V. Conclusion

“We ache and yearn—and fast—to know more and more of all that God is for us in Jesus. But only because he has already laid hold of us and is drawing us ever forward and upward into ‘all the fullness of God.’” (Piper)

Recommended reading: John Piper’s “A Hunger for God”

Class Schedule Overview

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Core Seminars—How to Grow

Class 7: Fasting

I. Introduction

Definitions of fasting:

- **Most inclusive**: abstinence from anything that is legitimate in and of itself, for some special spiritual purpose.

- **Narrower**: voluntary abstinence from physical nourishment—food and drink—for special spiritual purposes.

A. Fasting in the Old Testament

1. Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 21; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7)

2. After the Exile (Zech. 8:19)

3. Occasional fasts:
   - Individual (2 Sam. 12:22)
   - Corporate (e.g. Judges 20:26)

4. Fasting gave expression to:
   - Grief (1 Sam. 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:12; 3:35; Neh. 1:4; Esther 4:3; Psalm 35:13-14)
   - Penitence (1 Sam. 7:6; 1 Ki. 21:27; Neh. 9:1-2; Dan. 9:3-4; Jonah 3:5-8)
   - Humility (Ezra 8:21; Ps. 69:10)

5. Fasting was often directed towards securing the guidance and help of God (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; 2 Sam. 12:16-23; 2 Chr. 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23)

B. Fasting in the New Testament

1. Jewish practice:
   - Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9)
   - Pharisees: every Monday and Thursday (Lk. 18:11-12)
   - Anna (Lk. 2:36-37)
(2) Jesus’ fasting (Matt. 4:1-4)

(3) The fasting of Jesus’ disciples is assumed (Matt. 6:16-18)

(4) Acts: leaders of the church fast when choosing missionaries (13:2-3) and elders (14:23)

(5) Paul twice refers to his fasting (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27)

II. Characteristics of Fasting

A. Degree of Abstinence

(1) Normal Fast: The abstinence from all food and drink. (Est. 4:15-16, Ezek. 10:6, Acts 9:8-9, Deut. 9:9)

(2) Partial Fast: A partial fast is a limitation of diet, but not abstention from all food. (Dan. 1:12)

B. Number of Participants in the Fast

(1) Private Fast: Matthew 6:16-18


(3) Congregational Fast: Esther 4:16; Neh. 9:1; Joel 2:15-16

C. Length of Fast

D. Frequency of Fasts

(1) Regular Fast: On a repetitive schedule (Lev. 16:29-31)

(2) Occasional Fast: Whenever a need is perceived

(3) Continuous Fast: Example: John the Baptist (Matt. 3:4)

III. Should Christians Fast?

- What the NT says about food and eating: 1 Tim 4:1-5; Col 2:16-23; Rom 14:3-6; 1 Cor 8.
- Fasting is nowhere commanded in the NT. Yet it seems clear in Scripture that Jesus assumed his followers would fast.
- Matthew 6:16-17 – “When you fast,…” “But when you fast…” (cf. Matt. 6:2-3 “…So when you give” & Matt. 6:5-7 “But when you pray”)

IV. Christian Fasting Has a Purpose

None of the purposes involve earning God’s favor. We are made acceptable to God through the work of Jesus Christ alone

10 Good Reasons to Fast

(1) Fast to Strengthen Prayer: Ezra 8:21,23

(2) Fast to Seek God’s Guidance: Judges 20:26-27a

(3) Fast to Seek Deliverance or Protection: 2 Chr. 20:2-4

(4) Fast to Express Grief -- over sin or calamities 2 Samuel 1:11-12; but remember 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 1:9

(5) Fast to Express Repentance: Joel 2:12

(6) Fast to Humble Yourself Before God: 1 Kings 21:27-29

(7) Fast to Express Concern for the Work of God: Dan. 9:2-3

(8) Fast to Minister to the Needs of Others: Isaiah 58:6-7

(9) Fast to Fight Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God

(10) Fast to Express Love and to Worship God