



LESSON SEVENTEEN - FASTING

Text

Isaiah 58: 3-8
Matthew 6: 16 -28
Joel 2: 12 - 17

There are three spiritual legs necessary for the Christian to really gain power in the Spirit. Just like a three legged stool is unable to stand when one leg is missing, the same is true in really drawing closer to the Lord. These three legs are hearing or studying God's word (it is our bread), prayer (it is our water of refreshing – it includes our worship if done correctly), and then there is fasting which helps create the hunger and thirst and prepares our heart. You will often find that the three of these are given together to us as things we need to do to draw closer to the Lord.

Jeremiah 36:6 Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. 7 It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people.

Mark 9: 28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? 29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Nehemiah 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes,

and earth upon them. 2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

What Is Fasting?

Fasting is defined as the act of willingly abstaining from some or all food and in some case liquids for a period of time. It can be for religious reasons, health reasons, and has even been used as a means of protest. For the Christian however, the benefit of fasting depends on the purpose and attitude of the one doing the fasting. For example, the Lord criticized the Jews for not having the right heart or reason for fasting in Isaiah 58: 3 – 8

Isaiah 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 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? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the op-



pressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 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?

The Purpose of Fasting

In the scriptures above fasting was to be used primarily as a time when a godly person would deny himself and give food and clothing to the poor. However, there were spiritual reasons that could be noticed here and in the New Testament teaching by Jesus concerning fasting. Fasting has the following benefits:

- “to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke”. Fasting is a means of gaining victory over sin or for breaking the bonds of oppression.
- Jesus said that some demons can only be cast out by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17: 19 – 21)
- Fasting was always used by men of God in order to separate themselves in prayer, as a discipline to the soul and to draw closer to God.
 - Psalms 35:13
 - Psalms 69:10
 - Daniel 9:3
- Joel 2: 12 – 15 Fasting is used when we really need to repent of something where we are having difficulty and when we need to open our heart to God

The Difficulty of Fasting

Moses (Deuteronomy 9: 9-25), Elijah (I Kings 19:8), and Jesus (Matthew 4:2) are the only ones

listed in the scripture that had forty day fast. These were very miraculous fast since the Bible said they also did not drink. Normally this length in fasting is dangerous and deadly. In the New Testament we see several incidents of fasting:

- Acts 10: 30 – Cornelius fasted for four days until Peter came and preached to him which brought revival to his home
- Acts 14:23 – Fasting was done by the apostles prior to ordaining elders in the churches
- Acts 27:33 – there was fasting during the storm at sea when Paul was being taken to Jerusalem
- I Corinthians 7:5 – Paul speaks of fasting as a time of separating oneself during a time of prayer

However, there is no real guideline for how long a fast should be. Any fast longer than three days should only be considered with planning and preparation, such as entering into a longer fast with gradually changing food; drinking water or juices to make sure a person does not dehydrate. It is healthy both physically and spiritually to try to fast regularly, but sometimes medical conditions might mean a person can only do partial fast. As long as the heart and motive is right when a person fast, God will take care of the benefit and results.

When You Fast

The Bible did not say “if you fast” but “when you fast”. Let us look at Matthew 6: 16-18:

Matthew 6:16 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. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 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.

It is hard for me to understand how the practice of “ash Wednesday” can be so prevalent when the Lord is very plain about not doing it. This custom or tradition of the Catholic church is in direct contradiction to the teaching of Jesus.

Here are some guidelines:

- Fast or abstain from fleshly activity that defeat or hinder your ability to concentrate on spiritual things (I Corinthians 7)
- Try to fast at a time when you can avoid other distractions such as work or play. Because we are such busy people, fasting, like praying requires making the effort to get to a place alone or at least where there are not a lot of distractions. It may be that the best you can do is a partial days fast while others are out of the house, or hide yourself in a bedroom for a meal or two – or all day if possible.
- Don’t listen to or watch non-spiritual things that will take away your mind from focusing on God in prayer and meditation
- FAST YOUR WORDS. An old preacher use to tell his congregation that when the flesh is fighting for control (since it is resisting your efforts to bring it under), the tongue is still impossible to control completely. When fasting – do very little talking.