



Fasting

Establishing Bible Authority

- There are several more ways the Bible authorizes and deauthorizes than solely through (C)ommand, (E)xample, and (N)ecessary (I)nference.
- Consider just a few additional ways that we establish Bible authority.
 - **Informative Questions (Acts 22:16).**
 - **Rhetorical Questions (1 Cor. 1:13).**
 - **“Not . . . But” Construction (Eph. 5:18).**
 - **Conditional Statements (Matt. 6:14-15).**
 - **Assumed Obedience (Matt. 6:16-18).**

Matthew 6:16-18 and Assumed Obedience

- In Matt. 6, we see Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon provided “**disciples**” (Matt. 5:1) various warnings and instructions as part of His “**gospel**” (Matt. 4:23) message.
- Many of these warnings and instructions are given based on Jesus assuming His disciples would already be regularly performing certain duties, such as charitable deeds, praying, and fasting.
 - “**When you do a charitable deed**” (6:2-3).
 - “**When you pray**” (6:5-7).
 - “**When you fast**” (6:16-18).
- Jesus assumed His people were already doing charitable deeds, praying, and fasting.
 - Hence the repeated use of “when you . . .” and not “if you . . .”
 - Thus, fasting is not just permitted, but is required.

Approved Examples are Binding

- Approved examples are binding (**Phil. 4:9; 1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 6:12b; 2 Thess. 3:9**).
- Since approved examples are binding, Christians are, therefore, required to fast, due to the following approved examples:
 - Acts 14:23 – *When they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting . . .*
 - Acts 13:1-3 – *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 . . . Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*
 - 2 Cor. 11:27 – *In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*
 - See also 2 Cor. 6:3-5

Approved Examples are Binding

- While 2 Cor. 11:27 and 6:3-5 discuss fasting that occurs out of necessity, both Acts 14:23 and 13:1-3 deal with voluntary fasts.
- Most Christians in the United States will never have to follow the approved example of fasting out of necessity, but how often do we purposefully set aside time to voluntarily fast, such as what we see in Acts 14:23 and 13:1-3?
- The New Testament does not tell us how long or how often we should voluntarily abstain from food or drink, but that does not excuse us from fasting because the approved examples of such are binding.

The Logically Consistent Consequence of Rejecting Approved Examples of Fasting

- Many (most?) Christians attempt to get around God's fasting requirement by saying things like, "The New Testament never expressly commands us to fast."
- But an approved example is the equivalent of a direct command.
 - **We DO NOT need** to have a command, example, **AND** necessary inference (or another form of authority) to prove if something is binding.
 - **We DO need** to have a command, example, **OR** necessary inference (or another form of authority) to prove if something is binding.
- If approved examples in and of themselves are not binding, then we are not limited to partake the Lord's Supper only on the first day of the week because "we are never expressly commanded to" do so on Sunday; we only have an example (Acts 20:7).
 - See the issue?

The Bridegroom Has Been Taken Away

- We learn in Matt. 9:14-15 that the Lord's disciples would fast once the Bridegroom (Jesus) departed this earth.
 - ***Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" 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.'***

QUESTION – Is Jesus referring strictly to the period between His death and resurrection, or to all time after his death, including after His resurrection and ascension back to Heaven?

- Even if Matt. 9:14-15 is only referring to the time between Christ's death and resurrection, nothing is ever stated nor implied that fasting would become unnecessary or obsolete upon Jesus's resurrection or final departure from earth. Additionally, His disciples continued fasting long after Jesus's return to Heaven. Therefore, the Bridegroom's disciples should still be fasting today.

What is Fasting?

- People can fast (i.e. abstain) from anything, but every time the word “fast” appears in the Bible, it always refers to abstaining from food or drink.
- For instance, Strong, in his Bible Concordance, defines the Greek word **nésteia** (“fasting”) as, **“To abstain from food (religiously).”**
- Further, Strong defines **nésteuó** (“fasted”) as, **“To abstain as a religious exercise from food and drink: either entirely, if the fast lasted but a single day . . . or from customary and choice nourishment, if it continued several days.”**
- Lastly, in his Exhaustive Concordance, Strong defines the root word **néstis** (“fast”) as, **“Not eating, i.e. Abstinent from food (religiously) – fasting.”**
- Although abstaining from anything that can distract a person from serving God (cell phone, television, etc.) is certainly good, the New Testament only specifically requires abstaining from food or drink to be included in our spiritual duties.

Why / When Should I Fast?

- When we look at Old Testament examples of fasting, we "**learn**" (Rom. 15:4) a lot about specific occasions serving as prime opportunities for fasting.
 - **When Praying for the Sick / Ailing / Dying (2 Sam. 12:16).**
 - **When Loved Ones Die (2 Sam. 1:12).**
 - **When Seeking God's Forgiveness (Dan. 9:3-5).**
 - **When Seeking God's Favor / Help (Jonah 3:5-6, 10; Ezra 8:21-23).**
 - **When Facing Danger (Esther 3:8-9, 4:3).**

What Should I Do When I Fast?

In the New Testament, prayer often accompanies fasting.

- **Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” . . . “this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:18-19, 21).**
- **This woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Luke 2:37).**
- **Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:3).**
- **So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23).**

What Should I Do When I Fast?

- Fasting should never be seen as just another checkbox needing to be ticked. We should take great joy in obeying the commands of God.
 - **And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love** (Psalm 119:47).
- Opportunities to fast should be looked upon as special occasions for deepening our devotion to God.
- Time spent fasting should be used with purpose and intentionality. After all, if we abstain from food/drink and we dread every second of it or do everything but focus on God during that time, then our fast is pointless because our heart is not in it.
 - **God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth** (John 4:24).

How Long Should I Fast?

- The New Testament does not provide specific requirements for how long we should fast, but there are several examples in the Old Testament showing how God's people went about it in those days.
 - There is an example of a three day fast in **Esther 4:16**, but this seems like a special case.
 - There are also examples of 40 day fasts that appear to have been divinely aided and, therefore, cannot be replicated.
 - Old Testament – Moses in **Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9**.
 - New Testament – Jesus in **Matt. 4:2**.
 - What can be replicated is fasting one day until evening, which seems to have been the norm in the Old Testament (**Jdgs. 20:26; 1 Sam. 14:24; 2 Sam. 3:35**).

How Often Should We Fast?

- Again, the New Testament never specifies how long or how often a person should fast. So, a person can, at his choosing, purposefully set aside (“proclaim”) a time to fast.
 - **Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God . . . (Ezra 8:21).**
 - **. . . They proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem (Jer. 36:9).**
 - **She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people . . . They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people (1 Kings. 21:9,12).**
 - **So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them (Jonah 3:5).**

Is There a Wrong Way to Fast?

The Bible shows two clear ways that fasting can be useless (unprofitable).

1) Fasting without repentance or full obedience/submission to God.

- **‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ “In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:3-7).**

Is There a Wrong Way to Fast?

The Bible shows two clear ways that fasting can be useless (unprofitable).

- 1) Fasting without repentance or full obedience/submission to God (Isaiah 58:3-7).
- 2) Fasting to be seen by men.
 - **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. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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 (Matt. 6:16).**

Closing Thoughts / Practical Admonitions

- Remember, we are not given a requirement in the New Testament for how long or how often we should fast. So, if you find yourself reaching a limit, that's okay! You know your own body. The more you fast the more you will learn how often/long you can fast without causing harm to yourself.
- At the same time, recognize that "hunger pains" will come; be willing to fight through them because, when we fast, we affirm what Jesus said to Satan while the Son of God fasted:
 - **“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”** (Matt. 4:4).
 - Fasting should help affirm our dependence on the word of God (thus, God Himself) for sustenance. Therefore, while fasting, don't allow your body's desire for earthly sustenance to hinder you in your pursuit of true sustenance!

Closing Thoughts / Practical Admonitions

- You will be amazed the first few times after ending a fast just how much we take food for granted. Thank God when you finish your fast and sit down at the dinner table to enjoy your meal, knowing He is the giver of the food on your plate!
 - **God . . . gives to all life, breath, and all things** (Acts 17:24-25).
 - **And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude** (Matt. 15:36).
 - **In this manner, therefore, pray . . . Give us this day our daily bread** (Matt. 6:9,11).
- Finally, since fasting is something done privately, examine yourself and your heart before, during, and after you fast to ensure that what you do pleases the Lord:
 - **Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God** (1 Cor. 10:31).