

QUARANTINE

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First Position Paper

(Scripture quotations are taken from the NIV)

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INTRODUCTION

The most profound verse in the Scriptures is John 1: 1. It is the beginning of all creation and revelation from who was with God and created all things: the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian faith believes “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1: 14), and perhaps, some believers understand what the Word really means in the modern Christian life.

It is tough enough for a human mind to discern between physical and spiritual truth. Only through the grace of God, a faithful individual may believe he understands what the Word of God means in his life. And without hesitation, a refreshing knowledge permits those who have ears to hear and understand that the Word of God is “food.”

Actually, this is not merely spiritual food, but *in fact*, an act of communion nourishes our cellular system to levels scientifically explained as miraculous – because there is not reliable evidence of the phenomena. Living and healing by faith requires a regular consumption “not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8: 3). He is the bread of life that came like “manna” from heaven in the desert, which a believer may eat and will live forever (John 6: 48-55). It started in the beginning of all, and continues in God’s salvation/historical plan until the end of ages.

The word was incarnated in Jesus Christ as the Son of Man and the Son of God -- fully human and fully divine -- with the authority, glory, and sovereign power (Daniel 7: 14) to renew human bodies from illness, and -- overall -- to forgive sins and liberate sinners from eternal condemnation. However, it requires a living sacrifice for those who really believe and repent. They need a purification of their bodies to be temples of this grace, to stop sinning, and to pray and fast in order to receive the “bread of life,” his redemptive blood, real food and drink, without feeling “hunger and thirst” anymore, in the mystical communion known as transubstantiation.

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him” (John 6: 56). “You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful” (Psalm 80: 5).

Throughout this individual God-given grace, the believer is ready to be a vessel of *living water* running into the *river of life* that waters the *trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord* (Isaiah 61: 3) of the messianic community, namely, the kingdom of God. The mission is to teach, live, and preach the gospel or “good news” (Matthew 28: 19) through every aspect of our lives in (1) introspection with silence and solitude, (2) the family’s nucleus, (3) school and university, (4) church, (5) business, and (6) with any human or non-human encounter that every day brings to the believer ahead.

Grace imposes a voluntary “quarantine” period of self-examination and purification in the chosen individual: a time of isolation living *in* the world, but not *of* it, to keep human affairs restricted from him or her, where worldly issues can not contagious the believer’s decision of following the Word of God in radical obedience.

Hence, the question of this paper is *how important is fasting to a modern Christian?* The paper will develop some descriptions of the *critical problem, major positions, presentation and interpretation of the biblical data, and a personal position* about fasting.

THE CRITICAL PROBLEM

Fasting is generally considered as the abstinence of food for a period of time; but the degree of fasting, from partial to absolute, oscillates significantly throughout religious denominations. In addition, fasting attempts to regain spirituality through austerity. The critical problem with

fasting is its interpretation as a spiritual discipline that connotes salvation by works.¹ A first century dilemma of God's salvation plan and grace still evokes confrontation and debate even in the midst of Christianity today. Doing something (e.g., fasting) connotes "the workings" of the law in a sense that will give privileges and rewards, included, obviously, salvation. Jesus' teachings included both words and deeds. Nevertheless, he did not emphasize any particular practice about eating or fasting from merely practical, ethical, or spiritual concerns. As a matter of fact, during his ministry he spent many times eating and drinking with the people, especially those with doubtful reputation, so that some said of him, "He is a glutton and a drunkard" (Luke 7: 34).

Neither Jesus' disciples nor Paul of Tarsus were required to fast, and this spiritual discipline is not practiced by many believers either today. The apostles did not fast like those of John the Baptist, which created the questions of the religious leaders in Matthew (9: 15). Let the reader understand then that fasting is related with the "taking away of the bridegroom," in a vigilant preparation for his return. Even though his kingdom is already created and must give the believer joy, the consummation of this mystical marriage is a liberating process that requires strategies, discipline, and actions; or in others words: fasting and feasting.

The apostle Paul (Romans 3: 21-28) discerns about the differences between *faith* and *works*, and *grace* and *merit*. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (23). Thus, the glory of God is what makes this interpretation of salvation – more or less – a matter of old and new approach regarding of tradition, human limitation, and righteousness of God. But remember that "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6: 2).

¹ According to Christine J. Gardner, "Hunger of God: Why more and more Christians are fasting for revival?" *Christianity Today* 43, no. 4 (May 1999): 37. Modern evangelicals have tended to shun this spiritual discipline of fasting. Also, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, modern evangelicals too, argue "grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning [merit]."

Whether or not the faithful or unfaithful individual keeps the law or even abstains from sin, the grace of God will put him between a rock and a hard place. When he faces the “red sea,” he has to make a decision propitiated by Jesus’ death on the cross. At this historical moment for humanity, any single human being is able to see without the “veil of sin” that protected people from the “burning” glory of God. “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27: 51). No wonder Moses had to use a veil when he came from the mountain (in God’s presence) with the law of God, because his radiant face scared the Israelites (Exodus 34: 29-35).

Paul makes clear the Christ’s supremacy of everything under his feet (1 Corinthians 15: 25-28) in exaltation of his authority and power. “Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself [the Word of God], who put everything under Christ” (27). Through this motif of his supremacy, “Matthew beautifully and powerfully emphasized that Jesus came to rescue his people, to break the power of sin, and to set its captives free.”²

However, this dramatic openness of God’s will through the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of his Son Jesus Christ to his right hand is a characteristic of humility, and at the same time, exaltation nobody should dare to abuse. The warning that God would abandon people’s bodies as temples, and that Jesus would not return to them until the Second Coming is hermeneutically possible from verses: Deuteronomy (32: 51); Psalm (24: 3-6); Matthew (23: 37-38); 1 Corinthians (3: 16), to name a few. Thus, by grace related with the Word of God, the supremacy of the Son of Man as the Messiah to save the world is compiled in the Old and New

² Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Crown, and the Cross, An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 219.

Covenant. The believer must show both Old and New Testament treasures (Matthew 13: 52) in his sincere intentions to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Once the believer becomes conscious of sin for the Ten Commandments written in the Old Testament as the Word of God, his strict obedience depends on Jesus' sacrifice to the point of persecution, rejection, criticism, ostracism, and even death. The standards have been elevated to the higher spiritual level of faith which requires physical and spiritual disciplines to be holy, righteous, and perfect as the Father is holy, righteous, and perfect (Matthew 5: 48; Hebrews 13: 23; 1 Peter 1: 16; 2 Peter 3: 11). Therefore, the pillar of Christianity is the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation with all its paradoxes to know *what* to do or *not* to do in freedom.

These priorities remind the people of God where the real treasure of his kingdom lies. They are: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. As Paul's great theme in Galatians (5: 13), freedom is not giving to the faithful to become slave of the practices old or new, but benefit in the spiritual life in "liberating transcendence."³ Jesus remained faithful to the traditional triad of practices that were his Jewish heritage. "The Sermon on the Mountain" (Matthew 6: 1-18) is structured according to that schema.

Summarizing, the critical problem of fasting is centered in the reward (Genesis 15: 1). While for some believers is merely faith in Jesus Christ what makes them obedient to fast without thought of reward, for other believers, mere faith in Jesus Christ is what makes them fast within thought of reward -- where the radical obedience is lost.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAJOR POSITIONS

"Self-denial and mortification" Catholic position Far from stereotyping all Catholicism with this position, it is a remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ in lent, a penitential motif at

³ See Thomas Ryan, "Fasting: A Fresh Look," *America Press Inc.* 194, no. 8 (March 2006), 9.

some levels of strictness for followers regarding of their social and economic conditions, to punish themselves and compensate for guilt of being possessed by the passions of the flesh. Through fasting, Catholicism attempts to restore the relationship of and obedience to God in a fallen world. Fasting is seen as purification and the regaining of innocence.⁴ Fasting is seen as a strict rule wherein only a few really comply. There are some circumstances where fasting seems imperative to the believer to receive grace or blessing because of a financial need, health problem, or of repentance. The authenticity of this faith is not in the competence of anyone; it is a private matter between the faster and his or her spiritual Father.

However, fasting practice may be revitalized by the guidance of the Spirit which would produce a sense of its significance in the context of community -- in spite of his individual manifestation and personal commitment of the believer. This emphasis emerges in a theological theme in the Roman Catholic Church from law, structure, and ritual to theology, community, and worship: fasting as an act between prayer and charity. "Fasting helps integrate the body into the life of faith, which is a summary of the value tradition has placed upon it, as already seen clearly in Augustine and Aquinas".⁵ May those who see Catholic spirituality in light of "works-righteousness," believe they may understand the shifts of the Holy Spirit.

"Neglect of fasting practices" evangelical Protestant position Perhaps after the emerging fasting theology of the Roman Catholics, Protestants might find insights in their long neglect of fasting practices. Their judgment of Catholic fasting as legalistic behavior is what represents the *faith* versus *work* ethical dilemma within Christianity today. Hopefully, the impulse for a revival in the spiritual disciplines movements in American Protestantism instills the teachings of Dallas

⁴ See Orthodox Church, "Fasting: Eastern Orthodoxy & Eastern Catholicism," [no other information available].

⁵ Kent Berghuis, "Chapter 5: Toward A Contemporary Christian Theology of Fasting," *Bible.org* 3 (2007), [journal on-line]; accessed 8 February 2010; available from <http://bible.org/seriespage/chapter-5-toward-contemporary-christian-theology-of-fasting.htm>; Internet.

Willard establishing “the link in spiritual disciplines to the imitation of and obedience to Christ.”⁶ It sounds like a practical Christian theology indeed, the incarnation of holiness and submission in the present life of the believer.

Honestly, the imitation of Christ is a God-given grace far from legalism or merit to who suddenly experiences a burning desire or ethics’ imperative to live like he lived his earthly life. Keep in mind the motives and intentions of the heart of each person are only known by God, and can deceive Christians through judgmental attitudes toward others or themselves in negative or positive ways, as “hypocrites” (Mathew 6: 5) or “spirituals” (Matthew 6: 16).

“Patristic association between fasting and almsgiving” mainstream Christianity position
Now more than ever fasting is likely to be aligned to the patristic association between fasting and almsgiving. It is an initiative in solidarity with the hunger in the world such as: *Operation Rice Bowl* or *The Oxfam Fast*, and the *Lutheran Campaign of Prayer, Fasting, and Vigils*. These are campaigns focus on the charity with the poor, feeding homeless, balancing the distribution of the goods in communities, and teaching the use of the earth’s resources with frugality, care, and respect. Fasting is linked with the love of God and neighbor through challenging consumerism and a period of resource scarcity.⁷ It is developing a necessity of sharing and otherness even more in the midst of need and poverty where a spiritual response is evident as a blessing.

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL DATA

Jesus did fast for forty days and forty nights in a desert place to start his ministry (Matthew 4: 1-2). Moses did fast forty days and forty nights on the mountain (Exodus 24: 18) to guide the Israelites. Elijah was alone when he fasted for forty days and forty nights during his journey

⁶ Kent Berghuis, 5.

⁷ Peter Feldmeier and Adil Ozdemir, “Fasting,” *University of St. Thomas* 1, 2, 4 (2007), [journal on-line]; accessed 8 February 2010; available from <http://www.stthomas.edu/mcdc/topics/Fasting.html>; Internet.

through the desert (1 Kings 19:8). Esther in (4: 16) did fast for protection from evil. In 1 Samuel (7:6); 1 Samuel (21: 13); 2 Samuel (1: 12) there are descriptions of fasting to repent, morning, and convert people to God. Ezra proclaimed a fast for humility (8: 21). Daniel (1: 12-13) did fast for physical healing. Jonah did fast in (3: 5-10). Joel did fast in (1: 14). Paul fasted in preparation for his baptism (Acts 9: 9), and he and Barnabas fasted as they selected and commissioned elders in newly formed churches (Acts 13: 3; 14: 23), to mention a few.⁸

Fasting is implemented in the Old and New Testament with a transforming process that takes place in each biblical character to the levels of becoming really close to God in unity and inner conversion, focused on humility. Believers have lost the value of the tradition in the Old Testament -- the kernel of the discussion in Jesus' ethics (Mathew 15: 3). This tradition might be appreciated today more than ever. It does not mean to ignore the Scriptures' supremacy and overcome the Word of God with the traditions of men (Isaiah 29: 13); but rather Christians can keep the historical plan of God by reclaiming his Word of the great traditions of Christianity, conquering human limitation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New Testament through Christ as the "bridegroom" was the reason why Jesus' companion could not fast in his presence (Luke 5: 34-35). Yet Jesus explained his departure to make a way for his apostles with a promise of returning, in an interim ethics that would include a time to fast. In fasting, the believer can remember, imitate, and anticipate Christ, who is the center (apex) of God's revelation (Hebrew 1: 2) in the Christian theology today.⁹

⁸ See Elmer Towns in *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Regal Books, 1996), in Christine J. Gardner, "Hungry for God: Why more and more Christians are fasting for revival?" 38. He identifies nine biblical fasts.

⁹ Kent Berghuis, 6.

MY POSITION

A theology of fasting acquires Christological and eschatological “wedding garment” of divine grace. Whether *faith/grace* or *work/merit*, the judgmental attitude among Christians (Romans 2: 1) undermines their salvation and turns them away from the heavenly Kingdom.¹⁰ In my own words and experience, fasting (especially forty days and forty nights) is an ongoing process of the following strategies and actions in a modern Christian:

- Consecrate his life in holiness through the Holy Spirit in order to present it as a “living sacrifice.”
- Patiently wait for the definite result itself through time, and it alone that is guaranteed to be infallible, not the preliminary stages by which it is reached.
- Understand that some people do not require holiness of life, much less imply impeccability in its organs. Sinful and wicked men and women may be God’s agents in defining infallibility. Yield to the confrontation, opposition, criticism, persecution, ostracism to the righteousness of Christ before God.
- Fully adopt and model the righteousness of God in Christ. It would never become real to her life until she confessed it before the world.
- Make a 24/7 commitment to please God (1 Thessalonians 5: 10) without reservation or emotional evidence but God’s Word. Surrender beyond expectation or experience, even when the Christian is awake or asleep.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to come and live in the believer’s real life. Trust the Holy Spirit to dwell in the Christian’s life to become like him, life of truth, anointed witnesses, glorifying Christ, not speaking for the life itself, but receiving the spiritual gifts and

¹⁰ Lazar Puhalo, “Foreward,” *On Fasting: The Scriptural and Spiritual Meaning of the Orthodox Christian Fasts*, Point of Faith 4 (Dewdney, B.C.: Synaxis, 1973), 1 in Kent Berghuis, 2.

showing them to the world in inspiration. Let the Spirit control the believer's temper, passions, feelings, habits, emotions, conversation, and conduct -- wherever the believer is.

- Act on the promise without apparent change whether he eradicates his sinful nature or she is healed, with pain or without pain. The evidence is in witnessing the Holy Spirit, if the Christian can only exercise faith enough to believe him. Strive hard not to lean to the believer's own understanding or feeling. Authentically believe and act what he and she profess to believe.
- Effectively use the link between healing and sanctification by faith and testimony even though the believer's life feels no better physically, emotionally, or ethically. Claim the promise for the believer as if he were the only person living; then: pray, fast, act, believe, confess, and begin to walk in faith.
- Identify and eliminate any theological suspicion that may fall into delusion that the believer is the savior or the only begotten Son of God. They are an imitation of Christ, a *Second Jesus*, and only through him the Christian's life will see the Father.
- Monitor in self-introspection or examination thoughts, feelings, and actions. Connect with the Spirit of Truth to identify any spiritual pride, egotism, jealousy, anger, or any temptation that put the believer in the perils of error.
- Engage in spiritual responsibility using God-given gifts to help others.

Fasting is granted by God in his mercy to prepare the believer to receive his grace and specific blessings. God cannot dwell in the midst of sins; hence, Christians should consider fasting as recognition of their sinful nature which needs to be defeated with good works that show faith in the "otherness" of their neighbor and the Holy Ghost.

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