

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. Matt 17:21

Whilst the Lord Jesus was up on the mountain with Peter, James and John, the remainder of the disciples were down where they were confronted with a devil possessed child who they were unable to cure. The disciples were puzzled by their inability; "Why could not we cast him out?" Mark 9:28. They had previously been given power by the Lord Jesus to cast out devils, Mark 3:15. The Lord Jesus' response as recorded for us in Mark 9:29 was, "This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting."

In this article I want to give some consideration (it will not be exhaustive!) to what the Bible has to say on the subject of fasting. Fasting is a spiritual discipline. Although it is not commanded anywhere in the Bible, the discipline is certainly found throughout. Indeed the Lord Jesus in another place taught about fasting. In Matt 6:16-18, you will notice that the Lord Jesus said "when ye fast" , He didn't say "if ye fast"! Fasting was not to be done to impress others about our spirituality, but to be done unto our heavenly Father. Neither is it done to "twist God's arm!" or to impress God with our self denial!

In the Bible we find many individuals fasted; in the OT Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther David; also the nation of Israel fasted, an heathen city Nineveh fasted; in the NT Paul (in fastings often), the church (Acts 13) , the Lord Jesus Himself - for Him to be able to have cast out the devil from the child He must needs have fasted to be true to His own teaching!

Let us consider some of the different biblical reasons and examples of fasting.

1. In the incident mentioned above, the Lord Jesus told His defeated disciples that their problem was one of unbelief Matt 17:20. From this we can conclude that for us also one reason for fasting is to deal with our unbelief in certain situations.
2. Special times of drawing near to God. Moses Deut 9:9
3. A time of seeking God's mercy. Jonah 3:5-9; David II Sam 12:16-21 - in this situation God did not change His mind! - the undergirding principle here as it ought to be in all of our prayers is ' nevertheless not my will but Thy will be done!'
4. Fasting is often linked with a confession of sin. In the matter of Achan, Joshua 7; Neh 1:4, Dan 9
5. At special times of seeking light and direction from God. Dan 9 & 10, Neh 1:4
6. In times of dangerous or difficult situations. Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:21-23; II Chron 20:3; Matt 17:21
7. We are in a spiritual battle and sometimes fasting may be needful because of the unseen battle going on in the heavenlies. Dan 10:1-14
8. It can be a means of humbling ourselves before God. II Chron 7:14; IPet 5:6; James 4:6-10

The length of a fast will vary according to each particular situation for which we come before the Lord. In the Bible it was on a couple of occasions up to forty days. When we fast we are essentially saying that the spiritual is more important than the physical ie we set aside that which is essential for life. We are living out Heb 11:6.

We as a church set aside one day a month to pray and fast for particular needs. We also set aside days of prayer and fasting when we have special meetings for outreach.

A closing observation; some things will not happen without prayer and fasting! Matt 17:21; Mark 9:29

Keep looking up!
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