Us
2. A *wondrous* Hope

... which we went over last Time.

Now I want you to read a Passage with me that reveals how serious this all is. Please go to **Luke 14:16-24:**

16 But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'

18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'

19 Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'

20 Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'

21 And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'

22 And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'

23 And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.'

24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"

So, let me say this again: **“Nothing compares with Obedience!”** Obedience to God is the “Name of the Game”. But what IS a close Second to that - is to struggle- NOT perfectly- but struggling *honestly*- to obey.

So, as our Appetite for the World is *resisted*- our Hunger for God is *strengthened*. And as our Hunger for God is *resisted*- the more of this World we seek to have and enjoy. So, one type of “Hunger” wages War *against* the other. And yet, we *cannot* feed both of them. God has created us in such a way that one “Hunger” must be “*starved*” while the other one is “*fed*”.

So, part of Fasting is the Effort to “satisfy” a “Hunger for God” that *already* exists; and that has become so *intense*; that it drowns out any Satisfaction we might receive from the things of this World. But Fasting *also* includes the Impetus whereby we fight to even *have* that kind of “Hunger for God” in the first Place.

Because we live in this World- any “Hunger for God” we might have- is being *constantly* pushed down by our Appetite for more of the World. So, Fasting is not only the *spontaneous* Result of *already having* a superior Delight in God- it is also a Weapon that is used to fight against every Power in this World that would take that Delight away; or that would attempt to satisfy it with Things of this Life.

We must understand that the greatest Enemy that stands in the Way of us having this kind of a “Hunger for God” is NOT the huge, blatant, public, and obvious Sins that *everybody* condemns- even the people in the Lost world. No, the greatest Enemy that constantly *downplays*, *minimizes*, and even *eliminates* our Desire to hunger after God- is the tiny, seemingly insignificant, but frequent “Feedings” of what the World has to offer- that we engage in- all during the Day. A Phenomenon I call, “*snacking on the World*”.

In other words, the Reason people don't have a strong Urge to “Hunger for God”- is because the pagan World doesn't look as dangerous as the Bible says it actually is. But the Reason the Warnings about the Danger of this World from the

inspired Scriptures don't move more people to hunger after God- is because they have grown spiritually weak and frail- NOT because of wicked and blatant Sin- but simply because of partaking of the World in small little amounts- all the Time. And that is why we need to see the Danger of "*snacking on the World*".

Medical Science tells us that the main reason people in the United States are obese- (besides Inactivity) is NOT because they eat Breakfast, Lunch, or Supper. The *primary* Danger is in snacking all day long- in between Meals- on junk. So, too, it is NOT the seven course Meal that the fallen World places before us- that robs us of our Longing for God. Everybody can see the Danger of that. But what is insidious and what relentlessly robs us of this "Hunger for God" is that we constantly snack- a little here a little there- all day long- every day- on the "*spiritually unhealthy*" Things of the World.

So, most of the Time- it really isn't the overt, blatant, huge, public, and visible Sins that we commit but rather the endless Bombardment of *Frivolity* and *Triviality* that gradually *lulls* us into surrendering our Hunger for God without a complaint.

For example, I think the average 21st Century American Christian we will be hard pressed to explain to the many saints throughout Church History, who remained faithful- even though they were tortured and martyred for Christ- that while we lived our Lives on this earth- AS BELIEVERS- that we spent literally hours every day- being entertained with Sports and Movies and YouTube videos that were designed to do nothing but feed our fleshly and carnal Interests- while the world was on Fire.

Now there are many things that satan can do to rob people and destroy Lives. And most of the time we talk about this- we are referring to big, huge, and vitally important Issues. Yet, in **Luke 14:16-24**- when Jesus described what kept people away from the Banquet Table of His Glory- He said it was things like:

- A piece of land
- A yoke of oxen
- A wife

... things that are *hardly* associated with Sins- much less things able to divert our Hunger away from God.

Yet from this Warning- we see that the greatest Adversaries to God that hinder us the most- are *not* God's Enemies- but His Gifts! And the most- deadly Appetites are *not* for the "Poison" of blatant Evil- but for the simple (and seemingly un-sinful) *Pleasures* of this Life. Because when it is God's Gifts that

replace our Appetite for God- that kind of Idolatry is much *harder* to even recognize- much less fight.

Now out of the three Attributes of the Flesh that we discussed earlier- two of them are *not* Evil in and of themselves:

- ✓ The *worries* of the World
- ✓ The *desire* for other Things

.. and thus, are very *hard* to even recognize much less fight.

These are not prurient Vices in and of themselves- they are good and gracious Gifts from God! Yet for us to take Pleasure and Delight in what God has done or given- is not simply something that we *should* do- it is *commanded* by God and is *expected*.

These are your basic “meat and potatoes” Issues- like Coffee; and Gardening; and Reading; and Decorating; and Traveling; and Investing; and TV watching; and Internet surfing; and Shopping; and Exercising; and Collecting; and Talking; and Laughing; and Enjoying and Sports and Gardens and mystery Novels- that we all engage in every day- many times with Gratefulness in our Hearts. And yet, the inspired, inerrant Word of the living God says these are the very Things that have the Power to literally “*Choke the Word of God*” until what God has said- no longer has any Effect upon us! And THAT is frightening!

Mark 4:19

but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

So, when I am saying that Fasting springs forth from an *overwhelming* Longing for God- I mean to say that by Fasting- we are saying that we will do *anything*; and go *without* anything- if by any Means we may protect ourselves from the deadening Effects that these “innocent” Delights have on us; and preserve the Sweetness of our Longing for God. So, Fasting has to do with Food- but it’s not *only* just Food- it is anything! Martyn Lloyd- Jones, the Pastor of Westminster Chapel in London during most of the 20th Century said,

“Fasting if we conceive of it truly, must not... be confined to the question of food and drink. Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in

certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting.”⁵

My point is that the “Good” can do great Damage. And God’s Good Gifts can bring about Sin in us. The Apostle Paul said that the Law of God was “**holy, righteous, and good**” (Romans 7:12). But then he also said that, because we are sinful and fallen Creatures, that good, holy, and righteous Law, arouses “**sinful passions**” in us (Romans 7:5).

Romans 7:7-11

7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "**YOU SHALL NOT COVET.**"

8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;

11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Paul was saying here that while the Law of God is Good- *We* are NOT Good. And because *we* are not Good- that which *is* Good may sometimes produce Problems for us. There is absolutely nothing wrong with God’s Gifts. Or God’s Law. What is wrong in both of these- is *us*! God has graciously given us the earth and animals and the Union between a Man and a Woman- and these things are Wonderful; and we should thank God for them. Yet Jesus said that fields; and oxen; and Marriage can keep a man out of Heaven! And that is why Jesus said,

So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:33)

Anything has the Power to stand in our Way to hinder us from becoming a true Disciple- *not* just pure Evil; *not* just easily recognizable Sins- but even the good Gifts that God gave to us- need to be handled *lightly*. So, it should not be surprising that the greatest Competition that we face for our Devotion and

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol.2 (Grand rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p38.

Affection for God- might very well be what we have thanked and praised Him for the most.

Fasting not only helps us to see that- but it also will *empower* us to handle God's good Gifts- correctly.

So, while we all know that there are NO Contradictions in the Bible- there *are* Paradoxes and Mysteries that we have to struggle with- in order to understand. And that's NOT simply "splitting hairs".

Paradoxes and Mysteries may appear, at first, to be blatant Contradictions. But as we grow in both the Knowledge of God and our Love of Jesus Christ- we are enlarged with more and more Information that helps to solve the Mysteries and Paradoxes.

So, which Command do we obey? Do we "*do Business*" with the lost World OR do we "*separate*" from the World? This is where Church History comes in handy- because we are NOT the first Generation of Believers who have run up against this Paradox.

For over 1,000 years immediately after the Apostles died- the Church entered into a Phase called, "*Monasticism*" or "*Asceticism*". This was when the Leaders of the visible Church taught that "getting away" from the World and its Temptations and Obligations was the very "Height" and "Zenith" of Spirituality and Godliness and Christianity.

So, people from every walk of Life sold all their Belongings and moved into Communes- usually in far off Places- and spent all their Time Fasting; Praying; Singing; and studying the Bible. And it was glorious! The World is sinful- so, what Believer wants to be involved with that?

But as Time went on- the people who were involved in that Phase- noticed something. Not only did the Church have little or no Effect on the Sinners of the world- their own Families drifted away from God as well. So, even though the people who engineered this Disaster thought it was great- Monasticism and Asceticism is now correctly seen as something that Believers may do- PERIODICALLY- but NOT as a *total* and *permanent* Way of Life.

Of course, it is MUCH *easier* to pray when you are alone. Of course, it is MUCH easier to get with God- when you are by yourself or surrounded with ONLY people who are on the same Page as you. When you *eliminate* all of the various Problems that people have and create- your own individual Life becomes much easier; better; and more spiritual.

But how do you raise Children in that? How do you marry a Wife? How do you obey Jesus and go into all the World and preach the Gospel to every Creature in that Framework? How do you engage and confront civil Magistrates with "holy Indictments" calling them to repent; fear God; and to rule wisely- in that kind of setup? The Answer is- you don't. And neither did those who were caught up in

what was a *noble* Effort but which proved to be entirely unworkable on a permanent Basis.

The Answer is that God's people are to do BOTH. We are to "occupy" and "do business" with the world. And at the SAME TIME- we are to also, "Come out from their midst and be separate". So, we are to be

"IN" the World and yet not become a part "OF" the World

Now that is a great Slogan that many people have espoused over the years. But that Slogan is a whole lot *easier* to simply *repeat* than it is to actually *do* it. My Observation (NOT my Condemnation) from being in the Church for over half a Century-is that MOST EVERYBODY who tries this- fails at doing both! I, personally, have failed at doing both- much *more* often than I have succeeded. And yet I read what my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ prayed in **John 17:14-17:**

14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

So that is what we are told to do. But *HOW* are we to do both things? How do we live in this world and yet not become affected by what goes on in the world? For example, how do you work hard to make money to support your Family; pray that God will bless you; and make a Way for you; and then rejoice when God does that; and then *continue* to rejoice as God continues to bless- AND AT THE SAME TIME- maintain a Life that is free from loving money and entrapped by Covetousness? At what point did you cross over the Line from the good and godly and spiritual Aspect of working hard to provide for your Family- into lusting for more of this world's Goods? It is truly walking a Tightrope.

Because, many times, we don't even see the Line- until *after* we have crossed it. Sometimes we don't sense that we have already lost our Hunger for God- until AFTER many Compromises and wrong Decisions have been made- because all that we are *consumed* with- are the Blessings from God; and our earthly Responsibilities as His people living in a fallen World.

And I have also noticed that the people who lay claim to actually be doing both- have very little in the form of Teaching and practical Examples- to show the rest of us how it is done.

This is why I have personally “*hammered out*” what I believe is a Concept that might help with obeying both of these *seemingly* contradictory Commands:

God is NOT only pleased when I actually *obey* both sides of this Paradox. He is also pleased when I value His Commands enough to *struggle* to obey.

I DON’T always accomplish what God wants from me. But I try. I *want* to. And the REASON I want to obey and try to obey- is because I love God; and I believe His Commands are Good and Worthwhile. And I love God- because I am saved. And so, I have come to believe that God’s Commands are not only the Way I can honor God- but they are also the Path to *fullness* of my own Joy as well.

So, I believe with every fiber of my Being that obeying God is *absolutely* the very BEST thing that anyone can ever do. And that is my *ultimate* Goal. But I also believe- with just as much Energy and Passion- that the Fact that I am willing to struggle with the Paradoxes I find in the Bible- on a day-to day Basis- glorifies God as well. And so, even though I may fail at faultless Obedience- I am still glorifying God “by” and “through” and “in” that Struggle.

And I believe that- because I wouldn’t struggle at all- if I wasn’t already in “*Union with Jesus*”. And that Reality *compels* me to *try*- to *struggle* to obey. And it helps me to know that I am NOT a complete Failure- even when I fall short.

Beloved- one of the *primary* Weaknesses of the Old Covenant- was because it was based on human Performance. Human beings simply CANNOT obey God’s Commands- without *some* level of Fault. And that Failure at perfect Obedience is NOT a matter of how much Effort we put forth. It is a Fact of what our “Humanity” is. And that is why not a single soul, who lived under the Old Covenant attained faultless Obedience. NOT Moses; NOT David; NOT Isaiah; and NOT Daniel. No human born of Woman obeyed God’s Law perfectly EXCEPT JESUS! And that *indisputable* Fact is why we NEED Jesus!

But if all the New Covenant is- is a *different* set of Commands- that I have to obey- flawlessly- or else it doesn’t count- then I’m no better off now than they were then. In fact, the New Covenant becomes a CURSE to me- if it requires my faultless Obedience- because what the New Covenant commands and requires is infinitely HARDER than what God required under the Old.

The Old Covenant *primarily* managed our *outward* Behavior; while the New Covenant deals with the “heart Condition” that is *behind* the outward Behavior. So, if the ONLY Way I can please God is through *perfect* Obedience- then the New Covenant has been nothing but an abject Failure. Because there is NOT a single human- born of Woman- who has lived under the

New Covenant- that has obeyed it without Flaw. NOT Paul; NOT Peter; NOT John; NOT Augustine; NOT the Puritans; NOT Jonathan Edwards; NOT John MacArthur; and NOT you and me.

Thanks be to God- that Jesus obeyed God's Law- PERFECTLY! And we are forgiven and made Righteous by trusting in Him *personally*- and in His flawless Obedience! And then armed and empowered with the third Person of the Trinity dwelling continually in us; armed and empowered with Jesus interceding at the Right Hand of the Majesty; armed and empowered with 66 inspired; infallible; and inerrant Books; armed and empowered with the Guidance and Wisdom from 2,000 years of godly Teachers and Preachers; and armed and empowered with the Knowledge of 6,000 years of human Existence- my Desire and Ability to Sin and Compromise and fail God- has been greatly REDUCED!

But even then- Sin is so *pervasive*; and such an *engrained* Reality in my Flesh- it will NEVER be completely *eliminated* until I am with God in Heaven! And that is one of the Reasons God gave us the Gift of Fasting!

Amen. Let's 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.

