

The Sermon on the Mount  
(Lesson 13)

Introduction:

1. In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus dealt with 3 religious activities practiced by the Jews: doing alms, praying, and fasting.
2. Unfortunately, the Jewish leaders practiced these activities in a hypocritical way.
3. In dealing with these activities, Jesus first warned His followers not to imitate the Jewish leaders, and He then revealed His will.
4. This lesson is a study of Matthew 6:16-18 where Jesus dealt with "fasting."
5. In the Bible, people fasted on special occasions [holy days, when appointments were made], during times of crisis [personal or national], and to help them draw closer to God.
6. Let us consider fasting in the Old Testament, during the time of Christ, and in the church.

Discussion:

I. FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. (Leviticus 23:26-27) On the Day of Atonement the Jews were instructed to "afflict their souls."
- B. Eventually, the Jewish people began fasting at other times (Zechariah 8:19).
- C. Fasting was important, but God wanted His people to fast for the right reasons (Isaiah 58:3-4).
- D. In addition to fasting collectively, the Jews also fasted individually.
  1. (1 Samuel 1:7) Hannah did not eat when she was being provoked.
  2. (2 Samuel 12:15-16) David fasted while he prayed for God to spare his child's life.
  3. (Nehemiah 1:4) Nehemiah fasted and prayed when he learned that Jerusalem had no wall.
- E. In the Old Testament the Jews fasted on special occasions, during times of difficulty, and to help them draw closer to God.

II. FASTING IN THE TIME OF CHRIST

- A. The Pharisees fasted twice each week (Luke 18:12) [Mondays and Thursdays?].
- B. Jesus fasted Himself (Matthew 4:2).
  1. However, Jesus did not fast like the Pharisees did.
    - a. He was questioned about this (Matthew 9:14-15).
    - b. Because He did not fast like the Jews, He was called a glutton (Matthew 11:19).
  2. Jesus did not fast like the Jews, but He did place some value on fasting (Matthew 17:21).
- C. In His teaching the Lord did not command fasting, and He did not forbid it, but He did give some guidelines for those who do fast (Matthew 6:16-18).
  1. Fasting is not to be done for the purpose of drawing attention to self.
  2. Fasting is between the person who fasts and God.

III. FASTING IN THE CHURCH

- A. Examples of fasting:
  1. (Acts 13:2-3) When Barnabas and Saul were sent on their first missionary journey from Antioch, those involved fasted and prayed.
  2. (Acts 14:23) At the end of this journey, Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church with prayer and fasting.
- B. Should we fast today?
  1. Fasting is a personal matter -- it is one practice that we may participate in if we desire, but we cannot bind it on others because we are not commanded to fast in the New Testament.
  2. Fasting may help some people draw closer to the Lord, but it could actually be harmful to others such as diabetics.
  3. Fasting must not be done for the purpose of drawing attention to self.
  4. Those who fast must follow the guidelines that Jesus gave.

Conclusion:

1. If we so desire, we may choose days to fast to help us draw closer to God.
2. However, would it not be better to give some time each day to growing spiritually (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:16)?
3. Let us strive to be like Gaius (3 John 2).