

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*

Last time:

Why Fast? What Are the Benefits? Remembering that fasting is an auxiliary to devotion and not devotion itself, we must ask, "What may/should fasting accompany?"

Fasting is a significant **accompaniment**:

1. ...to our sorrow and penitence for sin before God.
2. ...to our grief before the Lord when overwhelmed with adversity.
3. ...when specifically petitioning God in earnest prayer about something very important.
4. ...to earnest prayer when one embarks upon a new and great work for God.
5. ...to growing in self-control, self-denial and mastery over bodily/sensual appetites.
6. ...to extending mercy and charity to the poor.
7. ...to expressing satisfaction in and love to God.

So What?

1. As you look at the above seven "occasions" for fasting can you say that these are things that you actually encounter from time to time in your life? If so, are you willing to consider that there are times in your life when fasting is appropriate?
2. Are you willing to learn more about fasting so that you might consider putting this into practice?

Today:

I. The Proper Method of Fasting

A. **When?** Though there is a tacit assumption that Christians will fast, the Scriptures prescribe no precise law as to *when* you should fast, or *how frequently* you should fast. I hazard a guess that this is one reason why fasting is not regularly practiced by many Christians.

How then are we to proceed?

1. As we look at the Scriptural data, we recognize that fasting is observed by:
 - a. Individuals (and families?)
 - b. Individual Churches
 - c. The Church as a whole (denomination?)
 - d. Nations (or communities, towns, cities, geographic areas)
2. The last three categories require a fast to be "proclaimed" by those vested with authority to make such a proclamation. A word to the Session in this regard...
3. I suppose the first category becomes the most practical for us - individuals/ families.
 - a. Is there a place for regular fasting, that is, on a routine basis such as once a week or once a month? As we remember that fasting is an auxiliary to devotion, we would have to ask if this would fit with any of the above occasions listed at the top of the page. It seems to me that items 5, 6, and 7 could qualify as somewhat regular occasions that could be accompanied by regular fasting. Consider Matthew 9: 14 (a positive) and Luke 18:9-14 (a caution) in this regard. So it seems to me that this would be lawful (and even profitable/ advantageous?) but not legislated.

- b. Is there a place for occasional fasting, that is, on an irregular basis prompted by God's special providence in your life? The propriety of this seems almost irrefutable given the Scriptural data. Consider Matthew 6:16-18 and 1 Corinthians 7:5. But how might you discern the times and seasons for this?
 - i. Be sensitive.
 - ii. Regularly review the seven occasions above to which fasting may be legitimately added.
 - iii. Beware of insensitivity in your heart.

B. What?

1. Perhaps it is unduly obvious, but food (and sometimes/usually? drink) is to be given up.
2. Generally the Scriptural example is of a single day fast. This could be from morning to next morning. This could also be from evening to next evening.
3. Minimally, the time not spent in taking meals should be devoted to that which your fasting is an auxiliary to. If possible, be earnest to redeem as much time as possible for this.
4. It will be outwardly kept in vain, unless the heart is sincerely engaged in the service.

II. Cautions in Fasting - as with most things there is always a corresponding danger.

1. Health concerns
2. "To be seen by men" - Matthew 6:16-17; Luke 18:9-14
3. To trust in the outward observance itself- Isaiah 58: 1-12; Zechariah 7:1-14 with 8:14-19

III. So What? (Points 1 and 2 from Samuel Miller; points 3-5 from Donald Whitney.)

1. The duty of religious fasting is by far too much neglected. It is a self-denying duty and an unfashionable duty but a necessary duty.
2. We have no less reason for fasting and humiliation than our fathers in former ages.
3. Will you confess and repent of any fear you have of fasting?
4. Will you fast as the Holy Spirit directs?
5. Will you plan a fast of dedication now as an expression of your willingness to fast in the future?