

Fasting

It is not commanded.

- NT church fasted voluntarily
- Jesus said when He was not with them any longer, they would fast
- Jesus fasted 40 days before being tempted
 - He knew the value of setting aside the physical to enhance the spiritual.

Fasting means abstaining from food, and possibly drink, for a limited period of time as a mark of religious commitment and devotion or an expression of repentance for sins committed.

- Fasting seems physical.
 - But is a spiritual discipline
 - It is designed to draw us closer to God and help spiritual growth.

The bible describes 3 main forms of fasting.

- Normal fast: total abstinence of food
 - Luke 4.2 Jesus without for 40 days
 - Usually lasts only 1 day.
 - The fast around the OT Day of Atonement.
- Absolute fasts
 - Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:9 ESV And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
 - Esther 4:16 ESV “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”
- Partial fast
 - Eating some foods, but abstaining from others.
 - Daniel 1:8 ESV But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.
 - For an unknown reason, Daniel considered the food and wine from the king to be unclean.

- Since he belonged to the true God, he did not want to displease his God.
 - Daniel and his 3 friends restricted their diet instead of a complete abstinence.
 - The context implies there were physical benefits from the partial fast.
 - But the verse indicates that God was with Daniel in this time of fasting.
- On another occasion Daniel abstained from “delicacies”, meat, wine, and anointing for 3 weeks.
 - Daniel 10:3 ESV I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.
- God told Israel to not eat anything with leaven for Passover week.
 - Exodus 13:7-8 ESV Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. (8) You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’
 - God gave this command for a spiritual purpose, to remind them of His kindness & His power.

The spiritual discipline of fasting is not simply a denial of food; it has an important spiritual focus that turns from the physical circumstances to focus on God.

- Confessing sins and repentance has been needed by some people.
 - After finishing the wall around Jerusalem, Nehemiah & the people worshiped and read the book of the law, explaining it so all could understand.
 - But when they heard the law, they realized they had sinned.
 - Nehemiah 9:1-3 ESV Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. (2) And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. (3) And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another

quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.

- Some people think sin is trivial, but God does not.
 - These Jews knew they had sinned.
 - They were happy about what God had helped them do, but also knew sin was still present in their lives.
 - Sin is serious business
 - When we learn of our sin, we should change our hearts and lives through repentance.
- Some have fasted while in great sadness.
 - When David learned that King Saul and Jonathan had died.
 - 2 Samuel 1:11-12 ESV Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. (12) And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.
- Some has fasted to seek God's favor at a critical time.
 - When David and Bathsheba's son was dying, David lay on the ground for 7 days and fasted.
 - But when the child died, he God up, bathed, anointed himself, and changed clothes.
 - The 1st thing he did was to worship God.
 - His servants did not understand.
 - 2 Samuel 12:21-23 ESV Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." (22) He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' (23) But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."
 - When Jehoshaphat faced Moab and Ammon in war, he sought God, and ordered a fast throughout all of Judah.
 - 2 Chronicles 20:3-4 ESV Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. (4) And Judah assembled to seek help from the LORD; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

- Some people fasted before important task in God's service.
 - Ezra had asked king Artaxerxes for money, supplies, and the Lord's house utensils.
 - The king had granted all his requests, but the king knew that God was with Ezra
 - Ezra gathered the leaders planning to go to Jerusalem
 - Ezra 8:21-23 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. (22) For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." (23) So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.
 - Ezra's prayer and fasting mattered to God, and God protected them from robbers and marauders.
 - While Paul and Barnabas were on their 1st missionary journey, the appointed elders to take care of the new congregations.
 - Acts 14:23 ESV And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
 - The work of an elders / shepherd / bishop is very critical to the church.
 - That is why they FASTED and prayed.

The Old Testament had commanded days of fasting (Day of Atonement), but the New Testament never commands Christians to fast.

- We do have examples, but no commands.
- A Jewish-Christian historian, Alfred Edersheim, noted that some of the stricter sects of Jews would fast from sunset to sunset.
 - They not only fasted, but also made rules against:
 - Washing
 - Anointing
 - Agreeable activities
 - Even greetings
 - So this type of fasting was practiced in a austere and pretentious manner, and became showy displays

- There are some Christian groups that made their own laws about fasting which is outside New Testament scriptures.
 - They have made their man-made traditions into laws.
- Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:1 ESV “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
 - Later he applied this principle to fasting.
 - Matthew 6:16-18 ESV “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (17) But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, (18) that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
 - When religion become like a show, people are concentrating on themselves.
 - But the purpose of fasting is to focus on God.
 - If we want to get close to God, we must focus on Him.
- Isaiah spoke of people who fasted but God was not listening because they sought their own pleasures and oppressed others.
 - They were fasting, but didn’t really change.
 - Isaiah 58:6-9 ESV “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? (7) Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (8) Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. (9) Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’

Abstinence in fasting is a form of self-discipline.

- It renounces for a time the pleasure and needs of the flesh, so we can focus on God and the spiritual.
 - We abstain from foods and other pleasures to focus on interests on a higher purpose, and more noble cause.

- Colossians 3:1-4 ESV If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (3) For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
- Abstinence deals with DISTRACTIONS in this world and points us to the important matters.
 - Matthew 16:24-26 ESV Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?
 - We know we must feed our bodies to live
 - We must feed our souls if we want to live eternally with Jesus.