Fasting in the New Testament and Today

Matthew 6:16-18

Introduction:

1. We continue our study on fasting.
2. Last time we examined fasting in the Old Testament.
3. Now let us turn our attention to the New Testament and today.
4. FASTING IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.
   1. Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry (Matthew 4:1,2).

* 1. Jesus taught on fasting.

“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”

(Matthew 6:16-18).

* 1. When questioned by John's disciples.

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”

(Matthew 9:14,15).

1. FASTING IN THE LORD'S CHURCH.
   1. The church at Antioch.

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. 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.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:1-3).

* 1. The churches in Galatia.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 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.” 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 14:21-23).

* 1. Paul.
     1. This was part of the trouble Paul suffered for the Lord.

But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings (2 Corinthians 6:4,5).

* + 1. This is distinguished from “hunger and thirst.”

in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— (2 Corinthians 11:27).

1. SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST TODAY?
   1. This seems to be assumed.
      1. Jesus said his disciples would fast.
      2. Churches fasted.
      3. Paul fasted.
      4. We are to imitate him as he imitates Christ.

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

* 1. When should Christians fast today–when we need divine help.
     1. In the Old Testament.
        1. In times of war or threat of it: Israel.
        2. When loved ones were sick: David.
        3. When seeking God's forgiveness: Israel, Ahab.
     2. In the New Testament.
        1. When dealing with temptations: Jesus.
        2. When serving the Lord: Antioch.
        3. When selecting and appointing elders: Galatia.
  2. How should Christians fast?
     1. As individuals in time of temptation or sickness.
     2. As a church when appointing elders or sending preachers.
  3. Not to be seen of 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” (Matthew 6:16-18).

* 1. There is no scripture that fasting is to be done as a regular ritual.
  2. With true repentance. Isaiah 58:3-9
  3. In the case of sin, the fasting must be accompanied by penitent obedience.
  4. Observations from Doyle Kee (*Gospel Advocate*, August 1991, pages 37,38):
     1. **Practical advice for fasting:**

Before fasting, analyze the reason and the motivation of your fast. It is not biblical to fast for the pleasure.

When your fast bothers those around you (parents, friends, children), it is better to wait for a more appropriate and secret moment.

It is important to “feed” this moment of fasting with prayers and reading of biblical texts.

It is fruitful and useful to share fasting and praying with a close friend or friends with whom you have an open relationship.

* + 1. **Some truths** (sic) **to retain about biblical fasting:**

Fasting is not an end in itself, but a means, a climate of dependence by and in which one desires to meet God.

The one who fasts is more occupied with the One who blesses than the blessing in itself.

A biblical fast is first of all the fact of being available to God with God and before God.

* 1. In the final analysis, there does seem to be some benefits in voluntary fasting at certain times. Reflect upon the following:
     1. The Scriptures seem to suggest that God honors fasting when performed as a token of deep and sincere dedication.
     2. Physicians indicate that moderate fasting can be a benefit to health, having the effect of allowing our systems to occasionally cleanse themselves.
     3. The mind appears to be able to plumb greater depths of contemplation during periods of fasting.
     4. Fasting can help one hone a keener edge on self-discipline.
     5. Fasting can also have the added effect of reinforcing our appreciation for those things of which we’re deprived during the periods of abstention (*Is Fasting for Christians Today?*, Wayne Jackson, *Christian Courier*).
  2. I have noticed the time we spend in eating when I have chosen not to eat for some days at a time.

Conclusion:

1. A person is not saved by fasting.
2. One is saved by the blood of Jesus Christ–by grace through faith.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

1. Have you contacted the blood of Jesus?

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3,4).

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