

Christ Likeness In The Spiritual Discipline Of Fasting

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Date: 04 September 2022

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[0 : 00] Thank you for being here one more time, more day.

It's a real blessing and privilege having this great opportunity of talking to all of you of this subject and I'm glad that you're still here.

And today we are going to talk about one of the most unpopular spiritual disciplines and we're going to go to the book of Matthew chapter 6 verses 16 and 18.

Verses 16 to 18 and as you look for that passage, we will remind what we have done so far.

This is week number four of this biblical discipleship series and teachings. Three more after this one and today we'll finish the part of imitating Christ in terms of how he did spiritual disciplines.

[1 : 50] We have gone through the first week, right, in which we discussed how the purpose of discipleship is Christlikeness and how we grow personally in imitating Christ and we help, equip, assist one another in the same purpose of imitating him.

So three components, Christlikeness, growing in that, and equipping one another to grow in the same subject. And we need to be a disciple, right, in order to make disciple.

We need to practice what we preach. And then the second week we talk about Christlikeness in the spiritual discipline of prayer and we talk about how our Lord Jesus Christ was a man of intense prayer life and how his disciples imitated him and how he did teach them how to pray and how we pray the will of God, how we pray the word of God, not according to our desires.

And we encourage all of us, right, to improve or make every effort diligently to imitate Jesus in our prayer life.

We saw also last week how we imitate Christ in the spiritual discipline of Bible and Scripture intake.

[3 : 41] We, again, saw how our Lord Jesus Christ was a man devoted to Scripture. This was clearly evident in the way that he refuted Satan, Pharisees, Pharisees, scribes, because he used, I mean, the Scripture in Christ was the sword of the Spirit.

And he, with the way of his life, the way he, in his minister, his earthly ministry, we can see how he studied the Scripture, how he meditated on the Scripture, how he memorized Scripture.

In the future, we saw bad statistics of how in many Protestant churches in the United States, all of those disciplines are being neglected, practiced by less than 40% in many surveys.

And that's sad. And that's why we need to make every effort and diligently imitate Christ in his prayer life and we take him in his Bible intake. And today, and before going to today, right, we, in the sermon number one, we know that these are things not done for salvation.

We never should see this in a legalistic manner, right? It's just a balance between what we have been given by grace, we, with the empowerment of God, in 2 Peter 1, 3, right?

[5 : 24] He says, God has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to him to his own glory and excellence.

So God has already granted the power on us to do that. We have the Holy Spirit in us, but he wants us to make every effort to be diligent in following the pattern that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gave us.

So today we continue talking about ways in which we imitate Christ in our personal life. And we're going to go under the subject of Christlikeness in the spiritual discipline of fasting.

I said that it's very unpopular. Let's see how God helped us to go through this and to explain things for his glory and in a way that you feel, and I feel, right, motivated to imitate Christ also in this way.

So let's read in Matthew 6, 16 to 18. And the Word of God says, And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.

[6 : 49] Truly I say to you, they have received the reward. Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we one more time come to you acknowledging our complete dependency. And we are unable without you. We are, without you we can do nothing. Only abiding in you, Christ, only being in you, only through the power of your Holy Spirit we can do and grow.

And we ask that your Holy Spirit be with us today as we talk about this subject, that the church be edified, that your Holy Spirit works in our hearts, and that your Word produces fruit today in the people here in it.

In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. In the back, there are more handouts for this teaching and sermon today.

[8 : 10] So if you don't have a copy at the end of the service, you can feel free to get one. Amen. So today, as I said, we continue talking ways in we imitate Christ in our personal life and also ways in which we encourage and equip one another for the same.

And as I said, we're going to talk about Christ-likeness in the spiritual discipline of fasting. And fasting is one of the most neglected disciplines among Protestant churches.

We saw pretty sad statistics last week regarding Bible intake and even prayer. This is even worse. First, for many professing Christians in this 21st century, fasting may actually be seen as strange, a little extreme, or even fanatical.

For many, many 21st century Christians in the United States and around the world. And of that, there are several contemporary men that have given us significant commentaries about fasting in terms of being sad or shocked for this neglect.

[9 : 47] For example, Dr. Joel Beek, he's the president of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. He has stated the following. Dr. Beek words, Fasting is an important biblical discipline for private and public devotion, yet it is generally forgotten today as if it were part of some extreme asceticism that we have outgrown.

Stephen Lee, he's the founder of Sermon Audio. He said, Unfortunately, fasting has become unpopular or simply uncomfortable to many Christians and churches, despite the wealth of the spiritual benefit and blessing that can be enjoyed if it is properly understood.

Donald Whitney, in his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, indicated, Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all spiritual disciplines.

Few disciplines go so radically against the flesh and the mainstream of culture as this one. But we cannot overlook its biblical significance.

Of course, some people, for medical reasons, cannot fast. But most of us, they are not to overlook fasting's benefit in this disciplined pursuit of Christian life.

[11 : 16] Paul Washer, founder of Heart Cry Missionary Society, indicates the following. Paul Washer said, As genuine fasting reveals a passion for God and a dependence upon His power, as well as a concern for others, that the lack of fasting may be an indicator of apathy toward God and excessive delight in or dependence upon self and the temporal pleasures of this world.

Last name I want to mention, John Piper. John Piper relates Christian fasting with having a hunger for all the fullness of God, aroused by the aroma of Jesus' love, and by the taste of God's goodness in the gospel of Christ.

So, brothers and sisters, there are many spiritual benefits that Scripture points out when we imitate Christ in the spiritual discipline of fasting.

And even though many Christians in our contemporary times have neglected it, seen its practice as strange or extreme or fanatical, Scripture does support that believers are expected to fast.

And I want to encourage all of us to enjoy this spiritual discipline of fasting and the spiritual benefits of it, especially when it is accompanied with prayer, because it's not just fasting alone.

[12 : 57] Like, just fasting alone is not actually a biblical way of fasting. It's a time that we dedicate for God, but that needs to be saturated with prayer and Scripture meditation.

That's the way that we see in the Bible. We're going to see some reference about that. So, it should be accompanied with prayer and Scripture reading and meditation, either personally or corporately, because that's what Christ did, right?

Christ did fast, and this is another way to imitate Christ. And not only Christ fast, but the Apostle after Christ did fast too.

For example, the Apostle Paul was a man of prayer, Scripture meditation, and also fasting. Not only them. If we continue, the Church Fathers, right?

Tertullian, all of them. If we continue going forward in history, the Reformers did fast. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Puritans, all of them did practice this spiritual discipline too.

[14:11] So, no respected theologian or scholar of our contemporary times will tell us that this is something that is not to be done anymore.

Why is it then that so many professed believers in our times feel uncomfortable talking about that or see it in a way that is not biblical?

When was the last time that you practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting accompanied with prayer and Scripture meditation? When was the last time?

What is fasting? Fasting involves the voluntary and purposeful abstinence from food for the pursuit of spiritual matters for a determined amount of time in devotion to our God.

So, it's a voluntary and it's done with a purpose. With a purpose. And in Scripture, generally speaking, we can notice like three kinds of fasting.

[15:20] There is a normal fast. Basically, that was the one done by our Lord Jesus Christ. He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. In that time, He did not eat food or drink food, but He drank water.

So, there is a fasting that is done without food, with water. That's the way Christ did. Because it never says that He was not thirsty.

It says that He was hungry. So, we assume that it was a fasting of food, both solid and liquid, but He drank water. There is also a partial fasting.

We see that done by Daniel. In Daniel chapter 3, chapter 10, sorry, verse 3, we see that I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine, entered my mouth, nor did I unnot myself at all for a full three weeks.

So, He did a partial fasting. Just some things. And earlier, like, you know, when He was, He just did one of vegetables, but that one was because of the fat of, that's another story.

[16:30] But this partial fasting, and that is also the absolute or complete fast. An example of that is in Acts 9, 8 to 9, the Apostle Paul, right after his conversion, he fasted for three days with no water and no food.

So, brothers and sisters, part of our Christ-likeness journey is growing into practicing all that our Lord did and fasting when done properly in a biblical sense.

It's another spiritual discipline that benefits disciples in their spiritual growth, and it helps us to focus, excuse me, in spiritual matters. It can be done personally.

It can be done with somebody else. Like a quick team, it's a great opportunity to deal with one another, and it can be done even as a church. So, let's go through three main points after this lengthy introduction.

Number one, our Lord Jesus Christ did fast. Number two, Christ did teach us to fast and expects us to do so.

[17:50] Number three, fasting done with a biblical purpose. So, we go to point number one. And our Lord Jesus Christ did fast. Again, fasting was another spiritual discipline practiced by Christ.

After his baptism, he did fast for 40 days and 40 nights before formally beginning his earthly ministry.

We're going to read again Matthew 3, 16. Not again, sorry. This is to support that statement, how he did fast, right, after his baptism.

Just going to read this, Matthew 3, 16. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him.

And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

[18:54] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.

After fasting, after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. So, we know that this was a particular fasting by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not called, right, to imitate Christ in this particular exact manner.

This was a particular prolonged fasting by Christ. It's not presented as a model for his follower to practice because it is an experience unique to the Son of God at the outset of his mission.

Nevertheless, when Jesus told his disciples and when you fast, right, that we read, he implicitly expressed his expectation for them to practice this spiritual discipline.

[20:07] So, in the same way that our Lord Christ did fast, his disciples after Christ, all his disciples after Christ resurrected, after Christ ascended into heaven, the disciples continued practicing this

spiritual discipline.

It did not stop when Christ ascended. In Acts 13, 2, right, we see how the disciples were worshiping the Lord and fasting.

In Acts 14, 23, we see how the disciples, this is after Christ ascended, right, and resurrected and went to heaven. In Acts 14, 23, we see how the disciples joined together with prayer and fasting. It's very interesting that every time, most times, actually, that we see the word fasting in a scripture practiced by the disciples in Acts and when it is encouraged by Paul, for example, to the Corinthians and all of them, excuse me, is accompanied with prayer, fasting and prayer.

Prayer is a very important component when we dedicate time for that. And after the disciples died, right, I have said that, the church fathers continued this practice and advocated for the same.

[21 : 39] You know, Tertullian, one of the church fathers, has a lot of written information about that. reformers like John Calvin and Luther also, and also many Puritans, as I said, they practice it, encourage it in other believers and they wrote about this topic, teaching the right way of doing it.

And all of them did it because they wanted to imitate Christ, they were disciples of our Master and Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and they were aware of these spiritual blessings when believers fast in devotion to God, mostly when done with prayer and scripture reading and meditation, these things need to be incorporated, right, in our time.

So, cried, did fast and the disciples after him did fast and the church fathers and the reformers and the Puritans and all throughout church history, this is a practice that has never ceased.

So, with this, we are now going to our point number two, Christ did teach his disciples to fast and expect us to do so.

Matthew 6, 16, and when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.

[23 : 12] Truly I say to you, they have received their reward, but when you fast and know in your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sits in secret will reward you.

So, in addition to practicing the spiritual discipline of fasting as we have seen in the first point, Jesus also expected his disciples to observe it in the right manner.

This expectation is clearly understood when he tells them and when you fast. And that is why he teaches them how to do it and when you fast.

Christ knows that his disciples will copy him, will imitate him in that manner. He assumes it's going to be a practice that those who follow him will do.

And when you fast, fasting was not new for the disciples as it was normally practiced, right, by the Israelites in which persons, again, deliberately go without food, usually as a way of honoring God or as part of a period of meditation and prayer.

[24 : 30] Moon indicates the following. For the Jewish community of Jesus' day, the three primary expressions of piety were charity, prayer, and fasting.

The only official Jewish day of fasting was the day of atonement, John Kippur, right? When eating, drinking were forbidden, the Jews would also fast in connection with the celebration of days of national disaster and it was frequently done on a private and individual basis as well.

And it was frequently done on a private and individual basis as well. So, when Jesus says and when you fast, right, it indicates that fasting should be a normal and acceptable practice in the Christian life, something that Jesus assumed and expected his disciples to continue doing on certain occasions.

So, brothers and sisters, there is no, nothing is stated by Christ regarding the frequency of fasting, right?

Whitney points out that it is interesting that Jesus gives us no command regarding how often or how long we should fast, just like all the other spiritual disciplines.

[25 : 59] Fasting is not to be a legalistic routine. Fasting is not to be a legalistic routine. It is a privilege and an opportunity to seek God's grace that is open to us as often as we desire.

Christ advised his disciples to guard their hearts and motive when fasting, like, the motive of the heart continues to be key in everything we do.

Why we do it? The motive of the heart. So Christ advised his disciples to guard their heart. That's why he tells them, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.

Rather, it should be, right, it should be sincere, in sincerity to our Lord. It should be for the glory of God and not for ostentation or of any kind.

The hypocrites that Jesus was referring to practiced fasting for the appearance of piety and not with godly motive and sincere heart, not with contrition or emulation of soul in them, which is the life and soul of the deity.

[27 : 22] They were mock fast, the show and shadow without the substance. That's the way they did it. But, instead, Christ encouraged his disciples, he encouraged us, that when fasting, they should anoint their head and wash their face, that their fasting may not be seen by others, but their heavenly father in secret.

As, right, as we sing in many things that the Lord teaches us, it's something for God.

We do it with a motive that is for God, not for any other motivation of our hearts. It is also important to clarify that although Jesus encouraged fasting in secret, it is not a prohibition of corporate fasting, because when done with godly motive, as the apostles and the early church did practice, right, they did it corporatively too, it's not a prohibition for that.

We see that they did it as a church in Acts 13 too. They did it privately, in private, but they also did it as a church. Acts 13 too, while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, right, they were doing it as a church, Acts 14 23, and when they had appointed elders for then in every church with prayer and fasting, right, they do that together.

It can be done personally, it can be done together. That's the point is the motive of the heart, the reason not to be done like the Pharisees were doing it as Christ told his disciples.

[29 : 25] Again, unfortunately, fasting is neglected in the contemporary churches now, the last couple of centuries. There is little preaching about it and little practice of it, neither personally nor corporatively.

religion. And that's true, right? I talked with some pastors, I have talked with some pastors of other churches.

When was the last time that the church talked about that? Most of them did not remember. So it's really a neglected discipline. It's little preaching, little practice of it.

In the Institute of Christian Religion, John Calvin writes, let us therefore say something about fasting since very many, while they do not understand how useful it is, regard it as not very necessary.

Others also consider it superfluous, completely rejected, and since its use is not well understood, it can easily lapse into superstition.

[30 : 39] And he gives a good explanation. the biblical and the motive for which his disciples need to follow Christ and imitate him. He did it, and he encouraged the people of his time to practice it the right way.

So many saints of the past understood that Christ did teach us to fast because he expected us to do so, and that's why its practice continued by Christians throughout history.

As fasting was practiced and taught by Jesus, by the church father, by all of those people, believers today should also continue to do it.

Again, it is understandable that some Christians are not able to fast because of medical conditions, right? If you have type 1 diabetes or type 2 diabetes or adrenal insufficiency pregnancy or if you're pregnant or anything, right, that prevent, that's not for you.

And if you do that, it needs to be done under medical supervision and actually approved by your primary care doctor, but I assume in most of us with no medical contraindications need to know that Christ's followers are expected to fast as clearly indicated by Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount.

[32 : 08] And as fast it has been a historical practice of the church, as I said, usually done with prayer and scripture meditation, this is the discipline that needs to be kind of restored in our times and in which contemporary believers need to be biblical and historically educated on.

Tertullian, he was one of the church fathers, right?

He advocated for the spiritual discipline, but at the same time he warned about extremism, right?

So, there are medical conditions like anorexia nervosa.

He didn't say that. It's something I'm adding, of course. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia, or something like that, right? It's not that. The extreme of applying it is also a problem.

And that's why we do that relying in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and not going to the extreme, not practicing it at all or doing it in an unbiblical, unhealthy way.

[33 : 35] John Calvin also encouraged the believers in practicing the discipline of fasting, warning Christians that it should not be done in a mechanical or superfluous way, but rather from the heart, urging believers to render hearts, not their garments, and pointing out that God does not greatly esteem fasting of itself unless an inner emotion of the heart is present.

This is John Calvin writings. And through this pleasure of one's things, through humility and through sorrowing, arousing from the fear of God.

So that is the posture, the attitude, right? When we practice this discipline. Fasting is more effective when done in conjunction or combination with other spiritual activities and less effective when it's done alone.

In other words, it is not only to fast, but also being involved in a spiritual devotion when we are practicing this discipline. There is a Puritan of the 17th century, his name is Arthur Hildersham, and he instructed the believers of his times regarding the things to do and consider doing when we fast. So when we decide to dedicate a day and time and devotion to God for fasting, he says, and this is supported in the scripture, of course, things that also need to be done when we dedicate time for fasting.

[35 : 07] Number one, he included reading the word of God. And he pointed out to Nehemiah 9, 1, 2, 3, right? Now, on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting in a sackcloth, stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers, and they stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day.

They read for a quarter of a day, eight hours reading scripture, and meditation and they confessed their sins for six hours while fasting.

So, the point is, it is done in conjunction, the reading and meditation of a scripture needs to be present when we dedicate time for fasting.

That's why maybe it's not a good idea to do it while we're working, right? Or while we're doing, I don't know, something else. It's a time for God. It's a time to be with God.

We have nothing else to do that day, right? We decide to be with God, talking to Him in His Word. Jeremiah 36, 5-7, And Jeremiah ordered Baruch saying, I am banned from going to the house of the Lord, so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the Lord's house, you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll that you have written at my dictation, you shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah to come out of their cities.

[37 : 14] It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against His people.

So, again, in this portion, we see the people, Jeremiah, encouraging Israel to fast, but also reading the scrolls, fasting with reading of the scroll.

Another thing to do when we fast, according to Arthur Hilderman, a Puritan of the 17th century that is also supported in the scripture, is that when considering a time of fasting, in devotion to God, he introd to sing, praise God, and thanks Him for everything, right?

Even the for everything, for everything. and he says Ephesians 5, 18 to 20, and do not get drunk with wine, for that is the vultory, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything, giving thanks always and for everything, to God, the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A third thing, a third activity that we do when we fast is prayer, right? Another activity when we fast that absolutely needs to be present is prayer.

[38 : 45] There's no way to dedicate a day for God in devotion without scripture reading and prayer. In many instances in the scripture in which the people are fasting, they are also complementing it with a time of prayer.

We see that in several scriptures. I'm just going to read to you Mark 9, 29. This is from King James version of the Bible. And he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting.

Israel, 8, 23, so we fasted and imploded our God for this in prayer, right? Implored, implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Paul, the apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, 5, this is also in the King James version of the Bible, he said that you may give yourself to fasting and prayer.

So there's always this connection between practicing, when we dedicate time for fasting, that needs to be done in the context of a good and quality prayer to the Lord.

[39 : 54] The last one he mentioned is another activity when we fast that needs to be present, examining our hearts for sins that we have committed or we are committing, right?

And we pursue repentance and obedience. So we, when we're fasting, another thing that we consider to do is examine in our hearts what are the ways in which I am being unfaithful or I am not reflecting Christ, in which way I am not Christ-like.

and we repent and we obey. And he mentioned 1 John 1, 8-9, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Amen? So, last point, fasting done with a biblical purpose. Fasting done with a biblical purpose.

[41 : 00] When we fast, it would be ideal to have a specific purpose in mind. In a scripture, we can find many reasons for which we people of God, for which the people of God fasted.

There are many. I'm just going to mention a few of them to you today because of time. Number one, seeking God's guidance. People in a scripture fasted in order to be clear on what is the route.

For example, Judge 20, 26 to 28 tells us about that. I'm not going to read the whole scripture, but I'm going to read Acts 14, 23.

You have those references in your handouts. Acts 14, 23, and when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting.

So, prayer and fasting was a component before the apostle decided the elders that they're going to appoint to church. So, in that way, it was a way of seeking God's guidance.

[42 : 06] Another biblical purpose is seeking deliverance or protection. Right? We all are, well, sorry about that. Esther, if we have read Esther, right?

This is a book in which we see how this woman of God, right? In chapter 416, they fasted for the purpose of deliverance and protection.

Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa and hold a fast on my behalf and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.

I and my young women will also fast as you do. then I will go to the king through it is against the law and if I perish, I perish.

And another one, the last one I'm going to mention is another purpose for fasting is overcoming temptation, overcoming, right, our struggles, our sins, and also dedication to God.

[43 : 27] And a clear example of that is we saw that right that in the middle of his temptations, our Lord Jesus Christ fasted. Pastor John MacArthur points out that fasting is never shown in a scripture to be the means to heighten a spiritual experience, visions, or a special insight or awareness as many mystics, including some Christian mixed disclaim.

Fasting is appropriate in this age because Christ is physically absent from the earth, but it is appropriate only as a response to a special times of testing, trial, and struggle.

This is another purpose that we can see in the fasting. So, as a matter of conclusion and final words, we have seen point number one, our Lord Jesus Christ did fast.

Two, Christ did teach us to fast and expect us to do so. And three, fasting done, with a biblical purpose, and we have also seen the other disciplines that should accompany a time of fasting.

So, brothers and sisters, this is another way in which we grow to be like Christ. Right? Disciples grow in the likeness of Jesus by the constant pursuit of imitating Jesus, and that includes incorporating the discipline of fasting in our devotion, independence of the Holy Spirit.

[44 : 54] Again, if you have a medical condition, this is not for you. I mean, it has to be done with the approval of your doctor. But if not, this is something that is expected from us from time to time.

Let's start practicing it now. Brothers and sisters, I'm actually going to challenge you today. this is between you and God, and you don't have to tell anyone if you're doing it or not.

This weekend, in our weekly prayer meeting on Wednesday, right, we were praying for several things. There are three things that God's put in my heart that we can assign as a purpose for our fasting in the challenge that I'm going to give you today.

We pray for those people visiting GFC that are not saved yet, including family members, spouses, sons, and daughters of members who are not Christian yet.

