

FASTING

The subject of fasting is very controversial. Many people, including Christians, feel that fasting is neither important nor necessary in the Christian life. In fact many believe that it is antiquated and obsolete. As Christians today, we must always view things from a biblical perspective because it matters not how we feel or how others feel, but the question is, "What does the Bible teach on the matter of fasting?" The mere fact that our Lord Jesus Christ both taught and practiced fasting should be enough to consider the subject worth examining.

What is fasting?

Fasting basically means to abstain from food. Many believe that one should abstain from food and drink water. Others believe that one should abstain from both food and water. Which is correct? Both are correct, depending upon the length of the fast and the manner the Lord directs an individual because he does instruct in various ways for various fasts. Fasting from both food and water for short periods of time (1-3) days is not unhealthy or dangerous for the human body speaking from a physical point of view. The body however, can dehydrate if the body is deprived from water for long periods of time. Water is a purifier, and thus, if fasting for a long period of time, should be consumed unless however God is divinely and supernaturally directing them to deny themselves from both food and water and in these cases of course he supernaturally sustains them and prevents any harm from coming to their bodies.

Jesus expects Christians to fast (St. Matthew chapter 6)

In St. Matthew chapter 6 while delivering his sermon on the mount, the Lord states in verse 16, "***Moreover, when ye fast.....***" Notice he did not say if you fast but when ye fast. This indicates that fasting was something that we would definitely be doing at some point and time in our Christian lives. The thing that he stressed in this particular scripture was that fasting should be done in secret. The reason for this is that fasting is to draw our attention upon God and not to draw attention to ourselves. He made reference to various individuals who fasted that others would be impressed by their actions. He made it clear that in these cases they already have their reward which is the praise and glory that they receive from men. The reward for those who fast in secret is the reward that comes from God as we focus our attention on him and seek his face.

Fasting is a focus of the heart

Fasting is not a “cure-all.” Many people believe that regardless of what the situation is, or regardless of how carelessly they live, all they have to do is fast and “poof,” they are cured. They feel instantly holy and instantly justified. Fasting is a focus of our heart. It is a time that we set aside to draw near to God. It is a time for self-examination and a time for deepening our relationship with him and also a time for interceding for others. It is also a means by which we crucify our flesh and bring it under subjection to God’s word and his will. As we fast, we deny the natural (eating) and seek the spiritual and thus, we find ourselves growing in the grace and in the knowledge of God and becoming more like him.

Types of fasts:

The bible speaks of three types of fasts. They are: The absolute fast, the normal fast and the partial fast.

The absolute fast is very extreme and should only be done if one is definitely led by God. This fast is one where nothing is taken in. No food and no water. It is recommended that depending upon your health that one should be sure that they are physically up to par before undertaking such a fast. A fast of this nature is usually between 1-3 days.

On a normal fast, you typically go without food, but drink water. Depending upon the length of the fast, some people will include broth or juice.

The partial fast is typically a fast where one gives up certain types of food usually for an extended period of time. The perfect example of this type of fast is in the book of Daniel. Daniel and his companions refused to eat the king’s meat but chose rather to eat vegetables and water and the outcome was that they were healthier at the end of ten days than those who consumed meats, sweets, wine, etc.

The duration of fasts vary. The bible gives examples of 3 days, 7 days, 10 days, 21 days and even 40 days.

Because fasting is a focus of the heart and a time to draw near to God, it should be associated with prayer and reading the word of God. One should refrain from watching television or doing things for personal pleasure because it would hence not be a total focus.

Many times when fasting, one may experience feelings of nausea, dizziness or even headaches. During an extended fast one may even notice a white coating that develops on the tongue. If one or more of those symptoms occur, just know that the body is being cleansed and toxins and poisons are being released from the body. When one fasts the

digestive system takes a rest and the cells in the body actually renew themselves and brings about a feeling of renewal and restoration. While the body is being cleansed, the spirit is also being cleansed of clutter and debris. As the individual prays and reads the word of God, they draw nearer to God and gain spiritual strength and insight. It has been proven that when one fasts, they become more sensitive to the Spirit of God and are more keen and aware of God and thus become more spiritual. So therefore, fasting has a two-fold purpose, physically and spiritually.

There are also many other benefits of fasting. In the book of Isaiah chapter 58, God gives a long list of benefits that can be derived from a sincere and spiritual fast.

The bible lists various people who fasted:

Moses:

And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water, and he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:28)

Israel:

And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, we have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel. (I Samuel 7:6)

Elijah:

And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. (I Kings 19:8).

Ezra:

Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johnanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, or drink water: for he mourned because of the transgressions of them that had been carried away. (Ezra 10:6)

Daniel:

I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. (Daniel 10:3).

Christ:

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. (St.Luke 4: 1-2)

Paul:

And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. (Acts 9:9)

Leaders in the church at Antioch:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. (Acts 13:2).

Paul and Barnabas:

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (Acts 14:23)

The bible gives no stipulation as to how often we should fast or even what type of fast we should embark upon but it is the opinion of this writer that fasting definitely should be a regular part of the believer's life. It is a means, coupled with prayer and study of the word of drawing near to God. As we drawn near to God, we become more like him and he strengthens and fills us with his overcoming power.