

What About Fasting?

Scripture Reading: *Matthew 6:16-24*

fast (*verb*) — to abstain from or interact sparingly with—particularly in reference to food.

- A. “When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites...” (*Matthew 6:16*).
- B. We live in a society much more inclined towards indulgence than fasting.
- C. Surprisingly to some, the Scriptures have a great deal to say about the subject of fasting.

I. Fasting in the Old Testament

- A. In connection with the Day of Atonement (*Leviticus 23:26-32; 16:29-34*).
 - 1. “You shall afflict yourselves” (*Psalms 35:13; Isaiah 58:3; Ezra 8:21*).
 - 2. More than affecting the body, fasting was aimed at affecting the soul (*Psalms 69:10*).
- B. Fasting in times of war or the threat of war (*Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6*)
- C. Fasting when loved ones were sick (*2 Samuel 12:16-23*).
- D. Fasting when loved ones had died (*1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12*).
- E. Fasting when seeking God’s forgiveness (*Deuteronomy 9:15-18; 1 Kings 21:17-29; Jonah 3:4-10; Daniel 9:3-5; Nehemiah 9:1-3*).
- F. Fasting when faced with impending danger (*2 Chronicles 20:3; Esther 4:3*).
- G. Fasting to commemorate past calamities.

II. Fasting in the New Testament

- A. Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights following his baptism (*Matthew 4:1-2*).
- B. Saul of Tarsus neither ate nor drank for three days in Damascus (*Acts 9:9*).
- B. The church in Antioch fasted before commissioning Barnabas and Saul (*Acts 13:1-3*).
- C. Christians prayed and fasted in connection with the appointing of elders (*Acts 14:23*).
- E. Paul regulates a different kind of fasting for devotion to prayer (*1 Corinthians 7:5*).
- G. Jesus’ words in his sermon on the mount (*Matthew 6:16-18*)
- H. Jesus’ response to the disciples of John (*Matthew 9:14-15*).

III. Perversions of Fasting in the Old and New Testaments

- A. Even the Day of Atonement was treated as an empty ritual (*Isaiah 58:4; Zechariah 7:5*).
- B. Fasting treated as a bolster to personal pride by the Pharisees (*Luke 18:12*).
- C. The reason behind Jesus’ words to kingdom citizens in *Matthew 6:16-18*.

IV. The Christian’s Relationship to Fasting

- A. Jesus did not institute formal or specific “fast days” for the church, either public or private.
- B. However, fasting can powerfully reveal self-seeking and levels of addiction or idolatry.
- C. It is presented in Scripture as a natural companion to prayer.