

# Fasting Today

In this lesson, we plan to establish that New Testament Christians fasted in the first century, and therefore so should we.

Why has this practice almost disappeared in our day?

What do I mean by “fasting”? What the Bible means by it and what we normally mean by it:

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- “of voluntary abstinence from food” - Vine’s, #3521
- “to abstain as a religious exercise from food ...” - Thayer, #3522

I Cor 13:8 says “tongues ... shall cease.” But the Bible never says “fasting shall cease.” But do many Christians act as if it does say that?

# Should Christians Fast Today?

yes, because we will be rewarded by God if we do ...

Matt 6:16-18 Moreover **when ye fast**, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall **reward** thee openly.

Notice Jesus assumed His disciples would fast (“when” not “if”)

# Should Christians Fast Today?

yes, because Jesus taught that His disciples would fast after the bridegroom (Jesus) was gone, which is true today ...

Matt 9:14-15 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, **when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.**

# Should Christians Fast Today?

yes, because new covenant approved examples are binding ...

Philippians 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

I Cor 4:16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me. (NKJV)

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (NKJV)

II Thessalonians 3:7,9 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us ... Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us

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

Hebrews 6:12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (NKJV)

Hebrews 13:7 Remember ... those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (ESV)

I Thess 1:6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord

approved examples of Jesus and Christians fasting ...

Jesus fasted - Matt 4:2 “And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.” Don’t other New Testament passages confirm we should “follow his steps” (I Pet 2:21) in this regard?

**church related** examples after the day of Pentecost ...

Acts 13:1-3 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 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. And when they had **fasted** and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:23 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.

approved examples of Paul ...

II Cor 11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in **fastings** often, in cold and nakedness.

II Cor 6:5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in **fastings**;

And aren't we supposed to emulate such approved examples?

**Now that we have established New Testament Christians should fast today, let's learn some more details about fasting from the Old Testament ...**

# When (On What Occasions) Did People Fast

(it was always or almost always accompanied by prayer)

**at the threat of war** II Chron 20:2-3 Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a **fast** throughout all Judah.

**when faced with impending danger** Esther 3:8-9,4:3 And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. ... And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was

great mourning among the Jews, and **fasting**, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

**when praying for the sick** II Sam 12:16 David therefore besought God for the child; and David **fasted**, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.

**when loved ones died** II Sam 1:12 And they mourned, and wept, and **fasted** until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.

**when seeking God's forgiveness** Dan 9:3-5 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with **fasting**, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:



# Purposes For Fasting

**to entreat God's favor** Jonah 3:4-5,9-10 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a **fast**, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. ... Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

**to chasten/afflict/humble our soul** Psalms 69:10 When I wept, and chastened my soul with **fasting**, that was to my reproach.

**to seek God's help in a particular matter** Ezra 8:21,23 Then I proclaimed a **fast** there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. ... So we **fasted** and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

# Length Of Our Fast

**most of the time it was for one day until evening** Judges 20:26  
Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord, and **fasted that day until even**, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord – I am thinking this was the shortest fast

I Sam 14:24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, **Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening**, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food.

II Sam 3:35 And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if **I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.**

**three days seemed to be a special case** Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and **fast** ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

**I am assuming 40-day fasts were aided by divine assistance ...**

Deut 9:9 When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I abode in the mount **forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water:**

Matt 4:2 And when he had **fasted** forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

# Wrong Reasons To Fast

**fasting for the wrong cause** Isaiah 58:4 Behold, ye **fast for strife and debate**, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

**to be seen of men** Matthew 6:16-18 Moreover when ye **fast**, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

# Objections

Some say fasting was only an Old Testament requirement, but the New Testament passages already cited prove fasting was practiced by saints under the New Covenant also.

Unless I have miscounted, fasting is mentioned **33 times in the New Testament** – including being done by Jesus, faithful Christians, and groups of Christians.

**Some say fasting is only forgetting to eat** due to being so busy with spiritual activities, but the six references to “proclaiming” fasts in the Old Testament completely refute that contention. How does it make sense to proclaim a fast if fasting is only forgetting to eat? We are going to plan to forget to do something? Actually, an important aspect of religious fasting is the purposing to do it.

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- II Chron 20:3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and **proclaimed** a fast throughout all Judah.
- Ezra 8:21 Then I **proclaimed** a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.
- Jer 36:9 And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they **proclaimed** a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem.
- I Kings 21:9 And she wrote in the letters, saying, **Proclaim** a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people:
- Jonah 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, & **proclaimed** a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

And **let's think about I Cor 7:5** (ignore these points if you favor a translation that doesn't have fasting in this verse)

Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to **fasting** and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

The only reason for suspending marital relations (risking a lack of self-control) involves fasting and this is not something Christians ever need to do?

And how could a couple consent to and plan to suspend marital relations for fasting and prayer, if fasting was just forgetting to eat?

# There Is No Command To Fast?

Every preacher I have ever heard make this argument recognizes the Bible instructs through command, example, or necessary implication, etc. - not just by command only. When someone says the Bible instructs through CENI, do they mean it takes all three methods before something is binding, or any one of the three? **Why then do we switch our hermeneutic just for this one topic?**

Mark 16:16 is not a command, but a statement. Does it not prove we have to be baptized to be saved? So NT instructions in the form of statements are binding too, even though they are not listed in CENI.

Earlier in this lesson we have shown New Testament statements and approved examples instructing us to fast. Why is that not good enough?



**We learn to practice the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week through example only.** Some reply, but we do have a command to eat the Lord's Supper. But that isn't the issue. We have no command to eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week; that is the point.

Having said that, don't we see examples of fasting done while implementing New Testament commands?:

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- We have a command to serve God (Matt 4:10), and Luke 2:37 (“**Anna ... served God with fastings and prayers**”) is an example of how to serve God. This qualifies as parallel unless you think fasting was never done by New Testament saints.
- Another parallel: We are commanded to ordain elders (Tit 1:5), and Acts 14:23 (“**when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting**”) is an example (part of the procedure) of how to ordain elders.

# The Fasting In II Cor 6:5 And 11:27 Was Involuntary?

In II Cor 11:27 (in hunger and thirst, in **fastings** often), Paul has already covered involuntary abstinence from food in the phrase “in hunger and thirst.” That leaves “in fasting” as voluntary.

Some argue the lists of II Cor 6:4-10 and II Cor 11:23-28 are all things Paul had to suffer involuntarily. But let's notice the many voluntary items on the two lists:

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6 ... in much patience ... in watchings, in fastings ... By pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness ... by love unfeigned, By the word of truth ... by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left ... As ... always rejoicing ... making many rich ...

11 ... in labours more abundant ... In journeyings often ... in watchings often ... the care of all the churches.

# The NT Doesn't Tell Us How Often To Fast?

Some preachers have said we don't have to fast because the New Testament doesn't tell us how **often** to fast (like it does the Lord's Supper).

But that kind of reasoning would mean we don't have to pray or teach the lost – since the scriptures don't specify exactly how often we are to perform those services to/for God.

The New Testament instructs us to fast, and it leaves the “how often” up to us! Because it depends on our life situations and circumstances.

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