

WHAT ABOUT FASTING?

Matthew 6:16-18

(Not entirely original with me)

Introduction: "Fasting" has, in all ages, and among all nations, been much in use in times of mourning, sorrow, and afflictions. It is the process of abstaining from food deliberately. It was done throughout the Old Testament and Jesus fasted at times, 40 days in one instance. The early Church fasted on occasion too. Most Christian Churches of today don't mention fasting very much, if at all. Is fasting supposed to be a part of the Christian's life? Why isn't it emphasized today? What is fasting supposed to do to and for the Christian?

I. FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Occasions of fasting:
 - Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7
 - The Law commanded a fast to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. (Atonement)
 - Fasting was to have an affect on the soul, not so much the body.
2. Other Fasts:
 - In war or the threat of it.
 - When loved ones were sick.
 - When loved ones died.
 - When one sought God's forgiveness.
 - When danger was near.
 - To rememvber certain events.
3. The purpose of fasting:
 - to affect and chasten the soul, to humble the soul, to incur God's favor.
 - when one needed forgiveness, for bodily healing, protection, deliverance from an enemy.
4. The nature of fasting:
 - Normally it is to abstain from all food, but not water and it could last from one day to forty days as with Moses, Elijah and Jesus.
5. Some warnings about fasting:
 - It can turn into an external show and into ceremonial ritualism.

II. FASTING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness - Mattahew 4:1-9; Luke 4:1-2
 - He felt it was appropriate to fast and ate nothing for those forty days and nights.
2. Jesus taught about fasting in His "Sermon on the Mount" - Matthew 6:16-18
 - He pointed out WHEN one fasts, not IF one did and it would be rewarded by God, the Father.
 - Fasting appears to have a place in the righteousness expected of believers in Jesus.
3. The disciples questioned Jesus about the disciples of John the Baptist fasting - Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-19
 - Fasting was to have a place in the lives of the disciples, but only on appropriate occasions, not some ceremony rite.
4. Fasting and praying are sometimes joined together - Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29
 - Sometimes faith is just not enough and prayer and fasting is necessary.

III. FASTING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

1. The Church at Antioch fasted - Acts 13:1-3
 - They fasted and prayed before sending out Barnabas and Paul
2. The Churches in Galatia - Acts 14:21-23
 - Every Church fasted and prayed before selecting their elders.

IV. FASTING BY CHRISTIANS TODAY

1. Should Christians fast today?
 - Yes, because Jesus taught it - Matthew 6:16-17; 9:14-15;
 - to obtain God's good favor, when the occasion calls for it, and sometimes add prayer.
 - Yes, the early Church fasted:
 - Antioch fasted and all the Churches in Galatia fasted.
 - Yes, because Paul, as a missionary, minister, preacher of Christ fasted.
2. Why should Christians today fast?
 - Obviously for health reasons, then in times of grief and sorrow, to gain some sort of self-control, for physical reasons.
 - When there is a need of divine help:
 - There were times when Israel needed God's help: times of war, loved ones sick, seeking God's forgiveness, His protection.
 - There is Jesus fasting for 40 days dealing with temptation, etc.
3. When should a Christian fast?
 - When one is faced with difficult temptations, or faced with serious illness of a loved one.
 - When one's Church is appointing leadership or sending out a missionary.
 - Sometimes prayer and fasting need to go together.
4. How should a Christian fast?
 - Not publicly, where others can see or know, not for show - Matthew 6:16-18
 - Not asd some regular ritual, only at special times when the occasion calls for it, in times when one needs to spend some time in prayer.
 - Not without true repentance, for it not sincere, then all the fasting and praying will mean nothing.
 - How to learn how to fast:
 - Don't do it just because it sounds like a "neat" thing to do - be serious, and only when the occasion calls for it and one desperately wants God's help.
 - Start slow, if never fasted before, for short, brief periods of time and end slow, gradually breaking the fast, with small amounts of light foods.
 - Fast when there is time to spend in prayerful meditation - and remember the purpose of fasting, humble oneself in God's sight, seeking favorable answer to prayer.

CONCLUSION:

1. Yes, Christian, fasting is in order for today and there are times when every Christian needs to fast.
2. Fasting has been done by God's people from the very beginning with Abraham and Jesus set the example for the Church.
3. In YOUR own time and at YOUR own occasion/need, learn to fast and see how God will bless, but do it for the RIGHT reason.

