

The Stewardship of Fasting

by J.G. Morrison

Fasting is a means of releasing divine power and qualifying before God to do His work in His way, and it is a crucial aspect of the Christian life.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 9:18, Ezra 8:21, Esther 4:16, Daniel 10:3, Joel 2:12, Matthew 9:14, Matthew 24:37, Acts 13:2, 2 Corinthians 11:27

Topics: "Fasting And Prayer", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

J.G. Morrison preaches on the importance of fasting as a duty bestowed upon us by God, highlighting how sincere fasting enables God to do what He otherwise cannot do for us personally, the church, the community, the nation, and the age. The sermon emphasizes the responsibility of God's people to fast sincerely, faithfully, and regularly, drawing examples from the Old Testament where fasting moved God to act in remarkable ways, such as with Moses, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, and Jonah. The sermon also explores Christ's approval of fasting and the early Church's practice of fasting in connection with their services, urging believers to fast and pray to release God's power and blessings.

Transcript

God has bestowed upon us the ability, the opportunity, the privilege and the duty of fasting. This is an obligation for which we are responsible, and for which some day we must give an account. When God's people sincerely fast, it enables God to do what otherwise He cannot do -- for us personally, for the local church, for the community, for the nation, and for the age. Consequently, we owe it to God to fast, and to do it sincerely, faithfully and regularly.

God's people are responsible for all the divine power that He is able to release because we fast.

In The Bible

In the Old Testament accounts of God's dealings with the human race, we note that fasting was one of the constant means by which His people approached God. It always was intended to denote the deep sincerity of the one who fasted, and also the great need.

Humbly and sincerely to fast, was to qualify before the Almighty so as to do God's work in God's way. When sincerely done in the Spirit, fasting never failed to move God and enabled Him to accomplish what otherwise He was unable to bring to pass.

In the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy we have a most notable instance of fasting. Here is recorded how Moses fasted a second forty days and nights. The first occasion of his lengthy fast was when he was in the mount with God, at the end of which he received the two tables of the law. In the case to which we call especial attention here, however, he had come down from the mount with the tables of the law, and discovered Israel's sinful worship of the golden calf; he had destroyed that idol, and was now pleading with the Lord Jehovah to spare the lives of sinful Israel, which He had declared He was about to destroy.

Moses had no promise here to plead. On the contrary, he had a distinct prohibition against asking for the remission of the decree of destruction. "Let Me alone," declared Jehovah. This was evidently a reply to the importunities of Moses, who for forty days with unappeased appetite pressed his case. God finally granted his prayer.

Note, then, the chief method by which this remarkable man of God secured his petition. Fasting! The very thing that millions of professing Christians today refuse to employ.

As a result of Moses' prayers, his faith--but chiefly because of another forty days of fasting--God hearkened unto him, spared all the people, turned them back into the wilderness again, and ultimately led some of them across Jordan into the Canaan land. This is one of the greatest instances recorded in Scripture of humanity winning out with Deity. How did he do it? By employing a method we generally disdain--fasting.

Who can tell what would happen in the way of world revival and the world's evangelization, and in the upbuilding of God's kingdom on earth, if all God's people in the world would today answer this urgent plea to fast and pray, and by systematic fasting, release the pent-up power of our omnipotent God?

Ezra and Nehemiah

In the eighth chapter of Ezra, we have another instance of how promptly the ancient people of God resorted to fasting as the means of releasing God's omnipotent hand. Ezra, the divinely chosen man to lead in the return of captive Israel from Babylon to their ancient home in Jerusalem, had gathered up some forty thousand men, women and children. The king of Babylon had bestowed much wealth upon them, in order to enable them to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

With great joy they marched through the king's domains till they came to its boundaries. There they faced the unbroken wilderness, infested with bandits and robbers. They themselves were wholly unarmed. What should they do? They immediately resorted to the methods their fathers had frequently employed with such signal success. They called for a period of fasting--the very thing that is so universally tabooed among Christians today.

Here were thousands of men, women and children wholly unarmed. They were loaded with unusual treasure and spoil--a helpless company loaded with rich booty for bandits and robbers. They sincerely fasted and God's power was released upon them. They were able to travel in safety to their destination. They used the very means for securing His favor and releasing His power that is now, generally speaking, so discarded.

Is not the God of today the same as He who guided and protected the Israelites when they were traveling to build again the walls of Jerusalem? Who then can tell the wondrous revivals that would take place, the individual conversions that would occur, and the releasement of God's power that could be had in these

days--if His people would more faithfully practice this ancient method of carrying on His work?

In the first chapter of Nehemiah, we have an instance where that man of God was praying and fasting over the as yet unbuilt walls of Jerusalem. As a result of his prayers and fastings, God moved upon the heart of the king, whom Nehemiah served as a cupbearer, to send him to Jerusalem, there to supervise the re-erection of the ruined walls of the city. Here again, this man also secured the answer to his prayer by means of fasting and prayer.

Esther

In the Book of Esther, we are told that the king, without knowing that Esther was a Jewess, had chosen this beautiful young woman as the queen of his realm. At the same time the wicked Haman, who hated the Israelites, had conspired with success, to secure a decree from the king for the concerted destruction of all the Jews in the kingdom. Mordecai, Esther's relative and guardian, congratulated her upon being chosen as queen, for that would, he declared, enable her to importune the king for the remission of the fatal decree that called for the death of all the Jews.

She sent back word that, until the king officially sent for her, it was fatal for her to attempt to interview him, and that she dared not force herself upon him. To this Mordecai answered that she would die anyhow, for when the fatal day fixed by the decree should dawn, the executioners would learn that she was a Jewess, and consequently she would be included in the massacre. Upon receiving this statement, the queen replied:

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

The result of this general fast on the part of the Jews was that God touched the heart of the king, gave Esther favor with him, induced him to remember the good offices of Mordecai which had been rendered to the realm on a previous occasion, and caused him to fall out with Haman, the instigator of the plot.

Whereupon, the king sent Haman to the gallows which Haman himself had erected for the expected execution of Mordecai, whom he peculiarly hated. The Jews were all freed from the diabolical decree. How did it all happen? Fasting!

Daniel

In Daniel, the 10th chapter, we are told that the prophet for three weeks tasted no pleasant food, or allowed any pleasing liquids to pass his lips. During this period of partial abstinence he was in great prayer concerning the future of his people. In answer God sent an angel to reveal many things to him. Please note, three weeks of partial abstinence brought the visit of an angel.

For the most part modern Christians make God's weekly day of worship more of a day of feasting than of abstinence or plain living. If there is to be a big meal served in a Christian family any time during the week, it is usually reserved for God's day, when God's cause is chiefly at stake.

Could we not more profitably devote the Lord's Day to plain living and deep devotion, even though we did not practice the omission of one whole meal? Could we not devote more time to intercession for the church, the family, the lost about us, and for the mission fields?

Particularly ought we not to be impressed along this line when we read in the New Testament that one of the peculiar signs of the closing days of this age is to be "they were eating and drinking" (Matt. 24:37-39), and then notice how generally some form of "refreshments" is today characteristic of religious meetings?

Joel

In Joel, the prophet states that when the times are desperate, God Himself exhorts His people to seek aid from Him, and suggests how to come. "Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Joel 2:12-13).

In another place, the prophet Joel calls upon the people to announce a time of fasting, and for everyone to come, even to the newlyweds and the children: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify [i.e. set apart] a fast, call a solemn assembly." This teaches that it is proper for all to agree upon a day, and fast unitedly. Some folk believe in fasting "when the Lord puts it on" them, as they say. But they do not do other things that way. Who waits for a divine urge before going to church, or arising in the morning, or paying the rent, or preparing meals for the household?

Speaking of a divine urge to fast: if the Scriptures that we are here quoting and calling attention to are not to be considered the voice of the Lord, then we are too far gone to heed anything quoted from the Bible. "If they heed not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Jonah

In the prophet Jonah's day, the king and the people of Nineveh, alarmed on account of his preaching, could think of no better way to secure the intervention of God in their behalf, and the answer to their prayers, than to fast.

If, therefore, God would heed the prayers, fasting and cries of a city full of unregenerate Ninevites, would He not heed and answer the intercession of His redeemed people if they earnestly, faithfully, fasted and prayed?

Christ

Our Lord Himself, at the dawn of His ministry, set His seal of approval to the great truth of fasting, by spending forty days without food, and during that time was subjected to the fiercest assaults of the enemy. He either equaled or exceeded the best that any spiritual leader in the past or present had done in this respect.

At one time Christ was asked why His disciples failed to fast, while the Pharisees and John's disciples fasted often. His answer was: "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?"

"But," said He, "the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them"; when they will seem to be alone; when they will be confronted by a thousand opponents; when they will have to live on their knees, fighting for their spiritual lives, and occasionally, for their physical existence. "Then," said He, "shall they fast." That is, when the battle waxed hot, when the need was great, when tremendous issues were at stake, "then shall they fast" (Matt. 9:14,15).

That word "shall," it seems to us, carries a bit more significance than merely the demand and pressure predicted of future events. Is there not also in it the element of Jesus' own wish in the matter? Perhaps, without doing too great violence to the syntax, there could be read into it the element of a divine command.

When were they to begin this spiritual exercise that released divine power? When He was taken from them--on that Ascension Day when He was "parted from them," "and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9)--after that they were to fast. How long were they to continue to offer to God that channel that He has so conspicuously used and blessed? Till He returned--over the eastern hills of eternity, on His second advent. Have we done this? Have not most of us rather conspicuously failed?

It would almost seem, as we study the New Testament, that in those first-century days they literally ran the Church with periods of fasting; for in Acts 13:2 we are admitted to one of the ordinary, everyday activities of a church, that at Antioch, while Paul and Barnabas were there ministering. We find them fasting. Read the following and ask yourself whether it sounds much like one of our modern church groups:

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

Do we not conduct whole revival campaigns sometimes lasting for two or three weeks, and never fast once during the time? Do we not attend district assemblies and general assemblies and never hear the subject mentioned the whole session? Perhaps it is because the fasting mentioned in the first part of this verse is so sadly neglected that we hear so little also about the Holy Ghost telling us definitely what to do. We wrangle and discuss and vote, and then repeat these creaturely efforts.

Maybe if we would heed the command to fast and pray, we could hear more of the second, "the Holy Ghost said..."

In those first-century days, fasting in connection with their usual services seems to have been a common custom, for in the next verses we read, as though it were a still later service, some days or weeks afterward:

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost..." (Acts 13:3-4)

What blessings are we not missing? What failure to secure releasements of God's power; what deprivation do we not visit upon our outgoing missionaries; what enduements upon the selection of church officers do we not fail to realize--because we are loath to do God's work in God's way? Is it going too far to allege this? Is this not correct?

"In Fastings Often"

2 Corinthians 11:27; 6:5

The difficulty of winning men to God these days is often discussed. The comparative scarcity of believers uniting with us after each revival meeting is the theme of many ministerial and Christian workers' conventions. We humbly ask, would not the situation be somewhat improved if we all obeyed the evident teaching of Scriptures on fasting? If we all followed the implied command of Jesus frequently to fast till His return?

Would we not receive greater degrees of His blessing if we would sincerely wait before God with unappeased appetites at stated times each week, and thus enable Him to do what otherwise He is unable to accomplish?

God has a way for His people to work, but it is a way of sacrifice, a way of devotion, a way of heroism. When we choose our own indolent, easy, comfortable way, then we prevent Him from accomplishing what otherwise He could bring to pass. But when we choose His way, then He can work in power and presence among us once more! Who then, is willing to do God's work in God's way?

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