

Fasting Today

What does it mean to fast? Is it a command for us today? In the Bible, fasting generally meant to withhold or abstain from food for a prolonged time.

The only specific command to fast is found in Leviticus 16:30-31: "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever." Fasting was a common practice among Jews, especially after the exile (Zechariah 7:5; 8:19), and was continued among Christians (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; 27:9, 41). In the occurrences of fasting where Jesus was involved, it was not a matter of whether to fast or not, but rather of doing it correctly. That was His main emphasis in Matthew 6:16-18 and 9:14-17. The New Testament does not demand that Christians fast as a part of their service to God. However, Christians have fasted to draw closer to God or gain strength for a particularly temptation, and this is not condemned.

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