

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Prayer and Fasting

(Jerry Fite)

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Jews made the following observation for His response: “*The disciples of John fast often, and make supplications; likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink*” (Luke 5:33). Jesus responded with, “*Can ye make the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come; and when the bridegroom shall be taken away, then will they fast in those days*” (Luke 5:34-35).

It is apparent Jesus and his followers were not fasting with their prayers. Fasting, other than the one God demanded yearly on the Day of Atonement (*Leviticus 16:29, cf. Acts 27:9*), was not a habitual part of the life of Jesus and His disciples when He walked among them. Jesus stresses fasting should be done when the occasion is appropriate.

One event Jesus focuses upon is His being taken from their midst. The desire for Him would then be intense, reflected in afflicting the soul in abstaining from food. Christians, strongly

desiring the return of the Lord, at times combined fasting with their supplications unto God.

There are appropriate times for voluntary and intense prayer and fasting in the private relationship of a husband and wife. A husband and his wife can devote themselves to prayer for a short time while abstaining from satisfying the sexual desires. Paul writes, “*Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency*” (*I Corinthians 7:5 – King James Version*).

While some of the oldest manuscripts omit fasting from prayer in *I Corinthians 7:5*, the text does universally include one strong desire that is set on hold while concentrating on prayer: sex. If one abstains from sex, then abstaining from food could also be included. The spiritual longing for the Lord is stronger than the physical desires of sex and food as a husband and wife give themselves to God in prayer.

Fasting unto the Lord was appropriate when sending God’s messengers to preach the Gospel, and when appointing elders in every church (*Acts 13:3, 14:23*). Seeking God’s guidance, men manifested a fervent desire for the Lord stronger than food.

When fasting, we do not disfigure our faces to be seen of men, for the Father who sees in secret recompenses us according to our fervent spiritual desire for Him (*Matthew 6:16-18*).

Many seek to diet this time of year for health and appearance reasons. Why not approach “cutting back” for spiritual reasons? Why not forego a meal time to concentrate your desire upon your Lord as you talk to Him in prayer? Fasting is voluntary. When done, it is a way to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, proving from time to time you are not controlled by the power of food, as you desire the Lord to come quickly (*Romans 12:1, I Corinthians 6:12, I Corinthians 16:22*). It has been rightly said that fasting is an exclamation point to fervent prayer.