

The Sin of Self-Promotion

Jesus employs the spiritual discipline of fasting to address the heart issues surrounding self-denial, self-mortification. Fasting represents pinnacle of self-denial in that it sets aside the most necessary part of life for spiritual reasons.

Definition of fasting: Voluntary abstinence from food for a spiritual reason.

- Only prescribed fast involved the Day of Atonement (ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ) – Lev. 16:29-31
- Fasting always associated with prayer, communication with God – Reasons: Lamentation (Neh. 1:4; Joel 1:13-14); Protection (Ezra 8:21); Humiliation (Acts 9:9; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 10:16); Revelation (Receiving – Dan. 9-10; Giving – Matt. 4:2); Condemnation (Jonah 3); Selection (Acts 13:2); Direction (Acts 13:2)
- God values purity of heart above the perfunctory practice – Zech. 7; Is. 58

The particular discipline of fasting yields universal principles regarding spiritually motivated self-denial.

Self-denial: The putting aside of thoughts, deeds, and words that fail to contribute to my alignment with Christ's character (Romans 6:1-14; 13:11-14). **Self-denial frees you from self-consideration so you can serve Christ and others.**

The road to self-promotion

1. **You can self-promote through self-denial** ("when you fast") (Depriving the stomach while gorging the pride)
2. **You self-promote by ignoring Christ's warning** ("do not look gloomy like the hypocrites")
 - a. **Characteristic:** Greater concern for appearance than spiritual significance ("hypocrites")
 - b. **Method:** Excessive personal attention ("the disfigure their faces")
 - c. **Reason:** Public appearance of piety ("that their fasting may be seen by others")
 - d. **Problem:** It is a contradiction! (Isaiah 58) **Self-denial frees you from self-consideration!**
 - e. **Causes:** Guilt, tradition, drowning of God's Word and hardening of the heart (Zech. 7:11-12)
 - f. **Contemporary parallels:** 'Ministering' to others to the neglect of basic relationships. Not taking the time to allow God's Word to change you. **Symptom:** Frustration when anyone gets in your way. It is a contradiction!
3. **God rejects your self-promotion** ("Truly I say to you, they have received their reward") (You can do all kinds of things for God and others, but if it was simply spiritual mascara, the activity amounts to rotten rags)

The marks of godly self-denial

1. **You engage in self-denial** ("when you fast")
2. **You engage in self-denial according Christ's instructions**
 - a. **Characteristic:** Maintain normal modesty ("anoint your head and wash your face") (Self-denial uses stuff to live and to pave the way for service. It refuses to live for stuff or to be pietistically weird. You fulfill your responsibilities and maintain your roles with excellence.)
 - b. **Reason 1:** To avoid observance by others ("that your fasting may not be seen by others") ("Our Lord's principle is always this: 'Forget other people altogether.'" – Lloyd-Jones)
 - c. **Reason 2:** To demonstrate confident trust in the Father's observation (Good theology leads to godly living.)
3. **You reap valuable rewards** ("And your Father who sees in secret will reward you") [Discerning the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2); Unique opportunities to serve Christ (2 Cor. 6:3-10); Acknowledgement before the Father (Matt. 10:32); Protection from being a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27)]

Christ transforms people from hypocritical self-promoters to godly servants, joyfully practicing self-denial.

Proof – The testimony of a transformed self-promoter: **Philippians 3:1-11**

Christ's power transforms self-denial from an *end* in itself to a *means* of becoming intimately acquainted with Christ!

Christ Himself is the ultimate pattern of self-denial to serve: **Hebrews 2:14-18**

Symptom of transformation – Eager desire to serve others for their spiritual success in Christ (Phil. 1:24-26; 2:17; 4:1).

This corresponds to the grand finale of Matthew – be such a follower of Christ that wherever you go, you make disciples by teaching of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20).