

“WHEN YOU FAST”

INTRODUCTION

A. **Matthew 6:16-18**

We will address the main point of Jesus’ remarks here further in our study, but for now, take notice of the phrase: “*when you fast*”. The Lord did not treat fasting as an obsolete relic of the Law of Moses; rather, He spoke of the manner in which it was to be done, clearly implying that the practice should be perpetuated.

B. **Matthew 9:14-15**

Observe Jesus’ words: “*then they will fast*”. Jesus said that after He was taken away, His disciples would fast. Clearly, fasting is a subject Jesus does not want us to be naïve about.

I. PURPOSE

A. **2nd Corinthians 11:23-31**

Fasting is deliberate, not incidental. When Paul speaks of his abundant labors in the Lord, including his many sacrifices, he mentions “*in hunger and thirst*” as well as “*in fastings*”. Hunger is the word that is consistently translated elsewhere as “*famine*”, which is not a chosen act. He makes distinct reference to fasting apart from hunger. So, fasting isn’t merely the absence of food, but selective abstinence from it.

B. **Isaiah 58:3**

Isaiah calls fasting a kind of self-affliction.

1. **Matthew 16:24**

Self denial is required in order to serve the Lord.

2. **Psalms 35:13**

David teaches that fasting is an expression of humility.

a. **James 4:10**

Humility is essential to godly service.

b. Ezra 8:21-23

It is right that requests humbly made to God in prayer be accompanied by fasting.

C. Psalm 69:10

From David we learn that fasting is a manifestation of mourning.

1. Judges 20:18-26

The people of Israel wept and fasted in mourning the casualties of war.

2. Esther 3:12-4:3

The Jews mourned with fasting at the threat of genocide.

3. 2nd Corinthians 7:10; James 4:8-9

Repentance from sin requires mourning.

a. 1st Samuel 7:3-6

When Israel confessed their sin of idolatry and repented of it, they fasted. This included pouring water on the ground – wasting what they could consume.

b. Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah prayed with fasting because his people were punished for their sins, so he acknowledged their error.

c. Daniel 9:1-5

Daniel prayed with fasting when he realized his people were in captivity because of their transgressions against God, and he confessed their iniquities.

d. Jonah 3:1-10

At the preaching of Jonah, the people of Nineveh repented of their sins, mourned, and fasted as a petition to God that He might relent from the destruction He had planned against them.

e. Acts 9:1-9

When Saul came to realize his error in persecuting the Lord's church, he fasted three days until Ananias came to complete the Lord's message.

D. 2nd Chronicles 20:1-3

Jehoshaphat's example shows that fasting is an appropriate element in seeking the Lord and gaining His help.

1. 2nd Samuel 12:15-23

David fasted with the desire to gain the Lord's mercy, but when his child died, knowing the Lord refused to hear his request on that occasion, he stopped afflicting himself.

2. Matthew 4:1-2

Jesus fasted immediately prior to the devil coming to tempt Him.

3. Acts 10:30-31

Cornelius the centurion was fasting and praying when God sent an angel to confirm that his prayer had been heard and to instruct him as to how to learn the gospel.

4. Acts 13:1-3

The teachers and prophets in the church at Antioch included fasting in their regular ministry and did so in particular on the occasion of sending Paul and Barnabas out to undertake a new work.

5. Acts 14:23

Desiring God's approval as they appointed elders in the churches, Paul and Barnabas prayed with fasting. Knowing the important work elders do in overseeing the church, shepherding God's flock, we wouldn't dare to appoint them without prayer. How, then, could we omit fasting from the process?

II. MANNER

A. Attitude

1. **Matthew 6:16-18**

We have previously established that a primary purpose for fasting is to humble oneself. To deliberately draw attention to oneself because of the fast defeats the purpose. This is not to say that it is sinful for others to be aware that we are fasting, only that we should not be seeking attention. Otherwise, how would we know of any of the fasts exemplified in the scriptures, or how could people ever fast together?

2. **Luke 18:9-14**

To boast about fasting is sinful arrogance.

3. **Zechariah 7:4-5**

God wants to know that we fast to gain His attention.

4. **Joel 2:12-14**

Fasting must be from the heart.

B. Attendant behavior

It would hardly be characteristic of humility, mourning, or self affliction if food were abstained from while continuing to enjoy other diversions such as music, TV, sports, or other recreation.

1. **Daniel 6:18**

When king Darius fasted, he refused to be entertained at the time.

2. **1st Corinthians 7:5**

When we choose to refrain from food in devotion to God, it is also right to refrain from marital relations.

C. Duration and nature

The extent to which people fasted varied considerably, underscoring the voluntary nature of fasting.

1. **Esther 4:16**

The Jews fasted for Esther three days and nights, abstaining from both food and drink. Abstaining from fluids does not appear to have been typical, but is not without precedent.

2. **1st Samuel 31:11-13; 2nd Samuel 1:12**

The valiant men of Jabesh Gilead fasted seven days for Saul and his sons, but David and his men fasted only part of one day. Since fasting is voluntary to begin with, how it is conducted is an individual choice.

3. **Daniel 10:2-3**

Daniel fasted three weeks. His fast prevented him from indulging in pleasant food, including meat and wine, but does not appear to have been total abstinence from food.

4. **Luke 2:37**

Anna fasted constantly. Unless this was miraculous in nature, it probably meant that she skipped a meal every day or restricted her diet somehow, without completely abstaining from nourishment.

CONCLUSION

A. **Jeremiah 14:11-12**

Fasting is not a substitute for obedience. God can choose to ignore it.

B. **Invitation**