

Fasting (Part 2) - The New Testament Sunday PM 12/05/21

Introduction:

In our first lesson we looked at fasting in the Old Testament. We noticed the following:

1. The Day of Atonement was the only fast commanded in the Old Testament.
2. Fast varied in length, some were for the day and ended at evening; some lasted 3 days, some 7 days, and 40 days.
3. A fast could be complete, not taking food or drink; or a partial fast.
4. Fasting occurred at various times: when facing impending danger, the sickness or death of a loved one, when seeking God's will, a time of repentance
5. Fasting was to humble or afflict one's soul, spiritual in nature
6. Fasting was not to take the place of obedience, not to be ceremonial or ritualistic
7. There were times when a fast was appropriate and times when it was not. i.e. King Saul claiming a fast while his men were battling the enemy. David ended his fast once his child died.

Now we want to turn our attention to the New Testament

I) Fasting In the Life of Jesus

A) He fasted forty days in the wilderness,

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. **3** Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." **4** But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" **5** Then the

*devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, **6** and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" **7** Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" **8** Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."*

1. This was immediately after his baptism and God declaring Jesus as "His Son"
2. Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted
3. He felt it appropriate to fast during this period of temptation

B) Jesus spoke about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount,

***Matthew 6:16** "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **17** "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

1. He used the word "when" and not "if" showing that His disciples would fast at times.
2. Jesus said to fast privately or secretly, to not make a show of it or proclaim one's fasting.
 - a. The same as prayer, **v. 6** and giving, **v. 3**
 - b. Fasting is between the person and God
3. The abuse of fasting mentioned
 - a. The Pharisees were hypocritical, **v. 16**

b. They were proclaiming their fast, **v. 17**

C) Jesus was questioned about why His disciples did not fast,

Matthew 9:14 *Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"* **15** *And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."* **16** *"No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse."* **17** *"Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."* **Mark 2:18-22**

1. Apparently Jesus' disciples were not following the "standard procedure' or ritual concerning fasting
 - a. How did John's disciples know they were not fasting?
 - b. Since fasting individual in nature the proper time in fast will differ among individuals
2. It was not the appropriate time to be fasting. In the future there would be time to fast but not now.
3. The Pharisees fasted often, **Matthew 9:14**
4. The Pharisees equated fasting with being pious,

Luke 18:9 *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:...* **12** *'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'* **13** *"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'"* **14** *"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

D) Casting out demons was done by prayer and fasting,

Matthew 17:14-21 *And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, **15** "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. **16** "So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." **17** Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." **18** And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. **19** Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" **20** So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. **21** "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."*

1. There are times when faith alone is not enough or our faith needs to be stronger.
2. Prayer when joined with fasting may accomplish things which prayer could not

II) Fasting in the Lord's Church

A) The church at Antioch,

Acts 13:1 *Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **3** Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*

1. They were fasting as a group
2. They fasted and prayed in preparation of sending out Barnabas

and Saul.

3. Fasting and prayer can be done as a group when involved in serving the Lord.
 - a. Note: the length of the fast is not mentioned in any of the above passages.
 - b. Did the church at Antioch fast for a day, until evening, until morning, for 3 days? We are not told.

B) The churches of Galatia,

Acts 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ***22*** strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." ***23*** So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1. Prayer and fasting in connection with the appointing of elders.
2. This was done in every church. Not just the "Jewish churches."
 - a. Again the length of the fast is not mentioned

III) Fasting In the Ministry of Paul

A) Fasting was a mark of his ministry

1. Passages in ***Acts*** which show Paul and others fasted on various occasions.
 - a. In mentioning various trials and persecutions, Paul lists fasting,
2 Corinthians 6:5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;
 - b. ***2 Corinthians 11.23-28*** in ***verse 27*** fasting is listed separately from normal thirst and hunger.

- B) Paul taught there may be a time when it would be appropriate to fast,

1 Corinthians 7:5 *Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

IV) **People Fast Today For Various Reasons**

- A) Some for health reasons
- B) Some without thinking about it, simply due to grief or lack of time (too busy to eat)
- C) Some in order to exercise self-control
1. None aimed directly toward God
 2. There is nothing wrong with the above fast but they are not commanded.

V) **Appropriate Times For Christians To Fast**

- A) When we feel the need for God's help
1. Most will be individual in nature
 - a. When we face difficult temptations, hard decisions, impending danger, etc.
 - b. When we face serious illness or death
- B) Some may be congregational in nature
1. Appointing elders
 2. Sending out missionaries, selecting a preacher, etc.
- C) The length and type of fast will be up to the individual

VI) **How Should Christians Fast**

- A) Privately-

1. Not to be seen of men
2. Do not go around talking about your fasting or to make a show of it.
 - a. Do not be like the man that went about proclaiming his humility
 - b. Do not be like the man in **Luke 18.12**

B) With true repentance

1. All the praying, all the fasting is of no value if not connected to heart felt confession and change
2. Fasting may be the result of being convicted but not that which makes us convicted.

C) Let the situation dictate the type of fast or if you will fast

1. Health reasons may not allow you to have a complete fast
2. Hard work will make it difficult to have a complete fast
3. The situation may not dictate a need for fasting,

Colossians 2:20 *Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

- a. Do not trivialize fasting
- b. Do not fast if you do not have the time to spend in prayer and meditation

Conclusion:

There may be times when Christians will need to come together to spend in prayer and fasting. There may be time when we individually may fast. It must be done willingly and from the heart. Jesus spoke of times when His disciplines will fast, we determine those times.

God has never accepted only a ceremonial religion. Today a lot of religions are involved in ritualism and ceremonial activities. In many places **baptism** is purely outward. People are baptized to show they are saved; to encourage others to be saved; as a sign of one's salvation. Baptism was never meant to be a ritual. Just as accepting Jesus as the Son of God is more than a mere outward sign; or confessing Christ is symbolic; or repentance is a ritual. God requires us to accept Jesus as His Son with our heart, to truly repent and change, to be baptized so the blood of Christ will wash away our sins.