

Memorial OPC Adult Sunday School - Westminster Shorter Catechism - 2010-2011

WSC Q. 58 What is required, in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requires the keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself.

The fourth commandment most broadly deals with the keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his word. Obviously this commandment deals most specifically with one day in seven.

But broadly, this command also includes such things as **fast days** and **feast days**. Today we are going to look at the idea of fast days and wrestle with the biblical idea of fasting. This is something explicitly mentioned in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21 - "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day:"

WCF 21.5 The reading of Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of Psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: besides religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.

1. Is this an area of the Christian life that you hear much teaching on, or are familiar with? Why or why not?
2. Three resources that I would recommend to you are:

"The Duty, the Benefits, and the Proper Method of Religious Fasting," by Samuel Miller.
Published by Presbyterian Heritage Publications, Dallas, TX, 1983 (reprint from 1831).

"Fasting... for the Purpose of Godliness," chapter 9 (pp. 159-180) in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, by Donald Whitney. Published by NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991.

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture (pp. 135-141), by John R. W. Stott. Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1978.

3. Starting in Matthew 6:16-18

What assumption do we find in 6:2-3? In 6:5-7? And finally in 6:16-17?

How does this fit with Matthew 9:14-15

4. A Command of God? Old Testament roots.

Leviticus 16:29-31

Joel 1:14 & 2:12-17

5. What is fasting?

Samuel Miller: Fasting is abstinence from food arising "from religious principle, and with a view to spiritual benefit."

Donald Whitney: "Fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes."

It should be noted that fasting is not an end in and of itself. Rather it is an auxiliary to devotion and not devotion itself.

6. Consistent with God-pleasing Piety?

Judges 20.26 - all of Israel

1 Samuel 7.6 - all of Israel

2 Samuel 12.16-David

2 Chronicles 20.3 - Jehoshaphat proclaims for the nation

Ezra 8:21 - Ezra proclaims for the travel party

Ezra 9:5 - Ezra (personal)

Nehemiah 1.4 - Nehemiah (personal)

Nehemiah 9:1 - all of Israel

Esther 4:3 - Esther and Mordecai proclaim for the Jews in exile

Psalms 35:13 - personal

Psalms 69:10 - personal

Psalms 109.24 - personal

Daniel 6:18 & 9:3 - Daniel (personal.)

Jonah 3:5 - Nineveh

Matthew 9:14 - John the Baptist and his disciples

Luke 2:37 - Anna

Acts 10:30-Cornelius

Acts 13:2 - The Church in Antioch

Acts 14:23 - Paul, Barnabas, and the Gentile mission Churches

1 Corinthians 7:5 - commended as appropriate

2 Corinthians 6:5 & 11:27 - Paul

7. So what?

If Matthew 6:16-18 says what it seems to say, am I willing to accept that occasional fasting may be something which Jesus assumes will be a part of my piety towards God?

If fasting is biblical, am I willing to learn more about it? To learn how it is an auxiliary to my devotion and of what use it may be?

If I am persuaded of the appropriateness, and even necessity of fasting, am I willing to put it into practice once I better understand it?