

How Fasting Changes Us



Fasting (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme for this week, "Fasting."

In my previous talks this week I've described fasting as a lost key, one that is found all through the pages of the Bible and yet somehow it has been set aside and misplaced by the Christian church. First of all, I defined fasting as voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. I explained that fasting is a way that God Himself has appointed for His people to humble themselves before Him. I also shared how Jesus Himself practiced fasting and taught His disciples to do the same and how the New Testament church following the example of their Master. I pointed out that when Jesus spoke about fasting, He did not say "if," He said, "when"; not "if you fast," but "when you fast." And thus He put fasting on precisely the same level as giving to the needy and praying. It was, "when you give," "when you pray," and "when you fast."

Today I'm going to deal with the mechanics of fasting. I'm going to explain how fasting changes us in our inner personality. The first thing that we need to see with absolute clarity out of Scripture is this: The power that makes the Christian life possible is the Holy Spirit. There is no other power that can enable us to live the kind of life that God requires of us as Christians. It cannot be done in our own will or in our own strength. It can only be done in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the key to successful Christian living is knowing how to release the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that in that power we can do the things we could no do in our own strength. Jesus made this clear to His disciples before He ever released them to go out into ministry of their own after the resurrection. In Acts 1:8, He said this:

> "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

He said, "In order to do what I've charged you to do, you're going to need power greater than your own. That power will come from the Holy Spirit. Don't go and begin to minister until that power of the Holy Spirit has come to you."

With this we compare the words of Paul in Ephesians 3:20, where he's speaking primarily about power in prayer. This is what he says:

> "Now to him [that's God] who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us…"

Paul says what God can do far exceeds the highest that we could ever think or imagine but it depends on His power at work in us. The extent of what God can do through us does not depend on our thinking or imagining but it does depend on His supernatural power being released in us and through us, whether it's in prayer, in preaching or in any form of service. And so the key, as I've said, is knowing how to release the power of the Holy Spirit and become, in a certain sense, channels or instruments through which the Holy Spirit works without hindrance.

Once we've seen this, then we can move on to the next key fact of Scripture and this is that our old carnal nature opposes the Holy Spirit. Its very essence, its character is such that it does not yield to the Holy Spirit. It's at opposition with the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament this carnal nature, what we are by nature before we're transformed by the new birth and by the grace of God, is called the flesh. It doesn't mean simply our physical body, it means the whole nature that we inherited in our flesh by our physical body, it means the whole nature that we inherit in our flesh by descent from our first father, Adam, who was a rebel. In other words, in every one of us lurking somewhere there's a rebel that's the carnal nature.

And this is what Paul says in Galatians 5:16–17 about that carnal nature:

> "But I say, walk by the Spirit [the Holy Spirit, capital "s"], and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. [You see, we're dependent on the Holy Spirit. And then Paul goes on:] For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit [capital 's,' the Holy Spirit], and the [Holy] Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."

That's very clear, very important. The carnal nature is in opposition to the Spirit of God. If we yield to the carnal nature, we are opposing the Spirit of God. If we're going to yield to the Holy Spirit, we have to deal with the carnal nature because as long as the carnal nature controls and operates through us, what we do will be in opposition to the Holy Spirit.

Now this applies not merely to our physical desires, although it includes those, but it applies also to what the Bible calls the carnal mind; that is, the way the old carnal, unregenerate nature thinks inwardly. There's a powerful verse in Romans 8:7, where Paul says:

> "The carnal mind is enmity against God…"

We have to point out the strength of the words that Paul uses. He says the flesh opposes the Holy Spirit. He says the fleshly mind is enmity against God, it's not neutrality. There's no suggestion that somehow the carnal nature and the carnal mind can be persuaded to do the will of God, it's impossible. The carnal mind, by its very nature, is enmity against God.

How do we understand the carnal mind? I understand it this way: It's the old, unregenerate soul in its main functions. The functions of the soul are usually defined as will, intelligence and emotions. And each of them can be summed up in a short, familiar, English word. The will says, "I want," the intelligence (or the mind) says, "I think," the emotions say, "I feel." Natural, unregenerate man is dominated and controlled by those three expressions of the ego: "I want," "I think," and "I feel." That's the way the flesh, the carnal nature, operates. If we are to come into submission to the Holy Spirit and if the Holy Spirit is to operate through us with freedom, then all that must be brought into subjection to the Holy Spirit. We have to subject the "I want," the "I think," and the "I feel" to the Spirit of God. And this is done, according to God's pattern in Scripture, by fasting. That was how Jesus Himself did it; that's how Paul did it; and that's how you and I are expected to do it.

Now I want to read to you the testimony of Paul himself, his own account of how he struggled with his own carnal nature and how he gained victory over it. It's found in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27. Paul describes this struggle in terms of an athlete going into training for victory in athletics. He says this:

> "Everyone who competes in the games [that's the Olympic Games] goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [He says, "I'm a man with a goal; I'm a man with a purpose. I'm a man under discipline." And he sums it up this way:] I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be

Paul realized that he had to bring his bodily nature, his carnal nature, his carnal mind into subjection if he was going to succeed in his divine calling. So this leaves every one of us with a question: Which is the master and which is the servant in each of us? Is the body the master and the spirit just the slave? Or is the spirit the master and the body the servant? I'll tell you this: Your body makes a wonderful servant but a terrible master.

I'm reminded of the story of a friend of mine, a lawyer in the Washington, D.C., area, who heard me preach on fasting once and decided it was the right thing to do. So he set aside a day and he was going to fast and he had a miserable day. Every time he walked out on the street he seemed to get outside a restaurant where there was a smell of cooking or there was pastries displayed in the window and he had a tremendous inner struggle. So, at the end of the day—and he himself told me this later—he gave his stomach a talking to and this is what he said, "Now, stomach. You've been very rebellious today. You've made a lot of unnecessary trouble for me and for that reason I'm going to punish you. I'm going to fast tomorrow as well as today."

Well, to me that's a tremendously clear lesson of establishing who is the master and who is the servant. Remember what I said: Your body is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. And if you're really going to succeed in the Christian life, if you're going to win the crown in the Christian athletics, you're going to have to establish the fact in your own experience that your body doesn't dictate to you, that your body doesn't control you, that you're not controlled by its whims and its appetites but that you are controlled by a sense of God's divine destiny and purpose for your life and that you'll do everything that's needed to bring your body into subjection so that it doesn't dictate to you, it doesn't impede you and hinder you in running your race. And I believe one of the basic scriptural ways to do this is by the practice of regular fasting.

When you fast, you serve notice on your body and your carnal nature: "You don't control me. I'm not subject to you. You're my servant. You'll obey what the Spirit of God in me declares I have to do."

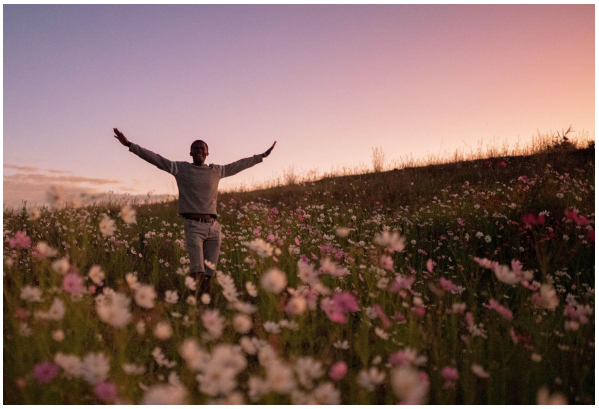
Well, our time is up for the day. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing with you how fasting can change history.

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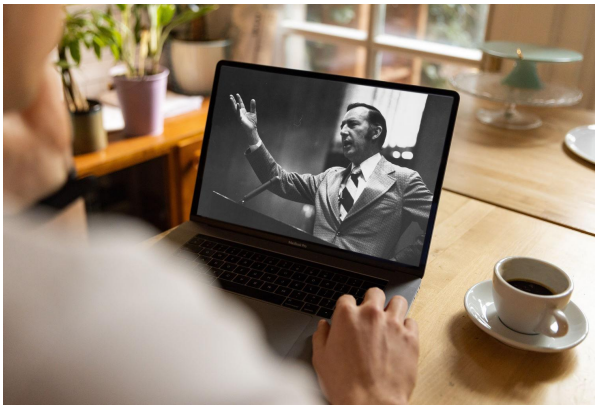
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