

Fasting

by Alan Redpath

Fasting is a means of spiritual growth and power that leads to intimacy with God, achieved through inward denial of everything that hinders our relationship with Him.

Duration: 1:20:02

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-8, Matthew 6:16-18, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Fasting"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the topic of fasting as a form of worship. He begins by emphasizing the importance of fasting in secret, rather than seeking attention from others. The preacher highlights the hypocrisy of those who fast to appear righteous in front of others, stating that they have already received their reward. Instead, he encourages believers to fast in a way that is pleasing to God, without drawing attention to themselves. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God sees our secret acts of worship and will reward us openly.

Transcript

Mr. Alan Redpath speaking at the Prairie Bible Institute, Canada, on fasting. We invite you to turn in your New Testament this morning to the Gospel according to St. Matthew and the 6th chapter. The Gospel according to Matthew and the 6th chapter.

And let me read three verses from verse 16. Moreover, continues the Lord Jesus, 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. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

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. We come this morning, my dear friends, to a brief consideration of the last of three aspects of the Christian's life of worship.

With which our Lord deals, in the first 18 verses of the 6th chapter of Matthew. The remainder of the chapter has to do with our walk, the important question of our worship. Verse 2, when thou doest thine arm.

Verse 6, when thou prayest. Verse 16, when ye fast. And here, at this point, it seems to me that the Holy Spirit probes the deepest of all.

Notice, will you, the order in which the Lord Jesus comes to this subject of worship. Giving, praying, fasting. The first, stated, is in fact, in real Christian experience, the last.

The last part of a Christian to be touched is his pocket. When the Holy Spirit gets hold of him. You notice, therefore, that before we give, we pray.

And before we pray, we fast. And so our Lord, in this statement, it seems to me, is moving from the outward evidence of our relationship. It seems to me, that the Holy Spirit probes the deepest of all.

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And before we pray, we fast. And so our Lord, in this statement, it seems to me, is moving from the outward evidence of our relationship to Christ. As revealed in our giving, to the very depths of the inward source of spiritual life and power.

Our fasting. Giving, that is merely a sense of duty, is not Christian giving at all. Giving that has its source of power in passion, in love, in a life that is utterly denying itself constantly, is giving that has the stamp of the Holy Ghost upon it.

The one proof of our relationship with Christ is our giving. For the test of a man's giving, in reality, is based upon our love for the Lord Jesus. The power that makes for real giving is praying.

And the condition that makes a man's prayer life really powerful and vital is fasting. These are the three great means of grace. And I consider with you, for a little while, trusting in the help of the Spirit.

In the last of these three, I want to ask you to think of it from three angles this morning. First, what is the meaning of this question of fasting here? And second, what is the method of it? If it means something to us, how must it be put into operation? And third and finally, what is the ministry of fasting to us and to others? What does this question of fasting mean in the Bible? Undoubtedly, it has a two-fold meaning. In the first place, it has to do with a deliberate abstinence from physical food for a spiritual purpose.

Physical food for a spiritual purpose. And as far as that aspect of the meaning of fasting is concerned, I think it would be true to say that it is almost dropped out of experience in evangelical circles anyway. And the reason for that isn't far to find, far to seek.

For evangelicalism in this, as in everything else of course, is reactionary. It is reactionary against anything that is ritualistic or formal. And whereas still in certain sections of the church, emphasis is laid on seasons of fasting, we have violently reacted against that, because it seems to us that such doctrine teaches that salvation is by work, instead of faith.

And to substitute fasting, or indeed anything else, as a basis of salvation in place of the precious blood of our Lord Jesus, is to deny the whole of the teaching of the Bible. But, I suggest to you this morning my dear friend, that the danger is that our reaction is so violent, that it has gone to the other extreme. And we

have excluded and forgotten this teaching of our Lord altogether.

Tell me, have you ever missed a meal for a prayer meeting? Have you? Have you ever denied your body one bit of food for a sincere spiritual motive? Have you? Have you refused to satisfy a physical appetite in order to nourish your soul? Yet here is the teaching of Christ alongside the question of giving and praying, and we can't just pick and choose, can we, as to what we're going to accept of our Lord's teaching. I have been looking through the word of God carefully this week, on this subject of fasting, and have been quite surprised in my study of it, to discover how much it has to say on the subject. Do you remember that the children of Israel were commanded to fast once a year, on the occasion of their deliverance from Egypt, and that rule of God was binding upon that people for all time? The Pharisees, they weren't commanded to do it of course, but the Pharisees fasted twice a week.

And there are always some people in every generation of the church, who will go further on most doctrines than the Bible teaches them. Our Lord spoke about this question of fasting, in the ninth chapter of this gospel and the fourteenth verse, you remember he was questioned by the disciples of John the Baptist concerning it. And they said, Master, why is it that the Pharisees fast so often, and we do, but your disciples don't do it? You remember his significant answer, listen to it.

Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the day shall come when the bridegroom is taken from them, then shall they fast. And we live in the day when the bridegroom has been taken from us, and the day of the absent Lord. Then, said the Lord Jesus, in that day I expect my people to practice this principle of self-denial.

No need now when I'm alongside them, but when I've gone from them, when I've been taken from them, when I'm away from them and they're living in a Christ-rejecting world, then I expect them to show their loyalty and their love by this very secret inwardness of fasting. Of course, we recall that the Lord Jesus set the example, for he fasted forty days and forty nights in combat with the enemy in the wilderness. And if you turn to the time of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles, you will perhaps recall that the church began its missionary enterprise in the thirteenth chapter of Acts, in the second verse, by a period of prayer and fasting.

And as they prayed and fasted, the Holy Ghost spoke. At the moment of the practice of self-denial, at the moment when the church was adopting a right attitude of prayer in its inward spiritual life, unobserved by others, when the inwardness of the thing was real, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Saul and Barnabas. That's always and only when the Holy Ghost can call someone to the mission field.

You are never called to the mission field, and God help you if you respond simply on the basis of a string of tear-jerking stories or on a statistical account of missionary needs. You are called to the mission field by the Holy Ghost operating in the church in answer to the prayer and self-denial of the people of God. If we want to send missionaries out from Moody Church in this desperate hour of need, this church will be in prayer and will be practicing fasting.

That's the basis of a missionary call. And you remember also that Paul himself spoke, do you remember, of being in fasting also. If you were to read church history, you would find that the saints of God believed in this and practiced it.

It was true in the time of the Reformation and especially true if you would take time to read the wonderful life diary and record of John Wesley and Whitfield. In that sense, in that primary meaning of the word,

beloved, I'm suggesting to you this morning that the practice of fasting has almost entirely died out. To deny yourself a meal for the sake of waiting upon God would be utterly unthinkable.

To sacrifice a T-bone steak for a prayer meeting would be fanaticism in the extreme. At least if ever you did it, you'd make it known through the whole church that you'd done it. The fact is, I don't wish to be hard about this except first to my own heart, the fact is that the desire to satisfy the physical appetite is far stronger with most Christian people than the desire to satisfy and to feed the soul.

Indeed, indeed I would go so far as to suggest that the surfeit in the realm of the physical has often led to starvation and loss of appetite in the realm of the spiritual. Check your own experience by that, especially after a big dinner. Do you feel like going to prayer when you've surfeited your body in food? Do you feel like really self-denying when you've gone to Hasty Tasty and had milkshakes by the score and chocolate ice creams that you say you must have, must have, and you surfeit your body? You wonder why it is, don't care for prayer meetings, think they're a bit extreme.

Don't like going to the prayer meeting, have no appetite for spiritual things, of course you haven't, you surfeit the body at the expense of the soul. I am reminded of that terrific verse in Psalm 106 verse 15, don't check me too accurately, I think it, I'm just speaking in memory, it only comes to my mind as I'm preaching. I think of that verse, certainly in that psalm, where the psalmist is giving the record of the wanderings of the people of God through the wilderness, and as they lusted, what for? Garlic, I can never understand why, excuse me mentioning it, garlic and onions and leeks and all that they could find in Egypt, as they lusted after all these things.

Lord, why can't we have them, we hate these rations of the wilderness, give us our bodily food. The psalmist says, oh what a dreadful thing. The Lord granted them their request and sent leanness to their soul.

And in a generation in which, if I may be pardoned for saying, there's a surfeit of food, and there's a tremendous luxury of feeding the physical appetite, I sometimes wonder if that's why it is that the spiritual appetite of so many Christians is so peevish and so dilatory and so easily satisfied. Ah, but I must come to grips with my subject more closely, for this is only one meaning of this question of fasting. I suggest to you there's a deeper one, and as I seek to examine it and bring it to you from the word of God, I think I would define the deeper meaning of fasting something like this.

It is the denial of everything that interferes with an intimate and direct fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. May I repeat that? It is the denial of everything which interferes with an intimate and direct fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The first meaning of fasting is merely seasonal, an occasional day without food perhaps.

But this is something that is perpetual. It is the Christian suffering, suffering the loss even of his rights, in order that he may come into a more intimate relationship with God. That is the deepest meaning of the word, and I believe that in proportion as the child of God learns to practice it from that angle, he begins to tap infinite sources of eternal power that can cause him to move as he's never moved before in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that can cause a whole church to shake a city if she's really fasting in the sense of the word.

I shall have more to say about that in a moment, but let me just make that definition perfectly clear on our mind and our conscience, and let me say to you, and listen especially young people here, but all of us

listen to me carefully, for these words have burnt their way into my heart and soul during this week. Any progress in intimacy, depth, reality of relationship with Christ is only at the expense of denying everything that would hinder. There is no move forward in the realm of the spiritual unless there's the denying of something in the realm of the physical.

Never. There is no advance with God until there's a crucifixion of the flesh. There's never a move on in blessing until in something in my life that may be legitimate I have said no.

It is the principle expressed in the testimony of the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 3, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but done that I may win Christ and be found in Him and not have mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is of God through faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death. This one thing I do, this one thing, this concentration, this abandon, this complete dedication, this absolute selling out of all that I have, this one thing that any man, any woman who's moved the world for God or moved men toward God or been blessed has been a man with one passion, one desire, one goal for which he sacrificed everything else. The meaning of that.

But let me get here to this second issue, the method of fasting. How is it to be done? Well, our Lord makes it clear in these verses that as in the case of giving and praying there's a right way to fast and there's a wrong way. Be not as the hypocrite he says of a sad countenance for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast.

The principle of inwardness of fasting, you see, didn't appeal to the Pharisee. He wanted everybody to know about it. He wanted everybody to know what he was doing.

So he puts on a pious look and puts dust and ashes on his face, hangs out the sign, this man is fasting. Of course that sort of thing is sheer hypocrisy. It's all with an idea of attracting people to impress upon them how tremendously spiritual we are.

Look what I'm suffering for the sake of my loyalty to Christ. And Jesus condemns this utterly. For the principle of the whole life of worship, you remember, is explained in the very first verse of Matthew 6, that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them.

Now in that sense of the word, beloved, how can you and I completely nullify this principle of fasting? Oh, in all sorts of subtle ways. You can do it by effecting a pious attitude. You can do it by a very sanctimonious experience.

You can do it by coming to a prayer meeting and saying to somebody, I'm awfully hungry tonight. And somebody says, really, why? Oh yes, you say, I felt so burdened in prayer that I missed my dinner. That's how you advertise it so that everybody will know.

And of course you can do it in the wrong way because of a wrong motive. You can practice this principle of fasting because you believe, apparently, that you'll get results. This is the way you may say that to get things from God, this will ensure the blessing.

Some people would even go so far as to say that my Christian life has been very up and down, very miserable and defeated, until one day I picked up a tract that spoke about fasting. I practiced fasting and the blessing came. That's a very dangerous position.

That's as much as saying you command the blessing of God and not God himself. If any feature of your Christian life you say, if I do this, then I'm sure to get that, my friend, you're completely violating God's sovereignty. God doesn't work that way.

But there's a right way to fast. Look, verse 17. Anoint thy head, wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy father which seeth in secret.

What does that mean? Wash your face and anoint your head? Well, it doesn't mean sort of put on a gay look. It just means forget yourself and be natural and be normal. The sort of person other people would expect you to be as a child of God.

Be concerned only about pleasing the Lord Jesus and living for His glory. He doesn't need you to heist a flag in order that He might know what's going on down here, He sees. And He looks down into the depth of your soul with that eye that pierces down to the very depth.

Does He approve of what's going on in there? If He does, nothing else matters. That's how to deny yourself. That's how to fast.

Doesn't matter what others think. Doesn't matter about putting on a pious expression. The one thing that matters is that I live my life every moment in the conscious presence of a living God, that His eye penetrates to the depths of my being, and He knows at this moment exactly what's going on in my own personal, private life of worship.

Does He smile upon it? That's all I would desire. Does He see that you so desire to live in closest touch with Him that you have been deliberately refusing to allow in your life anything that would hinder? You remember that great challenge of the first two verses of Hebrews 12, don't you? Let me remind you of it. Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

There's fasting, there's the right way. Let us lay aside every weight and every sin, two things that have got to go from the Christian life. Sin, and all of us know what that is.

We don't need to define it, we know it. The Holy Spirit speaks and conviction comes and it's got to go. If we're to go on with God, but wait, wait.

Something that's doubtful, something that's uncertain. And listen, this is how it works out in experience. The man who faces this challenge and seriously longs to go on with God, he'll go into the secret place.

He'll go alone with the Lord in his room, in his closet, and he'll kneel down. And in the presence of the Lord, he will review every aspect of his life. He'll talk over with God his friendships, especially, if you'll pardon me saying so, friendships with the opposite sex.

He'll go over them very drastically, very ruthlessly. Extraordinary to watch a man in a congregation sometimes, especially a young fellow. Sit in a congregation, enjoy the hymns, but let him see an attractive girl in the choir and watch his face change.

It makes me sick, absolutely sick. And he thinks he's so spiritual. And he thinks he's gone on with God and he's so wonderful.

And he betrays himself about that, you know. I say that a man who's fasting will get alone with the Lord and he'll review his relationships with the opposite sex. And wherever he finds one that's crowding his view of Christ and making fellowship with the Lord Jesus difficult, he'll deny it and he'll cut it out.

And he'll go through his bookshelf and his library and the girl will go through her wardrobe and she'll discover that she has fifty blouses and she only needs half a dozen. And she'll discover that she's about six coats and she's even thinking of getting another one and she doesn't need it. And she'll find a physical wardrobe that's overstocked because she loves luxury and says she needs it.

And she'll begin to say no and no and no. And she'll be contemplating buying a tremendously beautiful ring or a necklace or a jewel. It would look so lovely.

Everybody else has it. Why shouldn't I? And then God will speak to her and tell her that the price of that ring would keep her missionary on the field for twelve months. And she'll say no.

The principle of fasting and denying will get into your clothes, into your dress, into your wardrobe, into your friendship, into your sex life, into your library, into your bookcase, into everything. And the Christian will run with patience the race that is set before him. And that word patience means in isolation.

It's the word that was used of our Lord a little later on in Hebrews 12 who endured the cross. It's the word that's used of him when he's carried behind in Jerusalem alone. He'll run with patience.

This thing he isn't going to advertise. He isn't going to talk about. He isn't going to speak about to other people.

They'll notice it because of the radiance in his life. But deep down in his soul there'll be a private communion and an interview with the Lord on these matters that he won't find easy to discuss with anybody. But he'll know that the Lord has probed so deep that there's nothing left of it.

My young friend, you're cross with me now, aren't you? You're saying to yourself, fanaticism. Always a bit like that when we come to this church. All right, all right.

Carry on as you are. Please yourself. Choose the easy path.

Go the broad road. But Jesus is watching. And thy father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

One last word. The ministry of fasting. Is it worth it? What does it accomplish? Let me give you three thoughts quickly.

And if I have to say goodbye to our radio audience, I'm very sorry. I'm a bit crowded for time. Three brief things.

Three brief things about this question of fasting. The ministry and what it will affect. Is it worth it? Let me give you them.

First, it is a fundamental aspect of the life of worship. In fact, it is the real source of power in all worship. Now, take for instance this question of giving.

I referred to it a little last week. Let me take it again. This matter of tithing.

I have actually heard people say something to this effect. They had no peace in their lives, no prosperity in their business until they began to tithe. But the moment they practiced tithing and gave one-tenth to the Lord, joy flooded their life and business was tremendously successful.

In other words, if you want to do well in business, start tithing. Give your tenth and the results will follow. I hope that you haven't been educated to believe that.

Because quite frankly, that is both parasitical and unscriptural. Utterly unscriptural. Tell me, why is it that so many men in the time of prosperity give far less than when they were poor? I'll tell you why.

Because deep down in that man's heart who has been prosperous, the whole principle at the back of tithing has gone. The principle of self-denial. He preferred that his wife should have her fur coat and a couple of automobiles, and that he should have prosperity in business, and he should have his TV set, perhaps even three of them.

He preferred all this sort of thing, and gradually the whole generosity, love, tenderness, sweetness of his life has shriveled up in his own mind. He's a big shot today in the sight of God, he's a little worm. I'm sorry, but it's true.

The man who began tithing, fasting ceases, prayer ceases. But nobody can pray unless at the back of their prayer life there's utter self-denial. And when prayer ceases, giving ceases too.

I tell you, a man will give less now than he did when he had half as much to give if he has been educated to believe that all he's got to do is to tithe his income. I will never, from this pulpit, preach on the subject of tithing. Not that I do not advocate it and say that this church would be greatly enhanced if everybody tithed, but tithing is legal, outward, it's all in the Old Testament, it has to do with the law and not of grace.

The whole principle of Christian giving is this, deep down in my heart there is no to the flesh. There is self-denial to everything that keeps me back from an intimate walk with God. There is a refusal to admit any rival to the claims of His sovereignty.

Jesus perched all along the line. And deep down in my soul, in the silent place with God, that vow is committed, is transacted, is made real. And out from that there comes a life of prayer.

And out from that there comes a life of giving that makes tithing appear just like a little drop in a bucket compared with what a man gives when he's hot of flame for God. Do you see? The second ministry of fasting is this. It is vital to a soul-saving ministry.

You remember the Father who brought His Son, possessed with an unclean spirit, to Him, and He besought Him to heal Him and said, If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us. The record is in Mark chapter 9. And Jesus said, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And He rebuked the foul spirit and departed out of Him.

And then a pathetic little group of disgusted and defeated disciples, frustrated and conscious of failure, came to Him and said, Lord, why couldn't we cast Him out? And Jesus looked them in the face and said, This kind goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting. I want to speak to my own heart about this this morning, very quietly in your presence, speak to you all. And somehow the Holy Spirit has been probing so deep that this has got right beneath my skin.

Listen to me. There's a price to pay if a soul is to be won. Did you know that? Whenever there's birth, there's travail.

And the price of a successful ministry, successful ministry in that sense of the word, has to be paid in secret. There can be nothing lasting in blessing without this. That's why if you really care about a soul-saving ministry in this church, you'll be proving it by fasting, by the burden of your heart.

Beloved, the gospel of the broken heart of Christ can only truly be proclaimed by the bleeding heart of a saved soul. And if I stop bleeding, God stops blessing. Did you know that? Who is weak, says the apostle, but I am not weak.

Paul was exhausted in the weakness of other people. He heard a cry from Macedonia, and he felt the pain in his own heart. Do you know anything about that? Ah, yes.

It's essential for a soul-saving ministry. How many of you here know anything about it? You listen to the preacher, listen to the gospel. Perhaps you're thankful, some of you.

But oh, in your own life, are you backing up the public preaching by private fasting? Are you denying yourself something in the realm of the physical for the sake of the glory of the kingdom in Moody Church? The Holy Spirit has to answer that question, not me. And one last word. Fasting is absolutely essential if I would overcome the flesh.

Paul says, to paraphrase 1 Corinthians 9, 27, I am no shadow boxer. I don't beat the air. I buffet my body.

I knock it about. I make it black and blue. I bruise my body and make it my slave, lest, having been a herald to other people, I should be rejected.

If you live after the flesh, you shall die. If you live after the spirit, you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. To all my beloved fellow pilgrims, in the journey of life, let me say from my heart to you, the older I get, the more convinced I become that there's no victory without a fight.

Without a fight. And I'm telling you today, that the world doesn't know, and perhaps your husband and wife, your parents, your children don't know, but God knows the fight that's going on right now. And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

In conclusion, this whole aspect of the field of Christian worship, giving, praying, fasting before us, I ask you lovingly one question, which the Holy Spirit told me early hours of this morning to ask you. But first of all, he had to ask me, brother, sister, what does it cost you to be a Christian? That's my question. Are you, not in order to be saved, but because you are saved, are you paying the price at the source, the inwardness of spiritual power? Are you saying no to the physical for the glory of the spiritual? So, what's it costing you to be a Christian? Shall we pray? I think we'd better give each other a moment to talk with the Lord about that question.

And as he's been talking to us, to ask him for grace to trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. Lord, have mercy upon us. Thy Holy Spirit has probed into our hearts.

Make us, make me willing to pay the price in the inwardness of our soul, that there may flow out of that inwardness a light of prayer, of giving, of sacrificial living for Jesus, which will be utterly for his glory and for the rapid spread of the gospel, the salvation of souls. And Lord, we shall look to thee one day for thy

promise that thou who hast seen in secret will reward openly. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! All the Lord God is Alleluia!

Lord, as a bona fide cause thou didst thy hardest work, one day when heaven was filled with his praises, one day when sin was at peace, Jesus came forth to be born again of a very living he loved rising he justified freely forever one day the ground will sound for his coming one day the sky jesus living he loved freely forever peace with the lord in the light of his word what a glory he sheds on our way while we do his goodwill he abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey in jesus but to trust and obey not a shadow can rise but to trust he's he loves me grace and pardon he offers you today mr alan redpath speaking at the prairie bible institute canada on fasting we invite you to turn in your new testaments this morning to the gospel according to saint matthew and the sixth

chapter the gospel according to matthew and the sixth chapter and let me read three verses from verse 16 moreover continues the lord jesus 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 verily i say unto you they have their reward that 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 we come this morning my dear friends to a brief consideration of the last of three aspects of the christian's life of worship with which our lord deals in the first 18 verses of the sixth chapter of matthew the remainder of the chapter has to do with our walk as we have seen on

previous sundays deal with this tremendously important question of our worship verse 2 when thou doest thine arm verse 6 when thou prayest verse 16 when ye fast and here at this point it seems to me that the holy spirit probes the deepest of all notice will you the order in which the lord jesus comes to this subject of worship giving praying fasting the first stated is in fact in real christian experience the last the last part of a christian to be touched is his pocket when the holy spirit gets hold of him you notice therefore that before we give we pray and before we pray we fast and so our lord in this statement it seems to me is moving from the outward evidence of our relationship to christ as revealed in our giving to the very depth of the inward source of spiritual life and power

our fasting giving that is merely a sense of duty is not christian giving at all giving that has its source of power in passion in love in a life that is utterly denying itself constantly is giving that has the stamp of the holy ghost upon it the one proof of our relationship with christ is our giving for the test of a man's giving in reality is based upon our love for the lord jesus the power that makes for real giving is praying and the condition that makes a man prayer life a man's prayer life really powerful and vital is fasting these are the three great means of grace and i consider with you for a little while trusting in the help of the spirit in the last of these three i want to ask you to think of it from three angles this morning first what is the meaning of this question of

fasting here and second what is the method of it if it means something to us how must it be put into operation and third and finally what is the ministry of fasting to us and to others what does this question of fasting mean in the bible undoubtedly it has a two-fold meaning in the first place it has to do with a deliberate abstinence from physical food for a spiritual purpose and as far as that aspect of the meaning of fasting is concerned i think it would be true to say that it is almost dropped out of experience in evangelical circles anyway and the reason for that isn't far to find far to seek or evangelicalism in this as in everything else of course is reactionary it is reactionary against anything that is ritualistic or formal and whereas still in certain sections of the church

emphasis is laid on seasons of fasting we have violently reacted against that because it seems to us that such doctrine teaches that salvation is by work instead of faith and to substitute fasting or indeed anything else as a basis of salvation in place of the precious blood of our lord jesus is to deny the whole of the teaching of the bible but i suggest to you this morning my dear friend that the danger is that our reaction is so violent that it has gone to the other extreme and we have excluded and forgotten this teaching of our lord altogether tell me have you ever missed a meal for a prayer meeting have you have you ever denied your body one bit of food for a sincere spiritual motive have you have you refused to satisfy a physical appetite in order to nourish your soul yet here is

the teaching of christ alongside the question of giving and praying and we can't just pick and choose can we as to what we're going to accept of our lord teaching i have been looking through the word of god carefully this week on this subject of fasting and have been quite surprised in my study of it to discover how much it has to say on the subject you remember that the children of israel were commanded to fast once a year on the occasion of their deliverance from egypt and that rule of god was binding upon that people for all time the pharisees they weren't commanded to do it of course but the pharisees fasted twice a week and there are always some people in every generation of the church who will go further on most doctrines than the bible teaches them our lord spoke about this

question of fasting in the ninth chapter of this gospel and the 14th verse you remember he was questioned by the disciples of john the baptist concerning it and they said master why is it that the pharisees fast so often and we do but your disciples don't do it you remember his significant answer listen to it can the children of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them but the day shall come when the bridegroom is taken from them then shall they fast and we live in the day when the bridegroom has been taken from us and the day of the absent lord then said the lord jesus in that day i expect my people to practice this principle of self-denial no need now when i'm alongside them but when i've gone from when i've been taken from when i'm away from them and they're

living in a christ rejecting world then i expect them to show their loyalty and their love by this very secret inwardness of fasting of course we recall that the lord jesus set the example for he fasted 40 days and 40 nights in combat with the enemy in the wilderness and if you turn to the time of the early church in the acts of the apostles you will perhaps recall that the church began its missionary enterprise in the 13th chapter of acts in the second verse by a period of prayer and fasting and as they prayed and fasted the holy ghost spoke at the moment of the practice of self-denial at the moment when the church was adopting a right attitude of prayer in its inward spiritual life unobserved by others when the inwardness of the thing was real the holy ghost said separate me fallen

barnabas that's always and only when the holy ghost can call someone to the mission field you are never called to the mission field and god help you if you respond simply on the basis of a string of tear-jerking stories or on a statistical account of missionary needs you are called to the mission field by the holy ghost operating in the church in answer to the prayer and self-denial of the people of god if we want to send missionaries up from moody church in this desperate hour of need this church will be in prayer and will be practicing fast that's the basis of a missionary call and you remember also that paul himself spoke do you remember of being in fasting's office if you were to read church history you would find that saints of god believed in this and practiced it it was true in the

time of the reformation and especially true if you would take time to read the wonderful life diary and record of john wesley and whitfield in that sense in that primary meaning of the word beloved i'm

suggesting to you this morning that the practice of fasting has almost entirely died out to deny yourself a meal for the sake of waiting upon god would be utterly unthinkable to sacrifice a t-bone steak for a prayer meeting would be fanaticism in the extreme at least if ever you did it you'd make it known through the whole church that you've done it the fact is i don't wish to be hard about this except first to my own heart the fact is that the desire to satisfy the physical appetite is far stronger with most christian people than the desire to satisfy and to feed the soul indeed indeed i

would go so far as to suggest that the circuit in the realm of the physical has often led to starvation and loss of appetite in the realm of the spiritual check your own experience by that especially after a big dinner you feel like going to prayer when you've surfeited your body and food do you feel like really self-denying when you've gone to hasty tasty and had milkshakes butterscore and chocolate ice creams that you say you must have must have them and you surf at your body you wonder why it is don't care for prayer meetings think they're a bit extreme don't like going to the prayer meeting have no appetite for spiritual things of course you haven't you surf at the body at the expense of the soul i am reminded of that terrific verse in psalm 106 verse 15 don't check me too accurately

i think it i'm just speaking in memory it only comes to my mind as i'm preaching i think of that verse certainly in that psalm where the psalmist is giving the record of the wanderings of the people of god through the wilderness and as they lusted what for garlic i can never understand why excuse me mentioning it garlic and onions and leeks and all that they could find in egypt as they lusted after all these things lord why can't we have them we hate these rations of the wilderness give us our bodily food the psalmist says oh what a dreadful thing the lord granted them their request and sent leanness to their soul and in a generation in which if i may be pardoned for saying there's a circuit of food and there's a tremendous luxury of feeding the physical appetite i sometimes wonder if

that's why it is that the spiritual appetite of so many christians is so peevish and so dilatory and so easily satisfied ah but i must come to grips with my subject more closely for this is only one meaning of this question of fasting i suggest you there's a deeper one and as i seek to examine it and bring it to you from the word of god i think i would define the deeper meaning of fasting something like this it is the denial of everything that interferes with an intimate and direct fellowship with the lord jesus christ may i repeat that it is the denial of everything which interferes with an intimate and direct fellowship with the lord jesus christ the first meaning of fasting is merely seasonal an occasional day without food perhaps but this is something that is perpetual it is the

christian suffering suffering the loss eastern suffering suffering the loss even of his rights in order that he may come into a more intimate relationship with god that is the deepest meaning of the word and i believe that in proportion as the child of god learns to practice it from that angle he begins to tap infinite sources of eternal power that can cause him to move as he's never moved before in the power of the holy spirit and that can cause a whole church to shake a city if she's really fasting in the sense of the word i shall have more to say about that in a moment but let me just make that definition perfectly clear on our mind and our conscience and let me say to you and listen especially young people here but all of us listen to me carefully for these words have burnt their way

into my heart and soul during this week any progress in intimacy depth reality of relationship with christ is only at the expense of denying everything that would hinder there is no move forward in the realm of the spiritual unless there's the denying of something in the realm of the physical never

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