



Introduction: The subject of fasting in the Bible is a fascinating subject. John Wesley once said, "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason, and others have utterly disregarded it." I realize that some people think of this subject as unnecessary, divisive, and a topic to be ignored. However, many of our religious friends think of fasting as a matter of faith. What does the Word of God say about fasting? Let's study together. . . .

Discussion:

I. FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. When did they fast in the Old Testament?

1. When observing a religious holy day (**Leviticus 16:29-31, 23:26-32, Numbers 29:7**)
2. When confronting warfare or the threat of warfare (**Judges 20:26, I Samuel 7:6**)
3. When physically or mentally sick (**II Samuel 12:16-23, Psalm 35:11-13**)
4. When grieving or facing personal loss (**I Samuel 31:13, II Samuel 1:12**)
5. When seeking God's forgiveness (**Deuteronomy 9:15-18, Jonah 3:4-10**)
6. When handling dangerous circumstances (**Ezra 8:21, Esther 4:3, 16**)
7. When dealing with natural disaster or terrorism (**Jeremiah 52:12-13, II Kings 25:1-4**)

B. Why did they fast in the Old Testament?

1. For the purpose of "*afflicting the soul*" (**Leviticus 23:26-32**)
2. For the purpose of "*chastening the soul*" (**Psalm 69:10**)
3. For the purpose of "*humbling*" one's self in the sight of God (**Psalm 35:13, Ezra 8:21-23**)

C. How did they fast in the Old Testament?

1. Abstinence from limited/certain foods at limited times
2. Abstinence through partial fasts and complete fasts were also common
2. Abstinence of the animals could be included in the fast (**Jonah 3:5-10**)

D. How long did they fast in the Old Testament?

1. One day fasts (**Judges 20:26, I Samuel 14:24, II Samuel 3:35**)
2. One evening fasts (**Daniel 6:18**)
3. 3 days and nights (**Esther 4:16**)
4. 7 days and nights (**I Samuel 31:13, I Chronicles 10:12**)
5. 40 days and nights (**Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9, I Kings 19:8**)

E. What were they told about fasting in the Old Testament?

1. Don't allow it to become a show or a ritual (**Isaiah 58**)
2. Don't forget the spiritual implications of the fast (**Zechariah 7:1-14**)

II. FASTING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. How did Jesus feel about fasting?
 - 1. Jesus fasted in His ministry (**Matthew 4:1-9, Luke 4:1-2**)
 - 2. Jesus taught on fasting in His ministry (**Matthew 6:16-18**)
 - 3. Jesus commanded His disciples to fast (**Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:18-20, Luke 5:33-39**)
 - 4. Jesus believed in prayer and fasting (**Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29**)

- B. How did the Paul feel about fasting?
 - 1. Fasting was proof of his spiritual maturity (**II Corinthians 6:4-10**)
 - 2. Fasting was a mark of his personal ministry (**II Corinthians 11:23-28**)
 - 3. Fasting is commanded for couples (**I Corinthians 7:5**)

- C. How did the early church feel about fasting?
 - 1. The church was aware of the fasting of Jesus, the apostles, Paul, etc.
 - 2. The church of Christ at Antioch fasted (**Acts 13:1-3**)
 - 3. The churches of Christ in Galatia fasted (**Acts 14:21-23**)

III. FASTING IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST TODAY

- A. How should the church feel about fasting today?
 - 1. We should study and think about Jesus' view of fasting.
 - 2. We should study and think about Paul's view of fasting
 - 3. We should study and think about the early church's view of fasting

- B. Why should the church feel this way about fasting today?
 - 1. We may need self-control in our marriage (**I Corinthians 7:5**)
 - 2. We may need more dedication and service to God (**Colossians 2:20-23**)
 - 3. We may need divine help or forgiveness (**Deuteronomy 9:15-18, Psalm 35:13, Psalm 69:10**)
 - 4. We may need more passion, fervency or zeal (**Ezra 8:21-23, James 5:16**)
 - 5. We may need to do it for our nation (**Judges 20:26, I Samuel 7:6, Jeremiah 52:12-13**)
 - 6. We may need guidance through sickness or grief (**Psalm 35:11-13, II Samuel 1:12**)
 - 7. We may need strength in a dangerous situation (**Ezra 8:21, Esther 4, Daniel 6:18**)

- C. What else can we learn about fasting?
 - 1. If we choose to fast today it should not be done hypocritically (**Matthew 6:16-18**)
 - 2. If we choose to fast today it should not be done ritualistically (**Matthew 9:14-17**)
 - 3. If we choose to fast today it should not be done haphazardly (**Isaiah 58:3-9**)
 - 4. If we choose to fast today it should be done biblically (follow God's pattern).

Conclusion: The most important thing to remember about fasting is that it was meant to improve the relationship between God and man. How is your relationship to God? Do you need the prayers of the church family? Have you started your journey as a new creature yet? Do you seek the will of God for your life? Follow God! Let's be the church of Christ!!