

Fasting

Fasting has been an important part of the doctrine and practice of the Assemblies of God since its beginning. Fasting is a voluntary, private, and Spirit-led separation from one's usual activities of life. Typically it is practiced individually by members in the church body by means of separating certain foods and liquids from one's diet. Normally fasts are held in accompaniment with prayer, and are intended to heighten focus, intensify fervor, and gain control over one's fleshly cravings and human will.

The Scriptures speak much about fasting. The Old Testament practice of fasting was closely linked with a "spirit of mourning" over some national crisis (Leviticus 16:29-31). The prophets often called Israel to a fast as a means of producing repentance (Joel 2:12). Aside from the Day of Atonement, which mandated fasting, the Old Testament practice of fasting was closely linked to special times of national peril-war, famine, and pestilence. Unfortunately much of this became a formality. Isaiah pointed out that people were fasting because of a greedy desire to receive something for themselves. However, God wanted to see them fast to bring justice, get rid of selfishness, and help others who were in need (Isaiah 58:2-6).

In New Testament times, the practice continued as the Pharisees imposed an elaborate tradition of fasts and observances upon the people of Israel. But Jesus totally rejected the outward accompaniments of fasting found in the Old Testament as well as external things the Pharisees did to draw attention to themselves when they fasted. Jesus indicated the person fasting must fast unto the Lord, going about his business in the usual way and keeping his fast a secret before God (Matthew 6:16-18). While Jesus rejected all attempts to publicize fasts, He himself believed and practiced fasting as willfully demonstrated in His 40-day wilderness temptation (Matthew 4:1,2).

The apostle Paul refers to times of fasting, whether voluntary or imposed upon him by the circumstances of life (2 Corinthians 6:5). The early believers included fasting as a needful prerequisite before releasing the early missionaries for ministry (Acts 13:2,3). Interestingly, fasting is usually held in concert with prayer. Most fasts in the Bible were for 1 day, usually the hours between sunrise and sunset. At the most, people might fast 3 or 6 days (ending on the 7th day). But nowhere in the Bible does it encourage long fasts that would be damaging to one's body and mind.

Fasting is never to be used as a measuring stick to suggest one's religious devoutness or spiritual superiority. At every point the act of fasting is disallowed as a proof of piety. As mentioned earlier, fasting is to be carried out in secret only before God (Matthew 6:16-18).

Fasting should never be viewed as a merit-producing, manipulative, or in any other way an act of bargaining with God. The object of fasting is not to move God in closer alignment with us and our will, but rather to draw us in closer alignment with God and His will.

There are many circumstances that properly call for a fast: when sensing the urgency for revival; when deeply convicted over the sinfulness of the people of God; when desiring to separate more fully from the world and be joined more closely to God; when recognizing the need for a stronger faith to lay hold of the promises of God; when anticipating a special opportunity for ministry; and when wanting to intensify devotion. Above all, fasting should be done with a pure heart and a desire to honor God and help others.