

Fasting

Question:

What is fasting all about and are there specific days of the year that fasting is required by God's Church?

Answer:

We must understand this vital subject! Fasting is not a form of penance or punishment, but it is to be used as a tool to help us get closer to God. Fasting helps us to focus away from the physical and onto the spiritual.

When we fast, we abstain from physical food and our weakened state draws us closer to God. Christ showed us the importance of fasting: "Moreover WHEN you fast..." (Matt. 6:16). This scripture doesn't say "if" you fast, but "when" you fast, indicating that God expects us to fast. This same passage of scripture goes on to tell us *how to fast*: "...be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. But you, WHEN you fast anoint your head, and wash your face that you *appear not unto men to fast*, but unto your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret *shall reward you openly*" (Matt 6:16-18). We are cautioned against fasting to obtain pity from others or to look righteous, but are encouraged to fast to reap the many spiritual benefits of this most important duty. Therefore, when we fast our demeanor should not show it.

We all face trials and difficulties in our lives. Christ certainly faced them when He walked the earth – only much greater ones than we will ever face! Christ had to overcome the temptation from Satan the Devil to be able to prove that He was the Messiah and Savior! Let us take a look at how Christ prepared for this titanic battle of the ages. Matthew 4:1 states: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (or scrutinized, enticed, proved) of the devil. AND WHEN HE HAD FASTED FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS, he was afterward an hungered." The *first thing* Christ did to strengthen and prepare Himself for this battle was to FAST! Christ went to a quiet place (the wilderness) and used the time to get as close to God as possible. After Christ had fasted for this duration of time, Satan tempted Christ by saying: "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If you be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread". Evidently, Satan tempted Christ by asking Him to consume physical food and to demonstrate that He had Godly power to turn the stones into bread. Satan was only provoking Christ because he knew full well that Christ had the power to perform such a miracle! Satan thought that Christ would be at His weakest point after a fast of forty days and forty nights and expected Him to give in to Satan's temptation. He didn't realize that *because of the fact that Christ fasted, He was spiritually at His strongest and able to endure temptation!* Christ afflicted His soul by abstaining (fasting) from physical food, but spent forty days and nights consuming *spiritual food* – living by the Word of God! Christ's response to Satan's temptation was: "Man shall not live by bread alone, *but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*". On this occasion, Satan tried tempting Christ in different ways but fasting helped Christ and made Him spiritually stronger. He was able to resist any and all of Satan's temptations (Matt 4:5-11).

When we fast we should spend more time than usual in Study and prayer in order to get closer to God. During a fast, we could use the time we would normally use to prepare and eat our meals to further study our Bible and pray to God - in addition to our usual daily allotted time to study and prayer. We fast to get closer to God which helps us take on His

mind. This better equips us to face trials and tests that might come our way (Matt. 4). Fasting also helps us seek God's direction before taking any major decision (see Acts 13:1-3)

To gain the maximum benefit from a fast, it is best to fast on days when we don't have to go to work. This is not always possible, but helps get the most out of a fast. Mr. Herbert Armstrong, set an example for fasting. He would typically start off in the morning with one hour of prayer, followed by an hour of Bible Study, and then devote another hour to meditating on the subject that he studied. He would do this over and over – as often as time and circumstances allowed when he fasted. (If we are fasting before taking certain decisions, our study should revolve around similar biblical examples to help us in our decision making.) Fasting helps us get closer to God, and in doing so we take on the mind of God.

There is only one biblically commanded fast day in the year which the New Testament Church is to observe – the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, Acts 27:9). The Old Testament Israelites fasted on days during the year which commemorated national tragedies. While the New Testament Church is not commanded to observe these fasts, God's Church encourages its members to remember these days by fasting showing thanksgiving to God for the understanding and blessings that He has given.

Fasting is a vital and powerful tool to help us overcome and develop spiritual strength. Elijah understood the importance of fasting (1 Kings 19:8), and so did Daniel (Dan 10:2-3). Paul fasted often (2 Cor 11:27). These men, and others, fasted because they recognized it was profitable to their spiritual wellbeing and closeness to God. Under the administration of Mr. Armstrong, brethren were encouraged to fast once a month or at least ten times a year (including the Day of Atonement). The point is, the more we fast in the right attitude, the closer and deeper we develop our relationship with our Creator. We should fast as often as we feel we need to, in order to maintain a tight relationship with God our Father. This is what we need to help us fight Satan and strive to enter the Kingdom of God.