

The Fast I Have Chosen
And
Its Potential in the Christian's Life

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Preface

Often, we hear ministers and laymen alike emphasize the abundance of God's blessings provided us through His promises. These promises truly are for us to enjoy, but often we overlook a vital contingency on which the fulfillment of these promises hinge. Many of the promises have conditions attached; in such cases, on the honor of His written Word, God cannot fulfill these promises in our lives until we meet the conditions - even though, as far as God is concerned, the promises are true and have already been given.

The necessity for meeting these conditions recalls to mind the difficulty with which we yield ourselves to the molding process of the Holy Spirit. In our own strength alone, we are not capable of meeting the conditions or of making the commitments necessary to living the abundant life in the Spirit. Scripture says, "Give and it shall be given unto you . . ." Yet we find ourselves unwilling, or at least hesitant, to give. Scripture says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." We find ourselves seeking the "things" instead. Scripture says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee . . ." Our minds wander. "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you . . ." We lack motivation. We find ourselves in need of something, which will prepare us for meeting these conditions. This is a work of willingness and obedience on our part on the one hand and a work of cleansing and molding in our hearts by the Holy Spirit on the other hand.

These thoughts led me to consider various means by which we might be able more fully to yield ourselves to the perfecting work of the Holy Spirit. Fasting is one such means of preparation. Through humbling ourselves and submitting to the cleansing of the Holy Spirit, we can be brought to such a disposition as is needed in willingness and obedience. And, if we "be willing and obedient [we] shall eat the good of the land (Isa 1.19).

The definition of a true fast and its purpose in the Christian's life, as set forth in Scripture, involves much more than abstinence from food. If

observed sincerely in all its aspects, it will open to us avenues to the abundance of God's blessings and to the fullness of His righteousness. It is the one means by which we may be cleansed and prepared as vessels for the Master's use. It is a denial of self in order to win Christ (Ph.3.8).

Thanks goes to my colleague for reviewing this writing that was written 48 years ago, and helping to prepare it to go online.

PART I
BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF THE ACCEPTABLE FAST
Or
THE FAST THAT I HAVE CHOSEN

CHAPTER 1

Fast Defined Through Man's Participation

GENERAL DEFINITION

Simply defined, fasting is to abstain from eating food; it means, "To cover over (the mouth)."¹

Most references in the Hebrew have the same verbal root, "to fast" (II Sam. 12:21, 23) or its noun derivative. This root "predominates in the pre-exilic narrative literature, in the prophetic books, and in the Psalms." There are a few other words and sayings, which indicate abstaining from food: "not eat bread" in I Samuel 28:20 and II Samuel 12:17, "afflict oneself" in I Kings 21:29, and "to afflict one's soul" in Leviticus 16:29. The phrase in Leviticus is "the technical one for fasting in the Priestly Code and tends to become standard thereafter." A noun from the root "to afflict," is used once in the Old Testament (Ez 9:5) and in post-biblical Hebrew; and an Aramaic adverb, [טַרַּא (Aramaic) ṭevât] meaning, "fasting, hungrily," is used in Daniel 6:18.²

The phrase in Leviticus which means "to afflict the soul" is used (in some cases with slight variations) in several other Scriptures such as Numbers 29:7; Ezra 8:21 ("afflict ourselves before God"); Isaiah 58:10 ("satisfy the afflicted soul"). To afflict means, "To abase self, chasten self, deal hardly with, humble, submit self, weaken."³

An important aspect of fasting is that it is a sign of humility before God. This is "shown in the parallel expression 'to afflict the soul,' i.e. 'to humble oneself'" (Lev. 16:29,31; 23:27; Num. 29:7; 30:13; Isa. 58:3, 5).⁴ Fasting, then, must have this aspect of humility in order to be an acceptable fast.

¹ James Strong, The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary (New York: Abingdon Press, 1890), p. 98.

² George A. Buttrick, ed., The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, II (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 242.

³ Strong, p. 98.

⁴ James Hastings, ed., Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 293.

Historians have not been able to trace the origin of the observance of fasts; however, from the beginning of Israel's history, we have records of fasts for various reasons: 1) to mourn the death of a leader or a loved one (II Sam. 1:12; 3:35) 2) to react out of self-centeredness and greed (I K 21:4) 3) to fast when there is no food (Mt. 15:32) 4) to fast out of anger (I Sam. 20:34) 5) to fast for religious purposes, etc. It is not with this broad meaning that Christians need be concerned, but with the meaning and purpose of a true, Biblical fast, specifically, the fast that God referred to in Isaiah 58:6, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" This is much more than simply to abstain from food. We need to ask ourselves, "What is the true fast - that is, what are the characteristics and criteria set forth in Scripture?"

CHANGE OF HEART NECESSARY IN AN ACCEPTABLE FAST

Old Testament Scripture reveals primarily that the importance of fasting was not in self-discipline through the abstinence from food, but in the inward effects that it produced in the individual who was fasting and, secondarily, that these inward effects resulted in certain outward actions upon which God placed His approval by bestowing blessings.

Abstinence from food, in itself, holds no spiritual virtue. It must be accompanied by humility and a "detestation of the body of sin, for the weakening of which it is designed" (thereby leading one on to repentance); it must be accompanied by prayer "for the procuring of good or deprecation of evil;" and it must be accompanied by almsgiving.⁵ "Fasting is not to look in the cupboard where the bread is, and to say, we shall not want you today, but tomorrow about this time we shall be prepared for the feast. No, the loaf must be given away, and there must not be left one crust in the house. When we feast the poor, we *ourselves truly fast*."⁶ It must not become just an empty form with no inward effect, nor must it become a means of meriting God's favor.

There must be the pattern of outward - inward - outward. The outward act of humbling oneself through fasting brings the inward change of

⁵ Joseph S. Exell, The Biblical Illustrator, XI (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, n.d.), p 384.

⁶ Exell, Vol. X, p. 111.

a humble and contrite heart, which, in turn, affects outward acts - those of repentance, or change of direction, and of an ultimate reaching out to benefit others through prayer and almsgiving. This pattern, then, includes the four basic components of a true fast: humility, repentance, love, and prayer. When this pattern is completed, God then bestows those blessings - which are contingent upon this environment.

All the conditions set forth herein are - and necessarily so - results of a changed heart. Isaiah 58:10 (Septuagint Version) says to "give bread to the hungry from thy heart." All the criticisms that the Lord leveled at the Israelites centered on the degenerate condition of their hearts. It is interesting to note what the word, heart implied to the Israelites. According to Strong's concordance, heart was "used (fig.) very widely for the feelings, the will, and even the intellect; likewise, for the centre of anything."⁷ The "ancient Hebrews did not make a sharp distinction between physical and psychic powers and tended to attribute psychological functions to certain organs of the body. Of all such organs, the heart was the chief . . ."⁸ When in Proverbs 3:1, the Israelites are instructed, "Let thine heart keep my commandments" (also required in the true fast); it had the following implications:

[The heart] was the innermost spring of individual life, the ultimate source of all its physical, intellectual, emotional, and volitional energies, and consequently the part of man through which he normally achieved contact with the divine. In the recesses of the heart dwell the thoughts, plans, attitudes, fears, and hopes which determined the character of an individual; here also God . . . could work in secret to transform that character by implanting new thoughts and feelings.⁹

Isaiah 58 deals with the four major areas mentioned in the above quotation:

⁷ Strong. P 98

⁸ Buttrick. P 349

⁹ Buttrick.

1. Physical First, humble yourself through fasting; then you loose the bands of wickedness, you divide your bread with the hungry, you bring the outcast poor to your house, you cease to make false accusations, etc. Outward, physical action.
2. Intellectual Do not speak idle words. Perhaps the intellectual aspect can be seen more clearly through Proverbs 3:5, ". . . and lean not unto thine own understanding."
3. Emotional The will is involved in determining to take this attitude, but Isaiah 58.13 instructs to observe the Sabbath, honor it, "honor Him," and delight in the Lord. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh. 3:10)
4. Volitional Do not go your own ways nor find your own pleasure. Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him . . ." One should not choose his own path, but with all his volitional energies acknowledge and act upon the direction of God.

Is it any wonder that God refused to accept their fasts until they allowed their hearts to be changed!

FASTING DEFINED THROUGH GOD'S DEALING WITH ISRAEL'S DEGENERATE CONDITION

As the Israelites drifted away from the principles embodied in God's commandments, they came to take the ritual of fasting as a substitute for the true fast: for in one situation after another, God had to deal with their backslidden condition before He could acknowledge their fasts.

Three different prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah - expressed vividly this condition of Israel. Isaiah gave the most explicit description of the people's degradation, of what comprised a true fast, and of the resultant benefits of a true fast. God upbraided the people for their faults. They "used great outward austerity, and severe discipline towards the body,"

but their hearts were not changed. They practiced divisions and contentions - "ye fast for strife and debate." They lacked concern for those in need and failed to extend charity.¹⁰ In short, they were self-righteous:

They were at all events outwardly conformed to the ways and ordinances of God; they even delighted in approaching Him in their external religion: but they made their professed conformity to His regulations, a ground of complaint that God seemed to take no notion of them. In fact, there was no real exercise of heart before Him, no contrition and humility and true communion with the Lord. Even in the day of their fast, their external ritual . . . they found their own pleasure instead of His. They oppressed their labourers, they engaged in strife and contention, smiting with the fist of wickedness.¹¹

"Is it such a fast that I have chosen? . . . Wilt thou call this a fast? "Surely not! "If thou put away from the midst of thee the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking of evil, and offerest up thy gluttony to the hungry" (Isa.58) - they were not cleansed from their faults on their fast day; neither did they cease from carrying on their "worldly, selfish, everyday business," F. Delitzsch calls it a "work-holy delusion, behind which self-righteousness and unrighteousness were concealed," and through which they expected to merit some reward.¹² God refused to hear their petitions - not because of their degenerate condition - but because they refused to change. Nineveh's condition was degenerate, too, to the extent that God pronounced judgment upon her. However, the people humbled themselves through fasting, repented and turned from their evil ways, and sought God's mercy. As surely as God withdrew judgment from Nineveh, He would do the same for Israel - if only she would repent. God's hand was capable of saving and his ear capable of hearing, but the wall of sin separated them, and none were

¹⁰ Exell, Vol. VIII, p. 304.

¹¹ W.E. Vine, Isaiah: Prophecies, Promises, Warnings (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House. 1971), p. 188.

¹² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten volumes, VII (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), pp.386, 390.

willing to change. "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth . . . " (Isa.59:4).

God extended His effort to reach the people to a descriptive reminder of the true fast and its results. They must first make an active move toward humility in fasting: secondly, allow their hearts to be changed; thirdly, actively repent by changing directions. They must cease from breaking the law and the righteous principles therein; they must begin doing those things incorporated in the true fast:

Isaiah 58:6, 7 . . . do thou loose every burden of iniquity, do thou untie the knots of hard bargains, set the bruised free, and cancel every unjust account.

Break thy bread to the hungry and lead the unsheltered poor to thy house: if thou seest one naked, clothe him, and thou shalt not disregard the relations of thine own seed.¹³

[Is] not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

[Is it] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? (Isa 58.6, 7 KJV)

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" However, abstinence from food is not mentioned; instead, these acts of verses 6ff are given. How are they involved in a true fast? One commentator explains ". . . that they are all to be considered as involving acts of conscientious self-denial . . ."¹⁴ They are indeed that, but they are also more. They are the outflow of an inward work: "If thou remove from thee the band, and the stretching forth of the hands, and murmuring speech; and if thou give bread to the hungry from thy heart and satisfy the afflicted soul . . ."¹⁵ To the Hebrew, fasting meant

¹³ The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, with an English Translation (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

¹⁴ Exell, VIII, p 305.

¹⁵ Septuagint

giving to the poor that bread which he would normally have eaten. Verse ten instructs him not only to give his bread to the poor, but also to do so from his heart. This necessitated a change of heart; likewise, there had to be a change of heart before these other acts of self-denial could take place. This change of heart would result from humility and repentance in fasting.

The cleansing work must be complete:

If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, so as not to do thy pleasure on the holy days, and shall call the Sabbaths delightful, holy to God; if thou shalt not lift up thy foot to work, nor speak a word in anger out of thy mouth . . .¹⁶

Now the cleansing was complete - they would be revering the Lord - and God could say, "Then shalt thou trust on the Lord . . ." Now there were promises to be enjoyed.

Before discussing, in chapter two, God's promises in His response to the true fast, a look at the words of Jeremiah and Zechariah will emphasize God's attitude toward the condition of Israel.

In Jeremiah's day, the prophets prophesied lies in God's name, and the people chose to believe - they loved to wander (Jer. 14). They would not believe the true prophet of God. When they fasted, it was with the same hypocrisy and emptiness described in Isaiah 58. They would not let humility and repentance be a part of their fasting; thus, they allowed no change of heart. So severe was their chosen condition that God denied "his ministers the spirit of prayer and intercession in behalf of the people!"¹⁷

Zechariah seven gives a description like that of Isaiah. The people did not fast as unto God; therefore, their fasting availed nothing. God Commanded, "Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in

¹⁶ Septuagint.

¹⁷ Adam Clarke, The Holy bible Containing the Old and New Testament with a Commentary and Critical Notes, IV (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury press, n.d.), p. 293.

your heart." But the people refused to listen and "made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law" (Zec. 7:9-11). Because they would not hear the prophets, God would not hear them.

God's pronouncement of judgment could have been revoked; He wanted and sought reason to cease from His wrath. Through the prophets, He cried out against the sins of the people in an effort to lead them to repentance. Had they put off their hypocrisy and observed the true fast of the Lord, they could have enjoyed the richness of God's blessings.

CHAPTER 2

Fast Defined Through God's Response

GOD'S BLESSING ON ISRAEL IN RIGHT STANDING

In discussing God's answer to man's participation in the true fast, it will be enlightening to look at examples of God's blessings on the Israelites while their hearts were still right.

Fasting was a time of humbling oneself before the Lord and of seeking His forgiveness of sins. His help in battle, His guidance in a situation, His deliverance from the enemy, or His divine revelation as concerned His people. While Israel's hearts were right toward God, their reasons for and attitudes in fasting were acceptable to God. He heard and answered their prayers.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS: The outstanding fast of Israel as a nation was in observance of the Atonement; at this time, a general sacrifice for the sins of all Israel was offered. While the burnt offering and scape goat were sufficient requirement for taking away Israel's sins, the entire act of coming before God in humility and repentance included fasting, a required ritual: Leviticus 16:29 (Amp). ". . . on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves [by fasting with penitence and humiliation] . . ." Fasting, then, during the Atonement, was a significant part of the preparation of people's hearts in view of the covering, or the taking away of sins. Therefore, when the people's hearts were humble and right before God, He heard their prayers and forgave their sins.

HELP IN BATTLE: When the Moabites and the Ammonites came against Judah, Jehoshaphat feared, proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah, and sought God's help. They recognized God as their God and humbled themselves before Him: ". . . neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee" (II Chr. 20.12). God not only accepted their fasting and prayers, but He fought the battle for them while they sang and praised Him!

GUIDANCE AND DELIVERANCE: Ezra proclaimed a fast to seek the direction of God and deliverance from the enemy when the king allowed the

children of Israel to go to Jerusalem to worship. God directed Ezra as to what to do and led them to Jerusalem in safety.

DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMY: Again, God brought deliverance when Esther called for a fast and went before the king on behalf of Israel. The king favored her and gave her what she requested.

DIVINE REVELATION: While Moses fasted forty days and nights, he received the commandments at the hand of God. Daniel also received divine revelation from God after fasting.

Many were the supernatural acts of God among His chosen people when they sincerely kept their hearts pure or cleansed their hearts through the humble act of fasting and prayer.

GOD'S PROMISES SET FORTH IN Isaiah 58

It is not enough to define the true fast as only the responsibilities of and changes in the individual. The definition is not complete until God has put His seal of approval on it. Man's part is only the beginning. By fasting, he simply opens the door for the Spirit of God to work in him through humility, repentance, prayer, and charity. Then God puts His seal of approval on the fast by the fulfillment of His Word.

Here again, Isaiah gives the details: these blessings delineated in Isaiah are seen in effect at other times in the history of Israel - times when the Israelites knew the reality of the true fast. In three sections, Isaiah gives the conditions that man is to meet and God's promises.

If man will:

GROUP I (vs. 6 & 7)

Loose bonds of wickedness
Undo bands of the yoke
Let oppressed go free
Break every enslaving yoke
Divide bread with hungry
Bring homeless poor to one's house
Clothe the naked rear guard
Not disregard needs of family

(vs. 8 & 9a)

His light break forth as morning
Health spring forth speedily
Righteousness go before him
(conducting him to peace
and prosperity) Amp.
Glory of the Lord will be his

GROUP II (vs. 9b & 10a)

Take away yokes of oppression
Take away finger pointed in scorn
Take away every form of false,
harsh, unjust, and wicked speaking
Give of own sustenance to the hungry
Satisfy afflicted soul

(vs. 10b, 11, 12)

His light rises in obscurity
His darkness be as noonday
Lord will guide him continually
Lord will satisfy his soul in
drought
Lords will make fat his bones
Will be like watered garden
whose waters fail not
Ancient ruins be rebuilt
Called repairer of breach

GROUP III (vs. 13)

Not travel unduly on Sabbath
Not do his own pleasure on Sabbath
Call Sabbath a delight, holy to the
Lord, honorable
Honor Him and delight in the Lord
Not go own way
Not find own pleasure
Not speak own [idle] words

(vs. 14)

God will make him ride on high
places of earth
Will feed him with heritage of
Jacob, his father

The truths set forth in verses 6-12 (Grps. I & II) will lead the people from the "deepest adversity to the highest prosperity." These may be summarized as follows. The people must lay aside three sins and perform two ordinary duties.

- Sins:
1. Oppression - yoke - oppression.
 2. Scorn and contempt - "putting forth of the finger."
 3. Speaking vanity - evil speaking in general.

- Duties:
1. Draw out the soul to the hungry - "give, serve, minister" wherever there is need and to the best of your ability.
 2. Satisfy afflicted soul - "visit the widow and fatherless in their affliction - comfort those that mourn - endeavor according to your power to wipe away the tears from the eyes of all the sorrowful."¹⁸

These actions are in the natural realm, and God answers them with blessings in the natural realm.

¹⁸ Exell. VIII. P. 308

He offered prosperity. Their light would break forth in the morning. "prosperity will come on them as the genial dawning of a long and blessed day."¹⁹ Through the wilderness, they lacked nothing. Even their clothes failed to wear out. They did right in the sight of God, and the Promised Land flowed "with milk and honey" for them.

He offered health. Their health would spring forth speedily, and he would make fat their bones. When Hezekiah was faced with sickness and death, he could say, "I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart." (II K 20:3) God gave him health and added to his life. Certainly, God was offering the same to all Israel if they, too, would have upright hearts.

He offered protection and deliverance. Their righteousness would go before them "as the vanguard, to secure [them] from the enemies that charge [them] in the front:" and God's glory would be their rear guard, "the gathering host, to bring up those of [them] that are weary and are left behind, and to secure [them] from the enemies that, like Amalek, fall upon [their] rear."²⁰ There is a beautiful picture in this promise. God was telling them that they could have His protection just as they had had it when they fled from the Egyptians. The angel of God had led the Israelites; but in the crisis when the Egyptians closed in, the angel - and with him, the pillar of cloud - positioned himself behind the Israelites. Now, during the night, as they crossed the Red Sea, the cloud was a pillar of fire to light their way, but a cloud of darkness and confusion to the Egyptians (Ex. 14:19-25).

He offered guidance when needed. The Lord would guide them continually. Just as the angel of the Lord led the children of Israel out of Egypt, so God would lead them now. Ezra had told the king that God would protect them as they took their gold and silver to Jerusalem to worship God. He asked God's guidance in the situation. "Then, I proclaimed a fast . . . to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance . . . so we fasted and besought our God for this; and He was entreated of us." (Ez. 8:21)

He offered restoration. He promised that ancient ruins, even of many generations, would be restored. His people would be called "the repairer of

¹⁹ Exell. VIII. P. 307.

²⁰ Ibid.

the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in." Nehemiah felt so keenly the fact that Jerusalem's wall lay destroyed. He fasted and prayed before the Lord; and when he petitioned the king, he was granted permission to rebuild the wall. He would be called the repairer of the breach; God had rewarded an upright heart.

Fasting is just one means of producing pure hearts and right relationships toward God; the important thing is that the hearts are pure and the relationship right. These examples show that God's blessings, even in the natural realm, are inexhaustible when His people are truly His people. But He does not stop with the natural blessings. Isaiah 58.13, 14 (Group III) takes the participant in the true fast to a realm beyond the natural - that of praise and worship of the Father.

The Sabbath was to be a day of holiness, of setting oneself apart to enjoy communion with the Father. But the people came and went, carried on idle conversation with each other, and indulged in their own pleasures - thus ignoring the One with whom they should have interacted. Isaiah gives them the conditions of change for which they were responsible. They were not to travel unduly on the Sabbath nor delight in their own selfish desires; instead, they were to observe the Sabbath as sanctified unto the Lord. They were to rest from self-centered activities and delight in spiritual things; they were to honor and delight themselves in the Lord.

Instead of repentance in the area of individual-to-individual relations, as seen in Groups I and II, this called for repentance in the area of individual-to-God relations. While one is fasting, his hunger for natural food must be displaced by a hunger for spiritual food. Fasting involves a denying of self-interest; it causes one to focus on the spiritual rather than the natural. The true fast would heighten the Israelite's desire to keep the Sabbath day holy and honor the Lord. And God would answer it with his highest, spiritual blessings.

Among all the blessings bestowed for obedience in Deuteronomy 28:2-14 are these, the highest of all: "The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto Himself . . . all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord." There is no doubt that God, only, is holy, yet He promised the Israelites His holiness - they should be called by His name! He

would make them "high above all nations when He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor" (Dt. 26:19). They would truly "ride on the high places of the earth" as they delighted in the Lord. Their delight would result from peace, from total trust in the Lord, and from the promise that He would always be with them. The heritage of Jacob, their father, would be theirs:

I will give to you and to your descendants the land on which you are lying. And your offspring shall be as (countless as) the dust or sand of the ground, and you shall spread abroad to the west and the east and the north and the south; and by you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed and bless themselves. And behold, I am with you, and will keep (watch over you with care, take notice of) you wherever you may go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done all of which I have told you (Gen. 28:13b-15, Amp).

God would be their constant companion, their righteousness, as they rested and delighted in Him. And what higher honor - what higher relationship to God - than to be the people out of whom God's Salvation should come! This was their heritage in Jacob their father - if they would observe the true fast, the fast involving their right standing with God, and His response with promised blessings. Isaiah 58:14 says that God would feed them with the heritage of Jacob their father.

This, then, is a fast acceptable to God - not just what one must and must not do, but inclusive of God's actions resulting from one's true fast participation. One must accept the whole, or the true fast is not complete. It is not complete with just one's abstaining from some things and partaking of others (even spiritual things or the outward works toward those around him). It is not a complete, true fast until God adds His approval and bestows on the individual the blessings, the power, the joy that is described in Isaiah 58. It requires God's approval. This in totality, man interrelating with God, is the true fast set forth in the Old Testament by a powerful, loving God. Upon this acceptable fast, God could now set His seal - "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 58:14).

PART II

THE POTENTIAL OF THE ACCEPTABLE FAST

IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN

CHAPTER 3

Fasting - not an end, but a means

From the preceding Old Testament definition of fasting, we have seen that the true fast involves humility, repentance, brotherly love, and prayer. These components of the true fast often become the means of making necessary changes in the heart of an individual. We can deduce, then, that fasting is not an end but a means to a more fruitful Christian life. The attitudes toward fasting, and its application in the lives of Jesus and the Early Church leaders, indicate that fasting is one means of bringing us into a powerful, extraordinary life of ministry. Since fasting is not an end, but a means, let us look more closely at the components of the true fast: how the true fast benefitted others in Biblical history, and how we might benefit today.

SELF-DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is not a major component of the true fast, but it should be discussed here. A false impression often held by believers is that, while (they believe) fasting outwardly results in obtaining something from God, its only effect of the person fasting is that of developing self-discipline.

Discipline is involved in that one must exercise discipline over his appetite when he is tempted to eat, over his prayer life when he determines to enrich it through fasting, etc. If one, therefore, has a lack of self-discipline, especially in the area of gluttony, certainly he should be benefitted greatly by fasting. I do not mean to negate the benefit of fasting in an effort to control the appetite. Admittedly, discipline is important in this and all areas of one's life. Surely, God would be favorable toward this means of correcting these weaknesses as much as toward the eradication of any sin. I mean only to negate the false concept that this is the only benefit to the person fasting.

Scripture has a lot to say about temperance; "regular, controlled temperance in various areas would do more to strengthen or produce discipline than would short intervals of drastic action, such as fasting."²¹

²¹ Exell. Vol. XI. P.384.

Consider also that fasting, if employed primarily for the sake of discipline, is likely to be interspersed between periods of indulgence. Such indulgence would negate the benefit of fasting. On the other hand, temperance on a constant basis is continually strengthening the weak area. If the lack of self-discipline is a drastic problem in one's life, then the drastic measure of fasting might head the person in the direction of a remedy. From there, he should learn temperance. Participation in the true fast holds unlimited benefits in many other areas as well.

While self-discipline does not seem to be a major component of the true fast, humility is; repentance is; love, expressed through alms-giving and other charitable acts, is; increased prayer and supplication are. These are coupled with fasting throughout Scripture and are emphasized in God's dealings with the Israelites.

HUMILITY

Throughout Old Testament Scripture, the act of humbling oneself is a part of fasting, and in the New Testament, much value is placed on humility in the Christian's life.

In the Hebrew, humility (עֲנָוָה 'ānâvâh) means "gentleness, affliction" (Pro. 15.33; 18.12). In the Greek (ταπεινοφροσύνη tapeinophrosunē) means "lowliness of mind" (1 P 5:5). In many Scriptures, such terms as "humbled himself" and "humble themselves" are used relating to fasting. In addition, the people often put on sackcloth, rent their garments, and spread ashes over their heads, in a symbol of profound humility and repentance for sins.²² Also, I Samuel 7:6 says that Israel "drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day." Lamentations 2:19 "pour out thine heart like water" seems to indicate inward misery. "In connection with the fast, it would be . . . an act of deepest humiliation before the Lord."²³

Unger gives the following explanation of humility:

²² II Samuel 13.19; I Kings 21.27; Lamentations 2.10; Jonah 3:6

²³ Merrill Unger. Unger's Bible Handbook (Chicago: Moody Press. 1966). P. 385.

Christian humility is that grace which makes one think of himself no more highly than he ought to think (Rom 12:3). It requires us to feel that, in God's sight we have no merit, and in honor to prefer our brethren to ourselves (Rom. 12:10), but does it not demand undue self-depreciation or depressing views of oneself, but lowliness of self-estimation, freedom from vanity. It is enjoined of God (Col. 3:12; Ja 4:6). The word is about equivalent to meekness (Ps. 25:9) and is essential in discipleship to Christ (Mt. 18:3, 4).²⁴

Following are some examples of the humbling process of fasting and its results.

Ahab, one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history, deservedly had God's judgment pronounced upon him. Ahab rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon himself, and fasted - acts of humility. And what was God's response? I Kings 21:29, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

Jonah delivered God's pronouncement of destruction in Nineveh. The people believed God, proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth (humbling themselves), and cried unto God. Even the king "arose from his throne" and removed his robe from him, laying aside his position as king in honor of - in preference to - God's authority; he fasted and put on sackcloth, thus humbling himself before God. God "saw their works, that they turned from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10), and He spared the city.

The Psalmist was accustomed to humbling himself with fasting: "My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting" (Ps. 35:13).

Fasting, then, helps to bring us to the "lowliness of mind" necessary to a right relationship with God. Humility is a command of God (1 P 5:5, 6; Ja. 4:10), and Micah 6:8 tells us to walk humbly with God. What better way to obtain the attitude of humility than by denying self through fasting? We cannot think of ourselves more highly than we ought, if we are to esteem Christ as Lord of our lives and over all!

²⁴ Unger. P. 507.

REPENTANCE

Humility before God tends to lead us automatically to repentance. Thus, fasting is also instrumental in the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts - not just for the forgiveness of sins, but also even for the total eradication of bondages and hindrances to the work of the Holy Spirit within. We are not fully participating in the true fast if we humble ourselves and do not go on to repentance. Yet, the cleansing process need not stop with eradication of "sins." There are often desires, habits, thoughts - hindrances of the natural man - that need to be replaced with the disposition of the "new man." Here I would like to cite a few Scriptures connecting repentance and fasting.

In the case of Nineveh, the people responded, they "turned from their evil way." Therefore, God totally withdrew his judgment. This is not true of Ahab. There is no indication that he repented; in fact, the opposite is the case (1 K 21:27-29). Likewise, there is no indication that God forgave him, for He did not withdraw His judgment. Ahab humbled himself, and God responded with the appropriate consideration - He postponed the judgment. God's blessings on His people were extensive when their movement toward God was extensive.

In addition to these cases, Ezra, too, called the people to repentance and fasted in their behalf because they had taken unto themselves strange wives. They agreed to put away the strange wives - an act of repentance (Ez 10).

After the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, the Israelites assembled with fasting and with sackcloth and earth on their heads. They read from the law, separated themselves from all strangers, confessed their sins, and the sins of their fathers, and worshipped.

The individual must, himself, repent - turn from his evil way - and allow his heart to be cleansed.

BROTHERLY LOVE

The attitudes of a cleansed heart are revealed in neighborly love, outward expressions of alms-giving and other charitable acts; these are an important aspect of fasting. As one abstained from eating, it was customary

to give that food to the needy. Thus, the denial of self is only half the requirement. We must allow love to rule our actions and deny ourselves for the purpose of benefitting others. We need not worry about benefiting ourselves; that is God's responsibility as a part of His answer to true fast observance.

Isaiah 58 is probably the most significant Scripture of this aspect. It gives a list of charitable acts connected to fasting. God's rebuke to the Israelites was to a great extent due to their sin in this area, thus He placed much value on an outward expression of love. Isaiah gives God's response to their charitable acts.

God will always be nigh unto them to hear their prayers (v 9).
As, on the one hand, "he that shuts his ears to the cry of the poor shall himself cry and God will not hear him," so, on the other hand, he that is liberal to the poor, his prayers shall come up, with his alms, for a memorial before God (Act 10:4).²⁵

Zechariah also levels criticism in this area. The people were to "execute true judgment and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor" (Zech. 7:9, 10).

This principle is set forth in the New Testament when we are admonished to be considerate of others, care for the widows, provide for the poor (Act 6:1-6; I Cor. 10:23-33; I Tim 5). It became customary in the Christian church to participate in extraordinary fasts and apply the money saved to charitable purposes, for the benefit of the poor.²⁶ Again, Exell's words are appropriate, "when we feast the poor, we, ourselves, truly fast."²⁷

PRAYER

Communion with God involves prayer in some form; and, if fasting is to be an interacting with God, then it should quicken and intensify our communication with Him - that is, our prayers. We undoubtedly choose to fast when we feel the need for a drastic action; therefore, our fasting should

²⁵ Exell. Vol VIII, p 307.

²⁶ Unger. P. 346.

²⁷ Exell. X. p. 111.

be "joined with prayer that the mind, unencumbered with earthly matters, might devote itself with less distraction to the contemplation of divine things."²⁸

Prayer, or crying out to God, is a vital part of the Biblical fasts all through the Old Testament. The people prayed to God for mercy, protection, or whatever their need.

Prayer is also coupled with fasting in the New Testament, especially where there is need for intensive prayer or extraordinary application of faith. Jesus began His ministry with forty days of fasting and prayer (Mt 4). Anna, a prophetess, fasted and prayed night and day in the temple. To her was revealed Israel's Messiah (Lk 2:36-38). Fasting and prayer preceded the setting apart of officers in the Early Church (Act 13:2, 3; 14:23). While Cornelius fasted and prayed, an angel appeared to him with instructions which led to his receiving the message of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Act 10:30).

When fasting is a means by which we come into a more meaningful relationship with God - when it is a means to self-discipline, humility, repentance, brotherly love, and prayer - it becomes one of our most effective tools in achieving the position of a proficient Christian.

²⁸ Exell X p. 111

CHAPTER 4

New Testament Attitudes Toward and Applications of fasting

New Testament Scripture indicates that Jesus and the Early Church leaders took for granted that they should fast. Jesus, Himself, fasted and indicated that the time would come when His disciples would fast; however, not as did the Scribes and Pharisees. His disciples did indeed make fasting an important part of their lives and ministries.

JESUS

Jesus came not only to provide salvation for the world, but also to serve as an example to all Christians. His life included fasting. He said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father" (Jn 14:12). He performed miracles beyond the expectations of the people. His was an extraordinary work; it required an extraordinary life - a life totally submitted to the Father.

Jesus did not require His disciples to fast while He was with them. When confronted with the question regarding this, He replied that they need not mourn while the bridegroom was with them. Fasting as a part of mourning was customary to the Jews; Jesus answered them according to their understanding.²⁹ It seems plausible to assume that Jesus knew the time would come when His disciples would understand the meaning and purpose of a true fast. Then they would find the need for taking part in it. At this point, however, they were still thinking as natural, carnal men; and one thing they did not need was to fall into the trap of the Pharisaical, hypocritical, so-called fast! Better that they wait until their spiritual understanding should be enlightened; then they should discover the key to the door to self-sacrifice and spiritual power.

In response to the claim of the Scribes and Pharisees that they fasted regularly, Jesus expressed the same attitude that we find in the Old

²⁹ Matthew 9.15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:33-35

Testament in the day of Israel's departure from the law. "Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast" (Mt 6:16). The Pharisees' outward acts of humility had degenerated into nothing but acts, without the humility. Compare this with Isaiah 58:5. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *[Is it]* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *[under him]*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" The same was true in Isaiah's day - acts void of humility. Jesus said of the Pharisees that they have their reward - from men unto whom they fast! Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee who stood and prayed, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are . . . I fast twice in the week . . ." Jesus expressed His attitude in these words, "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Lk. 18:11-14). He warned His disciples against this hypocritical fast.

On the other hand, however, Jesus said to His disciples, "Moreover, when ye fast . . ." - indicating that they were to fast - " . . . anoint thine head and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast but unto thy Father" (Mt 6:16-18). In other words, take away the outward show that the action might take place in your hearts. The Father who sees in secret would reward them openly. He went on to say in verses 20 and 21, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If their treasures, that upon which they placed the most value, were in heaven, their hearts also would be inclined toward God. Jesus sanctioned the true fast - the fast unto the Lord.

Jesus, Himself, found it advantageous, possibly necessary, to fast; He began His ministry after a forty-day fast, thereby indicating the importance of participating in a true fast. It was after this fast that He withstood the tempter to the extent that Satan left Him, and angels came and ministered to Him. From this point on, Scripture provides us with the example of a power-filled life. He healed the sick; He raised the dead; He cleansed the leper; He set free those who were bound. And He did it as our example! He lived in a human body, being subject to all that we are subject to - that we might be capable of all that He is capable!

EARLY CHURCH LEADERS

Fasting became an important observance in the Early Church. There are, however, a few references which do not indicate a religious fast. Acts 27:33 refers to a fast forced upon those on ship with Paul during a storm. II Corinthians 6:5; 11:27 refer to fasts apparently forced on Paul because of lack of food.

The reason for Paul's three day fast after his confrontation with Christ on the Damascus road is not clear (Act 9:9), but it is probably that it was a part of his seeking God's direction for his life. He had been stopped abruptly in his religious efforts; now he must discover the ways of the Spirit for the future. He must come to know this Christ, whom he had rejected.

Regularly observed fasts developed soon in the church society. The Christians avoided observing Tuesdays and Thursdays regularly, as was the Jewish custom; however, literature of the sub-apostolic period "indicates that the pre-Ester and pre-baptismal fasts came early to be widely practiced, and Christians could be exhorted . . . to fast twice in the week - on Wednesdays and Fridays."³⁰

In I Corinthians 7:5, as Paul gives the Christians advice on marriage, he mentions giving themselves to fasting and prayer, an indication that this means of separation unto God was encouraged.

New Testament Scripture indicates that much of the Early Church's fasting was for the purpose of setting oneself apart for sanctification and concentrated prayer. The leaders at the church in Antioch ministered to the Lord and fasted. It was during one such time of consecration that the Holy Spirit led them in anointing and ordaining Barnabas and Paul for the ministry (Act 13:2, 3). These leaders, as did Paul and Barnabas, saw the need for being emptied of all forces that would hinder the ministry of the Holy Spirit through them. They set themselves apart unto God before choosing or ordaining anyone as leaders among them.

Jesus said that when He was no longer with them, then they would fast. The disciples had learned that the fast of the Scribes and Pharisees was

³⁰ Buttrick, p. 244.

an abomination to God, but the true fast, as unto God, played a vital role in emptying themselves of self.

CHAPTER 5

Potential Power in Fasting for Christians Today

What is the importance of fasting in the lives of Christians today? That is, what are the results upon the one fasting and, in turn, upon his ministry to other individuals and in the church in general? The answers to this question open avenues for us to a more abundant life in the Spirit; however, to see the full potential of fasting, we must apply to our lives the truths embodied in both Old and New Testaments.

DELIVERANCE FROM SATAN'S BONDAGE PROVIDED IN CHRIST

We Christians have been grafted into the inheritance of Abraham. Those promises made to him, and his seed, are also made to us through Christ, including the promises of Isaiah 58 (Eph. 3:6; Col 1:12).

However, the heritage of Christians is not that we should go to the country of Israel and possess it, but that we should go to that spiritual "land" of God's kingdom and possess it - that spiritual position where the milk and honey of God's promises are available to us and are appropriated by us. Here, God provides for our every need - physically, emotionally, materially, and spiritually - and gives us the desires of our hearts. There is an underlying principle throughout the Bible relating to the life of a Christian. If he would experience to the fullest the life in Christ (in the Promised Land), the walk in the Spirit, he must also experience the one general criterion - death to self. The self-sacrificing, Christ-centered individual is one who walks in the Spirit in power and authority. He has learned the secrets of living free from the yokes and bondages of Satan, free from selfishness and pride, free from attitudes and desires contrary to the nature of Christ. This kind of life is available to us as grafted-in heirs.

Satan desires to put us in bondage in any way possible, to any degree possible, so that he might hinder the work of the Spirit. However, Jesus is conqueror, and, in Him, we are conquerors. He defeated Satan and wrenched His power from His hand.

Satan had dominion; Jesus overcame his stronghold.

But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils (Lk 11:20-22).

Satan would hold us in bondage; but Jesus loosed those who were bound by him.

And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself . . . And ought this woman being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day (Lk 13:11,16)?

Satan would put his yoke upon us; but Jesus offered us His yoke in exchange for the yoke of bondage:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt. 11:28-30). Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (Ps. 55:22).

Should we not desire intensely to be totally set free from bondage ourselves? And should we not desire to be an open, pure channel, for the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we might set others free?

APPLICATION OF ISAIAH 58 FOR TODAY

We have examined Isaiah 58 in the application to the children of Israel; it has the same application to us Christians today. The fast was "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens.". These were things that the Israelites were commanded to do because this is wherein lay their sins. It was something within their power to do. They were enforcing the yoke, so they must loose it. So, with us today. In addition to this, I would like to make a different application of this Scripture. There is another, the enemy of our souls, who also enforces yokes and holds people in bonds

of iniquity; and he will continue to do so until we realize and appropriate our heritage in Christ.

Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from the book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord */is/* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18, 19).

Jesus was commissioned of God, and He passed this commission on to us. He purchased freedom from all bondages and hindrances. He provided entrance into the Holiest of Holies, into a walk in the Spirit (Rom 8). Jesus gave to His disciples - and thus, to us - the commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature . . . And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils . . . they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mk 16:15, 17). John 14:12 says, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." God's will for the Christian's ministry is expressed in these Scriptures. Why, then, do we so seldom see these fulfilled? The fault is not with God; His Word is sure. The hindrance then, is in us.

In answer to this problem, I present the following view of Isaiah 58. The emphasis in this entire chapter is on the effects of the fast on the individual who is fasting; so, let us keep the emphasis there. I am fasting therefore, I read verse six in this way:

Is not this the fast that God has chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness in me, to undo the heavy burdens on me, and to let the oppressed go free (to loose me from all oppression), and that I break every yoke (that attaches me to do anything or anyone other than Christ, in whom I choose to live)?

I, who am fasting, must experience release in these areas before I will be able to minister release to others effectively. Jesus was sent to preach, to heal, to deliver, to set at liberty. Because of the work wrought by Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit now has the power and authority to do this same

work in me and through me. He needs only that I be yielded to Him and His working. Fasting can be the means of bringing about this yielding and, as a result, total release.

Is not the true fast designed, therefore, to "loose the bands of wickedness" in us - those bands of wickedness with which the enemy of our souls has bound us? Is it not to "undo the heavy burdens" with which he weighs us down - burdens of besetting sins, burdens of guilt, burdens of human frailties, resulting from the Fall - all tricks and lies of Satan! Is it not to "let the oppressed go free," to break every power of oppression on mind, body, and spirit! It is designed to let that one, redeemed through the work of Calvary and the power of the Holy Spirit - to let him break forth from these bondages, and be released from the yokes with which hindering spirits would weaken God's chosen and - thwart much of the work of God's kingdom today.

Is it not also to help us direct our interest from self to God, to seek to know Him in His fullness? It is to affect the eradication of all hindrances of the natural man, until we realize in us death to self and life in Christ!

It is after we experience the work of Isaiah 58:6 in ourselves that we can expect to minister it to others. We can then share our spiritual bread with the hungry; we can share our spiritual riches with the poor; we can clothe the naked by the message of Christ's righteousness; and we can see and meet the needs of those of our own Christian household (v 7). We will be clear channels for the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Then will our own "light break forth" and "health spring forth speedily." Our righteousness will lead the way for us, and God's glory shall protect us from behind. Moreover, we will be able to minister in these areas to others.

Then will God hear us when we call. When can we pray for the needs of others and see God meet them? When we meet the conditions of the true fast, when we are clear channels, we can believe, ask what we will, and it shall be done! We will see miracles because there will be no hindrance to the Holy Spirit's ministry through us.

Then there will be no darkness to us; we will walk in the Light; we will minister light to others. We will be satisfied in the dry season with the waters of the Holy Spirit flowing without measure. We will see and take part in the restoration of that which the enemy has destroyed.

Then we will delight ourselves in the Lord, ride on the high places of the earth, and be fed with our heritage in Christ as we turn from our own pleasure, our own ways, our own words, and allow the Lord His rightful place in our lives.³¹

Indeed, this is the fast - the tool - at our fingertips! The apostles knew it, and their lives showed it.

Peter's shadow fell on the sick, crippled, and blind; they were healed.

Peter and John said, "Such as I have give I thee"; the lame man walked.

Paul shook the poisonous snake from his arm and was not harmed by it.

The apostles laid their hands on believers, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul, too, knew the importance of being a clear channel for the Holy Spirit. His writings are filled with advice to the Christians to walk totally in the Spirit. He, himself, strove for this. He was careful to avoid any yoke that would enslave.

To the Corinthians he wrote, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any (I Cor. 6:12)"

To the Romans, "All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense." Neither were they to offend another by what they ate or drank (Rom. 14:20, 21).

And to the Galatians, he admonished them to bring their flesh into subjection to the Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). Paul's Spirit-filled life was seen and felt throughout the Christian world.

³¹ Light: Ph 2:15,16; Ps. 139:11,12; Mt 5:16. Righteousness: II Cor. 3:18. Prayers answered: Mt 7:7; Guidance: Ps 32:8; Ex 33:14.

We can make use of this tool, and our lives, too, will show it.
"These signs shall follow them that believe."

PRAYER AND FASTING NEEDED IN TWO AREAS OF MINISTRY

So great is the need today for those who will be clear channels for the Holy Spirit to use! Sin so abounds; illicit sex, drugs, and the occult are the order of the day. There is an open invitation in the world, in the lives of youth especially, for demon possession. So many churches have spiritually incompetent leaders. They are they who know only the natural realm of ministry and only the natural realm of battle. But Christians must deal with these situations. We can no longer hide our faces from the facts. The Early Church leaders dealt with all bondages and sins; so, must we.

I wish to discuss two major areas of ministry - which need to be entered into with prayer and fasting.

First, we must be prepared to deal with all degrees of demonic bondage. A father brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples who were unable to set the son free. Jesus told the disciples that they failed because of their unbelief. Then He said, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:21; Mk. 9:29). Following is an explanation of my reasons for using the King James Version. In the King James Version in Matthew 17:21 and Mark 9:29, the Greek word for fasting is **νηστεία** which is in the Greek Textus Receptus in both Matthew and Mark; but some writers indicate the word, fasting, is not in the earliest biblical documents that we have, saying it was not in the Bible. Some modern translations omit Matthew 17:21 completely. However, they have not omitted Mark 9:29. **Note** that they have not omitted the verse in Mark's Gospel; however, **they have omitted** the word fasting - that is in older translations as well as the original language of the New Testament Greek. Each of the following verses are from more recent translations of Mark 9:29.

And he said unto them, This kind can come out by nothing, save
by prayer. (1901 ASV)

And he said to them, Nothing will make this sort come out but
prayer. (1965 BBE)

Jesus answered, "Only prayer can force out that kind of demon."
(CEV)

Only prayer can drive this kind out," answered Jesus; "nothing else can." (GNB)

He told them, "This kind of spirit can be forced out only by prayer." (GW)

He answered, "There is no way to get rid of this kind of demon except by prayer." (MSG)

And he said unto them, This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer. (RV)

The following translations are of Mark 9.29 also but are earlier translations in addition to the actual Greek listed last.

And he saide vnto them, This kinde can by no other meanes come foorth, but by prayer and fasting. (1599 Geneva)

And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. (KJV)

And He said to them, This kind can go out by nothing except by prayer and fasting. (LITV)

And he said to them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. (1830 Webster)

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελθεῖν εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ καὶ νηστείᾳ. (Greek New Testament)

G3521

νηστεία

nēsteia

Thayer Definition:

1) a fasting, fast

1a) a voluntary, as a religious exercise

1a1) of private fasting

1a2) the public fast as prescribed by the Mosaic Law and kept yearly on the great day of atonement, the tenth of the month of Tisri (the month Tisri comprises a part of our September and October); the fast accordingly, occurred in the autumn when navigation was usually dangerous on account of storms

1b) a fasting caused by want or poverty

Part of Speech: noun feminine

A Related Word by Thayer's/Strong's Number: from G3522

Citing in TDNT: 4:924, 632

Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew

Jesus said that the problem was unbelief, then added that this kind could not be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting. The disciples no doubt prayed, so I believe that Jesus referred to the quantity and quality of one's prayer life. Fasting, in the proper form, enhances one's prayer life and, therefore, would add power to the individual's ability to handle such a situation. In this respect, it would be appropriate to use this Scripture in discussing the value of fasting.

Two things are especially noteworthy in this passage. 1. Jesus said, "this kind," implying that some demons are more tenacious, more determined, to remain than others. 2. Obtaining the faith needed in this instance is somehow connected with prayer and fasting. The disciples lacked faith, and "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Prayer and fasting strengthen faith. In this way, one may "assail his unbelief" and change that unbelief into faith, for the expulsion of "this kind" requires "a more active and energetic exercise of faith."³²

Joseph S. Exell gives the following illustration.

Staying at Hastings a few months since I was much interested in watching the building of a breakwater just opposite my lodgings. It was done by driving massive piles of wood into the shingle. They were driven by a huge mass of metal being let fall upon them from a great height. True, the blows were not very quick one upon another, for it took some time to raise the weight to the necessary elevation; but when it did fail, it accomplished something. Now suppose an on-looker had suggested that time was being wasted in hauling the herculean hammer up, and had offered to tap the iron-bound pile with a child's spade, saying he could give a hundred taps to the one blow, what would have been thought of his suggestion? It would have been laughed to scorn, and he would have been told that one of their blows would do more than a whole century of his tapping; that there was no waste of time in raising the iron thunderbolt, for the power of its blow was in proportion to the height from which it fell. So, believer, your power and mine to affect men [or demons] is in

³² Exell. Vol. XI, p. 361.

exact proportion to the elevation of our soul-life, and this elevation can only be obtained by secret communion with God, and abstinence from all that panders to the flesh and hinders the spirit's fellowship.³³

Exell discusses the source of the power of fasting: its power comes from Divine institution. "Fasting comes to be effectual to dispossess the evil spirit, by being a direct defiance to what disposition of body and mind upon which especially he works." And concerning the obstinacy of the enemy, he says, "Certainly a cure is not likely to be wrought where an ordinary remedy encounters an extraordinary disease . . . you must cut off his supplies of provision, and never think to win the fort, till hunger breaks through the walls, and starves him into a surrender."³⁴

Let us, too, as ministers, prepare to face the spiritual warfare with the power and faith needed. Let us not be found beating at the strongholds of Satan with ineffective weapons. But let us, through every means necessary, present ourselves wholly for the unhindered ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The second area of ministry to be entered into with prayer and fasting is that of appointing and anointing leaders in the church. In addition to ministering in the natural realm of leadership, they must also be prepared to cope with spiritual battles; therefore, it is imperative that the Holy Spirit make the appointments. It is not sufficient - indeed, it is an outrage to the kingdom of God - for man to appoint man to positions of leadership and ministry! The Holy Spirit must direct these appointments, but how can He except the decision-making body be clear channels through whom He can function. It is no wonder that we see strife, contentions, selfishness, politics among Christian leaders; they are so often man-appointed to a particular position.

The Early Church leaders set an example for us. They encouraged setting oneself apart in sanctification unto God, to minister unto Him and to be used of Him. The leaders in the church at Antioch ministered to the Lord, fasted, and prayed, and were directed of the Holy Spirit in anointing and commissioning Barnabas and Paul for service. In turn, when Barnabas and

³³ Exell, XI, p. 362.

³⁴ Exell, XI, p. 384.

Paul ordained elders in every church, they accompanied this solemn task with prayer and fasting.

Imagine what would happen in our churches, our foreign mission work, our Christian day schools, our Bible colleges, if no position were ever filled without first the entire staff spending time in concentrated prayer and fasting! Imagine every administrative member, every minister, and every faculty member, having been chosen, anointed, and set in their position by the Holy Spirit!

As we fast, let us give ourselves over to the Holy Spirit completely. We will be loosed from the bands of wickedness, the heavy burdens, the oppressions of the enemy, and the yokes of bondage. And not only will we be loosed, but also, we will be prepared to loose others. We will be clear channels for the Holy Spirit to use to minister to others.

Surely, the direction and anointing of the Holy Spirit is just as vital to the ministry today as it was in the Early Church! Why expect any less consecration, any less yielding, to the Holy Spirit? Do we have an extraordinary disease among us? Then let us use an extraordinary cure! Let us recognize the effectiveness of the true fast and let us employ this means - along with any other means available - to tear down and destroy the works of Satan, and to build up the kingdom of God.

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