

Session # 6 on the subject of Christian Fasting: Fasting to see Answers to Prayer

Psalm 35: 13 – “With his prayers he joined humiliation and self-affliction, both in his diet (he fasted, at least from pleasant bread) and in his dress; he clothed himself with sackcloth, thus expressing his grief, not only for their affliction, but for their sin; for this was the guise and practice of a penitent. We ought to mourn for the sins of those that do not mourn for them themselves. His fasting also put an edge upon his praying, and was an expression of the fervor of it; he was so intent in his devotions that he had no appetite to meat, nor would allow himself time for eating.” (Matthew Henry)

We, as Christians must learn to fast when we are in the midst of difficulties with people who are oppressing and distressing our spirit. We must learn to fast in order that our faith might be strengthened in relation to acting righteously before God and men. You can see here that verse 9, David by faith is determined that his soul would be “joyful in the Lord, and rejoice in His salvation.” His confidence was that there was none like the Lord; that the Lord would deliver him from the schemes of wicked men; those who were too strong for him. Part of his being able to hold fast that confidence was that he would fast when they would reward him evil for good, and ask him things that he did not know, to the sorrow of his soul. When they were sick, he humbled himself with fasting. We find him using fasting as both a spiritual weapon and a tool to accomplish the spiritual goal of glorifying God in and through this difficult situation. He would use it also to truly attempt to help others come to see the salvation of God and the strength which is alone found in Him.

1 Samuel 1: 1-7 – Hannah wept and did not eat because she could not have children and her rival taunted her about it. She fasted because she knew the Lord was sovereign over her being able to have children, and knew that He could give her a son if it was His will. It was after she had fasted that she was also able to make the vow unto the Lord that she made in verses 9-11. Her fasting was the outgrowth of a sorrowful spirit. (verse 15) It was used in connection with her complaint and grief which she expressed in her prayer to God. (verse 16) Once she poured out her heart to God in this way, and had received the blessing of Eli the priest, she then went her way, and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

Zechariah 7: 1-13 – Fasting was not being done unto God and eating and drinking was done for themselves. When we fast unto God we are agreeing to hear what God would say to us through His word in relation to our obeying His voice to us and doing good to all people around us. And all eating and drinking should be done to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10: 31-33

Zechariah 8: 19 -But the Prophet seems to allude to what he had before taught when he indirectly taunted the Jews, because they were too anxious about keeping fasts, while they neglected the main things. But the simple meaning is, that if the Jews really repented and sincerely sought to return to God’s favor, there would be an end to all their miseries, so that there would be no need of fasting.

We must also remember that the design of fasting is this, that those who have sinned may humble themselves before God, and go as suppliants before his throne, that they may confess their sins and condemn themselves. Fasting then is, as it were, the habit of criminals when they desire to obtain pardon from God; for Christ says, that there is no fasting at marriages and during festal days. (Mat_9:15.) We then see that there is here promised a restoration which was to put an end to every former cause of sorrow among the people; not that these fasts of themselves displeased God, for they were appointed, as we have said, for a good purpose — that the people might thus exercise themselves in acts of piety, and also stimulate and support their

hope till the time of their deliverance; but Zechariah pursues what he had begun — that God was now plainly reconciled, for he favored his people, and proved this by the blessings he bestowed.”
John Calvin’s Commentary on Zechariah 8: 19

2 Samuel 12: 16 – David fasted for the life of the little child that he had conceived in his sin with Bathsheba. The Pulpit Commentary says: He went, not into the sanctuary, which he did not enter until after the child's death, but into some private room in his own house. There he remained, passing his nights stretched on the ground, and fasting until the seventh day. His fasting does not imply that he took no food during this long interval, but that he abstained from the royal table, and ate so much only as was necessary to maintain life. Now, what was the meaning of this privacy and abstinence? Evidently it was David's acknowledgment, before all his subjects, of his iniquity, and of his sorrow for it. The sickness of the child followed immediately upon Nathan's visit, and we may feel sure that news of his rebuke, and of all that passed between him and the king, ran quickly throughout Jerusalem. And David at once takes the position of a condemned criminal, and humbles himself with that thoroughness which forms so noble a part of his character. Grieved as he was at the child's sickness, and at the mother's sorrow, yet his grief was mainly for his sin; and he was willing that all should know how intense was his shame and self-reproach. And even when the most honorable of the rulers of his household (Gen_24:2), or, as Ewald thinks, his uncles and elder brethren, came to comfort him, he persists in maintaining an attitude of heart stricken penitence.