

## Should Christians Fast?

**Acts 14:23:** *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*



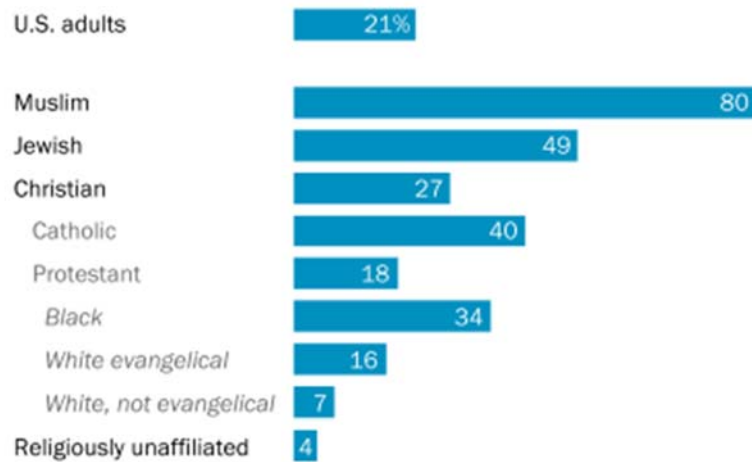
Fasting is a practice that has endured for thousands of years. Fasting appears often in the Bible, and among other things, it is used as a tool of focus, an expression of grief and a sign of humility. What seemed to have been a common occurrence in ancient days has now become far less mainstream. So, do all of the biblical references to fasting in both the Old and New Testaments mean we as Christians should be engaging in this practice regularly? If we should be participating, what circumstances bring on appropriate times to fast? Just as important, how should we fast? Are there time frames that should be kept? What about drinking water during a fast, is that appropriate? So many questions! Fortunately, the Bible gives us many practical answers, and some are VERY surprising!

So many people ask us practical questions about Christian fasting that we want to discuss them in their scriptural context. The latest Pew Research Center survey from February 2024 says 1 in 5 Americans fast for religious reasons—that’s 21 percent of adults. The majority of Christians fasting are Catholic, but Protestants fast as well.

Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/05/how-common-is-religious-fasting-in-the-united-states/>

### 1 in 5 Americans fast for religious reasons

*% who say they fast for certain periods during holy times*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 13-25, 2024.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fasting in the Jewish Law was all about humbling oneself before God in a repentant way, in direct relation to the part of the Law called the *Day of Atonement*.

**The annual Day of Atonement was a way to seek forgiveness for the sins committed each year, allowing the Israelites to maintain a relationship with God:**

**Leviticus 16:29–31:** (KJV) *29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls (fast), and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: 30 for on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. 31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls (fast), by a statute for ever.*

In doing all these things, one is in good standing before God.

(Source: Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) *Afflict your souls* The old term for fasting; but its meaning evidently embraces, not only abstinence from food, but that penitence and humiliation which give scope and purpose to the outward act of fasting. The Day of Atonement was the only public fast commanded by the Law of Moses. See further directions in Leviticus 23:27–32.

Fasting was one of the formalities of the Law Covenant the Israelites had to keep in order to show their obedience to God. The Law required only one fast per year on the Day of Atonement.

In addition to this specific fasting instruction for all of Israel, there are many other Old Testament examples of individuals and groups fasting. We will reference several of these throughout this episode.

One reason people fasted in the Old Testament was in grief over a tremendous loss.



**Nehemiah fasted over the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem:**

**Nehemiah 1:3–4:** *3 They said to me, The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire. 4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

We can picture this scene: Nehemiah is weeping, mourning and praying while he is fasting. His whole being was focused on his grief over the tremendous loss of the security of God's holy city, Jerusalem.

People fasted in the Old Testament over the death of a respected person or people.



**David fasted over the death of King Saul and his best friend Jonathan:**

**2 Samuel 1:11–12:** *11 Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. 12 They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

These two emotional examples of fasting were an outward expression of the grief felt because of loss or grief. They stopped what they were doing, stopped eating and took the time to mourn the loss. Again we see the pouring out of grief by these individuals over the death of King Saul, and most especially, the death of David's beloved Jonathan.

The first appearance of fasting in the New Testament is when Jesus was eight days old, and he was brought to the Temple for circumcision. The prophet Simeon took Jesus in his arms, emotionally prophesying. He realized he was holding the Messiah he had prayed for all of his life. Simeon then blesses Mary and Joseph.



Example:

**We next learn of Anna:**

**Luke 2:36–38:** *36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with **fastings** <3521> and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

fasting was an expression of humble service and discipline.

The prophetess Anna fasted frequently as part of her total devotion to God. At 84-years old, she had the privilege of seeing the Messiah as a baby.

It's important to note that Anna was a dedicated Jewish woman, and her fasting was a regular part of her focused dedication to God's Law and God's providence for His people. Her commitment to fasting was a part of her regular life of serving God in the temple. She never stopped worshipping.

These three examples shed light on what fasting meant to the Jewish people. Let's look at the three words for fasting in the New Testament. They are all closely related.

(See Bonus Material for the full Strong's Exhaustive Concordance definitions.)

In Greek, there is both a noun (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3523) and verb (#3522) meaning purposely and intentionally not eating for religious reasons. The third Greek word (#3521) used can either mean the same—abstaining intentionally and religiously—or it can mean not eating simply because there is no food to eat—it's either not physically available at that time or from poverty. When trying to comprehensively study this topic, it's important to understand why someone is not eating.

Fasting is literally “not eating.” It does not say anything about not drinking fluids. This becomes an issue later on, but here it is not eating, either intentionally or because food is not available.

Sometimes people didn't intend on fasting but were in a situation without food.

# Involuntary



**The crowd had followed Jesus for three days and were without food:**

**Matthew 15:32:** (KJV) *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away **fasting** <3523>, lest they faint in the way.*

In other words, the people wouldn't leave because Jesus was teaching them, and they literally didn't have any food to eat. They weren't purposely and intentionally fasting. Jesus didn't want them to faint with hunger, so through a miracle he provided the fish and the loaves of bread.




**2 Corinthians 6:4-6:** *4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, 5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in **hunger** <3521>, 6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the holy spirit, in genuine love,*

The word *hunger* here is the same word as fasting. Paul recalls situations where there was literally nothing to eat. He would have eaten if he could. This was an involuntary type of fast.

We've looked at the involuntary types of fasting like being caught on a journey without food. We saw the intentional kind of fasting of Anna in her religious service to God. All of these are from the same or related words. How does this apply to us as Christians?

## FASTING AND OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES:



Fasting is an ancient process used in Old Testament times for many reasons. The Law of Moses required all of Israel's communities to fast as a preparation for the Day of Atonement. Some individuals fasted when they were faced with great loss.

Thus far, we can see fasting as a tool for humility, thanksgiving and grief.

Fasting was part of the ritual of the Law to help the Israelites prepare for the Day of Atonement, making themselves right with God. But it was also a tool for specific circumstances like grief or deeply felt celebration. This gives us a basis for understanding what Christians should be focusing on. As we have just scratched the surface, we can see that fasting in the Old Testament was deeply and personally meaningful.

**With a basic Old Testament foundation in place, what can we now learn about fasting for Christians from the New Testament?**

As with everything else biblical, we need to be keenly aware of Old and New Testament differences. Those things that were mandated by the Law for the Jewish people have now become principles or examples for those who follow Jesus. Paying close attention to how Jesus used fasting will be the basis for our New Testament understanding.

But first, let's talk about another reason people fasted in the Old Testament:

Fasting was an expression of faith, hope and concern in the face of a potentially grave tragedy.



**Example:**

**King Darius fasted over Daniel whom he had just sealed in the lions' den:**

**Daniel 6:16–19:** *16 Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you. 17 A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. 18 Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him. 19 Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den.*

Darius fasted over his concern about Daniel. Just an important side lesson: Daniel slept better in the lions' den than Darius did in the royal palace. If we aren't ready to praise God where we are, with our conditions and circumstances as they are, we're not likely to praise Him in better and more desirable circumstances. We have to change our perspective, not our circumstances or possessions, in order for us to have hearts overflowing with joy and praise.

King Darius is profoundly concerned. He has worked himself into a corner—his advisors tricked him into putting this edict out, knowing it would trap Daniel in disobedience to bowing before the king like a god. Now Darius has to enforce his edict and feels he has ruined this great man Daniel, quite possibly killing him. He spends the night fasting because he is so distraught over what he may have contributed to.

He goes to the lions' den in the morning and finds Daniel alive, causing Darius to declare Daniel's God to be the true God. This king was pagan, not Jewish, but showed a deep, emotional outreach for Daniel's well-being through fasting, hoping Daniel's God would reverse Darius' foolish decision. It is a good example of fasting in a situation where there is a potentially grave tragedy unfolding.

From a practical standpoint,  
 What can fasting do for us?

# Discipline and Focus

Fasting may help us to disregard earthly distractions.



**If we follow in Jesus' footsteps and apply the principles that he applied, we can learn significant lessons regarding our own discipline and focus:**

**Matthew 4:1-2:** *1 Then Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after he had **fasted** <3522> forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry.*

**This incredibly long fast reminds us of Moses on the mountain as he communed with God:**

**Exodus 34:27-28:** *27 Then the LORD said to Moses, Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. 28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.*

Notice with Moses, it specifically says he did not eat bread or drink water for 40 days and 40 nights. With Jesus, it says he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, with no mention of whether or not that included drinking water.

A popular question searched at ChristianQuestions.com is, "Can I drink water during a fast?" There is no New Testament guidance for a Christian fast, so we have nothing that says NOT to drink water. We know both Moses and Jesus were sustained supernaturally for a specific purpose. Our fasting from water can be medically dangerous.



**Did Jesus drink water during the 40-day fast?**



There is an argument that says Jesus did not because he was following Moses' example, but the Scriptures do not tell us he did not. Either way, it is not relevant to us. We know he put his earthly needs aside to discern God's will through understanding prophecies about his mission, and we know he was sustained by God Almighty Himself.

Should we drink water if we choose to fast? The Old Testament Law told the Israelites to fast. Fasting, by definition, didn't include not drinking water—it was only abstaining from eating food. We see the same focus in the New Testament. Fasting was for the sake of enhancing spiritual communion with God by removing distraction, having **NOTHING TO DO WITH NOT DRINKING WATER.**

**However, fasting for an extended time weakens the physical body, even Jesus' perfect body. Satan saw this as an opportunity!**

**Matthew 4:3-4:** *3 And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the son of God, command that these stones become bread. 4 But he answered and said, It is written, **MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.***

Is this a fair fight? Here is an extremely powerful spirit being fueled by pride and evil against a mere human—although a perfect one—who isn't taking in any physical nourishment! Satan is trying to grab the advantage.

Jesus is hungry. The temptation is, *Go ahead and make some bread...you can do it—you have God's spirit in you! You have the power and are hungry. What's the harm?*



What can fasting do for us? Fasting can help us to reset our priorities so that which is most God-honoring remains our highest objective. Jesus' hunger was real, but it wasn't his highest priority. He shifted the focus of his own desire by fasting for a time.

Tending to our physical needs is necessary, and for those who follow Jesus, it should always be done in the context of our being nourished by the word of God.

Is God telling us to stop eating to the point of starving to death because we will be sustained by just continually reading the Bible? This would be absurd! We can't take this out of its appropriate context. Review the examples of fasting in the New Testament.

From a practical standpoint,  
What can fasting do for us?

Fasting can help us keep our hearts and minds clear and humble.



**Satan continued to attack the physically weakened Jesus:**

**Matthew 4:5-7:** *5 Then the devil took him into the holy city and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to him, If you are the son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU; and ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE. 7 Jesus said to him, On the other hand, it is written, YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.*

It sounds like Satan knows the Scriptures well! Notice he says, *If you are the son of God*, knowing full well who Jesus is.

All of this is occurring in the context of deep, physical hunger and being weakened physically. Yet Jesus answers, *You shall not put the Lord your God to the test!* It is really that simple. He doesn't say it in his own words, but quotes Old Testament Law. His extended fast has brought him the understanding of what he has read in the Old Testament. It has focused his mind to be able to answer these hard temptations with such clarity and humility. His weakness has been turned to great strength of mind and character.



What can fasting do for us? Fasting can help us keep our hearts and minds clear and humble. It reminds us in a practical and immediate way how reliant we are on God's providence, and what we owe Him in return. This could be more impactful for those of us who take for granted the instant gratification of having an abundance of food.

This enables us to never act in a way that would be testing God, as this puts US in the position of authority instead of Him. We also want to be fully aware of the need to apply holy Scripture only in an appropriate and loyal way.

How much did fasting help in this circumstance? Satan was trying to take advantage of a physically weakened human Jesus. Jesus, through his fasting, prayer, meditation and recalling of God's word, had been strengthened. Together these strengthened him to be able to withstand Satan's temptations.

Scripture was the key to his overcoming. Jesus always followed Scripture. Our belief is part of this 40-day fast and the isolation from others was to make sure he solidified in his mind what his guidelines were—going over again and again in his perfect mind all the prophecies that told him what he was to do.

From a practical standpoint,  
What can fasting do for us?

Fasting can help us maintain an unrelenting focus on our ONLY highest objective!



**The final attack was for Jesus to fulfill Satan's own desire to be like the Most High:**  
**Matthew 4:8–11:** *8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to him, All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me. 10 Then Jesus said to him, Go, Satan! For it is written, YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY. 11 Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him.*

Jesus' answer was, *GO, Satan!* What was his reason? Not, *because I said so*, but, *For it is written YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY!* You, Satan, are *NOT* the Lord God Almighty. You do not fit into the scriptural picture, the scriptural perspective or the scriptural direction in which I am going.



Jesus took this time and physical difficulty—this self-inflicted difficulty of fasting—and used it to draw himself as close as possible to his heavenly Father so he could do His will.



**What can fasting do for us? Fasting can help us maintain an unrelenting focus on our ONLY highest objective!**

Previously, we suggested it would help us reset our priorities, but we then need to maintain the reset in order to be spiritually effective. For us, it is reset and maintain. For Jesus, it was review the setting and then maintain. He did not need to “reset” anything.





## Is Jesus' example showing us that we are to fast in the same way as those in the Old Testament?

Fasting was, and is, part of the Jewish culture. We saw how national fasting was required one day a year, and sometimes public fasts were proclaimed to ask for God's help or forgiveness. In time of need or grief, individuals privately fasted. However, by Jesus' day it was apparent that many people looked upon fasting as a sign of piety, to be noticed by others and admired. Jesus spoke against this fasting "for show" in **Matthew 6:16-18**.

Jesus spoke of how the reasons for fasting were changing, especially in relation to the Old Testament model.

### He was speaking to the disciples of John the Baptist:

**Matthew 9:14-15:** *14 Then the disciples of John came to him, asking, Why do we and the Pharisees fast <3522>, but your disciples do not fast <3522>?*

John the Baptist was in prison at this time, so his disciples were likely fasting as a sign of mourning. Jesus gives John's followers a very unusual answer.

*15 And Jesus said to them, The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast <3522>.*

In **John 3:29**, John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the *bridegroom*. When the bridegroom is around, it's a joyful time for feasting, not fasting. When he is with them, all is well.

After centuries of trying and failing to keep the Law, a *new and living way* (**Hebrews 10:20**) was being opened. Jesus was about to die and pay the ransom for Adam's sin, redeeming the whole world of mankind. But this meant an end to the Law Covenant. Justification to life was no longer to be sought by performing works or following formalities. It would come through faith in Jesus' sacrifice. This is a paradigm shift!



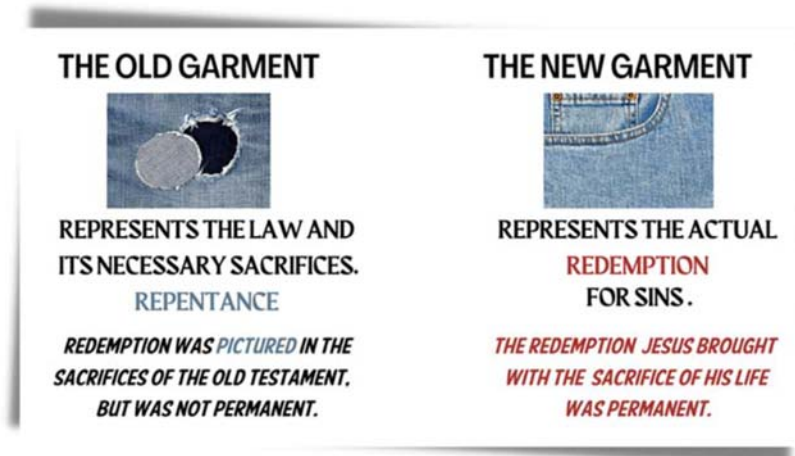
Jesus' answer has lifted the Law's mandatory fasting requirements. However, he absolutely leaves room for fasting to continue for his followers. We will suggest that this Christian fasting will be a much smaller focus and more centered around disciplining ourselves towards living God's will.

Fasting in the Old Testament was more of either a ritual or a response to circumstances. Christian fasting is more about coming from within than reacting to what's happening around us. So, is Jesus saying, Yes, Christians are going to regularly fast? He didn't exactly say that. What he said was, *My followers will fast when I am not here*. Is he expecting his followers to go back to the rituals of the Law? We don't think so. We think he is showing his disciples a higher level of fasting. We can get the sense of this answer by looking at the very next verses.

**Jesus next tells three parables. We will look at two:**

**Matthew 9:16–17:** *16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. 17 Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.*

What does all this mean? The old system under the Law could not contain the new doctrinal truths of the gospel. Why? Because the new system operates under a banner of love and grace, while the old system was a banner of works. The required, repeated sacrifices of the old way couldn't stop mankind from dying. The redemption Jesus brought with the one-time sacrifice of his life for all mankind will be permanent. This is a new garment, and new wine in a new wineskin.



We went into these parables in great detail in Episode #1243: “Am I Putting New Wine in an Old Wineskin?”

Some of the Jews of that time perhaps wanted to put a “**patch**” on their faith by **keeping the Law but accepting some of the teachings of Jesus**. But this couldn't make them whole. The “patched” garment wouldn't justify them; they needed to completely “clothe [them]selves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14).


Likewise, the “**new wine**” was the **doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus' blood**. Attempting to receive this new faith into a heart structured by belief in the Jewish Law would not be workable.

Complete faith in Jesus depended on the recipient recognizing that he/she could not keep the Law and therefore the Law was not able to give them eternal life. Each believer needed to **accept Jesus as God's gift of redemption replacing the demands of the Law**.

Remember, he speaks these parables RIGHT AFTER he says, *But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.* His very next words are basically, *but what I am showing you is different than what you have ever seen*—they could not “patch” the old garment of the Law, by believing in the new way and living with the old rituals. The old, rotten fabric would not support the “patch”—the new Christian beliefs—without tearing.

We need to understand the context of what Jesus is saying about this new way.

FASTING AND OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES:



Christian fasting is in no way a ritual,  
instead it is a tool of focus.

Jesus showed us that his own fasting at the beginning of his ministry was to help him better condition his mind towards the instinctive God-honoring principles he needed to absorb to be perfectly faithful to his mission.

Seeing Jesus in action always helps us understand what we need to do. Listening to what he taught shows us how to do it!

As usual, Jesus paved the way for us to understand where fasting fits into our Christian lives. What are the “dos” and “don’ts” of Christian fasting?

Not only did Jesus give us a personal example of fasting, he also taught us in very straightforward terms how Christian fasting would be clearly distinguished from the fasting of the Jews of his day. While these next lessons may seem simple, they remind us of the necessity to be sincere, humble and teachable as we follow in his footsteps.

We can’t help but compare Christian fasting to Christian tithing. Both are based on the Old Testament Law but are *not required or expected* of Christians even though as principles, they can be good and righteous.

Tithing for the Jews was a prescribed ritual. It was to teach the principle of giving to support the priests who served them (and in turn, the priests were also required to tithe). It was a great principle, but for the Christian, it is a principle, not a rule. Christian giving is not in accordance with a percentage with someone holding the parishioner accountable to donate a certain amount. This is not scripturally appropriate.

## LET'S LOOK AT SOME FASTING'S **DO**S AND **DO**N'TS!

We begin this examination with a clear reprimand to the Jewish people about what became their own twisted use of fasting.

### First, the problem:

**Isaiah 58:1-7:** (NLT) *1 Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! 2 Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. 3 We have fasted before you! they say. Why aren't you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don't even notice it...*

They are whining—we have been very hard on ourselves by fasting and You don't even notice! Look at how self-sacrificing we are before you, O holy God! Isaiah is talking about them putting on a show. We see the problem given to us through God's own words.

### God's response to the problem:

*...I will tell you why! I respond. It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. 4 What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with Me. 5 You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the LORD?*

We definitely would not want to be on the receiving end of this! We just don't want to have somebody say, *You call this fasting and you think that you're pleasing God Almighty with those actions?* They were physically doing what was required. They were “checking off the boxes” that went with the outward show of fasting:

- Don't eat
- Dress in sackcloth and ashes
- Be humble when proclaiming your sacrifice to others

### But they missed the point! God's reframes what He expects from proper fasting:

*6 No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. 7 Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.*

God is telling them that fasting before Him must come from the inside out. Yes, fasting is not eating food and dressing in sackcloth and ashes. However, if the inside—the heart—is not in harmony with the outside action, it doesn't mean anything to God. This was a huge lesson for the Jewish nation, and we are going to carry its principles over to the New Testament.

Denial of the flesh through fasting and to sit in sackcloth and ashes (which was the custom) without a true heart transformation doesn't impress God.

## Why was fasting in the Old Testament so often linked to sackcloth and ashes?



Sackcloth and ashes were an outward expression of grief and penance. Not eating and being in a physically uncomfortable position was an outward show that they were troubled.

It is not supposed to be, *Let's do this because God said to and then He will bless us!* This was the problem. They took what should have been transformational and made it sensational. They made it into something that impressed outside onlookers. It was important for self-denial like fasting to be accompanied by a true heart transformation.

Let's take this principle from the Old Testament and fast forward to the New Testament.

## LET'S LOOK AT SOME FASTING'S S AND DON'TS!

Question: Should I let everyone know I'm fasting, especially if it's for good spiritual reasons? Maybe I can encourage others that way.



**Don't fast in a way noticeable to others.**

**Fasting is NOT a tool for use in public witnessing:**

**Matthew 6:16:** *16 Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

Fasting isn't to impress others or to make them feel "less than." The Pharisees were all about fasting to make themselves look more pious.



**Do fast privately.**

**In so doing, fasting becomes a tool that can draw us closer to our heavenly Father:**

**Matthew 6:17-18:** *17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

So, don't make a big deal of it. Look normal. Keep it to yourself. This isn't a public show but an internal way to set aside the time and energy it takes to plan and prepare and eat and clean up, to instead focus on our connection with God.

Question: How long should a fast, especially one involving food, last?

This is subjective. What are we physically capable of? The New Testament does not give an answer. In the Old Testament, the ritual fast of the Day of Atonement was for one day. We are not to fast for the sake of fasting or following a ritual. If we fast, it should be for the sake of aligning ourselves with our heavenly Father by reducing outside distraction and increasing focus on our Father.

We need to be careful when considering a fast of several days or weeks, as it could be physically dangerous. God is NOT telling us in any way to put ourselves in physical danger by fasting.



**Don't fast as a sign of spiritual maturity.**

**This implies trying to earn our worth before God:**

**Matthew 6:19:** *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.*

**This reminds us of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican:**

**Luke 18:11–12:** *11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank you that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast <3522> twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.*

*Even like this tax collector—such scorn! Twice a week is a lot! But if he's talking all superior like this about the tax collector, there isn't much of a transformation in his heart! So, don't use fasting as an indication that we are more spiritually advanced or accomplished than the person next to us.*

Fasting isn't, *Look at ME! See how I'm fasting.* Fasting is about looking up to our heavenly Father. The fast is useless if we make it about us.



**Do fast as a method of personal communion with God.**

**This provokes our hearts to higher loyalty:**

**Matthew 6:20–21:** *20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Fasting is good if we are doing it to internally connect our heart to God. It is quiet and personal between us and God.

**Question:** What about mandatory fasting for the Jews (like during Yom Kippur which corresponds to the old Day of Atonement) and the time of Lent for Catholics? The intent is to get the focus off of food and more on charity and mercy. This seems like a good thing, especially when your faith community does it as a group and can support each other.

The principle is good, but we want to be careful. We don't want to take the principle of inward transformation and make it a public spectacle of sorts, turning it into an outward show.

We are not shown in the Bible that fasting is connected to showing charity and mercy, but if we do engage in these practices of fasting during set times, we need to be cognizant of our motivation for the fast and put ourselves in the position of doing it as quietly as possible.



**Do fast privately for the purpose of seeing God’s will and word more clearly.**

**Matthew 6:22–23:** *22 The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

How do we *clear up your eye*? Honestly evaluate what might be disrupting or distracting from our connection to our heavenly Father. We might have a medical reason why we shouldn’t fast, like diabetes or an eating disorder. Our fast doesn’t have to be food-related.

Consider taking a fast from social media—it might be harder than skipping a few meals! How about not bringing your phone to the dinner table, fasting from complaining, online shopping, television—whatever takes up our time and blocks our spiritual growth. Instead of listening to music in the car, we might listen to an episode of Christian Questions. Redeem the time; make your moments matter!

Fasting is about setting ourselves from the inside out into a greater harmony with our heavenly Father through Christ.

These are wonderful lessons in appropriate fasting!



- *treasures on earth,*
- *treasures in heaven and now*
- *making our eyes clear.*



**Do fast as a way to maintain singlemindedness.**

**Matthew 6:24:** *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

Fasting is a relatively easy and accessible way to practice self-denial and get into the mindset of needing less. We can’t serve God and social media. We can’t serve God and bow down to peer pressure. Fasting is stopping something for a time to be clear in our direction. By using fasting or denial as a kind of “pause button,” we can consider if the way forward is right for us spiritually. Fasting is, therefore, a “Selah” moment – a time to pause and consider; reassess from the inside out.



Saul of Tarsus, the Jewish man who became the Apostle Paul, was struck with physical blindness at his conversion on the way to Damascus. He fasted for three days and nights while he grappled for enlightenment on what the Lord wanted him to do now as a Christian.

**After hearing Jesus’ voice while on the road to Damascus—Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me:**

**Acts 9:7–9:** 7 *The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*


These three days must have felt like solitary confinement, but this fasting was a stepping stone for him to meet, receive and be guided by Ananias. It makes sense that, as a Jewish Pharisee, he would fast, especially after such a dramatic event.

This was a huge turning point in Christianity. To have this leader in trying to stop the early Christian movement suddenly become one of the key faces of it was the ultimate paradigm shift for the early church—and for Paul! It was good to regroup and do nothing but sit in the dark for three days to find clarity and come to grips with what he had done against the Christians.

In relation to the teachings of Jesus, we can see how they were all working in Paul during this time of darkness and fasting:

- ❖ *Not storing up treasures on earth*—there are no more earthly ambitions of trapping Christians and persecuting them to “purify” the Jewish faith.
- ❖ *If the eye as the lamp of the body is not clear, we cannot see spiritually*—Paul physically lost his sight so that when Ananias came to heal and baptize him, he would have new “sight.” He would find new *treasures in heaven*.

FASTING AND OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES:



The DON'TS of Christian fasting are in many ways similar to the DON'TS of Jewish fasting. However, the DO'S of Christian fasting are narrower in focus.

Our fasts should be laser-focused on the development of our loyalty and discipline towards walking in the narrow path of Jesus' own footsteps.

MIRROR  
QUESTION

Do I really walk in Jesus' footsteps to this degree?  
Does fasting fit or not fit into my walk?



It is painfully obvious that fasting, whether in a Jewish or Christian environment, is never something to be trifled with!



## What other practical examples do we have in the New Testament that help us grasp the practicality of Christian fasting?

When we talked about Jesus' example of fasting, we learned three broad lessons:

- Fasting helps to reset our priorities to our highest objective.
- Fasting keeps our hearts and minds clear and humble.
- Fasting can bring an unrelenting focus on “God first”—our highest objective.

Now let's look for some narrower objectives we can achieve through Christian fasting.



### Is fasting an important part of casting out demons?



The New Testament does not say it is important. Some point to texts in Matthew and Mark about an exceptionally strong demon. A man brought his afflicted son to the disciples of Jesus, but they couldn't cast out the demon. He then brought the boy to Jesus, who sent the demon away. His disciples ask why it didn't work for them, and Jesus teaches them about having faith.

📖 In the King James Version, **Mark 9:29** ends like this: *And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and **fasting** <3521>.*

📖 But let's read the same verse in the New American Standard Bible:

**Mark 9:29:** *And he said to them, This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer. (Fasting disappeared!)*

Fasting disappeared because the word “fasting” here is not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts, so it is omitted from modern translations. The King James Version was published in 1611, before many older (and therefore thought to be more reliable) manuscripts were discovered. There are fewer variations among the oldest manuscripts than the later manuscripts.

### The King James Version copied the concept from Mark 9:29 and added it to the parallel account in Matthew:

**Matthew 17:21:** (KJV) *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and **fasting** <3521>.*

In modern translations, this entire verse 21 is missing—skipping from verse 20 to 22. We call that “spurious,” meaning it is not in the oldest manuscripts and therefore it was added later and is not valid. In the New Testament, fasting was not a part of casting out demons. Fasting was added to the Bible several centuries after the older accounts.

From a practical standpoint,  
What can fasting do for us?

fasting can be a solemn tool of commitment of our specific actions to God.



**The appointing of Barnabas and Saul for the missionary work is one of the few New Testament examples of actual fasting in action:**

**Acts 13:1–3:** *1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering (meaning, serving at their own expense) to the Lord and **fasting** <3522>, the holy spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. 3 Then, when they had **fasted** <3522> and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

fasting was an outward sign of an inward focus regarding a major development in this Christian church.

This is often cited by some as an example of one of the more controversial reasons for fasting. They were seeking to make a decision and it might be interpreted that they asked to be given more of the holy spirit—God’s power and influence—to help with that decision. Here they fasted as a group and the holy spirit guided them to make a decision to set apart these two men for their first missionary journey. Back in the Old Testament, when Daniel fasted, an angel of the Lord appeared to strengthen him. We talked about Anna fasting and she got to see the Messiah.



**Should we expect miraculous answers to our problems, or, on the other end of the spectrum, maybe just some clarity, which would possibly involve the influence of God’s spirit? How does the granting of God’s spirit fit into this fasting?**



We should not expect some kind of miraculous answer. The church at Antioch knew they were supposed to expand the preaching of the gospel beyond where it currently was. They were laboring over this question of how best to do this. They continued in a fasting and prayerful mode as they chose Paul and Barnabas to go forth and expand the work in a way it had never been done before. God’s spirit directed them to the answer.

Fasting was for the purpose of getting their own prejudices, thoughts and worries out of the way so they could gain clarity of who God’s spirit was pointing them towards. It was nothing miraculous, but they used fasting to improve their focus and put aside their own wills.

Even if a dedicated Christian does have a holy heart condition, that does not mean God will exercise His power to answer that prayer in a way we can detect. Prayer and fasting are not a formula to prompt God to exercise His power. Obedience results in answered prayer if we pray according to His will.

From a practical standpoint,  
What can fasting do for us?

Fasting can be an outward manifestation of our inward commitment of others to God's care.

Later, in the book of Acts, Paul and Barnabas were appointing elders in the churches.

Ironically after having persecuted Christians for so long and so effectively, Paul himself was persecuted for being a Christian. In **Acts 14:19**, Paul is in the village of Lystra and Jews traveled from other cities and tried to stone him, but that didn't stop Paul.



**Acts 14:19–23:** *19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

Here the disciples were doing important work, but their troubles were just beginning. Paul and Barnabas are preparing them for the persecution and hard trials ahead, as they have to leave this city soon after this event.

*23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with **fasting** <3521>, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

Prayer and fasting was an expression of trusting in the Lord's providence. Those who established these early churches in these areas needed to move on. These fledgling churches left behind would be on their own except for receiving infrequent letters.

Fasting and praying focused them on these massive steps that had never happened before. Paul and Barnabas guided the brethren to elect elders in every church, and then with prayer and fasting for the Lord to guide these new endeavors, they walked away, knowing that these churches were now in the hands of God. They couldn't have Zoom meetings from the next city; they couldn't text one another for instant answers. They were going to be separated. Each church was just getting started, and Paul and Barnabas had to put the congregation's spiritual welfare into the hands of those who had never carried it before.

Of course they were going to pray and fast! It was such a big occasion in their lives and shows us how sincerely they held onto the principles of godliness and righteousness.

## Q Why is fasting so often linked with prayer?




Fasting and prayer set our inward heart toward outwardly finding and following the will of God. Prayer opens ourselves to God; fasting empties us of everything else so we can be better stewards of what we have been given.


Fasting without prayer is just a diet!

Are we instructed to have fasting play a role in our marriage relationships?

Not specifically:

 **1 Corinthians 7:5:** (KJV) *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to **fasting** <3521> and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.*

Let's look at this verse again in the New American Standard Bible:

 **1 Corinthians 7:5:** *Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

Fasting disappeared again because it wasn't in those earlier (closer to the original writings) manuscripts. It wasn't part of the accurate translation and understanding of the holy Scriptures. This verse is about the sexual relationship between husband and wife.

The Apostle Paul warns that any times of abstinence are to be in the context of sensibility. Do not stop marital relations to an extreme, just like fasting with food. God does not want us to fast or be abstinent within marriage to an extreme. We are to be careful to nurture and honor one another.

We will include more of these spurious fasting examples in the **Bonus Material**.

## Q Why do so many of the fasting examples in the New Testament seem to be added in later by the copyists or translators?



In preparation for this study, we were surprised by how many of the fasting references in the New Testament were added later. We think that because it was such an integral part of Old Testament culture, it spilled over into the New Testament. When people mourned, they fasted. When they prayed, they fasted. When they had a deep question, they fasted. Perhaps the copyists and translators assumed that with these things would naturally come fasting.

## FASTING AND OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES:



Once we carefully omit the several uses of fasting that were not in the most reliable manuscripts, we are left with Jesus referring to fasting twice in relation to his followers and three instances of Christian fasting written after Jesus went to heaven.

This tells us that fasting was not an absolutely central New Testament teaching and was only exemplified in church-altering matters.

What do we do now? We can take the powerful principle of fasting and liberally apply it to our lives. We can temporarily remove what is convenient, easy and comfortable in order to refocus our hearts on that which is higher, more noble—definitely more elusive—and sacrificial. Fasting can be a wonderful way to refocus our loyalty to our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus!

We have seen how fasting in the New Testament is not nearly as common as we may have thought, but we can still take the principles of the Old Testament and apply them to the practicality of the New Testament.

While we are not required to fast, we can make a personal decision when it's appropriate. Fast in an appropriate way, do it quietly, do it privately and do it for the reason of bringing your heart away from the distractions of the world in order to focus on how you serve your heavenly Father and walk in the footsteps of Jesus. This is what Christian fasting leads us to.

**So, should Christians fast?**

**For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...**

**...Think about it!**

*All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.*



## Next episode

Episode 1334:  
Are Monitoring Spirits Watching Us?



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Text CQREWIND to 22828

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### Bonus Material and Study Questions

#### Recommended additional study:

**Ep.1243: Am I Putting New Wine in an Old Wineskin?**

*Three parables to help us stretch with the Christian development required of us*

<https://christianquestions.com/parables/1243-wineskins/>

**Ep.1151: Has the Bible Been Mistranslated and Misunderstood? (Part I)**

*Discovering and authenticating how the Bible came to be*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1151-bible-authenticity/>

**Ep. 1040: Do Tithes and Offerings Belong in Christianity?**

*Understanding tithing and establishing Christian giving*

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1040-tithes-offerings/>



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

- **What is self-control?**  
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/what-is-self-control/>
- **What happened on the road to Damascus?**  
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/road-to-damascus/>
- **What was the purpose of the Jewish Law?**  
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/what-was-the-purpose-of-the-law/>
- **Did Jesus ever do anything wrong? (Satan tempts Jesus)**  
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/video-cq-kids-did-jesus-ever-do-anything-wrong/>

### Old Testament examples:

*Fasting was a way to present a profound and immediate life and death need before God.*

#### **With the lives of the Jewish people hanging in the balance, Mordechai and Esther proclaim a fast:**

**Esther 4:1–3:** *1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. 2 He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. 3 In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.*

**Esther 4:15–16:** *15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.*

*Fasting by a Pagan people as a demonstration of repentance for sin and humility before God.*

#### **All of Nineveh fasting before God in repentance as a result of the preaching of Jonah:**

**Jonah 3:5–10:** *5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish. 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.*

#### **Exhaustive word study on the three New Testament words for fasting:**

**Fast:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance root word #3523 *nestis*; from the inseparable negative particle *νη-* *ne-* (not) and #2068; NOUN  
not eating, i.e. abstinent from food (religiously)

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: fasting, not having eaten

**Matthew 15:32:** (KJV) *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away **fasting** <3523>, lest they faint in the way.*

**Mark 8:3:** (KJV) *And if I send them away **fasting** <3523> to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.*

**Fast:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3522 *nesteuo*; from 3523; VERB to abstain from food (religiously)

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to abstain as a religious exercise from food and drink: either entirely, if the fast lasted but a single day, or from customary and choice nourishment, if it continued several days

**All uses in the King James Version:**

**Matthew 4:2:** *And when he had **fasted** <3522> forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.*

**Matthew 6:16:** *Moreover when ye **fast** <3522>, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to **fast** <3522>. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.*

**Matthew 6:17:** *But thou, when thou **fastest** <3522>, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;*

**Matthew 6:18:** *That thou appear not unto men to **fast** <3522>, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*

**Matthew 9:14:** *Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees **fast** <3522> oft, but thy disciples **fast** <3522> not?*

**Matthew 9:15:** *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber 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** <3522>.*

**Mark 2:18:** *And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to **fast** <3522>: and they come and say unto him, Why **do** <3522> the disciples of John and of the Pharisees **fast** <3522>, but thy disciples **fast** <3522> not?*

**Mark 2:19:** *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber **fast** <3522>, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot **fast** <3522>.*

**Mark 2:20:** *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they **fast** <3522> in those days.*

**Luke 5:33:** *And they said unto him, Why **do** <3522> the disciples of John **fast** <3522> often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?*

**Luke 5:34:** *And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber **fast** <3522>, while the bridegroom is with them?*

**Luke 5:35:** *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they **fast** <3522> in those days.*

**Luke 18:12:** *I **fast** <3522> twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

**Acts 10:30:** *And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was **fasting** <3522> until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, (Fasting is omitted in early manuscripts and is therefore considered spurious.)*



**Acts 13:2:** *As they ministered to the Lord, and **fasted** <3522>, the holy spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

**Acts 13:3:** *And when they had **fasted** <3522> and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

**Fasting:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3521 *nesteia*; from 3522; NOUN  
 abstinence (from lack of food, or voluntary and religious); specifically,  
 the fast of the Day of Atonement:

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) a fasting, fast  
 1a) a voluntary, as a religious exercise 1a1) of private fasting 1a2) the public fast as  
 prescribed by the Mosaic Law and kept yearly on the great day of atonement, the tenth of  
 the month of Tisri (the month Tisri comprises a part of our September and October); the  
 fast accordingly, occurred in the autumn when navigation was usually dangerous on  
 account of storms 1b) a fasting caused by want or poverty

**All uses in the King James Version:**

**Matthew 17:21:** *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and **fasting** <3521>. (Fasting is omitted in early manuscripts and is therefore considered spurious.)*

**Mark 9:29:** *And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and **fasting** <3521>. (“and fasting” is omitted in early manuscripts and is therefore considered spurious.)*

**Luke 2:37:** *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with **fastings** <3521> and prayers night and day.*

**Acts 14:23:** *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with **fasting** <3521>, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

**Acts 27:9:** *Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the **fast** <3521> was now already past, Paul admonished them,*

**1 Corinthians 7:5:** *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to **fasting** <3521> and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. (Fasting is omitted in early manuscripts and is therefore considered spurious.)*

**2 Corinthians 6:5:** *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in **fastings** <3521>; (not voluntary)*

**2 Corinthians 11:27:** *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in **fastings** <3521> often, in cold and nakedness. (not voluntary)*

**Three texts that use “eat or drink” meaning a fast of sorts:**

**Acts 9:9:** *And he was three days without sight, and neither did **eat nor drink**.*

**Acts 23:12:** *And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither **eat nor drink** till they had killed Paul.*

**Acts 23:21:** *But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither **eat nor drink** till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.*

# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep.1333: Should Christians Fast?

See:  CQ Rewind  
SHOW NOTES

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1333-fasting/>

1. What is the definition of fasting? What does it involve? Is it always just about food? Is it a common practice among American Christians? Among other faiths? (Use Bonus Material and information on page 3 of CQ Rewind Show Notes)
2. Why did people in the Bible fast? Please be thorough in your descriptions: (Leviticus 16:29-31, Nehemiah 1:3-4, 2 Samuel 1:11-12, Luke 2:36-38, Matthew 15:32, 2 Corinthians 6:4-6, Daniel 6:16-19)
3. How did fasting affect Jesus physically? In what way did Satan seek to take advantage of this? Is this a warning to us about extended fasting? Jesus was able to use fasting in what way to counter Satan's three attacks of temptation? Please give Jesus' answer and the "Fasting can help" comments. (Matthew 4:3-4, Matthew 4:5-7, Matthew 4:8-11)
4. Why didn't Jesus' disciples fast like those of John the Baptist? Why were the rituals of the Law (like fasting) no longer applicable for Christians? How would the focus of fasting differ for Christians under Jesus compared to Jews under the Law? How can fasting be a tool, especially for Christians? (Matthew 6:16-18, 9:14-15, John 3:29, Hebrews 10:20)
5. Explain the Parables of the New Patch on the Old Garment, and the New Wine in an Old Wineskin. How did this apply to the Jewish Christians in the early church? (Matthew 9:16-17)
6. What was God angry about in Isaiah 58:1-7? What lessons can we take from this? What was the problem? (verses 1-3a) What was God's response to the problem? (verses 3b-5) How did God reframe what He expects from Israel? (verses 6-7)
7. Discuss the "do's and don'ts" of fasting. Be thorough and cite scriptures to prove your points. What does Jesus say about storing treasure? How do we *clear up our eyes*? What are different kinds of fasting? (Matthew 6:16-24, Luke 18:11-12)
8. Are you walking in Jesus' footsteps by storing your "treasures" in heavenly aspirations rather than earthly? Is your eye "clear"? How does the concept of fasting fit into your life?
9. Why did Saul (the Apostle Paul) fast for three days? What might Paul have considered during his fast? How did the teachings of Jesus work in Paul? What should the focus be of Christian fasting? (Acts 9:7-9)
10. How can you use fasting in your life to focus your spiritual concentration? In what way would you fast?