

# Honoring God with True Fasting: A Heartfelt Approach Beyond the Physical

By Richmond Shee

In the quest for deep spiritual communion with God, many Christians embrace fasting, traditionally understood as abstaining from food. However, a closer examination of biblical teachings, particularly Isaiah 58 and insights from the Apostle Paul, suggests that true fasting goes beyond the physical act. It's an inward posture that aligns with God's commandments and intentions.

## Isaiah 58: Redefining Fasting

Isaiah 58 criticizes the empty ritual of fasting that focuses only on the outward show of piety and humility. The Lord's definition of an acceptable fast isn't merely a ritualistic denial of food, but a setting aside of the flesh to focus on genuine devotion and righteous actions. This involves setting aside the "old sinful man," repairing the damages caused by sin, and restoring one's relationship with God. Such a fast honors God.

- *Isaiah 58:5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?*

## The Apostle Paul's Insight: The Spirit Over the Letter

The Apostle Paul does not address fasting, but rather another ritual that similarly could be done for the wrong reasons. In 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Romans 2:25, he argues that outward expressions of piety, like circumcision, hold no value if they are not accompanied by obedience to God's commandments. Paul's message is clear: external rituals are meaningless without a changed heart and adherence to God's law. In essence, it's not the physical act that counts, but the spiritual obedience and integrity it symbolizes.

- *1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.*
- *Romans 2:25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.*

## **The Lord's Critique of the Pharisees**

The Lord's words in Matthew 6:16-18 provide a critical perspective on fasting. He rebukes the Pharisees for their hypocritical approach, where they disfigure their faces to look like they are fasting, while holding on to various sins. Christ emphasizes fasting in secrecy, where the focus is not on public admiration, but on private, sincere communion with God. This teaching aligns with the broader biblical message that true fasting is a matter of the heart, not just a physical exercise to gain favor or approval.

- *Mathew 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*

Nothing can be more clear than the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9-14. Both men go to the temple to pray. The Pharisee tells God that he fasts twice a week and pays tithes. The tax collector, however, stands at a distance, unwilling even to look up to heaven and beats his chest (a sign of sorrow and repentance in Jewish culture) and prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The Lord concludes that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who went home justified before God. This parable teaches that true righteousness in God's sight is not about such religious rituals as washing, kneeling, and fasting. It's about recognizing one's own sinfulness, seeking God's mercy, and approaching God with a humble heart.

- *Luke 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

## **The Honorable Fast: Heart Over Body**

Drawing from these scriptures, an honorable fast in the eyes of the Lord is one that originates from the heart and manifests in actions aligned with His will. It's a fast that afflicts the soul rather than the body. This affliction is not about physical pain or discomfort, but about a deep introspection that questions

and abandons sinful practices and attitudes. It's a process of genuine repentance, a turning away from sin, and a turning towards God's righteousness.

### **Conclusion: Fasting as a Lifestyle**

In conclusion, an honorable and approved fast before the Lord is less about the physical denial and more about a spiritual realignment with God. Consider these two cases: a person afflicts his body by fasting food, hoping that by denying the flesh, his sin will come under control. Another eats three meals a day and afflicts his soul by allowing the word of God to penetrate his heart to bring about the conviction that results in repentance. The first case relies on the person's willpower. The second case relies on the word of God to transform him. Which do you think is more honorable to God? Fasting is good – why not fast sin instead of food?

# FAST-58

AN HONORABLE &  
APPROVED FAST TO  
THE LORD (ISAIAH 58)

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## RENOVATION

### 01 DON'T PERSIST IN SIN

[Isa 58:3] As with the Lord's Supper, examine and judge yourself before fasting.



### 03 DON'T BE NASTY & CONTENTIOUS

[Isa 58:4] Don't be bitter and quarrelsome. Fasting is not for God to take your side.



### 02 DON'T OPPRESS PEOPLE

[Isa 58:3] Don't abuse people: physical, mental, or spiritual oppression. Be merciful and compassionate and deal fairly.



### 04 DON'T BE VIOLENT

[Isa 58:4] Don't force people to comply with your wickedness.



## REPARATION

### 05 LOOSE THE BANDS OF WICKEDNESS

[Isa 58:6] Stop wicked practices. Eph 4:17-32, Col 3:1-17 Jer 14:20



### 07 LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE

[Isa 58:6] Free all whom you have broken and oppressed. Proclaim the liberty of Christ on all the subjects of your tyranny.



### 06 UNDO HEAVY BURDENS

[Isa 58:6] Remove the heavy yoke of bondage and put people under the yoke of Jesus, which is light. Mt 11:28-30, Gal 5:1, 1Jo 5:3



### 08 BREAK EVERY YOKE

[Isa 58:6] Break off every yoke of the law, false doctrine, and heresy. Eg. prosperity & love gospels, Mary & angel worship, Mormonism, JW, etc.



## RESTORATION

### 09 DEAL YOUR BREAD TO THE HUNGRY

[Isa 58:7] Share the bread of life with people, through evangelism & discipleship. Jo 6:35, Mt 28:18-20



### 11 COVER THE NAKED

[Isa 58:7] Nakedness refers to those who are void of God's righteousness. Cover them with Jesus' righteousness.



### 10 REACH OUT TO THE POOR OUTCAST

[Isa 58:7] Minister to those who are godless and strayed from God. Rev 3:17 defines who is poor, blind, and naked.



### 12 REFUSE NO ONE

[Isa 58:7] Feed His sheep; Evangelize the lost; Clothe people with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

