

Fasting

ISAIAH 58 VERSES 6-12

6 “Is not this the fast that I [God] choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 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, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 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. 9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

INFORMATION

At its simplest, fasting is abstaining from eating and usually drinking for a certain period of time. Usually, a fast will last at least one entire day. Christians in the New Testament are not commanded to fast, yet many of the apostles and disciples chose to fast regularly. Jesus also fasted. When a Christian fasts it is done for spiritual benefits, but there may also be physical benefits as well. Spiritually speaking, fasting is a way of dedicating a period of time to the Lord by denying your body and spending that time communing with God.

Notice that the verses given above do not describe the type of fasting we might usually think of. It is important to read the entire chapter of Isaiah to fully understand what God is saying, but the bottom line is that God is telling the Israelites that the way they had been fasting was unacceptable. In prior verses, we see that the Israelites were fasting just to fulfill a requirement of the law and often to be seen fasting and have people think of them as godly even though they were not.

Instead, God is telling us that fasting is not a substitute for good conduct, for loving others, for helping the poor and for executing righteous judgment. The type of fast God desires is the fasting that comes from the Holy Spirit, not from selfishness and self-centeredness. God desires that his people not only worship and love him, but that we also love and care for others. Notice also that the Lord attaches a promise to the type of fast that he desires, not a small promise, but an immense and awesome promise.

WHAT IT MEANS TO OUR FAMILY

Fasting is a personal experience that we should do to grow closer to God. It’s when we feel distant from God, that we should consider undertaking a fast so that we can use that time to grow closer. When we choose to fast we should not make a big deal of it by drawing attention to ourselves.

We must also choose to love our neighbors, to love God’s children and to uphold God’s judgments and his precepts. When we do this we should not be ashamed to ask God to remember the promise he attached. God is faithful to all of his promises.

Relevant Passages

Nehemiah 1:2-4

That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. 4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

Joel 2:12-13

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: 13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Mathew 6:16-18

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.

Acts 9:8-9

And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

Additional Thoughts

Great men of God fasted, shouldn't we?