

Matthew 6:16-18

Should Christians Fast Today?

Introduction:

Our Lord Jesus mentions three areas of worship in the Christians life; almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The first two make common sense and we are familiar with them, putting them both into practice, but the third one, fasting, seems unnecessary to most people. For one it's not fully understood and in most case is seldom practiced. Yet the Scripture speaks about fasting in many places and on many occasions for good and spiritual reasons. Jesus assumes that fasting would be practiced by His disciples not to manipulate God but to gain spiritual benefit and reward for the glory of God.

I. The Wrong Way To Fast – v.16

A. Definition – Abstaining from food for spiritual food.

1. Overreaction to Catholicism – “holy days”
2. Complete lack of understanding

B. Old Testament

1. Day of Atonement fast – Lev. 16:29-31
2. Private fasting – Neh. 1:4; Psa. 35:13
3. National fasting – Neh. 9:1

C. New Testament

1. Jesus disciples fasted rarely – Turn To: Matthew 9:1-17
2. Distinction between Old Covenant and New Covenant
3. The Pharisees fasted often twice a week – Luke 18:12
4. Islam's Ramadan

D. Fasting with a purpose

1. The early church sent out Paul and Barnabas on their missionary tour – Acts 13:2
2. A deliberate attempt to prove that repentance is real – I Sam.7:6
3. A call for a pagan nation to repent and believe the gospel – Jonah 3:7

E. Body, Mind and Spirit

1. The body and soul are distinct
2. The body and soul are connected

F. Fasting misinterpreted:

1. As a general physical discipline – I Cor. 9:27
2. To be something mechanical
3. To give clarity of mind

II. The Right Way to Fast – v.17-18

A. Led by the Holy Spirit – Luke 4;1; Rom. 8:14

B. Do not call attention to yourselves – v.17 (I Kings 20:38)

C. Be Natural – v.18

D. Finally – When we fast with the right motivation we will receive reward in God's time.