



"Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better."

—Richard Hooker

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Fasting and Reconciliation

[John 6:26-27](#) provides a significant reason why [God](#) requires us to fast on the [Day of Atonement](#). Some of the same people Jesus had fed the day before through a mighty miracle comprise the audience in this episode. He tells them they were [seeking God](#) for entirely wrong reasons. They wanted to use God for their own ends—not to serve Him, but to be served by Him. It essentially upends the relationship.

It is a good idea to consider what our relationship with God is based on. Is it solidly founded on belief or on what we can get from Him? Do we trust Him to provide what we need as we prepare for the [Kingdom of God](#), or are we motivated only by promises of blessings and rewards?

Why is disbelief so serious an infraction? Refusing to believe God is to be guilty of slandering His righteous character. It assumes He does not know what He is talking about and assaults His integrity and [love](#). A human rejecting God's revelation is similar to an immature and inexperienced whippersnapper telling a much older and wiser person—one who has been

"around the block" a few times—that he is wrong. Disbelieving God, though, is far more serious because rejecting the loving counsel of the Eternal Creator who does not lie involves [sin](#).

With stark simplicity, Genesis 3 shows that Adam and Eve did not believe God's Word. They thought they knew better. In the pride of their limited understanding, they declared their independence from God and exercised their free moral agency to sin against His government, bringing on the need for atonement. Humanity, like its first parents, simply thinks it knows better.

Only when we do not think much of ourselves, feel helpless, weak, and backed into a corner will we listen with the intensity required to believe, [repent](#), submit, and seek to become one with God. Often, He has to resort to stern measures with us before we will allow our minds to change. He would rather have us submit willingly and change ourselves. Thus, in His [wisdom](#), He has ordained fasting as an essential element of the Day of Atonement because it induces a weakness we can physically feel, not just intellectually agree with.

Fasting is a self-imposed trial that should help us feel and acknowledge what we are compared to God. Despite being a good exercise in discipline, its purpose is not to impress God with how disciplined we are but to remind us how much we need the things He so freely and generously supplies.

God has life inherent; He is self-sustaining. But when we, even for a relatively short time, are denied the food He supplies, our weaknesses and dependence quickly become apparent. Food gives us physical strength and satisfaction, but if we deny the body the food it needs, we become weak and die.

Food is a type of God's Word. Likewise, if our spirit is denied the manna from heaven, we become spiritually weak and would eventually die spiritually. If in our pride we reject God's food, even though we may have a form of godliness as shown by performing the formalities of worship, our weakness will become apparent through sin—proof that the strength of God's Word is missing. Remember, His Word is spirit, and it is life ([John 6:63](#)).

Fasting can help bring us face to face with what we really are: very mortal beings in need of all the help we can get. Because fasting usually intensifies the feelings of self-concern, it reminds us that we are still flesh and that much of our time is consumed caring for ourselves. This is indeed humbling.

It teaches us that being humble is a choice, which Peter brings out in [1 Peter 5:6](#): "Therefore *humble yourselves* under the mighty hand of God" (emphasis ours throughout). [James 4:10](#) agrees: "*Humble yourselves* in the sight of the Lord." Even as we can choose to fast, we can choose to allow our minds to change and submit to God to become one with Him. Hardening our hearts and exercising our pride are choices too (see [Hebrews 3:8](#), 15).

We must recognize that becoming one with God is proceeding apace! It is occurring on a one-at-a-time basis as individuals come to believe and repent of sin. It is an ongoing refinement process in each person's life as he continues to repent and grow in [holiness](#).

The means of reconciliation that lead to unity with God are the death of [Jesus Christ](#) for the forgiveness of sins and the life of our resurrected Savior as He works as our High Priest. We cannot leave out of the process our part in fighting our pride by choosing to submit to God's Word. We fast to feel and demonstrate our dependence on God so that we may continue to grow into His image.

The time is coming when there will be no cause of disagreement and thus no separation from God, as the prophet writes in Isaiah 11:0: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all [God's] holy mountain." What an awesome future to prepare for!

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Limited Atonement](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Bible shows 'limited atonement' rather than unlimited or universal atonement believed by a large number of Protestant evangelical theologians. To yield to the Protestant assumption of universal atonement nullifies the necessity of repentance, overcoming, and sanctifying. Atonement is indeed limited, confined to certain parameters and applies to certain conditions. The proof texts for universal atonement immediately break down when the conditions are spelled out, namely the necessity of the Father's individual calling rather than blanket salvation or amnesty for all who mention the name of Christ, whether they repent or not. The parable of the man cast out of the wedding feast for not having the right garment indicates that there are conditions for salvation. The prospect of atonement and salvation is available to everybody, but only those called by the Father—not by an evangelical altar call—are eligible. After the calling, a cleaning up process (sanctification) is needed to transform the crude clay prototype into a dazzling clone of God. People are called and resurrected in a specific order, when the Father can be sure of the maximum probability of spiritual success. Those who are called are expected to yield to God's precious law to the extent that they will be totally composed of Holy Spirit (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:31, God's Law in action). Currently, Jesus Christ is working with a small selected group of individuals (the Israel of God, Galatians 6:16) for the expressed purpose of helping in an infinitely larger harvest during the Millennium and the Great Throne Judgment. Even though Christ's sacrifice was made at a specific historical time, the callings and atonements are made in stages, dependent upon compliance to God's standards.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Fasting: Building Spiritual Muscle](#)

by David F. Maas

Though fasting deprives the physical body of nutrition and strength, a proper, biblical fast adds conviction and depth to the inner, spiritual man.

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