

Fasting Before God

Text : II Sam. 12: 15-20 ; Matt. 6: 16-18 ; 9: 14-17

S#1.

S#2.

A. How has culture affected your religion ?

1. The kneejerk reaction of most people is to say, “Not at all.” **Not exactly true ?**
2. In stores we observe women of a certain religion with long hair and long skirts, most women used to believe their hair was their glory and value modesty.
 - a. The fashion industry changed the definition of modesty. *Men are permanently casual.*
 - b. Working jobs out of the home motivated women to cut their hair short.
 - c. When hats went out of fashion the doctrine about head coverings changed.
3. Industrialization has changed the way we do church.
 - a. Gospel meetings lasted two or three weeks.
 - d. Technology changed teaching
 - b. There was one long assembly each week.
 - e. The style of church music changes
 - c. Dinner on the grounds was common.
 - f. Parents shift responsibility to church

B. The topic of this discussion is a doctrine which is no longer fashionable.

S#3.

1. Though not directly commanded, it is referenced more than 80 times in scripture.
2. It was practiced by both Moses and Jesus.
3. It was practiced by the O.T. prophets and the N.T. Apostles and the church.

C. We will center our discussion around the topic of fasting. We will observe : S#4.

1. What is fasting ?
2. Fasting is a biblical practice.
3. Occasions when fasting is appropriate.

I. What is fasting ?

S#5.

A. Fasting defined :

1. Dictionary definition, fasting : voluntarily not eating food for varying lengths of time.
2. Unger’s Bible Dictionary: from the Hebrew word *sum*, meaning “to cover” the mouth
3. The discipline of abstinence used to add emphasis to one’s prayers.

B. There are various kinds of fasts.

S#6.

1. **Normal fast** : To abstain from food for a set period of time.
 - a. **Matt. 4: 2 – After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he then became hungry**
 - b. During a “normal fast” one may drink water. (*normally only water*)

2. **Partial Fast** : To abstain from certain specified foods, drinks, or activities.
- One denomination forbids eating meat on Friday and observes 40 days of Lent.
 - There is a biblical example of a partial fast :

Dan. 10: 3 – I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.

3. **Absolute Fast** : To abstain from ALL food and drink for a specified time.
- This is the kind of fast that is used in urgent situations.
 - Esther 4: 16** – Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me: do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way.

4. **Corporate Fast** : To fast as a group using any one of the above methods.

- Many corporate fasts were declared in the bible.
 - Joel 1: 14 ... Israel commanded to fast as judgment was approaching.
 - Ezra 8: 21-23 ... Seeking safety on journey back to Jerusalem.
 - Jonah 3: 6-10 ... King of Nineveh declared absolute fast .. even for animals.
- Acts 13: 2-3** While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. S#7.

C. Some things that fasting is not : S#8.

- Fasting is not a way to lose weight. (*Fasting must reflect one's heart.*)
- Fasting is not a meritorious work ... One does not earn points with God for fasting.
- It is not a way to manipulate God into doing what you want done.
 - "I'll go on a hunger strike until God does what I am asking of Him."
 - Remember David ... **II Sam. 12: 15-20** ... David fasted for 7 days, child died.

D. Fasting will accomplish some things for the one who fasts. S#9.

- Fasting is always linked to prayer. (**Acts 13: 3 ; I Cor. 7: 5 .. fast from relations**)
- Fasting increases the effectiveness of our prayers.
 - It demonstrates the earnestness of our prayers.
 - It raises our prayer to a level above daily prayers. (Not "*Now I lay me down ...*")
- Facilitates concentration of one's mind on his prayers and makes mind more active.
- It helps one to humble himself before God. (*Often an expression of repentance*) S#10.
Psa. 35: 13 – When they were sick my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting. And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.

II. Fasting is a biblical practice both in the Old and New Testaments.

S#11.

A. It was a common practice in the Old Testament.

1. Because it was such a common practice, there is not much “*how to*” instruction.
2. All the great leaders of Israel fasted upon various occasions.
 - a. Moses .. Exod. 34: 28 , Deut. 9: 9, 18
 - b. David , his men , all Israel .. II Sam. 1: 12, I Chron. 10: 11-12 (*death of kg Saul*)
 - c. King Jehoshaphat .. II Chron. 20: 20: 2-3
 - d. Evil King Ahab .. I king 21: 27-29 (and more)

B. Fasting is also a practice which Jesus expects of His followers.

1. Jesus himself practiced fasting.

Luke 4: 1-2 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. (cf — **Matt. 4**) S#14.
2. Some object saying we do not need to fast because the disciples of Jesus didn't.
 - a. **Matt. 9: 14-15** Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” S#15

¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”
 - b. Jesus said that His disciple would fast after He left them.
3. We know Jesus expects for us to fast because He instructed us about how to fast.
 - a. **Matt. 6: 16-18** Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. S#16
 - b. “**Whenever you fast,**” assumes fasting as vs. 2 assume giving and vs. 5 praying.
 - c. He states that God sees and that He rewards then the next verse discusses treasures.

C. Christians individually and the early church corporately practiced fasting.

1. The church and its leaders prayed and fasted together.

Acts 13: 2-3 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (cf **Ax 14**) **S#17.**

2. Apostle Paul fasted in repentance and with his companions when appointing elders.
 - a. **Acts 9: 9** – And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **S#18.**
 - b. **Acts 14: 23** – When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

III. Fasting is appropriate on many occasions. **S#19.**

- A. Fast when praying for a sick loved one, e.g., David fasted for his sick child.
- B. Fasting is appropriate in times of deep sorry and mourning. (*death , divorce*)

1. When 18,000 Benjamites were killed in a civil war.
Judges 20: 26 – Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. **S#20.**
2. When King Ahab learned of God’s coming judgement he wept and fasted.
I king 21: 27-29 It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. ²⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ²⁹ “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days.” **S#21.**

C. It is good to fast when seeking God’s protection.

1. Ezra prayed for protection on their journey back to Jerusalem.
Ezra 8: 21 – Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. **S#22.**
2. When Esther faced the possibility of her death and the death of all Israel.
Esther 4: 16 – Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way.
3. When sending a son or daughter off to war or, just as bad these days, to college.

D. We need to fast to gain strength to defeat Satan.

1. Jesus told His disciples that fasting was needed.
Matt. 17: 21 – But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting **S#23.**

2. You and I must battle against Satan on a daily basis.
Eph. 6: 12 – For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
3. **Matt. 4** ... Jesus fasted 40 day before facing the temptations of the devil.
4. When we are faced with great temptations we strengthen our prayers with fasting.

E. Great decisions are best made with much prayer and fasting.

1. The original mission program of the church was launched with prayer and fasting.
Acts 13: 2-3 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. **S#24.**
2. We must avail ourselves of the strength which comes with fasting and prayer.
 - a. What I will do with my life, career, education.
 - b. Where I will live and how I will serve the Lord.
 - c. Should I buy that house, go in debt for a car.
 - d. Who should I marry? How many children should I have ?

CONCLUSION :

A. Why should I fast ?

S#25.

1. It has been a part of worshipping God from the beginning.
2. It supercharges one’s prayer life.
3. It provides spiritual discipline which promotes spiritual growth.
4. It humbles me before God. 5. It helps me express my repentance.

B. How should I fast ?

S#26.

1. It is totally voluntary so do it however you want to. (*Your spiritual maturity level*)
2. Start slow and work your way up. (*Consider medical conditions – diabetes*)
3. Keep your fast between you and God.
4. Fast with a group for a common purpose.

C. Fasting is a part of drawing near to God. Try it !!

S#27.

James 4: 8 – Drawn near to God and He will draw near to you.

INVITATION : The first step in drawing near to God is to surrender and obey..#28.

S#29. *Communion Slide*

Lesson Text :**II Samuel 12: 15-20**

15 Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. **16** David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. **17** The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. **18** Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!" **19** But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." **20** So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.

Matthew 6:16-18

16 Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. **17** "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face **18** so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Matthew 9:14-17

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" **15** And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. **16** But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. **17** Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."