

Sovereign Grace Church
“Fasting or Feasting?” outline
September 9, 2018

Matthew 4: 16-18

My first memories of fasting did not have anything to do with the church. Rather I had certain friends from other schools who wrestled and it always seemed that they were fasting in order to “make weight.” It did not seem like much fun. The church tradition in which I was raised did not encourage fasting as a religious practice and I don't remember it ever being discussed. Later, after becoming a Christian, I remember it being taught about but not emphasized or encouraged. It seemed tied to a more Roman Catholic practice of medieval “disciplines” which were usually interpreted as a form of works-righteousness.

But Jesus did fast and, even though He nowhere commanded the practice, He did seem to expect that it would be done...at least after His physical departure. His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount indicated that it could be done from either fleshly or spiritual motives. He taught that when we fasted we should not look miserable....but content and normal. I don't believe He was suggesting that we trick people into thinking we were not fasting when in fact we were. I think He was suggesting that fasting, for a person who was actively abiding in Jesus, was actually a form of nourishment....even physical nourishment. That would at least explain how Moses & probably Elijah could fast from both food and drink for well beyond the limits of mortality. We shall explore this topic this morning.

1. Fasting in the Bible

- **Absolute Fasting**
Esther 4: 16; Ac 9:9; Deut 9:9; I Kgs 19:8

- **Personal and Corporate Fasting** Joel 2: 15

- **Historical Problems** Matt 19:14-15

2. Fleshly/Worldly Fasting v. 16
Lk 18: 9-14

3. Spiritual/Righteous Fasting vv. 17-18
Phil. 3: 18-19; I Cor. 6: 12-13

- **Problem**
- **Solutions:**

Is fasting actually an effort to teach us to rightly feast?!

Matt. 4: 3-4; Deut 8: 3; Jn 4: 34; 6: 48-51; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 21: 3-4

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

- 1. Have you ever fasted for a spiritual purpose? For how long? What was its effect? Did it have the effect of deepening your dependence on Christ? Was it an overall negative or a positive experience? What did you learn from it?**
- 2. Why do you think fasting is so often connected with prayer in Scripture? How might prayer enhance ones prayers?**
- 3. Do you think Jesus fasted before Satan's temptations in order to make Himself humanly weaker? Or stronger? How might it be argued that His fasting made Him stronger and more prepared for Satan's temptations?**
- 4. Are you ever tempted to do good things to be recognized by other men or women for being a good person? Do you ever do good things in order to “shame” people you think should be doing them into doing them? How does that work out? Is there a better way?**
- 5. How can the church encourage a greater use of fasting in its life? How can you do this as an individual? Or as a family?**