

"Fasting is important- more important, perhaps, than many of us have supposed. . . For all that, it is not a major biblical doctrine, a foundation of the faith, or a panacea for every spiritual need."

- Out of vogue for the last 150 yrs.
- Fasting was one of the dominant features of asceticism
- People revolted against the idea; prejudices (and skepticism) prevail

". . .we may face a truth in Scripture again and again without it ever touching us."

Bible and Church Saints who fasted

Moses (the lawgiver)	David (the king)	Elijah (the prophet)			
Daniel (the seer)	our Lord	His apostles			
Hannah	Anna	Luther	Calvin	Knox	John Wesley
David Brainard	Charles Finney				

And many, many anonymous saints. . .who prayed with fasting. . .
to the God who sees in secret.

The Decline (of fasting)

- NT times: fasting a channel of power
- Spirituality waned and worldliness flourished (in the churches)
 - The loss of the inward power
 - Cling to what was left- the outward act of fasting
- Paul's prediction: (**2 Tim.3:5**); "the form of religion but denying the power."

SO- Why Fast?

- The Lord is coming for a church without spot or wrinkle
- So, the church needs revival
 - The world needs to see a glorious & powerful church
- Power that is released through the truly biblical practice of
 - ***Fasting unto God***

The Normal Fast (the most common type)

"Once the truth becomes nebulous it ceases to have any practical application."

- We (and/or the church) have come to believe "to fast" can mean
 - to abstain from anything that hinders communion with God
 - this we ought to do without neglecting biblical fasting!
- Fasting means primarily NOT to eat.
- Abstaining from all food
 - Solid or liquid. . .but not from water
- **Luke 4:2** "he (Jesus) ate nothing"
 - He was full of the Holy Spirit. . .led by the Holy Spirit
 - Then tempted by the devil
 - With bread (not with water)
 - **vs.14** "Jesus returned . . .in the power of the Spirit"

The Absolute Fast (abstaining from drinking & eating)

- normally not for more than 3 days
 - **Ezra 10:6**
 - "mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles"
 - **Esther 4:16**
 - A crisis of utmost gravity- extermination of the Jewish race
 - **Acts 9:9**
 - Saul of Tarsus- spiritual revolution
- Supernatural (extended) fasts
 - Moses- 40 days & 40 nights. . .twice (back-to-back)
 - Deut.9:9,18 Exodus 34:28
 - Received 10 Commandments and then the golden calf crisis
 - Elijah on his journey to Horeb (1 Kings 19:8)
 - After escaping Jezebel
 - Awakened by an angel

The Partial Fast (emphasis is on the *restriction of diet*)

- **Daniel 1:8** "Daniel resolved not to defile himself..."
 - Nothing but vegetables and water
 - vs.11 after 10 days they looked better; healthier than...
 - *fact of dietetics that a simple & wholesome diet is far more beneficial than a rich and elaborate one*
- Daniel received a definite spiritual value and victory over the powers of darkness as well as the unfolding of the vision by an angelic messenger
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- **1 Kings 17** Elijah's spiritual preparation & sustaining
 - Training of this man of God in self-denial
 - Entrusted with spiritual power (or responsibility)
 - A simple diet (there was a famine in the land)
 - Identified with the people's need & circumstances
 - **cp.** John the Baptist
 - fasted often; ate locusts and wild honey

Variations of the partial fast

- John Wesley (for a time) ate only dry bread
- Omission a certain meal
- Rees Howells, in prep. For a new work- fasted dinner for many days
- Partial fast good
 - When not able to do a normal fast
 - As a stepping stone to a normal fast
 - May be public or private fast
 - Regular or occasional
 - Involuntary or voluntary

"When"- not "If"

- **Matt.6:2,5,16** in light of Matt.28:19,20
 - Teach just the Epistles or all that He commands?
 - Thou shall not... = when you fast = communion (as often as)
 - Fasting- a spiritual exercise distinct from praying

The Time Is Now "When the bridegroom is taken from them. . .then

they will fast" Matt.9:15 (most crucial NT text on fasting)

- It was a season of feasting not fasting
 - The old order of rites & ceremonies & legal bondage was over
- What 'time period' was Jesus referring to?
 - Following His arrest until He reappeared after the resurrection?
 - Ref. to **John 16:16,20**
 - 3-4 days only?? NO evidence they fasted during this period
 - From 'bridegroom' is taken till (unstated) 'bridegroom' returns
 - **Acts 13:2,3** the apostles then fasted
 - The church still awaits; "Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him" **Matt. 25:6**
 - It is this age of the church- the time is now- to fast.
 - The apostles (and early Christians) fulfilled this prophecy/command
 - *And they received apostolic power*
 - "Fasting is a God-appointed means for the flowing of His grace and power that we can afford to neglect no longer."

NOTES:

Regular & Public Fasts (Wallis- Chap..7)

On a fast day. . .you shall read the words of the Lord - Jer.36:6

- In the context of vs.3- that 'perhaps' they might turn from their sin
 - so, they proclaimed a fast (vs.9)

Sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly - Joel 2:15

- the connection: almost all the regular fasts of the Bible were public ones, but not all the public fasts were necessarily regular.
- By the time of Christ the Pharisees had turned fasting into 'bondage'
 - Boasting, "I fast twice a week" (Luke 18:11,12)
- By the 2nd & 3rd century; Wed. & Fri. became recognized fast days

"It needs to be stresses that fasting, whether regular, occasional, is a matter between the individual and God." (Wallis)

- There is real value in the regular fast
 - "Why are we not more holy?" asked John Wesley
- Times of national or spiritual crisis
 - WW II King called the British to a day of solemn fasting and prayer
 - Feb.6th, 1756 on verge of the French invasion
 - Every church in the city was more than filled
- When a local church is threatened with discord & division

The involuntary fast

- No desire for food because of anxiety, sorrow, mental distress
 - Dan.6:18
- Where no food is available
 - Matt.15:32
 - Paul was accustomed to such circumstances, often
 - 2 Co.6:5; 11:27 Phil.4:11,12

Fasting Unto God (Wallis' chap.8)

When ye fasted. . .did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? - Zechariah 7:5

- Today we ask, "What's in it for me?" or "What's to be gained?"
 - 2 Co. 5:15 should be living for Him
- Beware of wrong emphasis or motives- fasting for personal benefits
 - Enduement of power or for spiritual gifts
 - Physical healing or answers to specific prayers
 - Jesus spoke of motives (Matt.6:16-18)
 - O.T. too (Isa. 58:3)
- Fasting **MUST** be done unto God (**Isaiah 58**)
 - *one*, He has chosen
 - God-initiated and God-ordained
 - *We* need to recognize the need & call to fast
 - even for the regular fast (say of one day a week)
 - no bondage
 - cp. Galatians 5:18
 - "*sanctify*" a fast; "set it apart for God"

John Wesley (excerpt from *Sermon 27; discourse 7*)

Wesley's quote in outlined and (somewhat) paraphrased form

- Unto the Lord; our eyes fixed on Him
- Our intention
 - to glorify our Father
 - to express sorrow & shame for our sins
 - to wait for His purifying grace
 - drawing our affections to things above
 - to add serious expectation of His promises towards us
- Let us beware of a danger deeply rooted in all our hearts that-
 - we merit (deserve) nothing from our fasting
 - fasting does NOT establish our own righteousness
 - does not procure salvation as a debt to us
 - it is of grace we are saved. . .period!
- Fasting is only *a way* God has ordained for us to be enabled to
 - wait for His unmerited mercy
 - without us thinking we have in anyway earned it
 - and freely receive the blessings He has promised us in the Word.

For Personal Sanctity (Wallis' chap.9)

- basic ingredient of true holiness: humility
 - Psalm 69:10
- **How can fasting help us here?** - first, the *negative side*: PRIDE
 - pride & a too-full stomach are old bedfellows
 - Ezekiel 16:49
 - The nations of the West- see any parallels??
 - God saw it back in Moses' day and warned them
 - Deut. 8:2,3 and vs. 11-14
 - What happened? (Hosea 13:6)

So, "fasting is a *divine corrective* to the pride of the human heart".

- Fasting also had to do with mourning (Matt. 5:4)
 - O.T. funerals- practiced as a sign of mourning for the departed
 - Rending of garments, wearing of sackcloth & ashes
 - Matt. 9:15 Jesus treated "mourn" and "fast" interchangeably
- Fasting facilitates the 'process' of sanctification
 - Mourning over personal sin & failure is an indispensable stage
 - 1 Sam. 7:6; Neh. 9:1,2
 - Need to be moved to mourn for the sin(s) of the nation, the church
 - Ezek. 9:4-6
 - The judgment began at God's sanctuary
 - Are you and I 'marked' men & women of God?
- **How can fasting help us here? CONSECRATION TO GOD**

Jesus- our best example

- His baptism was His dedication unto death
 - In anticipation of the cross
 - He received the fullness of the Spirit here
- His wilderness testing & fasting was His reaffirming to do the will of His father even to the end (the cross)
 - After the 40 days. . . the power of the Spirit became operative

Paul and Barnabas- there was a setting apart for apostolic ministry

- Acts 13:3 After they fasted and prayed. . . sent them off
- Acts 14:23 They used the same pattern for setting apart leaders in the local churches