



StudyGuide

by Brad Borch

GOTCHA!



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Three Helpful Principles of Fasting:
A Letter to a New Convert*

*Simplicity, Satiety, and a Litmus
Question*

(Anonymous Author)



http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/fasting_principles.asp

Whether or not you agree with everything the author states, this article is sure to provoke careful thought and consideration of fasting in the Orthodox tradition.

I have a friend, a priest, who has traveled the country speaking to audiences large and small. We were discussing fasting one day during Great Lent, and he told me that wherever he goes, no matter what he speaks about, someone always asks him about the rules for fasting. He could be speaking about icons, or patristics, or whatever, and somebody inevitably asks about fasting rules.

As we considered the implications of this, we decided that basically, people wanted to be told what to do. They wanted easy, guaranteed ways to be sure they were “following the rules.” They wanted to know how much they needed to do “to be saved” (but no more).

Unfortunately, that’s human nature—and very much a part of our Western, legalistic notions of salvation. Of course, it’s cliché to poke fun at the Roman Catholics, with their tragic history of “indulgences”—basically, payments for sins committed. The problem is, Protestantism emerged directly out of the Latin Church, and flourished in the same Western culture. We still think in terms of “following rules” and “obeying the law” in order to “fulfill our obligations.”

We’ve heard before about three “levels” of our relationship with God: first, as servants, fearful of punishment; then as em-

ployees, looking for rewards; and finally, as children, seeking His good pleasure. This perspective can clearly be seen in our approach to fasting. As servants, we fast because we think if we don’t obey the rules, maybe God won’t be pleased with us, or will punish us for our lack of self control. As employees, we fast because it’s what we’re supposed to do; it’s what’s expected of us. We might be, in some way, proud of it.

When we reach the perspective of being God’s sons and daughters, we gain an entirely new perspective. At this point, we are fulfilling the ultimate meaning and purpose of fasting: we are entering into the death and resurrection of Christ himself. By denying ourselves, we are taking up our crosses and following Him.

Make no mistake; no matter where we are spiritually, it is still critical that we understand—and obey—the principles of fasting. Our Church in her wisdom has provided us

with the guidelines we are to follow. But the simple act of following them humbly is an act of Christlike, self-sacrificial love.

*“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”
Luke 9:23*

***Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works. If you see a poor man, take pity on him. If you see a friend being honored, do not envy him. Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye, the ear, and the feet and the hands, and all members of our bodies. Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice. Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin. Let the eye fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful. Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip. Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism. For what good is it if we abstain from fowl and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers?
St. John Chrysostom***

>> ACTION ITEMS

How can you cultivate a healthy attitude towards fasting? Follow these three Action Points:

Fast from other indulgences as well—entertainment, greed, lust, gossip, etc. Complete your lenten practice with almsgiving and prayer.

Obey the direction of your spiritual father. Making up your own rules is a recipe for spiritual disaster.

Pay no attention to what others are—or are not—eating. Do not make a big deal with others about your fasting routine