

## Numbers 5

### Fasting That Delights God (and Delights in Him)

**Saturday, March 16, 2024 • Read Matthew 6:16–18**

*Questions from the Scripture text: To what religious exercise does v16 now refer? Whom are they not to be like? What do the hypocrites do when they fast? For what purpose? What do they already have? Who is to be a contrast to them (v17)? What are they to do instead? In order to prevent what (v18)? Who is their target audience instead? Where is He? Where does He see? How will He reward them?*

**What is Christian fasting?** Matthew 6:16–18 prepares us for the morning sermon on the Lord's Day. In these three verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **Christian fasting is a period of not eating in order to enjoy God as all of our delight and the One upon Whom we entirely depend.**

**Christians fast.** Jesus assumes His disciples will fast (v16), even as on another occasion, He says plainly that they will do so (cf. Luk 5:33). A life without fasting isn't a Christian life any more than a life without prayer (cf. v5–14) or a life without works of mercy (cf. v1–4). What is fasting? At the most basic level, it is abstaining from food. But, obviously, Christian fasting is more than that. Indeed, as the Lord Jesus is now teaching, it is more and better than any other nutritional or religious fasting.

**Christians enjoy fasting.** It is the hypocrites who fast with a sad face (v16). They even make their faces look artificially sad so that everyone can see how sad they are! They are like their spiritual fathers, in Isa 58, who thought the more miserable they were, the happier God should be (cf. Isa 58:3–5). This was a great mistake. Time set apart to God should be a joy, not a pain, as the conclusion to that chapter taught about the Sabbath (cf. Isa 58:11–14). It is true that fasting is joined to humiliation and repentance and great pleading with God, throughout Scripture. But, as the Lord Jesus has been teaching us in this sermon, the proper complement to mourning and humiliation about ourselves is rejoicing and exultation over the Lord (cf. 5:3–8).

**Christians enjoy fasting for God (and God in their fasting).** One reason that you might not know that mature Christians are fasting is that they don't tell you about it! The Lord even directs extra care with our morning routine so that others will not know that we are in a *mourning* routine (v17)! Like works of mercy and prayer, our fasting is to be kept between us and the Lord. Our Father sees the secret place in the heart (v18). Here, it is most clear that this "secret" place is not necessarily the closet (though we do have Him there, when we sneak away to be alone with Him, cf. v6). For the Christian, the secret place is a place that he can take with him wherever he goes. It is the communion—the shared life—between his soul and his heavenly Father.

So Christian fasting is not just enjoying God more than food or needing God more than food. It is that—and more. Christian fasting is a fitting conclusion to this section of the sermon on the mount, because its essence is to find God as our great reward. It is enjoying God more than all created things and needing God more than life itself. It finds Him to be marrow and fatness for the soul (cf. Ps 63:3–5)!

What are you most susceptible to enjoying more than (or apart from) the Lord? What are you susceptible to depending upon instead of Him? When have you fasted? When you do fast, what is your plan for keeping it between you and the Lord? What is your plan for enjoying Him in it?

*Sample prayer: O God, You are our God; early we will seek You. Our souls thirst for You; our flesh longs for You, as in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water. And with this longing, we have sought You in the holy place, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your covenant love is better than life, our lips shall praise You. Thus, we will bless You while we live; we will lift up our hands in Your Name. Our souls shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, while our mouths praise You with joyful lips, through Jesus Christ, AMEN!*

**Suggested songs: ARP63 "O God, You Are My God" or TPH63A "O God, You Are My God, Alone"**

**(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via [hopewellarp.org](http://hopewellarp.org))**

Matthew 6 16-18. These are God's words. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the Hypocrites. With a sad countenance. For they disfigure, their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. But surely I say to you, they have their reward. But you and you fast. Anoint your head and wash your face.

So that you do not bear to men to be fasting. But to your father who is in the secret place, And your father who sees in secret, Will reward you openly. And so far. This reading of Gods inspired ander and twerked.

In our day. In our season and the life of the church. In order to open up this text, you have to establish first the Christians actually fast Many Christians. Do not fast at all. those branches of what professes to be the visible. In which fasting is more common.

Are actually the ones. that have a corruption. Of the gospel and a severe corruption. Of the worship of God so much, so that They are like to be described. by the Bible. Not as churches but to generate it as to be synagogues with Satan. And so the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church worse than the Eastern Orthodox churches. For they indeed. Have anathematized the gospel. For those of the branches, the visible Church in which fasting is most common. And sometimes in Ultra, legalistic Pentecostal type churches. You might have among their various. superworks that that can fall into believing exist or practicing?

some sorts of fasting. But these sorts of fasting. Are the our patterned after the same mind as that of Those when Jesus calls the Hypocrites. In our passage. It's a sort of fast.

Where you think that? The more miserable, you are the better. The fast is going. are eager for others to see how miserable you are in your fasting that they may be. Impressed with your religiosity, and misery. And perhaps, even that you may, get them to join.

this sort of religion. That you're practicing. And so you have things like the literal disfigurement of faces on. what the papists call, Ash Wednesday, where they put literal ashes on their forehead. not only do they disfigure their faces with ashes to make themselves. look miserable literally in ashes.

I don't remember any wearing sackcloth. but they they add Superstition and idolatry by putting the ashes on themselves in the shape of a cross. Extremely Wicked exactly the opposite. Of what the Lord Jesus says here. So we must establish first of all that Christians do fast.

Of course, in the rest of the passage, we're going to see. The Christian fasting is very different. Than any of those sorts of faster. But Jesus here assumes that we will fast is moreover when You fast and Luke. There are some who are still following John. the baptizer instead of the Lord Jesus.

And they ask why his disciples don't fast? And he says, they won't fast while they have the bridegroom with them. Little fast when the bridegroom is gone. the one, if you have the one who is your delight, with you then you enjoy his presence. And you make whatever.

Yes, you can. The provision of God for that direct enjoyment of him. is the implication there? If the Disciples would have fast would have weakened. Themselves constitutionally. They would have been expressing misery at being with Jesus not misery in themselves and longing. After So, Jesus assumes that we will fast.

In fact, if you take the first three sections here, Works of Mercy first and then prayer. And then fasting, you would rightly conclude That you can no more call a life without fasting a Christian Life, than you would call a life without prayer, a Christian Life or a life without Not doing Works of Mercy.

A Christian Life. And so, I am convicted that we have not often enough, we've sometimes but not often enough. Fasted as a family. Just from one supper to the next or maybe for a whole calendar day. Or whatever. not only because there are things. to have fasted for in prayer.

But also, because as we are reminded now, Fasting ought to be an ordinary part. Of the Christian Life. So the first thing we learn here is that Christians fast. The second thing we learn here is that Christians enjoy fasting When you fast, do not be like the Hypocrites with a sad.

Countenance. Now these Hypocrites go one step further. There's had countenance isn't even aimed at God. They disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. As surely I say to you, they have their reward. So if what they're aiming at is that men will see them sad and fasting and men, see them, sad and fasting.

Then they have gotten old. They're gonna get Out of their fasting. But it's actually wrong. To fast with a sad countenance. At all. We fast in mourning over ourselves, but the whole point of fasting is to turn our attention away from ourselves. Indeed to turn our attention away from the creature and the pleasure pleasure and comfort.

That is in the creature. And the strength that is in the creature to say, we We find our Delight in the Creator, more than the creature. We've place our dependence upon the Creator more than upon the creature. I have more Delight in God than in desert. I have more dependence upon God.

Then I do upon good nutrition. Protein, or whatever. Is good nutrition. And so while there is a morning, Aspect of fasting, especially fasting and repentance from sin. when we fast before God and acknowledgment, that we have so much fleshiness remained that needs to be starved. That we communicated to ourselves and we acknowledge it before God by.

for a Time starving, our body. And this may be a little bit in the fast of a day and it may be a lot. On Lord, Jesus, fasted, 40 days if it were wrong to do so, the Lord Jesus would not have done so, And so it is appropriate at times even, For Christians to have an extended fast.

but our fasting is to be a delight. There were those in Isaiah 58. Who made? of taking the light and approaching God. Their Delight was in their Works in approaching God. So, Isaiah 58 2. They seek me daily Delight to know my ways as a nation that did righteousness.

And did not forsake, the ordinance of their God. They asking me the ordinances of Justice. They take Delight in approaching God. But then listen to what they say after. Why have we fasted? They say and you have not seen. Why have we Afflicted our souls? And you take no notice.

In fact in the day of your fast you find pleasure and exploit all your laborers. Indeed, you fast for strife and debate to strike with the wit fit with the Fist of wickedness. And so in their fasting, they're not fasting for righteousness. They're fasting in the midst of committing unrighteousness.

There's no repentance involved in their fasting and even worse. They're fasting. To try to manipulate God to strike him with the festive wickedness and so he continues in Isaiah 58. You will not fast as you do this day to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen a day for a man to afflict his soul?

Is it to bow down his head like a bull Rush and to spread out sackcloth and ashes. Would you call this a fast and an acceptable date to Yahweh? Is this not the fast that I have chosen to loose the bonds of wickedness? In other words, a fast that turns you away.

From your sin to undo the heavy burdens to let the oppressed Go free. And that you break every yoke. To share your bread with the hungry to bring to your house, the poor who are cast out and so fasting is not To be a misery competition. But as if the god that we have is one who the more miserable, we are the more happy he is with that.

No fasting is to be miserable about Sin. So that you turn from it and rejoice. In God, who gives you repentance? God who has given to you and you then knowing this God who is generous with you are also generous with others. So the the Lord ties here fasting with giving.

But his solution is to pay attention to how he designed the Sabbath, because the Sabbath is a fast, it's not a fasting from food, it's a fasting from worldly, thoughts and words, and Pleasures. But is it a day of misery? Because you're fasting from those things, we're manipulating God by showing, how horrible we feel that we have to go without all that stuff.

Is that what the Sabbath is? So he says, take your lesson for what fasting should be like, from what the Sabbath should be like. And so, He connects us, he says if you take away the yolk from your Mets, the pointing a finger, the speaking of the wickedness, extend your soul.

to the hungry. Satisfy the Afflicted, S. Then your light shall Dawn in the darkness, your Darkness shall be as noon day. Yahweh won't guide you, continually and satisfy your soul in drift and strengthen your bones. And so, this is what fasting is is supposed to do. To turn our attention away from those things, in which we had delighted in those things upon which we had depended and turn our attention to God and find that.

He satisfies us that he strengthens To take a more spear more, direct, spiritual enjoyment of and strengthening by The Lord himself directly. You shall be like a watered Garden a spring of water. His water's not fall. Those from among you shall. Build the old waste places. You shall raise up the foundations of many generations.

You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to dwell in. Now, how many have I heard? Who have the? Alarmist cultural revolution. sort of militancy. Who talk about standing in the breach. And, There is no Delight in the Lord's day and Devotion to that.

And But that's who the what the one standing in the breach and repairing, the breach does. The verse that immediately follows is one that is more is very famous. So you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the stores restorer of streets to dwell in if You turn away your foot from the Sabbath.

From doing your pleasure in my holy day. And call the Sabbath of delight. The holy day of Yahweh. Honorable And shall honor him not doing your own ways nor finding your own pleasure nor speaking your own words, Then you shall Delight yourself in Yahweh. So you see how the Sabbath is a fast of sorts training us to Delight in when we don't have those things.

Because we're taking our pleasure, and strength, and turning our attention to the Lord directly apart from those things. And that a fast. has the same Sabbath principle behind it. that we are. feeling and making ourselves to feel and expressing unto God. Our Delight in him and dependence upon him.

Then, you shall delight yourself in your way and I will cause you to ride on high heels of the earth and feed you with the Heritage, to Jacob, your father. The mouth of Yahweh as spoken.

And so that is the fasting. That the Lord has commanded in Isaiah 58, and he comes now here. In Matthew 6. And he says, The Hypocrites who disfigure their faces or the sad countenance. Not only do they have their role all the reward before men. Not only are they doing it for the faces of men?

But they receive no other reward at all. Because God himself is supposed to be the reward and faster. And, and having him. Having. All all other things together with him. And so he says, you and you fast and want your head. And wash your face. So, they do not appear to men to be fasting.

So, we're not to be sad at all. And now not only are do Christians fast in the first place and are Christians supposed to enjoy fasting in the second place. But in the third place. Christians enjoy fasting because they are enjoying God himself and they're fasting about which we have said much.

but which he concludes here, he says, So that you do not appear to men to be fasting. But to your father who is in the secret place, And your father who sees in secret, Will reward you. Now, one of

And one of the few places. Erasmus's Greek text Diverges from the majority text is here at the end of Verse 18. where that Greek text used in the Torxury Pages does not say open. But openly is implied in the procedure. In verse 17, in the first half of verse 18, The fact that you are anointing your head and washing your face.

Indicates that you are. Going out where men can see you. Because he says student, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting. So when he says your father who is in the secret and sees a secret place, And your father who sees in secret, he's not saying stay in your closet the entire time you're fasting.

Just as He is not saying that you should not pray in the public worship of God. when he was instructing on prayer. Rather. The instruction on prayer about praying in the closet is a discipline, a habit, a practice. Of praying where only he who sees in secret can see you.

So that when you are out in the open, when you are in public worship and praying you have, You have trained, your heart. To pray in a way that engages God in the secret place. Between you and him. And, Goodness fasting. we do it in such a way, even he recommends here.

This grooming routine. That would support. Fasting only for the eyes of God. And this makes sense if fasting is a delighting in him and a depending on him and turning away her attention from other things, then we ought to do what we may. That our fasting would be as As much as possible just between us and the Lord, and we will find him, then to be our Lord.

Not. Not the idea that others are fasting and this may be one of the reasons why Some think there is not as much faster. As there is, I hope there's more than I think. But, one of the reasons why there might not appear to be that much is because those who are actually mature And fast in this way in their spiritual Authority.

That they're not telling other people that they're fasting. But these things of course, are in the scripture for our instruction and they must be taught to churches and they must be taught within households or else, how will Christ's people whom he assumes will fast. And whom he instructs and how to fast.

How will they know? If we aren't taught, And so may the Lord, teach us, may the Lord teach us every Lord's day. To have this delighting in him turning away. Our our hearts and our even our mouths and our stomachs from Ordinary use. Independence and Delight. but let us also learn to incorporate fasting.

Into our spiritual life. In our walk with the Lord, let's pray. Lord. We do pray for the help of your spirit. That we would fast in a way that you instruct us. The last two thirds or so the last half or so. Isaiah 58. That. So that even when we are not.

Fasting. We would be conditioned by your spirit's use of those fasting times. To be depending upon you and delighting in you and devoted to you. In all of our spiritual life. So we pray that you would help us to. Practice, what we have learned. So that these things, Will become.

Moral part of our walk with you just as you have commanded us. Before we asking Christine, amen.