

What is the Perspective of the Bible on Fasting?

Services: Wednesday, March 1 at 11 & 7

Church Year: Ash Wednesday – 2017

During Lent: Wednesday Services at 11 & 7; Meals at 12 & 6

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: This sermon is for *repentant sinners*, who desire to grow up in God's Word! Today we focus on fasting; what is fasting? It means to "abstain from all or some kinds of food or drink" (Google).

Fasting ♣ is recorded in the OT and the NT, ♣ can be coupled with a serious prayer and repentance, ♣ can help us focus on God, ♣ can be helpful in seeking the will of God, and ♣ should normally be kept to ourselves.

1. **Coupled with a Very Serious Prayer:**

- a. ^{ESV} **Esther 4:1-3** When Mordecai learned all that had been done [that a date had been set when all the Jews would be exterminated], Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.... And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with **fasting** and weeping and lamenting... // When death has been commanded, *eating is no longer important!*
- b. ^{ESV} **Daniel 6:16, 18** Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of

lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” ... Then the king went to his palace and spent the night **fasting**; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. // The king was focused on Daniel *being in the den of hungry lions*; he wanted no diversions, *thus no food, etc.!*

2. **As hypocrites:** ^{ESV} **Isaiah 58:3-4, 6-8** [The people said to the LORD:] “Why have we **fasted**, and you see it not? ... [The LORD responded:] Behold, in the day of your **fast** you seek your own pleasure... Behold, you **fast** only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. **Fasting** like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.... Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness...? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him...? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.” // The LORD called for **His kind** of fasting; then, *for those who heeded His call*, He promised blessings! Let us respond by giving up sin and loving people according to their needs!

3. **Coupled with repentance:** ^{ESV} **Joel 2:12-13** “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with **fasting**, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...” // To

be away from the LORD is a *most serious matter*, so, let us *examine our hearts* and *be sorry* – even with fasting!

HYMN: LSB 560, sts. 1-2 *Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed*

4. **On the Most Important Day of the Year** (Atonement):
^{ESV} **Leviticus 16:29-30** “...on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you.” // What does it mean to “afflict yourselves”? “Included in the self-denial practice by the Israelites was a 24-hour abstention from food, drink, bathing, anointing, and sexual intercourse” (TLSB, 190). What is the most important day of the year in the NT? Hint: It’s a particular Friday!
5. **Keep it inside:** ^{ESV} **Matthew 6:16-18** “...when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **But** when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” // Fasting gains one of two possible rewards: **(1)** That others know about your fasting; **(2)** that others don’t know, which will result in a reward from your Father in heaven!
6. **With worship and prayer:** ^{ESV} **Acts 13:1-3** Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers [*five of them*].... While they were worshiping the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me

Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after **fasting** and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. // When we fast, *it can keep us more focused on the LORD!*

HYMN: LSB 560, sts. 3-4 *Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed*

7. **With important tasks:** ^{ESV} **Acts 14:19** But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When 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 that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders [*thus pastors*] for them in every church, with prayer and **fasting** they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. // Did you notice what happened? Even though Paul was left for dead – *by Jews from Antioch and Iconium*, he still returned to those cities to strengthen the believers and appoint pastors; then he prayed for their important tasks *with fasting!*

Conclusion: Let us pray: Dear Father, show us how to fast so You are honored and we are blessed! In Jesus’ name, we pray...