

The Biblical Doctrine Of Fasting

- Introduction:
1. Probably very few of us seldom if ever fast.
 2. Fasting has become a very emotional issue for a lot of people and often carried to extremes.
 - a. Some demand that we should fast.
 - b. Others don't want anyone telling them how to eat.
 - c. And others don't want to be worried with more non-essentials.
 3. The list of people who have fasted is a virtual "Who's Who" of Scripture.
 - a. Moses
 - b. David
 - c. Elijah
 - d. Esther
 - e. Daniel
 - f. Anna
 - g. Jesus
 - h. Paul
 4. There was not a single book published on the subject of fasting among our brethren from 1861 to 1954...yet we proclaim we want to restore N.T. Christianity.
 5. Let's take a cursory look at fasting throughout the Bible and draw some conclusions.

I. Fasting In The Old Testament

- A. The "Day of Atonement" was the only fast that was commanded by the Law (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7).
 1. Though not called "fasting," the phrase "afflicting one's soul" was used.
 2. Thus, fasting was more than a physical exercise, but had a spiritual purpose.
- B. Other times when fasting occurred in the Old Testament.
 1. Fasted in times of war or threat of war (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6).
 2. Fasted when loved ones were sick (2 Samuel 12:16-23).
 3. Fasted for their enemies (Psalm 35:11-13).
 4. Fasted when loved ones died (1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12).
 5. Fasted when seeking God's pardon (Deut. 9:15-18; 1 Kings 21:17-29; Jonah 3:4-10).
 6. Fasted when facing danger (Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:3, 4:16).
 7. Fasted to commemorate certain calamities (Jeremiah 52:12-13; 2 Kings 25:23-25; Jeremiah 41; 2 Kings 25:1, 3-4).

II. Fasting In The New Testament

- A. Fasting and Jesus.
 1. Jesus fasted forty days (Matthew 4:1-9; Luke 4:1-2).
 2. Jesus taught about fasting in his sermon on the mount (Matthew 6:16-18).
 3. Jesus was questioned about it by John's disciples (Matthew 9:14-17).
 4. Jesus taught of a combined power of prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:14-21).
- B. Fasting and the Church.
 1. The church at Antioch fasted (Acts 13:1-3).
 2. The churches of Galatia fasted (Acts 14:21-23).
 3. The apostles fasted (1 Corinthians 6:1-10).

4. Paul often fasted (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).
5. Married couples may find need for fasting (1 Corinthians 7:5).

III. The Purpose Of Fasting

- A. Some fasting was the natural reaction to grief.
- B. But more often, fasting was done to purposely “afflict the soul.”
- C. The purpose of this affliction was to “humble” the soul (Psalm 35:13).
- D. Evidently, they felt that by so humbling themselves, they would more likely secure God’s favor and blessings (Ezra 8:21-23; Isaiah 57:15; 66:1-2).

IV. The Nature Of Fasting

- A. The usual form of fasting was to abstain from all food, but not water.
- B. Sometimes a fast was partial, restricting the diet, but not total abstinence (Daniel 10:2-3).
- C. Sometimes a fast was absolute, included water (Jonah 3:5-10; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9).

V. The Length Of Fasting

- A. One day [Sunrise to sunset] (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 14:24; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35).
- B. Three days (Esther 4:16).
- C. Seven days (1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12).
- D. Forty days (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2).

VI. Warnings Concerning Fasting

- A. It can turn into an empty ritual (Isaiah 58:3-9).
- B. It can be turned into a show (Matthew 6:16-18).

VII. Summary Of Thoughts On Fasting

- A. Should Christians fast today?
 1. Yes, but not the difference in “should” and “must.”
 2. Jesus assumed that his disciples would fast (Matthew 9:14-15).
 3. We should fast because Jesus expected us to and the N.T. church practiced it.
- B. Why Should Christians fast?
 1. There are times when we need divine help (temptation, illness, beginning a new work, appointing elders, in times of war, seeking forgiveness).
- C. How Should Christians fast?
 1. Not to be seen of men (Matthew 6:16-18).
 2. Not as some regular ritual (Matthew 9:14-17).
 3. Not without true repentance (Isaiah 58:3-9).

- Conclusion:
1. Fasting is not a church ordinance, but rather it is a private matter.
 2. The church can be called to fast; but the choice is yours.
 3. Jesus expects you to fast; but the choice is yours.
 4. Fasting...the choice is yours.