

What Is This Fasting About?

[Mat 6:16-18 NASB] 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. 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.

- In churches, there seems to be a feast and famine situation when it comes to the subject of fasting. This has resulted in ignorance or imbalance.
- It is important for us to look at what the Bible tells us about fasting.

What does Matthew 6:16-18 teach about fasting?

Here are four observations about fasting from Matthew 6:16-18.

I. Fasting is about food, not activities.

- A. The Greek word for fasting is νηστεύητε which is a compound word. The first part is "not". The second part is "to eat". So, fasting is not eating.
- B. This is important. Fasting is not neglecting everything. It really is about food. It can include sex (1 Cor. 7:5, some translations).
- C. Food can become a god to us. [Phl 3:18-20 NASB] 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is [their] appetite, and [whose] glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.
- D. Gluttony is a sin.
- E. Self-righteousness is a sin. Many times, false religion was more about what they ate or did not eat than about God. Acts 10, God tells Peter to rise kill, and eat. This was counter to anything he would have done.
- F. [Mat 4:4 NASB] 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.'"
- G. Within fasting, the preoccupation with food should lead us to God.

II. Fasting is about Him, not them.

- A. V. 16 – "...so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting."
- B. V. 18 – "...so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret
- C. Fasting is about honoring and seeking Him.
- D. Attitude: The real issue Jesus was dealing with was when we fast for the purpose of being seen by people. This does not mean your fast is negated when people find out you are fasting or you are part of a corporate fast, the issue is INTENT. Are you fasting to seek to know God or to seek people's praise?
- E. Action: See to it that you are praying while you fast. Take the time you would be eating and spend that time in prayer to God.

III. Fasting is about discipline, not abuse.

- A. V. 17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face
- B. The disfigurement of the face was paramount to not washing. They saw fasting as absolute neglect/abuse of the body. Yet, Jesus said anoint your head, wash your face.

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- C. “Oil does not here symbolize extravagant joy but normal body care.” (Carson) Jesus taught that they should take care of their body as they normally would.
 - D. Do not abuse the body but discipline it.
 - E. [1Co 9:23-27 NASB] 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but [only] one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then [do it] to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.
 - F. Kenneth Boa – there is a renewed call to the traditional disciplines (fasting, giving, praying, solitude, corporate worship, and service.) He says, **“Today’s Christian leaders pitch their message so low that if their members practiced the spiritual regiments they propose, it is unlikely they would be distinguishably different from their neighbors.”**
 - G. In the NT, Jesus engaged in all the spiritual practices. They are not an end in themselves, but a means to know and obey the Father. (KB)
 - H. [1Ti 4:7 NASB] 7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness
 - I. Spiritual disciplines and habits must be our responses to His Grace!
 - J. We are disciples of Jesus Christ. That means disciplined learners. A Christian is a disciplined learner of Jesus Christ.
 - K. Fasting is about being disciplined in your walk with God.
- IV. **Fasting is about receiving not earning.**
- A. V. 16 – “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” GR: μισθὸν – BDAG “pay” “wages” even if it is God Who would pay.
 - B. V. 18 – “. . . and your Father who sees [what is done] in secret will reward you.” GR: ἀποδώσει – BDAG “recompense” “reward” “restore”
 - C. Similar definitions, but different usages. The first is mere wages, the second is more about getting more than you “earned”.
 - D. [Rom 11:6 NASB] 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer based on works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.
 - E. More about receiving and abundance than earning a wage.
 - F. Japanese Culture: In the standard model, workers receive two fairly large bonuses and their regular salary, one mid-year and the other at year's end. In 1988 workers in large companies received bonuses equivalent to their pay for 1.9 months while workers in the smallest firms gained bonuses equal to 1.2 months' pay. In addition to bonuses, Japanese workers received a number of fringe benefits, such as living allowances, incentive payments, remuneration for special job conditions, allowances for good attendance, and cost-of-living allowances.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_work_environment)
 - G. American Work Culture “hours = dollars” “work = pay” no more.
 - H. As great as the American work culture is naturally, do not bring that mentality into your relationship with God.
 - I. God desires to bless you beyond what your work for Him earns.
 - J. You fast; God blesses you, your family, your finances, and your God-given dreams and goals. Your fasting connects you to His resources.
 - K. It is not about earning; it is about receiving.

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- **Fasting is/should be a normal part of Christianity as we avoid eating for the purpose of seeking God in a disciplined lifestyle while receiving an a grace-based reward.**