

Prayer and Fasting (Part 2)

An Introduction to Christian Fasting

What is fasting?

- “Abstinence from food or drink or both for health, ritualistic, religious, or ethical purposes.” - Britannica
- “Fasting is a temporary renunciation of something that is in itself good, like food, in order to intensify our expression of need for something greater — namely, God and his work in our lives.” - John Piper

Some Non-Christian Forms of Fasting

- Fasting is a universal religious practice.
- Fasting can be a form of protest or used as a political weapon.
- Fasting can be part of a health regimen/dietary plan.

Why didn't Jesus' disciples fast?

“14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ 15 And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. 17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.’” - Matthew 9:14-17

Arguments Against Fasting

- Some argue that the time when the bridegroom was taken away was the three days of Jesus' death, so that was the time that Jesus meant that “they will fast.” Fasting is part of the old wineskins that must be replaced.
- The New Testament letters are virtually silent on the topic of fasting. It could even be argued that Paul discourages the idea of fasting.
 - “3 who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” - 1 Tim. 4:3-5

Arguments For Fasting

- The time that the bridegroom is away is while we wait for Jesus' return. Jesus expects His Church will fast during this time.
- Jesus explains that His disciples must fast in a way that is different from previous forms.

Distinctives of Christian Fasting

Christian Fasting is Different from OT Fasting (New Wineskins)

- “[T]he yearning and longing and ache of the old fast-ing was not based on the glorious truth that the Messiah had come. The mourning over sin and the yearning for deliverance from danger and the longing for God that inspired the old fasting were not based on the great finished work of the Redeemer and the great revelation of his truth and grace in history. These things were all still in the future. But now the Bridegroom has come.”
- “What then is new about the new Christian fasting? What’s new about Christian fasting is that it rests on all this finished work of the Bride-groom. It assumes that. It believes that. It enjoys that. The aching and yearning and longing for Christ and his power that drive us to fasting are not the expression of emptiness. Need, yes. Pain, yes. Hunger for God, yes. But not emptiness. The firstfruits of what we long for have already come. The down payment of what we yearn for is already paid. The fullness that we are longing for and fasting for has appeared in history, and we have beheld his glory. It is not merely future. We do not fast out of emptiness.”
- John Piper

Christian Fasting isn’t Asceticism or Merely an Exercise of Willpower

- God created food and it is meant to be received with thanksgiving. (1 Tim. 4:3-4)
- “20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” - Col. 2:20-23
- Self-control is good and necessary, but it is not truly produced by our own power, but is a fruit of the Spirit’s work in our lives. (Gal. 5:22-23)

The Essence of Christian Fasting

- “This is the essence of Christian fasting: We ache and yearn—and fast—to know more and more of all that God is for us in Jesus. But only because he has already laid hold of us and is drawing us ever forward and upward into ‘all the fullness of God.’” - John Piper