

THE PREPARATORY WORK OF FASTING – SAMUEL CLOUGH
UNDERSTANDING GOD’S METHOD OF PREPARING A PEOPLE THROUGH FASTING

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Fasting must be seen as one of the tools available to a believer in developing their walk with the Lord. Though many in recent times neglect fasting as a discipline, it has been given to us as a gift and it will help develop strength in our inner man if we will simply use it.
- B. While there is a purpose and value for targeted seasons of fasting, there is great benefit from a life rhythm of regular fasting every week. Though the idea of fasting regularly every week is foreign to many western believers, throughout history the practice of regular fast days every week has been common.
- C. The first and primary reason to fast is to tenderize the heart. Fasting should be rooted in love for Jesus and out of a longing for His return. Fasting that is rooted in this reality will also serve the purpose of deepening our longing for Him. Jesus set this context for fasting in the Scripture.
And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. – Matthew 9:15
- D. While our primary motivation for fasting should be out of longing for Jesus’ return, the Lord is also strategically using fasting to prepare a people in this hour for what is coming. God has given fasting to us as a gift in this hour to prepare us. He loves us whether we fast or not, but *by embracing fasting we will be better prepared for the coming shaking.*

II. THE PREPARATORY WORK OF FASTING

- A. The western world has experienced unprecedented prosperity in the last generation, but it is also now on the brink of massive crisis. Everywhere we look there are clear indicators of a coming crisis in every area including the religious, economic, and political components of our world. What has been normal in the last few generations will not be normal much longer.
- B. While fasting is primarily a tool to strengthen our longing for Jesus, in His kindness God is also giving us fasting to prepare our hearts for the hardships that are coming.
1. Believers who fast now are preparing themselves like wise virgins. *They are storing up oil for the hour that is coming by voluntarily developing the muscle of denial before it will be required.*
 2. The hour is coming when denial and lack will not be an option, but a reality. Most likely we will go through seasons that are more extreme than others, but the seasons ahead will not be marked by the abundance that we have known for the last two generations.
- C. The battle that most of us face right now when fasting is the desire to eat what we want, not the desire to eat because our health or survival depends on it.

1. By fasting a day or two a week, most of us do not face actual hunger; we simply battle the desire to eat. It’s not true hunger that is warring against when we fast; it’s the desire to eat the things we want to eat. For the most part, we are accustomed to the ability to have whatever we want to eat whenever we want it and fasting is uniquely designed to begin to dismantle this mindset.
2. By saying “no” to the desires of our body one or two days a week, we condition our body to live in subjection to the desire of the spirit.

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others I myself should become disqualified. – 1 Corinthians 9:27

- a. Paul did not believe his body was inherently bad, on the contrary he longed for the resurrection of the body. *Fasting must never be the out working of an attitude that despises the body.* We must have a healthy view of the body if we are to fast properly. A healthy view of the body begins with the understanding that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, took on a body like ours. Right now a human body sits at the right hand of God with all power and authority. Our body is to be cherished as a masterpiece of design by God, but it is not to dominate us.
 - b. Paul disciplined his body so that his appetites stayed within proper bounds and his body did not become a stumbling block to him. *He did not despise the body, but he lived so that his body served the purposes of his spirit* rather than his body dominating his life and potentially disqualifying him for the things he desired most. The body is healthy and good, but was not made to dominate a human being.
 - c. Tragically, the western world is far more dominated by the appetites of the body than most realize. Most westerners see western society as the most sophisticated and advanced society on earth but, in reality, the average western individual lives a life that is completely dominated by the pursuit of the physical desire for comfort, food, leisure, and sex. Fasting is a tool that helps break this addiction and awakens the heart to living for the great pleasure of loving God.
- D. Perhaps the most valuable part of fasting is learning to love Jesus in the midst of self-denial or lack. While most of our lack now is through a voluntary choice when we fast, the day is coming when there will be real lack and, *if we have not learned to love Jesus in the midst of voluntary denial, we will be offended with Jesus when we face imposed self-denial.*
1. The heart that has been tenderly prepared by fasting to love Jesus even when the body is faced with lack will be prepared to endure the crisis that is coming.
 2. By choosing lack now, we prepare ourselves to face the reality of the lack that is coming and to be unoffended with Jesus when it comes.
 3. Tragically, many believers will be greatly offended with Jesus when they face real lack, because they have not prepared their hearts to love Him in the midst of pressure and lack.

4. Teachings that distort the nature of God's blessing have unintentionally prepared believers to be offended with God because they only know how to love Him in the midst of abundance and have no theological point of reference for relating to God in the midst of pressure or lack.

They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. – Isaiah 8:21

5. Loving Jesus under pressure and lack is a legitimate heart test that many in this generation will face, some in very extreme ways, because God will expose everyone's heart through the pressures of the end of the age

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. – 1 Peter 1:6-9

My brethren, count I all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. – James 1:2-4

- E. Jesus connected weakness and love in the act of fasting. We embrace the weakness of fasting because of love. Fasting doesn't earn anything with God nor does it get Him to notice us. It is an expression of love from our heart to His born out of the pain of the fact that He is not physically present with us. It tenderizes us to experience His love more.

But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. – Matthew 9:15

1. Love is expressed most deeply in weakness. As fallen men we spend our lives groping for strength and yet love can blossom most deeply in our weakness.
2. Love from a position of strength is different from love from a position of weakness. Love that flows from strength tends to be self-absorbed as the lover is confident in their own ability and their own person. Love from a posture of weakness is a completely different kind of love as the lover focuses on the one being loved and loses sight of self.
3. At the end of the age, God will use a combination of voluntary weakness and imposed weakness to both expose our hearts and to tenderize them that we might love Jesus more deeply and long for His return with greater desire. Fasting out of voluntary weakness prepares us to respond correctly to weakness that is imposed on us by forces beyond our control.

4. We cannot choose whether or not we live in periods of imposed weakness, but we can embrace the process and prepare for the possibility by embracing voluntary weakness through fasting.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF PREPARATION

- A. We must understand the crisis that is coming. It is foolish to ignore the signs of what is coming. It is also unbiblical to assume that God will protect us from every form of suffering.
 1. All over the earth, believers are suffering some very intensely. We are not immune to the same sorts of things.
 2. Many believers do not have a theology of suffering. Because of this they are being setup for a great falling away because their view of God does not include the possibility of suffering. This distorted view of God is ignored both of the Scripture and the experience of millions of believers worldwide. It is a western god that God Himself will dismantle.
These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. – John 16:33
 3. We must embrace preparation for the crisis. We are not to look at a looming crisis and be paralyzed by fear. We are to have understanding of what is coming and prepare our hearts before God. He will be faithful to give us what is needed.
- B. Some feel that a crisis is coming but they fail to prepare. The key to preparation is to value the small things. Faithfulness in “little things” is the preparation to be faithful under great pressure.
He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. – Luke 16:10
And he said to him, “Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.” – Luke 19:17
 1. Many are aware that trials are coming, but fail to prepare.
 - a. Some fail to prepare because of a spirit of denial that looks at coming pressure and prefers to ignore it and turn away rather than prepare. This is because the human spirit tends to turn away from suffering rather than embrace it.
 - b. Others fail to prepare because they are presumptuous. They are either presumptuous that they can already stand, or they are always waiting for a “big event” that will suddenly prepare them to stand.
Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. – 1 Corinthians 10:12

2. We must understand that preparation for big crisis comes in small, daily decisions. Fasting a day each week, giving small amounts of money, and obeying in small things all really matters. When we are not faithful in little things when we have little pressure we will not be prepared for strong pressure. By the same virtue, faithfulness in little things is what equips us. *We must value the small things. Many people never make progress or build a strong life in God because they don't value small things.*
 3. Trusting and inviting God into the small things of life all prepare us for the massive hour of crisis.
- C. While the vast majority of people do not fast because it can be difficult, it also must always be understood that fasting is simply a tool one can use rather than the end goal. The end goal is loving Jesus more tenderly and more devoutly.
1. For this reason, those with medical situations, children, pregnant women, and those who have struggled with eating disorders should not fast food in the way that other individuals can.
 2. While most individuals can fast with no injury, others should be careful and take the proper precautions. For those who cannot fast food, other type of fasts can be entered into in order to work the muscle of fasting.
 3. However, it should be said that most people can fast in a healthy way, and therefore receive all the benefits of fasting, if they take care of their body properly.