

Fasting Article No. 7 – Instruction

By Prayer and Fasting (Part Seven — Famous Fasts)

What a wonderful meeting we have had with Brother Beckum this past week (1/14/08)! God moved mightily, our people were blessed, and our church revived. During one of his messages, he mentioned that the human body will die after seven days without water. I did some research and discovered that the consensus is that a person will die of dehydration after anywhere from 3 to 7 days, depending on factors like health, and level of activity during the abstinence.¹ I mention this here for two reasons: first, to alert you to the importance of being wise and circumspect regarding extended periods of fasting, and second, because a while back, I fasted for fourteen days, and the first seven of those days I took neither food nor drink, and lived to tell about it.

Occasionally, I become so overwhelmed by a sense of God’s displeasure toward His people, and foreboding of imminent judgment, that I am driven to extended periods of fasting and prayer for revival. The fourteen-day fast mentioned above was one of those occasions. I had determined I would neither eat nor drink until the Lord bid me “come and dine.” On the seventh day, it came to my mind that I should begin taking some water. I was unaware that it was the consensus of nutritionists that one would die of dehydration after 3 to 7 days without water, so now I find it very interesting that the Lord impressed upon me the need to take some water on the seventh day of that fast. However, at that time, I was skeptical that I was merely surrendering to weakness of the flesh. I prayed about it and discussed it with my wife. Of course, she greatly desired me to take some water. After more prayer, I became convinced it was the Lord, so I waited until the end of the seventh day, and began taking a little water. I continued my fast for seven more days, slowly introducing more and more water, and finally, believing the Lord had bid me “come and dine” I broke my fast after fourteen days. Our current topic is the 40 days fast of Jesus, our Lord. One of the main points I intended to make in this article was that it is important that we, like Jesus, are led up of the Spirit into any extended periods of fasting. That is the first insight I offer from Jesus’ forty day fast — He was “led up of the Spirit ...” into this extended fast — we must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in everything we do, and this is no where more important than in an extended fast.²

We notice that Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness “to be tempted of the devil.” Jesus taught us to pray, “lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13). Why did the Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil? This question is especially important in view of the fact that the Bible says “... God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man ...” (James 1:13). Thomas knelt before Jesus and cried, “my Lord and my God,” and was not reproved, for he spake the truth concerning Jesus our Lord (John 1:1,14; Colossians 1:15-18; Hebrews 1:3, 8-9; Philippians 2:5-11). If Jesus is God, and God cannot be tempted, and, further, if Jesus would have us to pray that we would not be led by the Spirit into temptation, how is it that Jesus was led up of the Spirit of God into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil? We cannot say that

¹ Irvin, Jill, *How long can a human live without water and food*, Staff, Food and Nutrition, Ohio State University, cited as source: [Nutrition in Perspective](http://www.madsci.org/posts/archives/1999-09/937540022.Gb.r.html), by Patricia Kreutler, 1980 [ONLINE] www.madsci.org/posts/archives/1999-09/937540022.Gb.r.html (1/14/08)

² NOTE: In past articles I have defined an extended fast as being one that continues for more than three days.

while He was led up to be tempted, in fact He was not tempted, for the Holy Ghost has testified that He was indeed tempted (Hebrews 4:15). Finally, what has this to do with prayer and fasting?

First, let's address the question of how it is that Jesus was "*in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15). The "yet without sin" part presents no difficulty to us. The difficult part is where we are told He was "... tempted like as we are ..." The reason that presents a difficulty to us is that the Holy Ghost has defined temptation as occurring when a man is "... drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14). The "enticed" part is no problem — clearly, Satan attempted to "entice" Jesus into disobedience to His Father during his temptation in the wilderness. The question comes down to this, how was Jesus "drawn away of His own lust"?

Jesus has lusts? The word *lust* refers to a strong appetite. We tend to think of it in terms of sexual sins, but the word *lust* is used in the Bible to speak of appetites that God encourages His people to feed (Deuteronomy 12:15-21; 14:26). Certainly, it is true that our sinful flesh craves, or lusts, for unholy, and ungodly things, and the Holy Spirit is contrary to the flesh, and so lusts against it (Galatians 5:17). Yes, it is true that God has strong appetites, but His appetites are for righteousness, judgment, justice, godliness, purity, goodness, and whatever might not miss-become our Mighty God. When Jesus came looking for fruit upon that fig tree, it was symbolic of His hunger for righteousness the precious fruit of Israel's repentance; and His curse brings to mind the shameful day that first Adam used its leaves to hide his shame from His Maker. Make no mistake about it, dear brother, Jesus hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Jesus was not drawn away by a lust for evil. You will notice that the Holy Ghost said God cannot be tempted "with evil." Therefore it is clear that those verses that tell us Israel tempted God (Psalm 78:18-56; 95:8-9; 106:14; see Exodus 17:2-7; Numbers 14:22; Deuteronomy 6:16), cannot be understood to mean they *tempted Him with evil*. What they did to tempt Him was evil, but God was not drawn away and enticed by their evil to join them in it. He was tempted, however, to execute upon them the judgment they deserved for their foolhardy behavior. In the New Testament, the Holy Ghost warns us not to follow the example of these Israelites in the wilderness: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents" (1 Corinthians 10:9; see also Acts 15:10).³ Since we are warned against tempting Him, we know it must be possible. However, it is not possible to *tempt* Christ with evil, because there is nothing in evil that could appeal to Him. How did Satan tempt the Lord?

Did you notice that each temptation was an effort to draw Jesus away by His strong desire to honor His Heavenly Father? Turn the stone to bread, he said, not to feed your starved belly, but to prove you are the Son of God. Leap from this temple tower, Satan hissed, and validate the truthfulness of the Word of your Heavenly Father. There is no question that validating His Father's Word and His own identity as His Father's Son were strong motivations in Jesus, but Satan failed to seduce Jesus into sin by these temptations. He would try another tactic. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten

³ NOTE: I hope you caught the testimony this gives to the deity of Christ Jesus. Who was tempted in the wilderness, God, or Christ? Clearly, Jehovah God was tempted in the wilderness. According to the Spirit of God, through the Apostle Paul, when they tempted God, they were tempting Christ.

Son, not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved from Satan's power through Him (John 3:16-17; Acts 26:18). The Devil dangled a tempting proposition before this Son, and heir — he would willingly hand over to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. All Jesus would have to do is to kneel before Satan, and worship him. Before you dismiss this as an absurd attempt on the part of Satan, consider that Jesus was fully aware of the price He would pay to secure salvation. Visit Gethsemene, and watch with Him for at least one hour, agonizing over the prospect of Calvary as He prayed, sweating drops of blood, "Not my will, but thine." Enter into the prayer closet of the prophet David, in Psalm 22, and hear the Saviour crying from the Cross, in a travail of soul so intense, it rent the rocks beneath it. Now come into David's prayers closet again, at Psalm 18, and transported by faith into the throne room of God (Revelation 4-5), hug the neck of the slain but living Lamb that stands before the throne there, and watch as the Father watched His Son upon that Cross. Tremble with me as you see that when His Son cried to Him from the Cross, He blew from His nostrils a smoke that billowed from heaven and darkened the skies of earth. Gasp in awe of the awful stream of fire that shot from the mouth of God and ignited the coals on the altar before His throne, and then follow that blazing stream across the heavens to where it set ablaze that Lake of Fire. Fall prostrate before Him shaking as you're reading how that His voice thundered out across the heavens in rage against the wicked as they crucified His Son. Only when you have seen the Cross, from the heart of the Father and of the Son, can you fully appreciate the marvel, the wonder, that Jesus did so unhesitatingly turn down the crown that Satan offered to Him, and clung to the Cross His Father gave Him instead. Now you can appreciate the triumph of the moment, so now hear Him say, "Get thee hence, Satan."

Next time we will contemplate the relationship of fasting and prayer to this great victory of our Lord. And I will offer you some insight into the significance of this encounter to the entire ministry of our Saviour, and to ours. For Jesus taught us, that before you can spoil the strong man's house, you must bind him.

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