
Fasting: Article No. 2 - Instruction

By Prayer and Fasting (Part Two — Serious Fasting) (1517 Words - submitted 8/2/06)

The dumbing down of discipleship has cost us more than we know. We are over due for revival in America — a revival so necessary that if we do not have it, this nation will perish from the earth. Only about seven percent of those who call themselves Christian actually believe the Bible is the word of God. Most of these are learning very little Bible in the churches they attend. Fewer still are challenged to rise to the call of Jesus for disciples who strive to “be perfect” [Deuteronomy 18:13; 2Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 3:15; 2Timothy 3:17], to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,” [Colossians 1:10; 1Thessalonians 2:12] — to “deny self,” take up their cross and follow Him [Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23; see Galatians 2:20]. Perhaps some reading this article balk at the call to “be perfect.” Isn’t it interesting how the world has corrupted the sense of certain words so that when we speak “according to this word” and say, “be perfect,” those who speak “according to this world” think we are talking about sinless perfection. Pay attention — the seducing spirits, who teach doctrines of devils, [1Timothy 4:1-4] are always saying, “you can’t be perfect,” and, “no one is worthy.” In our spiritually dull condition, we have failed to hear the hiss of the serpent in that ungodly language — even repeating it ourselves — dumbing down discipleship. We complain about a public school system that gives diplomas to students who can’t read and yet we give the name “disciple” to those whose carnal lifestyle besmirch the name of Jesus and encourage the mock of devils. What does this have to do with fasting? The cost of discipleship has gotten more cheap with every passing generation. Most think it is as free as salvation. But Jesus told us to count the cost. If believers are to rise up against the demons attacking America, we are going to need disciples who recognize that the cost of discipleship includes fasting with prayers — who will count the cost, and pay it.

Serious Fasting

Mourning moves us to fasting and prayer. Jesus said His disciples could not “mourn” while the Bridegroom was with them, and therefore they could not fast [Matthew 9:15]. The Bridegroom has ascended into Heaven [Acts 1:5-11]. Jesus expected us to fast in these days, mourning His absence. I wonder if Satan mocks Jesus with our lack of fasting? The Holy Spirit exhorts us to, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” [James 4:9]. If we were appropriately mindful of our condition, and the condition of this world, we would mourn. And this mourning would move us to chasten our soul with fasting. O, that we might turn our laughter into mourning and enter into the fellowship of the Spirit [Philippians 2:1], the communion of the Holy Ghost [2Corinthians 13:14], Who makes intercession for us, “... with groanings which cannot be uttered” [Romans 8:26]. The Spirit mourns. And the first step to effective fasting is to consciously commit yourself to let, (allow) your laughter to be turned to mourning. The Spirit said, “let”; and this tells us He is exerting His Holy influence to draw us into communion with Him in mourning. But we resist, and so we add grief to His groaning [Ephesians 4:30-31]. O, my dearly beloved — consider! We who would never compromise our sobriety by strong drink, are only too willing to be drunk on excessive pleasure and ease [2Timothy 3:4; Amos 6:1]. Excessive pleasure dulls our spiritual senses like alcohol dulls our physical ones. Have you ears to hear the unutterable groaning of the Spirit in His admonition, “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” [1Peter 5:8]? The pleasure-drunks need to dry out — to let their laughter be turned to mourning — and this mourning will move you to fast and pray.

Isaiah 58 offers insight into effective fasting. Isaiah 58:5 says, “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?” You must check the context of the verse to know that God is not rejecting these ancient “forms” of mourning that are here associated with fasting. Indeed, the following Scriptures make it clear that afflicting the soul, bowing the head as a bulrush, and using sackcloth

and ashes are biblical forms of godliness: Leviticus 16:29, “And ... ye shall afflict your souls ...”; Psalm 95:6, “... let us worship and bow down ...”; Genesis 24:26; “And the man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord”; Esther 4:1, “... Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes ...”; Jeremiah 6:26, “... gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning ...”; and Daniel 9:3, “... I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” The context of Isaiah 58 makes it clear it is the use of these “forms” insincerely, to be seen of men, that God rejects. Modern “Christianity” has followed seducing spirits in their disdain for ancient “forms” of worship. But that these “forms” do have influence with God, when used sincerely, is evident all over the Scriptures (see those references above) but no where more evident than when God acknowledged the repentance of wicked Ahab, when he humbled himself in this manner [1Kings 21:25-29].

Soul affliction through fasting serves to humble the soul before the Lord [Psalm 35:13; 69:10]. Bowing the head to the Head is a physical gesture that gives expression to the humility of the soul. But what about the ancient use of sackcloth and dust and ashes that are so often associated with fasting?

Sackcloth is particularly meaningful to God. In response to the suffering of His Son on Calvary, the Father spread sackcloth over the face of the heavens [Isaiah 50:3]. So when His humbled servants got serious about their mourning, they were moved by the Spirit to don sackcloth before His throne [Genesis 37:34; 2Samuel 3:31; 1Chronicles 21:16; Psalm 69:11; 2Kings 19:1; Isaiah 37:1-2; Esther 4:1]. Where else did they get the notion, if not from the Spirit of Him who covered the heavens with sackcloth? The use of sackcloth gives expression to one’s willingness to forsake the pleasures of the flesh, to turn their “laughter” to mourning.

Dust and ashes speak to the truth that we are but flesh. Hear Abraham, by the Spirit, declare, “Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes” [Genesis 18:27]. It is a gesture that declares our recognition that we are but dust, sinners worthy to be burned to ashes; and so it was used in connection with repentance [Job 42:6].

I’m not suggesting that unless you don sackcloth and put ashes upon your head, you are not serious about your fast. But I think it is interesting how we have come to despise these ancient “forms” as meaningless. Something in our spirit disdains them, and I fear it is rooted in a spiritual pride that will provoke God to resist us [1Peter 5:5]. Some might argue our disdain for these “forms” has arisen from God’s own rejection of those who used them insincerely, as in our text. But God did not reject the “forms”; He rejected the insincere use of them. Which brings me to another observation worthy of our attention. The contemporary churches’ disdain for “forms,” or outward displays of humility and holiness before God, has had every bit as much a corrosive effect upon the piety of the believers as has the hypocrisy of those who displayed those “forms” insincerely. Indeed, the Holy Ghost does not complain against a “form of godliness.” He complains when the “power thereof” is denied. Did you hear the Spirit, my brother, my sister? He complains against those who, “Having a form of godliness ... “ deny the “... power thereof” [2Timothy 3:5]. Examine the words, *power thereof*, and consider what is obvious to those whose spiritual senses are sober. You can have “a form of godliness” without “the power thereof,” but you cannot have “the power thereof” without “a form (outward expression) of godliness.”

You might or might not be moved to use sackcloth with dust and ashes in your fasting and praying, but you should consider the spiritual implications of these forms. Indeed, set your heart upon the Cross, and let your soul be wrapped in the sackcloth of mourning that God used to cover the heavens [Romans 8:22]. And come before the Lord in the spirit of Abraham, who said, “Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.”

In my next article I intend to show from Scripture the biblical principle of Sincere Fasting.