

# THE CHOSEN FAST

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By: Phillip Hayes

*"Is not this the fast that I have chosen . . . . ?"*

*[Isaiah 58:5]*

To those of you that don't know what fasting is, let me first acquaint you with the definition of the word. In the Hebrew, the word fast means: *to cover over (the mouth)*. In the Greek, the word means: *to abstain from food*.

I am acutely aware that this message will not be popular with most Christians. Preaching on any kind of self denial is avoided like the plague in this generation. Fasting is not easy. If it were, everyone would love doing it.

I hope this message will awake a desire in the heart of every reader to seek God in sincerity. The world desperately needs a real God sent revival.

I am called "Old School" because of what I preach. Over fifty years ago I gave my life to Christ. I confess that I have failed Him many times, but He has never failed me. I guess you would say I came up the rough side of the mountain. I was taught fasting and prayer was a way of life if you wanted to please God and have Him move for you. I was taught to live a sacrificial life style. I remember one pastor telling the church, "If you don't give at least 20% of your income to God, I doubt your salvation!" We were taught to give and give until it hurt. Many times I would

leave meetings flat broke as I had responded to the call to "give all tonight"!

Years went by before I ever heard a "Prosperity Gospel" message. And when I heard it, I thought it was garbage! Yeah, I guess I'm "Old School" alright. But there is one thing about that era of my life that I want you to know . . . God moved in miraculous ways on a day by day basis. Miracles, signs, wonders and healing abounded in our lives and ministries! My testimony of those times is this, "Self Denial, Dedication, Prayer and Fasting works"!

I remember the altars being full of hungry souls seeking after God. Many of them including myself were fasting to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Our hunger for God far exceeded or desire for natural food!

I know this all sounds strange to modern ears that have been taught a no sacrifice, no dedication, only believe gospel. Most of you reading this article have probably never fasted a day in your life. I would venture to say, you have probably never heard a message about fasting. This is a shame that the ministry has gotten that far from God. Obviously the old paths have been forsaken.

Fasting is necessary for every Christian and I hope to prove that to you in this message. We will also see why God will not accept every fast. We will find that He has chosen the way in which He wants us to fast.

The Bible is clear that Christians are supposed to fast! In Luke chapter five, verses 33-35 we find these words our Lord spoke when asked why His disciples didn't fast as John the Baptist's disciples did. *"And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of*

*the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days” [Luke 5:33-35].* Jesus is clear, after the bridegroom (Jesus) is taken away from them, they will fast!

Fasting was a common practice in the time of Jesus and the early church. We know that fasting was practiced throughout the Old Testament and continued to be practiced in the New Testament.

*“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred” [Matthew 4:1-2].*

Jesus fasted forty days and was tested and challenged by the devil during His wilderness experience. I believe He left us an example what it would take to have power over the devil and a real sign gifted ministry. It would take fasting and prayer!

Let me show you something that should wake you up. People want the power of the Holy Ghost in their lives to heal the sick and cast out devils. I’ve heard it all my Christian life! “All it takes is the Holy Ghost!” we are told! I’m telling you that is only partly true!

In Matthew chapter 10 Jesus personally gave His disciples incredible power to do far more than just healing the sick. *“And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” [Matthew 10:7-8].* Look at that! Jesus commissioned them to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out devils!

But just a few chapters later we find the disciples could not cast the devil out of a child. The story is in

Matthew chapter 17. *"And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him"* [Matthew 17:14-16].

Now please remember, Jesus had given them this incredible power to do much more than casting out devils. They had been given power to cleanse lepers and even raise the dead! But there was a problem! They could not deliver this man's child that was possessed with a devil!

Jesus is clearly upset by this news! *"Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me"* [Matthew 17:17]. Jesus calls His own disciples faithless and perverse! He is not only upset, He is angry! Think about our Lord's situation here. He had given them the power to do what He had told them they could do. The Gospel of Luke recorded His commission this way, *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* [Luke 10:19]. Clearly, they had the power to get the job done! Jesus had given it to them!

After rebuking His disciples, He says, "Bring the child to me"! *"And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour"* [Matthew 17:18]. This devil in the child was no problem for Jesus to cast out!

In the next verse we find the disciples coming to Jesus apart and asked Him why they couldn't cast the devil out. *"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this*

*mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” [Matthew 17:19-21].* Three areas of their lives had to be addressed. Jesus said it was because of their unbelief and these kind of devils will not come out but through fasting and prayer. They had to have faith in what Jesus told them they could do. They had to believe they could do it. But that was not enough. Even though they might address their unbelief and have faith they would still have to fast and pray. Jesus was a praying man and a fasting man! The most stubborn and powerful devils were no match for Him! He had overcome Satan and won the victory during His wilderness experience.

I wonder how many of the “Faith” preachers in our day have been stopped dead cold and unable to cast the devils out because of a lack of dedication to prayer and fasting? What about you my friend? Have you fallen short in this area?

As stated earlier, fasting was a common practice in Christ’s time. And not just the men, but also devout women fasted often. *“And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” [Luke 2:36-37].*

Jesus taught His disciples the proper way to fast. He acknowledged that many were fasting for the wrong reasons. His instructions will help us keep a right attitude and perspective when fasting. *“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. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy*

*face; 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” [Matthew 6:16-18].*

In these few verses we find a great truth and a hint to what a real “Chosen Fast” is. Your fasting should be done in secret and it should be between you and God.

As an individual you may be led to go on a fast. In times of great distress and trouble a pastor may call a fast for his congregation. That is acceptable to God. But there are times when one needs to come before God in secret. These times of separation are precious and rewarding. Jesus said those that appear before men to fast have their reward. Men might look up to them and applaud them as some great person because they fast. Jesus said when you fast in secret before God; the Father will reward you openly! There is a reward in fasting!

I want us to get this deep into our hearts that fasting has been and should be an ordinary practice among dedicated Christians. Let’s look at the early church a moment.

Apostle Paul fasted often. *“In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings” [2Corinthians 6:5].* Again in 2Corinthians 11:27 *“In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”*

Look at the reward this man received after praying and fasting! *“And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing” [Acts 10:30].* An angel appears to him!

Here are a few more verses to further prove that fasting was a common occurrence among God’s early Christians and ministers.

*"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" [Acts 13:2-3].*

*"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" [Acts 14:23].*

*"And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing" [Acts 27:33].*

In these next two verses Apostle Paul encourages and advises husbands and wives to fast. This lets us understand it was not just the ministers that fasted, it was also for church members. *"The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency" [1Corinthians 7:4-5].*

There are instances when fasting doesn't always get results. Sometimes fasting is rejected by God and we need to know the reason. We find this is Jeremiah chapter 14. *"Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence" [Jeremiah 14:10-12].* Why did God reject their fasting? There was no repentance! Without repentance you can

never enter into God's chosen fast! Jesus said, "*I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*" [Luke 13:3,5]. Transgressions must be dealt with before a commitment to fasting. Here again, fasting is between you and God and you must first establish or reestablish your relationship with God through repentance.

At this point, I would like to share with you some personal experiences in fasting. In the first few years of My Christian walk, I was convinced by the Word of God that fasting and prayer was the answer to having a greater relationship with the Lord. Many of the famous ministers I had read about began their ministries in fasting and prayer.

Fasting and prayer became a way of life for me and those that I fellowshiped with. The duration of our fasting increased as we sought after God. I remember the first time I fasted for 3 days. By the end of the second day, I thought I was surely going to die! The devil and my flesh fought me relentlessly hour by hour and day by day. But, Praise God, I made it!

As time went on, I was able to fast 7 days, then 14 days. It seemed the more I fasted, the easier it became. I would eat for a few days then I would start fasting again. It wasn't something I was told to do; it was something I wanted to do. Within my first two years serving the Lord I had been able to complete a 21 day fast and a 30 day fast. My hunger for God far outweighed my desire for natural food. It was my hunger for Him that drove me to fast. Because of my fasting, I discovered food that few were aware existed! God had brought me a long way!

Thinking back to how I felt during those years of continued fasting reminds me of a time the disciples brought Jesus something to eat. *"In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought*



*to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" [John 4:31-34]. Truly I have also found meat that many know not of!*

I have been greatly blessed by the visions, revelations and anointing I have received because of my dedication to fasting and prayer. The ministry I have today was ignited through fasting and prayer. It's the Bible way my friends!

As I mentioned previously God doesn't accept everyone that fasts. We found that it should be done in secret as much as possible. We found also that it required repentance and an established relationship with God before fasting.

In Isaiah chapter 58, God clearly reveals His "Chosen Fast". We will begin examining His instructions with Isaiah 58, verses 1-3: *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours."* Let's look closely at what we have just read.

The people ask God, *"Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?"* In other words, Why don't you answer us when we fast and pray? You don't pay us any attention! God had commanded His prophet to Cry aloud, spare not. Tell My people their transgression! His message was loud and clear! God's people needed to hear their transgression and obey His Voice.

They were told to seek God daily, and delight to know

His ways. They were Israel, God's people! They were supposed to love God and be devoted to Him. Other nations around them looked to Israel as God's people. They had the appearance, the history and reputation as God's people but in reality, they were far from God. They were a people that should have taken delight in approaching God.

They were deceived because they were saying, "Lord, we have fasted, but you still don't answer our prayer. Don't you know that we seek you daily and delight to know your ways and take delight in approaching You? But you don't answer our prayers!"

*Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.*" God's rebuke exposed the people to be hypocrites! This is also a clear warning to us dear ones. Times of fasting should be times of separation and devotion when at all possible.

*"Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 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" [Isaiah 58:4-5].* God is exposing their religious mask! In the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your laborers. God said, this IS NOT the kind of fast I have chosen! The reality was that the fasting His people were doing was just a ritual. Their heart was not right with God. They were fasting for all the wrong reasons! God didn't accept their fasting because they were not sincere in their heart. They were hypocrites!

*"You fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness."* They did fast for needs, but their needs were selfish. "Lord, help me win this debate," "LORD, help me win this argument." "LORD, help me defeat this person." Though their prayer was accompanied with fasting, it was

still a selfish, wicked prayer so God did not answer. We must be careful what we are praying and fasting for. Your fast must be for a godly purpose.

*"You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high."* The purpose of their fasting was to glorify themselves, to make their voice heard on high. God says, "No more. You will not fast as you do this day.

*"Is it a fast that I have chosen?"* The kind of fasting God rebukes here is a hollow, empty, show, without spiritual substance behind it. This isn't the kind of fast God has chosen. Although they may be going through the motions of fasting like not eating and spreading sackcloth and ashes, but God didn't accept their fasting.

The people of Isaiah's day had the same problem as the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They trusted in empty religious rituals that had little to do with repentance and a genuine relationship with God. The Pharisee bragged about paying their tithes and fasting twice a week but Jesus said, "inwardly they were full of dead men's bones".

Now, let's see what kind of fasting is acceptable to God. What is God's "Chosen Fast".

*"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh" [Isaiah 58:6-7].*

*"Loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke"* God says, "If you want to fast the way that pleases me, begin with getting right with your brothers and sisters. Stop oppressing others and reach out to help others. This means getting right with God begins by

stopping the evil we do towards others. You have to get yourself right first! It's called repentance which means to turn from sin, not continuing in sin. How can you deliver someone when you need deliverance yourself?! This reminds me what Jesus told His disciples after they couldn't cast the devil out of a child, *"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"*. Jesus had given them the power but they were missing what was just as necessary: *prayer and fasting*. We say we want the demon possessed delivered but are we willing to pay the price to accomplish it?

Jesus said, *"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye"* [Matthew 7:3-5]. You cannot help anyone until you first help yourself!

*"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"* Getting right with God begins by doing good things for others. *"Jesus went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil"*, see Acts 10:38. Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."* (See Matthew 25:35-40). I have always said, there is more to ministry than singing and preaching! The work of God is to also feed and clothe the poor. We shouldn't hide ourselves from our own flesh. We must take care of our own, the widows and the orphans. I hope you can see how God wants us to deal with our own faults, transgressions and sins first before we enter into a fast that God will accept and bless.

Now let's look at what will happen once we are qualified for God's "Chosen Fast".

*"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in" [Isaiah 58:8-12].*

*"Then your light shall break forth like the morning."* If God's people would couple their fasting with godly living and love, then they would see their prayers answered. They would have lives full of light, full of healing, full of righteousness, full of the glory of the LORD. When they called out to God, then the Lord will answer. God's Word guarantees it!

*"If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness".* Again, the LORD gives them three things to stop doing. They must stop oppressing others. They must stop pointing of the finger at others and accusing them. They must stop speaking wickedness.

*"If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul."* Again, the LORD gives them two things to start doing. They needed to minister to the hungry with

more than food; they had to extend their soul to the hungry. They had to look for the afflicted soul and seek to satisfy it. They are things that we should have done, yet we have not.

*"Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday."* When things are made right, God promises blessings. Not only will they have light, but even their darkness shall be as the noonday!

*"The LORD will guide you continually."* This is a promise for those who do more than live empty lukewarm religious lives. What a blessing it would be to have the guidance of the LORD, continually in your life.

*"And satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones."* Those who serve God with sincere hearts and actions enjoy a supernaturally blessed life that is impossible for the lukewarm follower of God to know.

*"Those from among you shall build the old waste places."* Those who obey and follow after God will accomplish great things for God's kingdom. They build, and are called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of paths to dwell in. You can't build anything for God's kingdom on the foundation of a cold or lukewarm walk with God. There is only one condition of devotion God desires in His children and that is being on fire for Him.

Is there a cause in which we should fast? Look around you! We live in a broken nation and world. Broken churches, broken hearts and broken homes abound. Our children and grandchildren are lost. The sacredness, peace and power we once found in churches is almost non-existent. Most are nothing more than gathering places for social events and the Biblically illiterate. Once there was a feeling of security in our world but now fear and turmoil grips the hearts of multitudes. Life has lost all its meaning to many. Yes, there is a cause to fast. Will you do it?