

RESOLVE!

The Purpose and Power of Fasting

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INTRODUCTION

One subject which is often misunderstood is the subject of fasting. Many are confused as to what fasting is, why we should fast, and the goal of fasting.

Fasting is an important spiritual discipline in our lives. It is important for us to discover the Biblical teaching regarding this subject and to begin to practice and apply it in our lives.

In this lesson we will attempt to answer the three questions we have raised regarding this important subject from God's Word.

WHAT IS FASTING?

Just as the body requires exercise and discipline to remain healthy, so does our soul and spirit. Fasting is a spiritual exercise which *"tones the muscles of our soul and spirit"*.

The Bible teaches us by example and instruction that fasting, when accompanied with prayer releases fresh spiritual power into our lives and circumstances.

Fasting is formally defined as, *"the voluntary refraining of food and drink for a certain period of time for the purpose of seeking the mind, heart and counsel of God through prayer and the Scriptures."*

The act of *"fasting"* is expressed in many different ways. There are different kinds of fasts and approaches to fasting.

Note the following:

- **Complete fast** -- Receiving no food or drink whatsoever. This kind of fast should not exceed 3 days.

- **Regular fast** -- Eating no food but drinking water.

Matthew 4:2 (NIV) "After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry."

- **Partial fast** -- Omitting certain meals each day or restricting the quality or quantity of food or drink consumed.

Daniel 10:3 (NIV) "I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over."

- **Liquid fast** -- A partial fast which allows liquids of all kinds for a period of time. (Used for extended fasts.)

WHY SHOULD WE FAST?

Jesus gave us the example and from Scripture it is assumed that it will be a part of our spiritual lives:

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV) "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

From Biblical examples we can see that fasting frequently results in the reception of fresh understanding and revelation from the Lord:

Daniel 10:2, 3; 12 (NIV) "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. ³ I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over... ¹² Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.'"

Acts 13:2, 3 (NIV) "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called

them.' ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

Fasting is one way to bring our bodies into submission to God. Man is a "*tripartite being*" -- body, soul, and spirit. Frequently we find that our bodies are controlling us, making demands that we obey.

Fasting is one of God's methods for bringing our bodies under the authority of the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 9:26, 27 (NIV) "Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

THE RIGHT KIND OF FASTING

It is important to understand that an effective fast involves much more than abstaining from food for a period of time. It involves possessing a right focus. Fasting is not to be viewed as a way to pressure God into doing what we want Him to do. True fasting involves seeking the Lord for a change in our hearts. True fasting always leads to repentance and change!

Isaiah 58 is a chapter that addresses this issue of "*True Fasting*". *This chapter is divided into two distinct parts.*

- *Ineffective fasting* -- vs. 1-5
- *Effective fasting* -- vs. 6-14

Verses 15 describe the ineffective fasting of the people of God. *It was ineffective because of:*

- *Spiritual superficiality.*
- *Spiritual disobedience.*

God was not pleased with their fasting because it did not change their hearts and lives. They remained the same!

In verses 6-14, God describes the objectives of a "*true fast*". God's desire and design for fasting is for it to have a personal effect upon us. True fasting changes

our perspectives about life and our orientation to life. Through proper Biblical fasting our priorities are rearranged!

Verses 6, 7 describe 5 specific results of a true fast:

- *Loose the chains of injustice. (In our own lives and in the lives of others.)*
- *Untie the cords of the yoke.*
- *Set the oppressed free.*
- *Break every yoke.*
- *It opens our eyes and hearts to the genuine needs of others. We become less "selfcentered".*

Verses 8-14 describe the kinds of personal and societal changes which can occur through proper fasting!

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF TRUE FASTS

- *Jonah and Ninevah.*

Jonah 3:4, 5; 10 (NIV) "On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.'⁵ The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. ...¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened."

- *Esther and the Jewish people.*

Haman intended to destroy the Jews. Mordecai discovers this and goes to Esther entreating her to approach the king. She needed divine wisdom to approach the king on behalf of her people. Note her response to Mordecai:

Esther 4:16 (NIV) Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

- *The ministry of Christ and the disciples.*

Matthew 17:14-21 (NIV) "When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before Him. ¹⁵ 'Lord, have mercy on my son,' he said. 'He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.' ¹⁷ 'O unbelieving and perverse generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to Me.' ¹⁸ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' ²⁰ He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (vs. 21 NKJV) "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

TRUE FASTING ACCOMPANIED WITH FERVENT PRAYER ARE POWERFUL TOOLS IN THE HANDS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SHAPE OUR LIVES, TO SHAPE OUR FAMILIES, TO SHAPE THE CHURCH, AND TO LITERALLY SHAPE THE COURSE OF HISTORY! I encourage you to join me in fasting and prayer again and again until we truly experience revival in our homes, our churches, our beloved nation, and throughout the world.