



# Fasting

by  
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## *Fasting*

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As you read the Bible you quickly find that God not only approves of fasting, at times, in the Old Testament at least, He required it.

Three questions that we as Christians should ask about fasting are:

1. Is it a requirement for us in this Church Age?
2. Is it acceptable for Christians to practice fasting in this Church Age?
3. Is fasting a Christian discipline that merits God's blessing and favor? In other words, does fasting move God to action?

The answers that we will discover to these questions about fasting as we study the Word of God will be as follows:

1. Is it a requirement for us in this Church Age?  
**No!**
2. Is it acceptable for Christians to practice fasting in this Church Age? **Yes!**
3. Is fasting a Christian discipline that merits God's blessing and favor? In other words, does fasting move God to action. **No!**

Fasting that is approved by God is simply one way of expressing the profound impact our relationship and fellowship with God has on our day to day life.

It is often an expression of extreme sorrow and distress. Sin is frequently the cause of sorrow and distress and so fasting in the Bible is commonly connected to repentance.

Fasting is a natural expression of sorrow and distress as many times a loss of appetite accompanies such extreme emotions.

Fasting is presented in Scripture from time to time as a way to focus time and energy on communing with the Lord in order to know, understand and obey His will.

In almost all cases Biblical fasting is practiced in connection with prayer. That is why fasting is an expression of the profound impact our relationship with God has on our life. Our dependence on God, our need to call upon Him for help, guidance and deliverance is more important than our daily food.

There are many, many references to fasting in the Old Testament and a few in the New Testament. I'll point you to just a few of them to confirm my answers to the three questions we posed to begin our study.

**Sorrow** – David fasted after receiving the news of Saul and Jonathan's death because of his deep grief at the loss of his dear friend, Jonathan and of God's anointed king. *2 Samuel 1:11-12*

**Repentance** – Samuel led Israel against the Philistines, but only after they acknowledged their

sin in repentance that was expressed with fasting.

**1 Samuel 7:3-6**

**Preparation to commune with God** – On the Day of Atonement God commanded Israel to prepare their hearts to commune with God by “afflicting their soul,” which is synonymous with fasting. **Leviticus 16:29-31**

So we see that fasting was an acceptable practice of expressing sorrow, repentance and dependence on God and was at times even commanded by God.

However, God severely condemns the religious practice of fasting when it is not a genuine expression of sorrow, repentance or dependence on God. In other words, the act of fasting means nothing to God. It is the heart from which flows the reason and motive for fasting that matters to God. **Isaiah 58:1 - 14** God desires hearts that are changed because of faith. He does not honor religious rituals that are motivated from carnal hearts and minds that seek only to satisfy their own selfish lusts.

**Jesus’ words on fasting – Mark 2:18-20**

Jesus tells His critics that it would have been completely inappropriate for His disciples to practice fasting while He was with them since His presence brought great joy and enlightenment. Why would they need to express extreme sorrow while in the presence of the Eternal Son of God?

Nevertheless, He does say that there would

come a time when it would be appropriate for His disciples to express sorrow and distress through fasting. Jesus probably was referring to the great persecution that the early Church suffered shortly after His ascension into heaven.

Jesus' words do not prohibit the practice of fasting nor do they require it. His words only express that there are times that it is appropriate and when it is not.

Jesus gives further instruction on fasting in this Church Age. ***Matthew 6:16-18***

Fasting in this Church Age is to be a private and personal matter between you and God. It is practiced as a natural expression of sorrow or distress or repentance that drives you to cry out to the Lord in full dependence on Him.

Fasting is one way you can express to God that your need of Him is more important and necessary than your daily food.

#### **Jesus Fasted – *Matthew 4:1-2***

However, Jesus' fasting seems to be on rare occasions in contrast to the Pharisees that apparently fasted twice a week. ***Luke 18:12 / Mark 2:18***

**Other references to fasting - *Matthew 17:18-21*** Verse 21 - "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting," is not found in the oldest manuscripts and is not believed to be a part of the original passage. Verse 20 gives the reason for the disciples failure, "*your unbelief.*"

Fasting and prayer with a heart of unbelief will not produce the desired results. A heart of faith in the will of God and a desire to bring glory to God will result in the will of God being accomplished with or without fasting.

The Apostle Paul is connected with several fasts in the book of Acts. *Acts 13:2-3 / Acts 14:21-23* These fast had to do with seeking the specific direction of the Lord concerning ministry.

The Apostle Paul mentions his own fastings in his writings in two passages. *2 Corinthians 6:4-5 / 2 Corinthians 11:23-28* However, these may have been references to forced lack of food due to extreme circumstances and not merely voluntary choices to fast.

Paul gives no teaching on the practice of fasting though there is a reference to it in his teaching on marriage. *1 Corinthians 7:4-5*

With no clear teaching on fasting from the Apostle Paul we can assume that the practice of fasting by some of the early Christians was a carryover from the Jewish practice of fasting and not a practice that was to be emphasized in this Church Age.

Most fasts by Christians today are related to petitions desired of the Lord. The motive for fasting seems to be to impress God with our sacrifice so that He will give us what we want from Him. But that is not the teaching or

example we find in the Scriptures. More often than not fasting is motivated by deep sorrow, repentance or a need for the Lord's direction. At times there may be a petition involved, but it is directly related to the sorrow, repentance or need for direction.

We can conclude that fasting by Christians in this Church age is neither prohibited or promoted. If fasting is practiced, according to Jesus' teaching, it should be done privately before the Lord and not before man. It must be done as an expression of a heart that is truly surrendered to God and whose faith is in the power of God, not the power of fasting. Fasting may be an expression of genuine faith, but faith seeks the will and glory of Jesus Christ above everything else. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to lead us into all things that will bring glory to Jesus Christ. May we be sensitive to the leading of His voice.



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