

Feasting and Fasting

Key Verses: *“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”*
—Matthew 6:17,18

Selected Scriptures:
Daniel 1:5,8-17;
Matthew 6:16-18

THERE IS CONSISTENCY

reflected in godly admonitions and examples recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. One such illustration deals with the appropriateness of fasting as a means of drawing nearer to God.

Daniel and three youthful, godly companions were deported to Babylon approximately eleven years prior to the subsequent overthrow of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar. They did not wish to defile themselves by partaking of the king's rich food, when offered such fare as part of special training in preparing them for major roles in the

Babylonian government. Acting as the spokesman for the four Hebrews who revered Jehovah, Daniel requested an exemption from eating food not approved by Israel's law from the prince of the eunuchs. He proposed, instead, a test for ten days whereby they would only partake of vegetables and water.

This petition was granted, and while the Hebrews did not engage in a total fast, they refrained from consuming the delicacies served to others. At the end of the ten days, the appearance of their skin was superior to that

of the non-Jewish captives who partook of the king's meat and wine. As a result of their fidelity to righteous principles, including abstaining from that which might defile them, God blessed Daniel and his Hebrew brethren with great knowledge, wisdom and skill, which they used effectively while achieving prominence as leaders in a foreign land.—Dan. 1:3-20

As the greatest servant of God, Jesus addressed areas including charitable giving and prayer. Both of these privileges, when acted upon in sincerity, will be valued by God. Nevertheless, the Lord also warned against hypocrisy associated with performing charitable deeds for the purpose of receiving acclaim from others for being generous, or even offering prayer as vain repetitions to impress those hearing such petitions. Regarding this last illustration, our Lord then sets forth a prayer which might serve as a guide for his disciples to follow in approaching the Heavenly Father.—Matt. 6:1-15

In our Key Verses, Jesus gives a rebuke with regard to fasting. He reproves those who would attempt by disfigurement of their faces to create a sad countenance in order to make their abstinence from food evident to onlookers as an evidence of their devotion to God.

As followers of Christ, we should desire to commune with God in the spirit of holiness. The Master after his baptism was so consumed with understanding and doing his Father's will that he withdrew to the wilderness, fasting for forty days and nights. It also might be appropriate for us, especially if we are undergoing special trials, to occasionally partake of a very plain diet, or even abstain from eating for a season. Such may provide us with greater self-control by temporarily depriving the body, while seeking to obtain divine counsel as we strive to draw nearer to our Creator. If this is to benefit us, however, let us do it privately and not in the spirit of the Pharisee as described in one of our Lord's parables.—Luke 18:9-14 ■