

FASTING — COMMANDED OR NOT

Text: [Matt. 6:16-18](#)

Copyright (c) 1986, Robert F. Harkrider

Intro. (1) Fasting—a matter of great concern to many. (2) On great and solemn occasions, fasting has in all ages and in all times, been connected with prayer as a means of spiritual and religious discipline. (3) Yet, does God require of man to fast in this age?

“Fasting” DEFINED: (1) “To keep from eating all or certain foods, as in observing a holy day.” (2) “To eat very little or nothing-” Webster’s Dictionary.

I. Fasting As Prescribed In Bible. (When, Where, For What Purpose)

A. Under Law of Moses

1. Day of Atonement — only fast prescribed by Law
 - a. [Lev. 16:29-31](#) — 10th day of 7th month
 - b. [Lev. 23:26-32](#)
2. Jews kept many voluntary feasts
 - a. [II Chron. 20:1-4](#) — proclaimed fast before battle
 - b. [Joel 1:14-20](#) — had sinned; proclaim a fast
 - c. Jews now keep twenty-eight annual feasts

B. Under Law of Christ

1. No regular fasts prescribed
2. [Matt. 9:14-15](#)
 - a. Should fast after his departure
 - b. Taught lesson that must do things at right time
3. [Acts 13:2-3](#) — Before carrying gospel to Gentiles, they fasted—new and important task
4. [Acts 14:23](#) — Were about to part with new work given to these men.
5. [I Cor. 7:5](#) — KJV fasting and prayer a means of moral culture and progress in holiness.
6. [II Cor. 6:4-8](#) — approved ourselves as ministers
7. [II Cor. 11:24-31](#) — Paul’s infirmities

II. Purposes of Fasting — Effects

A. A Natural Necessity

1. Man, hungry, receives message of death of wife.
 - a. Vital energies directed from stomach to brain.
 - b. Becomes intensely sorrowful at swellings and impulses of soul.
2. [II Sam. 1:11-12](#) — People fasted at death of Saul & Jonathan

B. Means of Spiritual and Religious Discipline

1. [Ezra 8:21-23](#) — Ezra sought divine guidance and protection.
2. [Psa. 35:13](#) — humbled his soul with fasting
3. [Dan. 9:3-6](#) — made confession with prayer and fasting.
4. [Jonah 3:1-10](#)—Ninevah fasted at preaching of Jonah.
5. [Acts 9:9](#) — Saul prayed and fasted (showed repentance)

III. God’s Desire In Fasting.

A. Jews Fasted In Wrong Way. [Isa. 58:1-12](#)

1. Purely Formal Fasting. v. 3
 - a. Without any accompaniment of prayer
 - b. Mechanical acts will not save. [Matt. 15:7-9](#)
 - c. [Zech. 7:4-7](#)
2. Fasting For Ostentation’s Sake

- a. [Matt. 6:16-18](#)
- b. [Luke 18:9-14](#)
3. Fastings For Strife and Debate. v. 4
 - a. Either no food caused irritation.
 - b. Or Fasted to provoke other group, etc.
- B. Rightful Fasting — such as O.T. & N.T. allow & require
 1. Unostentatious.
 2. Inward as Well as Outward.
 - a. Repentance. [Neh. 9:1-2](#)
 - b. Prayer. [Luke 2:37](#)
 - c. Almsgiving and charitable acts to fellowman. [Isa. 58:5-7](#)

IV. How Are We To Fast Today?

- A. Questions.
 1. On what particular occasion should we fast?
 2. How long should we fast?
 3. When should we abstain wholly or only partially from food?
- B. No Specific Rules Given for None Needed.
 1. Man who really loves God need not be told a duty;
 2. Realizes and takes opportunity of the privileges.

Conclusion: [I Cor. 15:58](#)