

FASTING

I. Scriptures pertaining to fasting in New Testament.

- Matt. 4:2 - Jesus "had fasted forty days and forty nights" (Lk. 4:2)
- Matt. 6:16,17,18 - "when you fast, do not put on gloomy face...to be seen fasting by men, but when you fast wash your face, so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret."
- Matt. 9:14,15 - (John's disciples to Jesus) "Why do we and Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" When bridegroom is taken away they will fast."
(Mk. 2:18-20; Lk. 5:34,35)
- Matt. 17:21 - "this kind (of demon) does not go out except by prayer and fasting"
(Questionable manuscript evidence; not in parallel of Mk. 9:29)
- Lk. 18:12 - (Pharisee) "I fast twice a week"
- Acts 13:2,3 - (Christians in Antioch) "When they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them (Paul and Barnabas) on their way."
- Acts 14:23 - (Paul and Barnabas) "appointed elders, having prayed with fasting"
(KJV) - Matt. 17:21; Mk. 9:29; Acts 10:30; I Cor. 7:5 (Not in best manuscripts).

II. Fasting in the old covenant.

- A. Reasons for
1. seek God's will - Judges 20:26
 2. seek deliverance or protection - II Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21-23
 3. penitence - II Sam. 12:16-23; Neh. 9:1; Dan. 9:3,4
 4. humility - I Kgs. 21:27-29; Ps. 69:10
 5. express sorrow - I Sam. 31:13
 6. times of mourning - II Sam 1:12; 12:21; Isa. 31:13
 7. religious rite
 - a. to rejoice and show appreciation - Esther 9:31
 - b. Day of Atonement - Lev. 16:29; 23:27-32
- B. Abuses of
1. Hypocritical fasting - Isa. 58:3-7; Jere. 14:12
 2. Selfish fasting - Zech. 7:5,6
 3. Became meritorious religious exercise in itself.
 4. Pharisees required on Mondays and Thursdays
- C. Prophecy of fasting being superseded.
1. Zech. 8:19 - "the fasts will become joy and gladness"

III. Invalid reasons for fasting.

- A. Fasting is NOT
1. a means of coercing or bribing God, forcing God's hand, pushing God's buttons, showing our sincerity so that God will work on our behalf, and do what we desire, and give us the result we want.
 2. a way to enhance "soul power"
 3. a way to seek additional "blessings" (Eph. 1:3), or "spirituality"
 4. a "spiritual" means of weight loss, a "divine diet plan," a nutritional regulation, a way to "purify the body"
 5. a means of cleansing oneself in repentance.

6. a means of overcoming temptation.
 7. a means of determining God's will.
 8. a "spiritual discipline," a mark of "spirituality"
 9. a test of faith and fellowship
 10. a legalistic means of spiritual "obedience" to be imposed or regulated by the church.
 11. an ordinance of the church
 12. a requirement of new covenant Christianity.
- B. Why religion uses fasting.
1. External, visible appearances
 2. Self-abasing; self-abnegation; self-affliction
 3. A show of self-denial, humility .
 4. To demonstrate the earnestness of their prayers.
 5. Demonstrates dedication, commitment, wholeheartedness
 6. Requires self-discipline; something to "do" - performance, "works"

IV. The Christian and the practice of fasting.

- A. The religious practice of fasting has been superseded by the joy that is in Christ Jesus.
1. Fasting, as a religious exercise, is a thing of the past in the old covenant.
 2. The old patterns cannot hold the new
 - a. New garment (Mk. 2:21)
 - b. New wine (Mk. 2:22)
 3. There are no commands for fasting made by Jesus or writers of the New Testament.
 4. Fasting is not to be regarded as having any meritorious value as an activity in its own right before God.
- B. If a Christian does choose to abstain from food (or other activities) such a decision and such activity should:
1. Be voluntary, freely chosen; not obligatory.
 2. Be done in secret; not ostentatious
 3. Not be regarded as having any spiritual value or benefit before God.
 4. Be done in accord with "counting all things but loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8).