

# Fasting Before the Father

Jeff Rogers / Lamplighter Bible Study

Matthew 6:16-18

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Questions about fasting:

- **What is fasting anyway?** The word in Scripture means not to eat or to abstain from food. Fasts can be total or partial, and usually only water is consumed.
- **Is fasting required by the Scripture?** In the Old Testament, fasting was required on the Day of Atonement. The term “*shall afflict yourselves*” is an expression (ESV) that signified forsaking food as an act of self-denial (Lev 16:29; cf. 23:27). This is the only time and was part of the Day of Atonement.
- **So, is fasting required in the New Testament?** Fasting is not commanded by God in the Scripture in any other place. Unlike other spiritual disciplines (prayer) it is not commanded in the New Testament.

## I. The Overview (Matthew 6:1)

### A. The Danger of False Righteousness (6:1a)

1. Practicing religion before others in pride.
  - a) Carefully consider that we must remain, “Poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness. These qualities are inclusive and not singular.” Matt 5:3-10.

### B. The Loss of Heavenly Reward (6:1b)

1. The exposure not only of the Pharisees over the top “religion,” but also the devastating impact of sin on us in the form of self and pride.
2. Sin can follow us into the very presence of God. (Martyn Lloyd Jones).
  - a) Giving (6:2-4)
  - b) Praying (6:5-8)
  - c) Fasting (6:16-18)

## II. The Hypocrite’s Fast (Matthew 6:16)

### A. It is Pretentious<sup>1</sup>

1. The hypocrite’s gloomy face.
  - a) They would not comb their hair.
  - b) They would use makeup to appear pale.
2. The hypocrite’s neglected appearance.
  - a) They would wear old and torn clothes.
  - b) They would cover themselves with dirt and ash.
3. The hypocrite’s audience.
  - a) “*may be seen by others.*”
  - b) Pharisees often boasted of fasting twice a week (Luke 18:12).
    - (1) Usually on the second and fifth days of the week
    - (2) Those days, they claimed, were the days of the two trips of Moses up Mt Sinai.
    - (3) Those days were the two major market days in cities and towns (most people).

### B. It is Hypocritical.

1. Hypocrites were associated with the ancient Greek theater. The “hypocrite” would wear a mask to portray his part or identify a mood. The Jewish hypocrites resorted to theatrics.

### C. It is a Heart Matter

1. Jesus condemned those for fasting to be seen by men.
2. They received their full reward – to be seen of men.

## III. The Believer’s Fast (Matthew 6:17-18)

### A. Fasting is normal and without command.

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985. (1, 400)

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1. Jesus said, “*When you fast...*”
  - B. Fasting does not bring heightened spiritual experience, visions, special insight, or awareness.
  - C. Fasting is associated with special times:
    1. **Times of Sorrow**
      - a) David upon the birth of Bathsheba’s child (*2 Samuel 12:15-18a, 18b-23*)
      - b) David upon the death of Abner (*2 Samuel 3:31-37*)
    2. **Times of Danger**
      - a) Jehoshaphat when threatened by invasion (*2 Chronicles 20:1-6*)
      - b) Queen Esther when threatened by Haman with genocide (*Esther 4:13-17*)
    3. **Times of Repentance**
      - a) David upon Nathan confronting him with his two grave sins (*2 Sam 12:13-14, 17; Psa 51:1-4*)
        - (1) **Scorned (Vs. 14, 9, 10) – to despise; to look down with contempt; to spit upon; trample**
      - b) Daniel prayed for God to forgive the sins of Judah, his people (*Daniel 9:1-4*)
    4. **Times of special revelation** (fasting accompanied these times and was not a means of achieving)
      - a) *Daniel 9:2-3, 21-22*
      - b) As the church sought direction and in response to God’s direction (*Acts 13:2-3*)
  - D. Fasting is linked to:
    1. Times of deep prayer (fasting is never done in isolation) “*You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying.*”
    2. A pure heart and characterized by obedience.
    3. Humbleness and Meekness. (*Psalms 35*)
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