

What The Bible Teaches on  
**PRAYER and FASTING**  
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## Chapter 7: What does the New Testament teach about Fasting?

### 7. What does the New Testament teach about Fasting?

#### (a) The Teaching of Jesus

##### (1) Matthew 6: 16-18

As part of the famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ makes it clear that he expects fasting of His followers by saying, “When you fast ...” and not, “If you fast ...” He then cautions against fasting for the public to see and applaud, explaining that it is a private affair between the person fasting and God.

##### (2) Matthew 9:14-15; [Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35]

The disciples of the Pharisees and also of John the Baptist fasted but Jesus Christ did not make His own disciples to observe the fast. When challenged to explain the reason, He said that the time for them to fast would be when He was no longer with them in the flesh.

##### (3) Matthew 17:14-21; [Mark 9:17-29]

When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found a man who had brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples while He was away, but they could not cast out the demons. This happened after they had been given the power to do so when they were sent out two by two. They asked Jesus Christ the reason for their failure. His answer was that to cast out this type of demon required prayer and fasting. (Note that Matthew 17:21, and also “and fasting” in Mark 9:29, are recorded as footnotes in some versions of the Bible).

#### (b) The Teaching of the Disciples

There is no direct teaching on fasting recorded for us by any of the disciples. There are areas of Paul’s teaching on other matters, however, which are sufficiently close to this subject to be worthy of reference.

##### (1) Romans 14:5-9

The teaching here is about what food to eat or not to eat. St Paul lays down the principle that each Believer is a free agent before God, because each one of us is fully and directly accountable to Him. Therefore we should be careful not to judge one another on the basis of what we eat and drink or what we abstain from eating or drinking. This is a principle we can safely apply to the question of fasting: when we fast or how we fast, or whether we fast or not, is between each Christian and God.

##### (2) 1 Corinthians 7:4-5

This is part of St Paul’s teaching on family life. He cautions married couples not to deny each other the sexual pleasure which God wants them to enjoy to the full in marriage. By common agreement, however, they could choose to abstain for some time in order to devote themselves to prayer. (Some, but not all, Bible translations say “fasting and prayer.”) Such sexual abstinence by itself even without refraining from eating is a form of fasting when we remember the experience of Daniel who denied himself certain pleasures for three weeks.