

LESSON 20

THE CONCEPT OF BIBLICAL FASTING

CENTRAL TRUTH: Biblical fasting brings our physical body in subjection to the Holy Spirit for spiritual upliftment.

MEMORY VERSE: the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. _____ **Mathew 9:15b.**

LESSON TEXT

LEVITICUS 23:26-32, LUKE 5:33-39.

Leviticus 23:

26. The LORD said to Moses,

27. "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the LORD.

28. Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God.

29. Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people.

30. I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day.

31. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

32. It is a day of Sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your Sabbath."

Luke 5:

33. They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

34. Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"

35. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they

will fast."

36. He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.

37. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

38. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

39. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"

INTRODUCTION

Fasting from the biblical perspective is primarily the act of willingly abstaining from food and sometimes water for a period of time to bring the soul and flesh in subjection to the spirit of God. The practice of fasting as a spiritual discipline is essential for our spiritual formation.

Whilst some believers do question its relevance for the contemporary Christian, other Christians who do practice fasting testify of the positive impact it makes on their spiritual life. This lesson is to help us come to terms with fasting as a spiritual discipline for the upliftment of the soul.

LESSON

Three types of fast are generally identified:

1. The normal fasting, in which there is no intake of food for a prescribed period of time, though there may be an intake of liquids.
2. Partial fasting, in which food intake is limited.
3. The absolute fast, in which there is a total abstinence from food and liquids in all forms.

Fasting in the Old Testament was regarded as an act of self-renunciation to gain God's mercy and to show one's repentance of sins committed hence the psalmist's confession that he humbled his soul with fasting (**Ps 35:13**). The people of God in the Old Testament also fasted as

a means of boosting their prayer and to experience the presence of God. Fasting during the Old Testament period was sometimes abused. Instead of a sincere act of self-renunciation and submission to God, fasting became a ritual by which people presented themselves falsely as devoted to God. Christ commended fasting in the New Testament when the Pharisees questioned why He (Jesus) claimed to be the Messiah but His disciples were eating and drinking (feasting) when they should have been fasting at the time. The Lord answered that there was no reason for His disciples to fast when He was still with them since His presence gave them spiritual and emotional security. However, when He is taken away from them, they would fast. It is therefore clear that Jesus expected His followers to fast after He was gone. Therefore, He approved of fasting as a means of spiritual formation.

Fasting coupled with prayer is therefore appropriate and essential to enhance our spiritual life in a world influenced by satanic forces as we look forward to the coming of the Lord. Fasting must also be linked to the new life in Christ. Therefore, anyone who goes into fasting without a commitment to Christ may not experience its benefits.

LIFE APPLICATION

The Bible shows that proper biblical fasting is a legitimate form of spiritual devotion. Both the Old and New Testaments speak favourably of fasting and provide numerous instances of saints fasting. Fasting that is done with a pure heart, backed up with a righteous life and a right attitude, is affirmed and accepted by God. However, it must not be done for the purpose of seeking to gain favour with God or to manipulate God to act in your favour. It must also not be done when maintaining ungodly relationships with others.

The main purpose of fasting is to gain mastery over oneself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is to liberate oneself from dependence on the things of this world in order to concentrate on the things of the Kingdom of God. It is to give power to the soul so that it would not yield to temptation and sin.

DIALY BIBLE READING

Monday: The Lord's Teaching on Fasting. (Mathew 6:16-18).

Tuesday: Fasting God Approves. (Isaiah 58:3-7).

Wednesday: A Call to Fast for Restoration. (Joel 2:12-14).

Thursday: Fasting for God's Leadership. (Nehemiah 1:1-6).

Friday: Fasting for God's Favour. (Esther 4:13-16).

Saturday: Fasting as a Sign of Repentance. (Jonah 3:5-10).