

The Gospel According to Luke- Part 2

FASTING AND PIETY

PART 2

Why do we fast?

READ MATTHEW 6:16-18

INTRODUCTION

The topic of fasting is foreign to many of us in today's western society. Unless it is part of a diet regimen, many of us do not fast regularly, if ever. Here, in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is talking to the people and He is explaining to them the way that they were to fast. Fasting was done at least twice a week by the Jews (Mondays and Thursdays) and was something that indicated true dedication to the Lord. There was a trend by the more religious men to smear ash on their faces to make it look like they were gaunt and unhealthy on the days that they would fast so that people would look at them and either pity them or look on them with admiration for their dedication to God.

Jesus, as He regularly did, was explaining to the people that this is not what God wants when we fast but that we make ourselves look healthy so that no one might know that we are in a time of fasting. There is always a personal heart position that Jesus seems to be concerned about over anything else. There is no need for others to see our sacrifice because God sees it and that is far better. In fact, Jesus explains that when men see the sacrifice, we have gained our reward and it is here on this earth. This means that we receive the far lesser gift of men's acknowledgement and miss out on the gift of God's pleasure.

In the book of Luke we see that fasting can be something that we, as Christians, practice. Why we fast is important in this discussion. We fast because we desire to realign our hearts, minds, and bodies with Jesus and His will. It is something that we do so that we can focus on what He wants for us and it enables us to get our minds off of our stomach and onto the Lord and His Word. Jesus explains to Satan in chapter four of Matthew that man does not live by bread alone and we are to look to the Word of God for our very sustenance in this life. It is sweeter than honey and it refreshes like water. It has everything we need.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How often have you fasted? Have you ever fasted? Do you think that fasting is still something that Christians should do regularly? Why or why not?
2. Why did the Jews fast twice a week? What were they doing that was wrong according to Jesus?
3. Is it more important for people to see our faith or for it to be private? Why?
4. Why is it so easy to desire man's acknowledgement over God's? How can we be accountable to each other to only pursue the approval of the Lord?
5. What does it mean to "eat" the Word of God? How can we be better at relying on it to be our sustenance? Why is that important in today's world?

WRAP UP

So many different things pull us around today. We are busy with work, family, faith, and a myriad of other activities that can distract us from what God wants us to focus on. We must turn to Him for all of our questions and answers. We should be looking to His Word to know Him better and learn how to follow Him better. When we avoid His Word and turn to the world, only folly awaits us, especially as people who claim to be His children.