

The Bible Doctrine of FASTING

Matthew 17:

14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Fasting

“Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”
Matthew 17:21

Introduction:

1. We have purposed to make prayer a greater priority in 2005, and fasting is a basic part of fervent praying.
2. We have an important event in a church family scheduled for February 9; we want to beg God for His mercy.
3. Fasting, and most things of sound doctrine, have been replaced by entertainment and fables (II Tim 4:3-4); the reasons are simple: contemporary Christians love pleasures and deny God any authority (II Tim 3:1-5).
4. How big would Saddleback Church be, if Rick Warren proclaimed fasting, sackcloth, and ashes against the contemporary sins of movies? Halloween? Mixed swimming? Rock music? Frivolous divorces? Immodesty?
5. It is a whole lot easier for us to preach or hear this sermon than it is to accept it, remember it, and practice it.

INTRODUCTION TO FASTING

- A. **Fast.** Abstinence from food. We call the first meal of a day breakfast, for it breaks the fast of night.
 1. There are no hard and fast rules in the Bible for the specific kind of fast or the length of the fast.
 2. You may abstain from some food or all food and drink; it might last a day, two days, or a week.
- B. A grieving father brought his lunatic son to Jesus to show the importance of fasting (Matt 17:14-21).
 1. A lunatic is a crazy and insane person, as this boy showed by falling into fire and water. His irrational, unreasonable, and self-destructive symptoms were the result of devils inside him.
 2. The Lord Jesus Christ had no difficulty whatsoever casting the devil out of the boy. Glory!
 3. The father and Christ's disciples were disturbed by the fact that the disciples could not cure him.
 4. Faith in prayer sufficient to move mountains is not sufficient for every need. Fasting is required.
 5. Fasting adds power to prayer by showing more faith, fervency, and need by the one praying.
 6. Here is an incredibly plain and valuable verse, for it teaches wisdom about great difficulties.
- C. Do not look for this fantastic advice in any version but the King James Bible, for it has been deleted.
 1. Matt 17:21 is one of 50 whole verses deleted from the New Testament in the NIV, NASV, etc.
 2. Demon possession did not go away with the death of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:17; Acts 19:11-17).
 3. Paul instructed Timothy to wait on the Lord to deliver men from the devil (II Timothy 2:24-26).

EXAMPLES OF FASTING

- A. The Bible, the holy book on which we base our faith and practice, illustrates fasting to seek God.
- B. King Jehoshaphat, in extremity by his enemies, sought the Lord with a fast (II Chronicles 20:1-4).
- C. Daniel, when seeking God's favour upon Israel, prayed with fasting and affliction (Daniel 9:1-3).
- D. Nineveh, being warned by Jonah of their coming judgment, fasted and prayed (Jonah 3:1-10).
- E. Anna, a widow prophetess that served God continually, fasted day and night (Luke 2:36-38).
- F. Jesus Christ fasted for forty days after His baptism, before He began preaching (Matthew 4:2).
- G. Cornelius, a devout man who greatly feared God, included fasting with his prayers (Acts 10:1-4,30).
- H. Fasting joined prayer when Paul was sent, and he fasted when ordaining elders (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23).

VALIDITY OF FASTING

- A. While many may think that fasting was an Old Testament practice, it was also done in the New.
- B. Fasting was not commanded under the Law of Moses; it was a spontaneous act of worship to God.
- C. John the Baptist's disciples, a holy group of men, were committed to regular fasting (Matthew 9:14).
- D. Jesus Christ taught that His disciples would fast more when He returned to heaven (Mark 2:18-20).
- E. The apostle Paul made mention to the Corinthians of his much fasting (II Corinthians 6:5; 11:27).
- F. Paul exhorted the congregation to regulations regarding their fasting and prayer (I Corinthians 7:5), which indicates it was considered a normal and regular part of being a New Testament Christian.

MANNER OF FASTING

- A. Since we are Bible Christians, we must consult the scriptures of God to know how to fast rightly.
- B. Even Catholics talk about fasting with their Lent tradition from paganism. But how should we do it?
- C. True fasting is abstaining from eating and drinking to a greater or lesser degree (Jonah 3:5-7).
 - 1. Daniel mourned and fasted three weeks by abstaining from “pleasant bread,” meat, and wine (Dan 10:3): he avoided pastries, doughnuts, and other delicacies available for a king’s court.
 - 2. One, three, seven, or forty days is scriptural (Judges 20:26; Esther 4:16; I Sam 31:13; Mat 4:1-2).
 - 3. Therefore, a fast can be abstaining from some food, all food, all food and drink, or other things.
 - 4. Therefore, a fast can be of any length, from part of a day all the way out to forty days and nights.
 - 5. Neither the king of Nineveh nor the Jews in Shushan would have worried about a headache!
 - 6. But spoiled Americans, addicted to carbohydrates and eating every other hour, may have pain!
- D. God has not called us to damage our bodies in His worship, but rather to afflict them (Ezra 8:21).
 - 1. Neglecting the body due to legalist rules from the Law of Moses is worthless (Col 2:20-23).
 - 2. Cutting yourself like Baal’s followers or whipping yourself like Mexican Catholics is worthless, for it was never prescribed nor practiced by the true followers of God or Jesus Christ.
 - 3. Darius the Mede, king of Babylon, fasted without his ordinary instruments of music (Dan 6:18); he denied himself the additional pleasure of music by which to sleep, so he stayed awake.
 - 4. Avoiding normal sexual relations can accompany godly fasting (I Corinthians 7:5; Ex 21:15).
 - 5. The wearing of sackcloth, similar to a burlap bag, often joined fasting (II Sam 3:31-35; I Kings 21:27; Esther 4:3; Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 58:5; Jeremiah 6:26; Lam 2:10; Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:5-8).
 - 6. Sitting or lying in ashes or doing other such unpleasant things was common (Esther 4:1,3; Job 2:8; Isaiah 58:5; Jeremiah 6:26; Daniel 9:3; 10:3; Jonah 3:6; Matthew 11:21).
 - 7. Lying prone on the ground to show humility was practiced (Esther 4:3; II Sam 12:16; 13:31).
- E. Fasting must be accompanied by an afflicting of the heart for it to be accepted (James 4:9).
 - 1. David described humbling his soul by fasting, when praying earnestly for enemies (Ps 35:13).
 - 2. Joel exhorted Israel to rend all their heart with fasting, weeping, and mourning (Joel 2:12-14).
 - 3. A fast is a very sober event, mixed with mourning; it should not include pleasure (Joel 2:15-18).
 - 4. Fasting that includes pleasure is fasting that will not accomplish its goal with God (Is 58:1-3).
- F. Fasting must be accompanied by repentance for sins and proper doctrine for it to be accepted.
 - 1. Samuel led Israel in fasting and confessing their sins for national revival (I Samuel 7:3-6).
 - 2. Fasting that does not include repentance and righteousness is not acceptable (Isaiah 58:4-12).
 - 3. Fasting that does not include refraining from evil will not be fruitful (Jeremiah 14:10-12).
 - 4. God accused captive Israel of fasting for themselves as previous generations (Zechariah 7:4-7).
- G. Godly fasting can be corporate (Jonah 3:5-8; Joel 2:15-17) or private (Luke 2:37; Matt 6:16-18).
- H. Fasting is not to be used as a meritorious form to be performed ritualistically (Luke 18:9-14).
- I. Godly fasting is to be done privately to the Lord, without external show of piety (Matthew 6:16-18).
- J. Fasting can be for a day (Judges 20:26), a week (I Sam 31:13), or forty days (Matthew 4:1-2).
- K. Fasting can be denying yourself any combination of food, drink, sex, pleasure, comfortable clothes, bathing, or other things in order to humble yourself and show your earnest desire to seek God.
- L. Fasting requires much fervent prayer; that is its purpose; simply going without food is not enough.
- M. Fasting may be done at work, if you include extra prayer before, during, and after work; or fasting may be done by taking the day off and giving yourself to prayer and reading at home.
- N. The Roman Catholics have created a superstitious monster out of fasting by countless inventions.
 - 1. Their rules for fasting would choke a lawyer for the IRS. See below for just a short illustration.
 - 2. Fridays require complete abstinence, meaning you cannot have any meat, but you can gorge fish!
 - 3. They call Lent a fast, but they can eat most anything in three meals and liquids between meals!
 - 4. They say Lent is 40 days long, but they ignore the six Sundays in it; Lent is truly 46 days long.
 - 5. The whole custom of Lent is of pagan origin: no apostle or disciple of Jesus Christ observed it.

6. Catholics mark their foreheads with ashes like Hindus and ignore Sundays in counting 40 days.
7. The day before Lent is Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, for gorging on food before Ash Wednesday.
8. While condemning meat to keep a doctrine of the devil (I Tim 4:1-3), they eat tuna sandwiches, deep fry oysters, broil scallops, chill shrimp appetizers, and feast on flounder stuffed with crab!
9. You cannot get married in the Catholic Church with a nuptial mass during these sacred days!
10. The errors in this pagan custom adopted by Rome are Legion, which are appropriately named!

PURPOSE OF FASTING

- A. Fasting should only be done for those righteous purposes that the Bible justifies would please God.
- B. It is wrong for carnal joy at the power of fasting to use it in seeking things for your lusts (James 4:3).
- C. As feasting expresses joy and merriment, fasting expresses grief and sorrow (Psalm 35:13; 69:10).
 1. When Saul died, Israel showed their sorrow by fasting (II Samuel 1:11-12; I Chronicles 10:12).
 2. When Abner died unjustly, David showed his sorrow by fasting for a day (II Samuel 3:33-35).
 3. When Nehemiah heard of the disrepair of Jerusalem, he mourned with fasting (Nehemiah 1:4).
- D. Fasting is used to show God great contrition and repentance for evil done (Nehemiah 9:1-3).
 1. Moses fasted for forty days to beg God to spare Israel from impending doom (Deut 9:17-19).
 2. Israel sought God for repentance and deliverance from the Philistines (I Samuel 7:1-13).
 3. Even wicked Ahab was able to find some mercy from a holy God by fasting (I Kings 21:25-29).
- E. Fasting is used to implore and beg God for a great blessing or deliverance (Deuteronomy 9:9).
 1. David was told Bathsheba's child would die; he fasted seven days for its life (II Sam 12:14-23).
 2. Ezra and returning Jews used fasting to beseech God for protection from enemies (Ezra 8:21-23).
 3. After Paul was struck blind going to Damascus, he fasted three days before preaching (Acts 9:9).

OCCASIONS FOR FASTING

- A. Are there situations that call for fasting today? The Bible gives us examples that apply to us today.
- B. Sorrow for judgment or loss justifies fasting. Consider the death of family members, as with David.
- C. Contemplation and confession of sins justify fasting. Consider your own confession of sin.
- D. Undertaking a great responsibility justifies fasting. Consider marriage, ordination, and childbirth.
- E. Seeking great blessings from God justifies fasting. Consider conversion and Spiritual revival.

Conclusion:

1. If you want to add to your effectual praying in 2005, here is another means of showing God your sincerity.
2. We have an important event in a church family scheduled for February 9; we want to beg God for His mercy.
3. It is a whole lot easier for us to preach or hear this sermon than it is to accept it, remember it, and practice it.
4. If we merely hear this sermon and do little or nothing about fasting in our lives, we are very great hypocrites.

For Further Study:

1. From My Catholic Faith, a manual of religion by Louis Laravoire Morrow, we have the following hilarious entry to answer the question, "What is a fast day?" "A fast day is **a day on which only one full meal is allowed**; but in the morning and evening some food may be taken, the quantity and quality of which are determined by approved local custom. 1. The one *full meal* may be taken either at noontime or in the evening. **Only at this meal may meat be taken.** 'Meat' is the flesh of warm-blooded land animals, including birds and fowl. At the principal meal meat may be taken on a day of fast **except on days of complete abstinence like on all Fridays.** 2. *Two other meals*, both meatless, may be taken according to each one's need; but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating *between meals* is forbidden; but liquids, including milk and fruit juices, are allowed. Wine, coffee, tea, cocoa, lemonade, beer, sherbets, and like preparations are permitted." [Emphases in original work].
2. The sermon outline, "[Prayer Is a Priority](#)," which outlines numerous aspects of prayer and emphasizes its importance.