

Fasting
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Introduction: Should a Christian fast today?

- A. This is a commonly asked on question night but rarely answered in depth.
 - 1. There have been various attitudes shown in both OT and NT.
 - 2. God has commanded fasting in the past while the NT has no such command. We do however have examples!
- B. Another area of study will be God's purpose for fasting.
 - 1. How can we accomplish these purposes without fasting?
 - 2. We need to learn how many in Israel abused fasting.

I. What is fasting?

- A. It is from a word that means: "to abstain from eating".
 - 1. It is not however just a diet or any occasion of eating. It always involves a focused mind.
 - 2. There are two kinds of "focused mind": voluntary and involuntary.
 - 3. Occasions for fasting include: loss of a loved one, guilt of sin, a burden of great responsibility and concern for others in their sin.
 - 4. Fasting is a result of a focus and mourning that causes food to have little appeal.
 - 5. Prayer is often connected to it. This is where burdened hearts find relief.
- B. There were also occasions for a "proclaimed fast". Even here the individual was to focus on issues that would produce this burden that would lead them to pray.

II. Fasting Under the Old Testament

- A. Jews commonly fasting during the day of Atonement.
(Lev 23:27-32; 16:29, 31)
 - 1. In this affliction over sin the Jews chose to fast. (Psa 35:13)
 - 2. By the NT times another word for the day of Atonement was: "the fast".
(Acts 27:9)
 - 3. To fast without affliction was pointless!
- B. In the days of Joel God proclaimed a fast because of the present circumstances
 - 1. They were invaded by a great nation and all was failing. (Joel 1:6; 13-15)
 - 2. God wanted them to return to Him in their hearts. (Joel 2:12-14)
 - 3. How many have only mourned for a while and then turned back to sin?
- C. There were occasions were the people fasted with God's approval.
 - 1. On the occasion where the people sought relief from the Philistines.
(1 Sam 7:2-3,7)
 - 2. There were fasts for King Saul by the mighty men and by David himself.
(1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:12)

3. David fasted over sins. (Psa 35:13)
- D. The Jews observed days of fasting from their own traditions.
 1. The Jews regularly observed four fasts. (**Zech 8:19**)
 - a. Fourth month in memory of the wall of Jerusalem being broken up.
 - b. Fifth month in memory of the burning of the temple. (Jer 52)
 - c. The seventh month in memory of Gedaliah the governor being slain. (Jer 41)
 - d. Tenth month in memory of Nebuchadnezzar coming against Jerusalem. (Jer 52:4)
 2. Was God pleased with these proclaimed fasts? (**Zech 7:3-14**)
 - a. These people could not be moved. They have hearts of flint!
 - b. They also had an attitude problem towards God's authority. They ended up with over 28 fasts!

II. Fasting in the New Testament

- A. During the ministry of Christ fasting was acceptable.
 1. While he debated the Pharisees He did not deny there would be a time for fasting. (**Matt 9:14-17; Lk 5:33-39**)
 2. Jesus also spoke of the proper way of fasting. (**Matt 6:16-18**)
 3. In the casting out of demons Jesus spoke of fasting. (**Matt 17:21**)
 4. There would be occasions for the Christian to focus his mind on sin, temptation, responsibility which would lead them to fast.
- B. In the church we see occasions of fasting with God's approval.
 1. In the sending out of Paul and Barnabas. (**Acts 13:1-3**)
 - a. How involved are we with the men we support?
 - b. Do you take time to focus and plan concerning the lost?
 2. In the selection of elders. (**Acts 14:23**)
 - a. How much does this mean to you? Would you fast?
 - b. This is an important step we need to be focusing on.
 3. In the spiritual life of a family. (**1 Cor 7:5**)
 - a. How many of you would go this far to deal with spiritual matters?
 - b. We need to learn how to worship.

III. What does this mean to me?

- A. Fasting is not commanded.
 1. Putting our hearts into God's will is. (**Mark 12:30**)
 2. Mourning over sins is commanded to. (**Matt 5:4**)
- B. Fasting is a private, individual matter.
 1. Do we take time to deal with matters before God?
 2. It must not be a show!

Conclusion: Consider the Conversion of Paul. (**Acts 9:9; 22:16**)