

SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

We read in the Bible about fasting. Should we practice fasting in the church? What can one profit from fasting?

As we consider these questions, we must first understand what fasting is. In the dictionary we find that fasting is defined as "eating sparingly" or "abstaining from some or all foods."

In the Bible we have many examples in the Old and New Testaments where individuals fasted. In these examples we see that the individuals were putting away personal desires to focus specifically on the spiritual. In the Old Testament, fasting also included the idea of "afflicting the soul." These were times when a person would allow himself to become totally consumed in religious things, therefore putting away the desires of the flesh, such as food. These periods of time were usually specified by the individual or groups and a certain amount of time was set aside for the fast. Often individuals would also fast because of sorrow over sin or the mourning of a loss.

In Matthew, chapters 5 & 6, Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon we see that Jesus gave references to giving, prayer, and fasting. Because of this, many assume that fasting was given the same importance as giving and prayer. However, let's remember that giving and prayer are also confirmed as specific acts of worship to be engaged in by the church of our Lord (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Fasting is not! We should also acknowledge that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, was dealing more with the problem of hypocrisy in relationship to giving, praying, and fasting. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus said, ***"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."*** Many in that day, like the Pharisees, were obviously not sincere in their spiritual offerings to God because they were basically performing these acts to be seen of men.

When we consider the true uses of fasting in the Bible, it was basically engaged in at times when someone needed to draw closer to God, thus putting aside the things of this world (Matthew 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 1 Corinthians 7:6; Acts 13:2; 2 Corinthians 6:5). So, the Bible does not specifically command that a Christian fast in order to be pleasing to God. However, the Bible does give many examples when people did fast in order to focus entirely on God.

Although we are not specifically commanded to fast, fasting can be a great source of strength. If an individual or group is willing to put aside fleshly desires in order to focus specifically on the spiritual, what greater devotion could one give to God? Fasting is a time to reverence and honor our God, to be encouraged in His Word, and in our devotion to Him. At the same time, keep in mind that it should not be done in order to be seen of others or to prove we are good Christians. If we fast, it should be done out of a sincere heart and a clear conscience. Fasting is setting aside time to give ourselves totally to God; time specifically allotted by us to grow closer to our Creator.

Today, I believe we should engage in some forms of fasting, especially Christians who are actively involved in local evangelistic works or foreign mission works. Often we can become involved in these works for the Lord such as campaigns,

evangelism, gospel meetings, and Bible studies. These events can sometimes consume an entire day before we give in to our physical needs such as food and rest. Even though we did not specify a time to fast, we have put aside the fleshly desires and needs and have given ourselves totally to the work of the Lord.

The greatest lesson we can learn from fasting is that we all need to give more specified time to the Lord. The more we study and dwell on His Word, the stronger Christians we will become and the more we will accomplish for His Kingdom!