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Fasting On A Full Stomach

By Darrell Powell

(Introduction - Lesson 1)

Think Out Loud:

Question: Should Christians fast today?

- It was done in Bible times, but we don't talk much about it now.
- Is it useful...necessary...commanded?
- Fasting - temporarily choosing not to partake of food and drink for a spiritual reason.
- In the Old Testament era, the Jews fasted frequently, though there was only one fast prescribed by the law.
 - Day of Atonement, the Hebrews were to "afflict" their souls (Leviticus 16:31), or fast, (cf. Isaiah 58:3).
 - We may not be commanded to fast, but the New Testament seems to indicate that Christians would see a need for it at times.
 - When the Lord's disciples were criticized for not fasting, Jesus pointed out that it didn't make sense for them to fast while He was still on earth, though the time would come when He would be taken away from them; then they would fast (Luke 5:35).
- Motives are important:
 - Jesus did caution the disciples about improper motivation to fast: "... when you fast, be not, as hypocrites. . ." (Matthew 6:16). \
 - The Pharisees would fast from eating, and instead of using the experience to grow closer to God, they made themselves look pitiful so people would notice.
 - Their desire was to be noticed and heralded by others.
 - Notice that he did not say, "if," but, "when" you fast—seeming to expect that they would do it from time to time.
 - Still, fasting today seems to be expected on a strictly voluntary basis.
 - Could fasting be a helpful tool used to help you train yourself to exhibit self-control and self denial?

Digging Deeper:

- Now, I'd like for you to consider a scenario with me: Imagine a person who fasted every day.
 - They'd die for sure, right?
- But here's HOW they fasted:
 - At midnight, they fast until morning (breakfast)
 - Then, they fast until mid-morning snack.
 - Don't forget about elevensies...
 - Then, they fast again until lunch.
 - Then, again until supper...
 - At this point, they start the cycle over again.

Question: Is this "fasting?" (technically speaking...yes)

Question: Does this type of fasting involve sacrifice? (NO)

- This person's "fasting" is no sacrifice at all.
 - They are simply doing exactly what they please...and then they proudly point out when ANY of their actions appear to be spiritual service.
- This person is "fasting on a full stomach."

Discuss:

- Of the things YOU do to serve God, which ones involve true sacrifice?
 - (Romans 12:1) - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*
 - (Philippians 1:21) - *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*
- Of the things YOU do to serve God, which ones do you do because you're truly submitted to God?
 - (Romans 8:7) - *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*
 - (James 4:7) - *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
 -
- Of the things YOU do to serve God, which ones do you do because of who you ARE...not who you're trying to look like?
 - (Matthew 23:25-26) *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.*
 - (Proverbs 15:8) - *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.*
- The next few lessons will help us explore this idea further.
- We're not just talking about fasting...in fact, that was just an example to bring us to a place where we can examine our own lives and hopefully find the willingness to change.
- This idea of "fasting on a full stomach" represents:
 - SERVICE without SACRIFICE
 - OBEDIENCE without SUBMISSION
 - OUTWARD APPEARANCES without INWARD BEING.

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(Lesson 2 - SERVICE without SACRIFICE)

Think Out Loud:

So, in these lessons, we are comparing the idea of fake fasting to the pitfalls in our own spiritual lives. A man who “fasts” only between regular meals and snacks is not serving anyone but himself. Today, fasting on a full stomach will represent SERVICE without SACRIFICE.

- ❖ Many “Christians” are looking for a brand of service that is free!
 - They want to be recognized as a follower of Christ...but don’t want any responsibility, and certainly don’t want to make any personal sacrifices in Christ’s name.
 - They want to do as little as *they* think is necessary to get to heaven.
 - But where is the logic in seeking to do as little as possible for the God who has done absolutely everything for us? (John 3:16; Philippians 2:5-8)

Digging Deeper:

- ❖ So, how do people practice service without sacrifice?
 - The person who participates in spiritual service ONLY when he has nothing better to do is serving without sacrifice.
 - Can you give an example of this? (would this idea apply to one who only comes to service projects/devos when they have nothing "better" to do?)
 - The one who gives ONLY out of her abundance like the rich people in (Mark 12:41).
 - They gave, but not to the point of sacrifice.
 - What are the things you make sure you have money for BEFORE you give to God? (movies, video games, dates, gas for cruising?)
 - Do you only give enough to God ease your conscience, or do you give until the pains of sacrifice are felt?
 - We are not required to physically die for our Christian family, but we have opportunities to make little sacrifices regularly.
 - When was the last time you gave up some time (that you really wanted to use in some other way) for the betterment of the Church?
- ❖ While some are looking for a cheaper brand of Christianity, Christ has already paid the ultimate price for our chance to spend eternity with Him (Acts 20:28).
 - A faithful Christian makes daily choices that reflect his or her love for Jesus.
 - As Christ himself put it, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).
 - Remember, only those who deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Christ can be His disciples (Matthew 16:24).

Some of us who are honest with ourselves would probably have to admit that some things we have labeled as spiritual service are really things that serve OUR OWN interests, and just happen to be good in some way. There's certainly nothing wrong with your actions in your everyday life being of service to God. In fact, that's the way it should be (Romans 12:2). But should your ONLY service to God be accidental/coincidental? Why not PLAN to serve Him in great ways and watch as your life improves for the better.

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(Lesson 3 - OBEDIENCE without SUBMISSION)

Think Out Loud:

- ❖ Can this be done...can a person obey without truly submitting?
 - Have you ever obeyed your parents without a submissive spirit? [Eph 6:1-2](#) *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (2) "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),*
 - If you have a job, have you ever obeyed your boss but done it with a bad attitude?
 - Absolutely it can be done, and it is done a lot...and many times that's the kind of service we offer to God.

Digging Deeper:

- ❖ What is obedience without submission?
 - This is the man who worships God on Sunday but inwardly he harbors hatred for people who aren't the same color as he is.
 - This is the woman who teaches her neighbor the gospel, but is living a life far removed from God's will.
- ❖ These are the people who live for the benefits that come from going through the motions.
 - These are people who do what they believe is expected of them, but they don't do it out of love for the God who created and sustains me.
 - Ex: If I'm not truly dedicated to God, but I obey His command to be faithful to my wife...my life will be better because I obeyed.
 - If I do good to them that do evil to me...I'll reap benefits from that behavior.
 - But, on Judgment Day, That type of obedience will not help me one bit.
 - Mat 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in

heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

- People just happen to “obey” God all the time (Because God’s way is always the best way).
- Just like the man who fasted on a full stomach...even though at times he “just happened” to be engaging in an activity that can be pleasing to God...He was NOT “doing the will of the Father.”
- This is “obedience without submission.”

Discuss:

- ❖ Jas 4:7-8 *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (8) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*
 - Submission=Resisting the devil
 - Submission =Drawing near to God
 - Submission=Cleansing/purifying self for God
- The Pharisees were kings and queens of “obedience without submission.”
 - Mat 23:23 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you **tithe** mint and dill and cumin, and **have neglected** the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and **faithfulness**. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*
 - They knew the law...better than anybody.
 - They could give you book, chapter, and verse for much of what they taught...but they were still WRONG.
 - They had a form of obedience, but they never SUBMITTED to Christ! (in fact, they quoted scripture daily, but spit in the face of God’s son!

- There may have been many reasons why these Jews could not/would not submit to Christ.
- One story sticks out in my mind:

Read Luke 7:36-48

- Have you been forgiven much...or just a little? ...
- Your answer to that question may very well be the deciding factor in whether or not you ever truly submit to Christ.

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(Lesson 4 - OUTWARD APPEARANCES without INWARD BEING)

Think Out Loud:

The idea of a person fasting only between regular meals and snacks and calling it spiritual service is ridiculous, but sadly many of us may be serving God in an equally absurd manner. In this last lesson, let's compare "fasting on a full stomach" to OUTWARD APPEARANCES without INWARD BEING.

- ❖ Isaiah prophesied to God's people regarding their fasting practices
 - 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. (Isa 58:3-4)
 - Mar 7:6 And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

Digging Deeper:

- ❖ Mama always said, "You show your true colors when nobody is looking...."
 - **Mat 23:25-28** *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (27) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. (28) So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*
 - When we read about these misguided scribes and Pharisees, we think, "how appalling they were"...but are we altogether different sometimes?

- Is the outside of your cup spotless, but hiding self-indulgence inside?
- How many of us are “fasting on a full stomach?”
- How many of us are Servants of Christ, only as long as we can continue to do as we please? (servants without sacrifice)
- How many of us go through the motions of obedience (we have the book chapter and verse part down)...but we haven’t submitted to Christ as LORD?
- How many of us appear to be faithfully serving the God of heaven... but inwardly, our hearts are far from Him?

Discuss:

- ❖ Let’s look inwardly for just a minute as we close.
- ❖ Who among us can honestly say that we have never/ are never guilty of fasting on a full stomach.
- ❖ Who can boast of a life without horrible blemishes...mistakes that we cannot undo?
- ❖ A person like that wouldn't need Jesus...and doesn't exist.
- ❖ After the story of the rich young ruler:
 - And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Mat 19:23-26)
- ❖ Even though we are ALL rich, we can be saved because CHRIST has reconciled us to God...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he

made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2Co 5:17-21)