
Faithful Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food, and or drink for spiritual purposes. God's people fasted for various reasons: for lamentation or to express sorrow (Joel 1:14). When David's son by Bathsheba died, he fasted (2 Sam 12: cf. 3:35; Psa. 35:13). People fasted for protection (2 Chro. 20:3-4; cf. Ezra 8:21-23); to show humiliation (Lev. 23:29; cf. Acts 9:9; 1 Kings 21:27; cf. Psalm 35:13); for confession (Ezra 10:6); for revelation (Daniel 9:2-3; 10:2; cf. Acts 10:9-10); to avoid condemnation (Jonah 3:5); and for direction (Acts 13:1; cf. 14:23). Fasting is always linked with prayer. Fasting is only commanded once in Lev. 16:29, but is never commanded in the New Testament. Fasting was a personal, non-compulsory, spontaneous, voluntary act.

In this context, while rebuking the Pharisees of their hypocritical practice of fasting, the Lord Jesus Christ gave instruction to His disciples on how to practice proper fasting.

1. *Jesus _____ us against fasting _____*

The problem with fasting is when it is done out of an impure heart. The Pharisees have managed to do it out of conceit and pretense, walking around *with a sad countenance and disfigured faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.*” Jesus exposes and attacks them because of the hypocrisy of pretended humility and the fact that their fasting is really not directed towards God. They desire to be praised by men rather than heard by the living God in their fasting. Consequently our Lord Jesus says, *“Assuredly I say to you, they have their reward.”*

2. *Jesus _____ us on how to fast _____*

The Lord Jesus expects His disciples to be engaging in the spiritual work of fasting but they should do it secretly. The Jews used to anoint themselves with an oil to keep their skin from getting too dry and to give them fragrance. Jesus is saying, when fasting, don't call attention to yourself. Just do it without pretense by being your normal self.

When God confronted Israel with her hypocrisy, He pointed on the uselessness of their fasting (Isaiah 58:3-7). God says the fast that He desires was the fast that issues from a righteous life that is lived in obedience to God's divine truth; that kind of fast results in God's favor (Isaiah 58:8-11). Fasting that is faithful and God-pleasing comes out of a true, pure, obedient heart. May the Lord impress upon us anew, the need to fast and pray faithfully and properly!