

Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: When Nothing Else Works! Matthew 17:14-21

Fasting means eating little or no food, either from necessity or by choice. In medicine, fasting means flushing unhealthy substances out of the body by restricting food.

Spiritual fasting, on the other hand, means more than just reducing the amount of food one eats. It also means cutting down on the activities one does and replacing these with prayer and meditation on spiritual concerns. The New Testament word that is translated “fasting” literally means one who has not eaten, one who is empty.

Three types of fast are generally recognized:

1. normal, in which there is no food for a period of time, though there may be liquids;
2. partial, in which the diet is limited, though some food is allowed; and
3. absolute, in which no foods or liquids are taken into the body in any way.

In the Old Testament the fast was thought of as a way of renouncing oneself and as a way of reducing God’s anger, moving him to forgiveness. In times of emergency, the people fasted to persuade God to spare them from calamity (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:9; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Jeremiah 36:6, 9). Individual people fasted in the hope that God would save them from trouble (2 Samuel 12:16-20; 1 Kings 21:27; Psalms 35:13; 69:10). Prayer was a part of fasting (Ezra 8:21; Nehemiah 1:4; Jeremiah 14:12).

Regular fasts usually lasted one day, morning to evening, with food permitted at night (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 14:24; 2 Samuel 1:12), although there are reports of longer fasts, such as Mordecai’s call for a three-day fast (night and day specified-Esther 4:16) and the seven-day fast at Saul’s death (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 3:35). Special fasts included Moses’ forty days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28) and Daniel’s three-week fast prior to receiving visions (Daniel 9:3; 10:3, 12).

Fasting was often abused during Old Testament times. It was often done insincerely and as a way of showing off; rather than fasting for God, people fasted so that they would seem pious and spiritual. The prophets cry out against this kind of fasting, as in Jeremiah, in which the Lord says “Though they fast, I will not hear their cry” (Jeremiah 14:12, RSV; see Isaiah 58:1-10).

During the time between the Old and New Testaments, a great tradition grew up around the practice of fasting. People confirmed vows by fasting; remorse and penitence were accompanied by fasting; and prayer was supported by fasting. Special fast days were observed, some voluntarily imposed. In the opinion of many rabbis, fasting was the primary way to demonstrate one’s piety. Those who fasted often wore mournful expressions on their faces, and the mood of fasting was one of gloom.

Jesus' words about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount illustrate a totally different approach to fasting than the one taken by many teachers who lived at the same time. Jesus condemns the type of fasting that seeks to impress people. He gives it a new meaning: Fasting is service to God. This new meaning is part of Jesus' message of hope and salvation. The Bridegroom (Jesus) is here. It is a time of joy, not of sorrow. The coming of the Messiah has broken the power of the evil age. This means that fasting is inconsistent with the joy and happiness of the new age that Christ has brought, but because the kingdom of God is not fully realized-has not completely arrived here on earth-there is still a place for a certain kind of fasting. It should be a part of prayer, and we should fast in the same way that we pray: with quietness before God, not trying to show off, grateful and thankful, grounded in faith, hoping to grow spiritually.

FASTING- Once that the principle is acted on, "he that eateth eateth to the Lord, and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not" (Rom 14:6), and "meat commendeth us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse" (1 Cor 8:8), **fasting and eating are put in their true place, as means not ends.**

Ignorance creates bondage and lack of Christian liberty.

FASTING NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR THE RIGHT REASONS.

Fasting-going without food in order to spend time in prayer-is noble and difficult. It gives us time to pray, teaches self-discipline, reminds us that we can live with a lot less, and helps us appreciate God's gifts. Jesus was not condemning fasting, but hypocrisy-fasting in order to gain public approval. Fasting was mandatory for the Jewish people once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:32). The Pharisees voluntarily fasted twice a week to impress the people with their "holiness." Jesus commended acts of self-sacrifice done quietly and sincerely. He wanted people to adopt spiritual disciplines for the right reasons, not from a selfish desire for praise.

There are now 28 yearly fasts in the Jewish calendar. Daniel's (Dan 10:3) mode of fasting was, "I ate no pleasant bread," i.e. "I ate unleavened bread, even the bread of affliction" (Deut 16:3), "neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth." In Matt 9:14 "fast" is explained by "mourn" in Matt 9:15, so that fasting was but an outward expression of mourning (Ps 69:10), not meritorious, nor sanctifying in itself. A mark of the apostasy is "commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim 4:3). The "neglecting (not sparing) of the body," while seeming to deny self, really tends "to the satisfying of (satiating to repletion) the flesh." Ordinances of "will worship" gratify the flesh (self) while seeming to mortify it; for "self crowned with thorns in the cloister is as selfish as self crowned with ivy in the revel" (Col 2:18-23).

FASTS

4. In the New Testament the only reference to the Jewish fasts are the mention of "the fast" in Acts 27:9 (generally understood to denote the day of atonement) and the allusions to the weekly fasts. Matt 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 18:12; Acts 10:30. These fasts originated some time after the captivity.

5. The Jewish fasts were observed with various degrees of strictness. Sometimes there was entire abstinence from food. Est 4:16, etc. On other occasions there appears to have been only a restriction to a very plain diet. Dan 10:3. Those who fasted frequently dressed in sackcloth or rent their clothes, put ashes on their head and went barefoot. 1 Kings 21:27; Neh 9:1; Ps 35:13.

6. The sacrifice of the personal will, which gives to fasting all its value, is expressed in the old term used in the law, afflicting the soul.

Do you long for intimacy with God? Do you desire to feel His presence, to hear His voice, to sense His pleasure? If drawing near to God is the desire of your heart, then fasting is a part of you achieving that goal.

Since ancient times, fasting has been considered an essential means of Deeping one's faith and connection with God. But in recent years it has become increasingly rare and often misunderstood practice. The Bible refers to fasting more than fifty times in scripture.

- Matthew 6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
- Matt 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 expected of His followers when it came to fasting, but did He ever observe this practice Himself?

- Matt 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.

There is a need for honor in the Church: Malachi 1:6 A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?"

As the Old Testament closed God spoke to His people through the prophet Malachi. Dreadful days were about to come on the nation of Israel. It would be a time when there would not be a word from God a time of silence. What cause that time to come? Scholars believe that a period of approximately 400 years existed between the close of Malachi and the opening of Matthew. The question was asked how are we dishonoring you?

The people had **ignored His laws of sacrifice, giving God the worst gift and keeping the best. God judged the nation for dishonoring Him through their selfish disobedience.**

God asks the church today, where is my honor? Where is God's honor in the conflicts over power in the church? Where is God's honor when the church and its minister cannot work together? Where is God's honor when we don't give Him our best? Where is my honor when there are broken relationships in the church? The church has forgotten what God called us to be. Jesus prayed, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and thou hast loved me. St. John 17:23. Jesus' prayer for the church today is that it will demonstrate the glory of God by unity of purpose and spirit. Church conflicts don't honor God. Individual disobedience in our Christians lives dishonors God. When we do not treat the ministers God has given the church with honor, how can we say we honor God?

Our lesson starts out with Jesus coming back from the mountain where He was Transfigured before their very eyes. Peter, James & John had never seen anything like this before! But as Jesus comes down from the mountain full of glory, He is hit with a problem. Your disciples were not able to cast out the Devil in my son? The nine disciples wanted to know why they were not able to and Jesus responded by saying this kind come out only prayer and fasting.

I. What is Fasting?

Abstinence from food and/or drink as an element of private or public religious devotion. Fasting is nowhere commanded in the Torah and, in fact, is never attested earlier than the time of the judges of Israel

- Judges 20:26 Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. ²⁷ And the Israelites inquired of the LORD. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, ²⁸ with Finneas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministering before it.) They asked, "Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother, or not?" The LORD responded, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands."

The fact that Jesus and the disciples sanctioned it by their own example, however, is sufficient justification for its practice in biblical times and, in fact, in modern times as well.

- Matt 4:2 (After **fasting** forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.)
- Acts 13:2-3 (While they were worshipping the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

II. Afflictions: Isaiah 58: 3-6

The real fast is the sacrifice of the personal will, which is meant by the term afflicting the soul.

- ISA 58:3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your **fasting**, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.
- ISA 58:4 Your **fasting** ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.
- ISA 58:5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

- ISA 58:6 "Is not this the kind of **fasting** I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"
- Psalms 35:13 yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered,

Isa 58:9-14

- Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;
- 10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:
- 11 And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.
- 12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.
- 13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:
- 14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.
- Daniel 6:18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

The purpose of fasting is never explicitly stated in Scripture but its connection to penitence, mourning, and supplication suggests a self-denial that opens one to God and to the immaterial aspects of life. Inasmuch as food and drink typify life in the flesh and all its demands and satisfactions, their absence or rejection speaks to the reality of a higher dimension, one in which the things of the spirit predominate. The theology of fasting, then, is a theology of priorities in which believers are given the opportunity to express themselves in an undivided and intensive devotion to the Lord and to the concerns of the spiritual life.