

# **FASTING AS AN EXPRESSION OF OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD**

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Various Passages  
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## **PASSAGES ON FASTING**

*2 Samuel 12:11-23, 1 Kings 21:4-12, 2 Chronicles 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21-23, Esther 4:1-17, Isaiah 58:1-12, Jeremiah 14:10-13, Joel 1:1-16, Joel 2:11-16, Jonah 3:1-10, Matthew 6:16-18, Matthew 9:14-17 (Mark 2:18-20; Mark 5:33-35), Luke 18:10-14, Judges 20:24-28, 1 Samuel 7:3-10, 1 Samuel 31:8-13, 2 Samuel 1:11-12, 1 Kings 21:25-29, Zechariah 7:1-14, Ezra 9:1-7, Nehemiah 1:1-11, Nehemiah 9:1-3 (the entire chapter is a good one re. fasting), Psalm 35:10-19, Psalm 69:5-18, Psalm 109:21-27, Daniel 6:1-23, Matthew 4:1-2, Acts 13:1-3, Acts 14:21-23*

## **MAIN POINTS**

1. The chief call on our lives is to glorify God by following Jesus in the power of the Spirit.
2. There are two key aspects to following Jesus: conversion and sanctification.
3. One aspect of sanctification is coming to recognize our complete and utter dependence on God.
4. The two primary biblical expressions of our recognition of our dependence on God are prayer and fasting.
5. There are a number of different reasons that people fasted in Scripture.
6. Fasting is primarily about expressing our dependence on God by declaring his sufficiency in all things.
7. God, in his love, gives us instructions on fasting.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fasting is never mentioned in the Pentateuch. Even though there is great detail given in the Law regarding appropriate foods to be eaten and abstained, we never read of fasting. Fasting just sort of appears (although the context suggests that it had been a part of Jewish practice for some time before) in Judges 20:26 where the Israelites are fasting as an expression of their need for God's help.

From that point on it is easy to see that it is an important part of Jewish and Christian practice.

So, what is fasting, how are we to fast, what is the role of fasting in the Church today? These are some of the questions that I want to address this morning.

## **PRAY**

## **FASTING AS AN EXPRESSION OF OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD**

1. The chief call on our lives is to glorify God by following Jesus in the power of the Spirit.
2. There are two key aspects to following Jesus: conversion and sanctification.
3. One aspect of sanctification is coming to recognize our complete and utter dependence on God.
4. The two primary biblical expressions of our recognition of our dependence on God are prayer and fasting.

5. There are a number of different reasons that people fasted in Scripture.
  - a. People fasted because they needed help and so they turned to God (2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:1-17; Judges 20:24-28; Psalm 35:10-19; Psalm 69:5-18; Psalm 109:21-27).
  - b. People fasted because they grieved the sins of others (Ezra 9:1-7).
  - c. People fasted as a sign of sadness (1 Samuel 31:8-13; 2 Samuel 1:11-12; Daniel 6:1-22).
  - d. People fasted out of a religiosity or false piety (hypocritically) (Jeremiah 14:10-12; Luke 18:10-14; Zechariah 7:1-14).
  - e. People fasted because they were commanded by God to fast (Joel 1:1-16; 2:11-16).
  - f. People fasted because they were remorseful or repentant over their own sin (2 Samuel 12:11-23; 1 Kings 21:4-12; 1 Kings 21:25-29; Jonah 3:1-10; 1 Samuel 7:3-10; Nehemiah 1:1-11; Nehemiah 9).
  - g. People fasted in preparation for ministry (Matthew 4:1-2; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:21-23).
6. God, in his love, gives us instructions on fasting (Matthew 6:16-18; Isaiah 58:1-12; Mark 2:18-20; Mark 5:33-35).

#### **Instructions from Matthew 6:16-18**

*"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

- a. Fast (v.16a). Notice that Jesus does not say, "If you fast" or "In case you fast" or "Should you choose to fast". Instead, He says, "When you fast." It is assumed that those who love God and recognize their dependence on God will fast. Practically speaking, fasting means denying yourself some of the things (usually food) that get in the way of depending on God in the way that you should.
- b. Fasting is not meant to draw attention to you (vs.16b-18a). Rather it is meant to draw your attention back to God. Fasting helps reveal the things that hinder (from wholly depending on God) us and it helps break the bonds of the things that already have a hold of us.
- c. God rewards those whose fasting reflects their dependant heart(v.18b). The Bible doesn't tell us specifically what rewards that God will give us, but you can rest assured that any gift from the King will be well worth the effort!

#### **Instructions from Isaiah 58:1-12**

*"Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. <sup>2</sup> Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. <sup>3</sup> 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. <sup>4</sup> Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with*

*a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? <sup>8</sup> Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, <sup>10</sup> if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. <sup>11</sup> And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. <sup>12</sup> And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

- a. There is nothing intrinsically holy or pleasing to God about fasting (v.3a). We see from verse 3a that it is possible to fast in such a way that is not pleasing to God. In this passage the Israelites were fasting and humbling themselves and God did not even see it.
- b. Hypocritical fasting is not pleasing to God (v.4b). Indeed, on the same day that the Israelites were fasting as a result of the fact that they “delight to draw near to God” they were also “seeking their own pleasure” and “oppressing their workers” and fighting amongst one another. Indeed, God says, “Fasting like yours will not make your voice to be heard on high” (4b).
- c. Fasting is not merely about outward expressions (v.5). In verse 5 we read that a person can humble himself (in the context this is primarily about posture), bow his head, and put sackcloth and ashes all around him, but not be pleasing to God.
- d. Biblical fasting is meant to free people from oppression (v.6). God has chosen (v.6) to use fasting as a means of freeing his people from the oppression of all sorts of wickedness.
- e. Biblical fasting is meant to turn our attention to righteous acts (v.7). Fasting is a means by which God empowers his people for good works such as sharing bread and providing shelter to the poor and cloths for the naked (v.7).
- f. The ultimate result of fasting will be to see and savor the glory of God (v.8-11). Once our bonds are broken and we are empowered for righteousness our lights shall “break forth like the dawn,” our “healing shall spring up speedily,” our “righteousness shall go before us,” the “glory of the LORD shall be our rear guard” (v.8), we will “call and the LORD will answer,” we will “cry and he will say, ‘Here I am’” (v.9), the LORD will “guide us continually,” “satisfy our desires,” “strengthen our bones,” (v.11) and on and on!

What an awesome picture of the power and glory that God intends through fasting!

### **Instruction from Matthew 9:14-15 (Mark 2:18-20; Mark 5:33-35)**

*Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"<sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."*

- a. Fasting is not meant for things that are, but for things that we long for (v.14-15). There will be no fasting in heaven because there will be no good thing lacking. In our fasting we express our longing for some absent good (holiness, health, God's unhindered presence, etc.).
  - b. Christians will fast (15b). Again, it does not say "if they fast" it says "they will fast."
7. Fasting is simply denying ourselves some good thing, but it is primarily about expressing our dependence on God by declaring his sufficiency in all things.

Fasting was used as an expression for a number of things throughout the Bible (some good and some bad), but we must recognize that fasting is pleasing to God when we deny ourselves some good thing (usually food) as an expression of our dependence on God and a declaration of his sufficiency in all things.

That is, fasting acknowledges the unique ability of God to meet all of our needs and it is a unique way to fight against all the things of the world that creep into our lives and take God's place of prominence.

### **CONCLUSION**

Fasting, like prayer, is a wonderful gift from God. It was a regular part of the lives of the Israelites before Christ and the Church after Christ. It is a practice created by God to respond and draw our attention to our need for Him. That is, fasting is both an expression and a tool. It is an expression of our recognition of our complete dependence on God. And it is a tool that God has chosen to use to help us trust in Him as Jesus did.