

## Fasting

- **Fast**- Heb.6684- to cover over (the mouth), that is, to fast. Gk.3522- to abstain from food (religiously): -fast.

Jeff Smith, July 1, 2001, Watchman Magazine

*“Fasting is a Bible matter, though decidedly more so in the Old Testament than the New. Jesus says a few words of regulation, but there exists no evidence that God intended to bind a form of fasting upon Christians.”*

*“... fasting remains a matter of personal discretion and should not be used a test of fellowship among the saints.”*

*“Naturally, we go to the law of Moses first to find if fasting was enjoined upon ancient Israel as a matter of commandment or prohibition. Strangely, though, the old law is practically silent when it comes to fasting. Moses says that he fasted before God gave him the law and again when he found the people dancing around their molten calf as he returned (Deuteronomy 9:18), but gives no indication that God told him to do so.”*

**Deu 9:18** And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

*“There are many more instances of fasting in Old Testament times but nothing to suggest it was originally anything more than a common cultural custom. Fasting does take on a spiritual component, however, as it continually accompanies moments of deep import.”*

*“Lewis writes, ‘It is a matter of common observation and experience that great distress causes loss of appetite and therefore occasions abstinence from food’ (‘Fasting,’ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, page 1099). Indeed, we witness Bible fasting, not as a matter of divine directive, but personal expression of sorrow, loss or yearning. Hannah “did not eat” as she grew more distressed over her barren womb (1 Samuel 1:7). David fasted as he mourned Abner’s death (2 Samuel 3:35)...*

**2Sa 3:35** And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.

*...and prayed for the life of his own son (2 Samuel 12:16-23).*

**2Sa 12:16** David therefore besought God for the child (*that he had with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite*); and David **fasted**, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. **17** And the elders of his house arose, *and went* to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, **neither did he eat** bread with them. **18** And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: **how will he then vex (Heb.7451- harm) himself (here showing how fasting is equal to harming the body)**, if we tell him that the child is dead? **19** But when

David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. **20** Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed *himself*, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. **21** Then said his servants unto him, What thing *is* this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, *while it was* alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. **22** And he said, While the child was yet alive, **I fasted and wept**: for I said, Who can tell *whether* GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? **23** But now he is dead, **wherefore should I fast?** can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

*-The genocidal decree of King Ahasuerus in Esther's time caused the Hebrews to mourn and fast in every province of the empire (Esther 4:3).*

**Est 4:3** And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, *there was* great **mourning** among the Jews, and **fasting**, and **weeping**, and **wailing**; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

*-Soft-hearted teacher Ezra fasted over the sins of Israel as she faltered while rebuilding (10:6)."*

**Ezr 10:6** Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and *when* he came thither, he did **eat no bread, nor drink water**: for he **mourned** because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

*"Numerous other passages could be cited to indicate that fasting was not a command of the law of Moses, but rather a natural cultural custom derived from the simple fact that "great distress causes loss of appetite." Even today, some are heard to wonder on such occasions, "How can you eat at a time like this?"*"

*"Lewis writes further that "Fasting ... became the customary mode of proving to others the inner emotion of sorrow" (ibid.). This public facet of fasting hints at the regulation Jesus would give in his day."*

**Luk 18:9** And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: **10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.**

**Mat 4:1** Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. **2** And when He had **fasted forty days and forty nights**, He was **afterward** an hungred. **3** And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. **4** But He answered and said, **It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.** *(And there were other temptations with which the tempter tested Jesus...)*

**Mat 4:11** Then the devil left Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.

Adam Clarke

*“It is remarkable that Moses, the great lawgiver of the Jews, previously to his receiving the law from God, fasted forty days in the mount;...”*

**Deu 9:9** When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, *even* the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water:

*...that Elijah, the chief of the prophets, fasted also forty days;...*

**1Ki 19:8** And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

*...and that Christ, the giver of the New Covenant, should act in the same way. Was not all this intended to show, that God’s kingdom on earth was to be spiritual and Divine? - that it should not consist in meat and drink, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?”*

**Rom 14:17** For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

*“Relative to the forty days’ fast of Moses, there is a beautiful saying in the Talmudists. ‘Is it possible that any man can fast forty days and forty nights? To which Rabbi Meir answered, When thou takest up thy abode in any particular city, thou must live according to its customs. Moses ascended to heaven, where they neither eat nor drink therefore he became assimilated to them. We are accustomed to eat and drink; and, when angels descend to us, they eat and drink also.’ Moses, Elijah, and our blessed Lord could fast forty days and forty nights, because they were in communion with God, and living a heavenly life.” Adam Clarke*

- Not that **Moses** or the others literally ascended to **Heaven** but they were living as physical beings in a “*spiritual existence*” during the time of their fasting. And since time doesn’t exist in the spirit world, it could be said that their bodies were in a state of animation during those forty days and nights. Just as **John** was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (**Rev 1:10**) and received the revelation from **Jesus** there is no mention of his receiving it over a period of time beyond that day. **Paul** also experienced this state of spiritual existence in **2 Cor 12:1-4** stating “in the body...out of the body, I cannot tell”. In **Mat 4:2** when **Jesus** was “afterward an hungered” a gloss in the **Greek** for “afterward” is (**Gk.5305**) “eventually”. As a man **Jesus** would eventually have to nourish **His** weakened physical body. And just as it is with physical beings in a spiritual existence so it is with spirit beings in the physical.

**Gen 18:1** And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; **2** And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw *them*, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, **3** And said, **My Lord** (*One of these three being the pre-incarnate Christ.*), if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant: **4** Let a little water, I pray You, be fetched, and wash Your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: **5** And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for

therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. **6** And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead *it*, and make cakes upon the hearth. **7** And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave *it* unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it. **8** And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set *it* before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and **they did eat**.

- In another example we see where Jesus appeared, after His resurrection, to His disciples and to prove He was Who He said He was He requested they give Him something to eat.

Luk 24:36 And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, **Peace be unto you**. **37** But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. **38** And He said unto them, **Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?** **39** Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. **40** And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. **41** And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, **Have ye here any meat?** **42** And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. **43** And He took *it*, and **did eat before them**.

1Co 15:49 *And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.* **50** *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.* **51** *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

Mat 22:30 *For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.*

Php 3:21 *Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.*

- In order to exist in a spiritual environment for eternity our bodies need to be adapted for such an environment. And **nowhere** in the Bible does it state, in any uncertain terms, that there are certain foods that are to be abstained from on certain days of the week. Period!

1Co 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. **13** Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but **God shall destroy both it (the body) and them (foods)**...

Col 2:20 Wherefore **if ye be dead with Christ** from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, **21** (Touch not; taste not; handle not; **22** Which all are to **perish with the using**;) after the commandments and doctrines **of men?** **23** Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and **neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.**

\*Mar 7:19 *Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?*

- Fasting, for any reason, is not to be considered as an act of worship.

1Ti 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, *and commanding to abstain from meats* (*Gk.1033-food: -meat, victuals*), which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

Jeff Smith, July 1, 2001, Watchman Magazine

*“Barnes comments that the Pharisees would often throw ashes upon themselves to increase the appearance of suffering. Their fasting was not to express sorrow but to create the appearance of sorrow. They would go about with hair uncombed, beards unkempt and clothing a mess. And all this to impress the world with their willingness to sacrifice for God. God was unimpressed.”*

Mat 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

*“Jesus said that fasting should be a private matter and that one who fasts should keep it between him and God, seeking not human accolades.”*

Mat 9:14 Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not? 15 And Jesus said unto them, *Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.* (*Fasting, in most cases, is the result of mourning. His disciples would mourn once He was taken from them and then they would fast. For the time being they had no need to fast.*)

1Co 7:5 Defraud ye not one the other, except *it be* with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

*“Considerable doubt exists as to whether fasting was added here by translators, but the point has mainly to do with time for religious devotion within the demands of family life. Fasting could be an expression of that devotion.”*

*“While there is no clear command given in the Bible to fast as a religious exercise, it is clear that fasting was practiced by godly people in distress over sin within their own lives or surrounding them. A Bible sanction exists for the individual to choose to fast as he feels it might benefit him. Naturally, many fast almost involuntarily in times of mourning and deep emotional distress. These occasions actually seem to fit the Bible pattern best.”*

Act 27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought *them* all to take meat (*Gk.5160-nourishment*), saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I pray you to take *some* meat: for this is **for your health**: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. 35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when

he had broken *it*, he began to eat. 36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took *some* meat.

*“The New Testament makes it clear that one is neither condemned nor saved by virtue of his diet. Still, if one garners spiritual benefit from fasting, he should not be discouraged in the exercise. His fasting should not become a public venture or means of self-exultation, however. This occurs far too often among those proud of their self-sacrificial custom.”*

*“Fasting is a choice left to the individual, having never been legislated in the old or new testaments, although the practice is regulated by both.”*

Jeff Smith, July I, 2001, Watchman Magazine

- As we continue to live in this physical world we continue to be in need of those physical foods that sustain our bodies lest we die. But we who are Christians, who live and rule in the spiritual kingdom on Earth, the church, are also in continual need, besides the physical, of that spiritual food that only Jesus can give.

Joh 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth [*Sometimes this word actually means to believe but used in this context it encompasses much more.*] (*Gk.4100- to entrust [especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ]*) [*If we trust Christ to save us we'll do what He asks. It is a "working" faith.*] on Me hath everlasting life. 48 I am that bread of life. 49 Your fathers did eat manna (*physical bread*) in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven (*spiritual*), that a man may eat thereof, and not die (*spiritually*) [*Physical food sustains the physical person. Spiritual food sustains the inner spiritual person.*]. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. 52 The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat? 53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. 54 Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. 58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.

*“The plain meaning of the passage is, that by his bloody death - his body and his blood offered in sacrifice for sin - he would procure pardon and life for man; that they who partook of that, or had an interest in that, should obtain eternal life. He uses the figure of eating and drinking because that was the subject of discourse; because the Jews prided themselves much on the fact that their fathers had eaten manna; and because, as he had said that he was the bread of life, it was natural and easy, especially in the language which he used, to carry out the figure, and say that bread must be eaten in order to be of any avail in supporting and saving men.”*

Albert Barnes

1Pe 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 3 If so be ye have tasted (*Gk.1089- by implication to eat; figuratively to experience*) that the Lord is gracious.

- We are to “consume” (*experience*) Christ through His word if we aim to please Him in order to obtain that home in Heaven when He returns. In context, 1 Cor 8:8 has to do with the eating of meats offered to idols but also gives the idea that physical food of any sort does not bring us any closer to God, or separate us any further away from Him, whether we eat it or not.

1Co 8:8 But meat commendeth (*Gk.3936- Thayer: to bring into one’s fellowship or intimacy*) us not to God\*: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. (*\*...doesn't bring us any closer to God.-Contemporary English Version*)

1Ti 4:4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. (*If we don’t give thanks each and every time we sit down to a meal, that meal might as well of been what was considered to the Jews as unclean. To not give thanks is to not appreciate each time we’ve been blessed with another meal.*)

- To sum it up, fasting is neither commanded or implied to bring us any closer to God. It is not an act of worship, a test of fellowship or something that should be imposed on anyone through an appeal to the conscience. In many cases it is a natural act brought about by mourning or distress and is up to each individual whether to fast or not.

But in order to “consume” Christ, to “experience” Him, we must begin by first hearing about Him and His offer to have given His flesh and blood to prepare us for eternity.

Hear: Romans 10:14 ..."how shall they believe in Him Whom they have not heard?"

Believe: Heb 11:6 ..."for he that commeth to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Repent: Act 3:19 ..."Repent ... be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."

Confess: Act 8:36 And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Be baptized: 1 Pet 3:21 "...baptism doth **also** (*not the only thing but is necessary to*) now save us..."

Remain faithful: Rev 3:21 “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.”

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