

SCRIPTURAL FASTING

By Dr. Thomas E. Pool

Fasting is rarely mentioned, except incidentally, in the modern churches.

In describing the conditions that would be found on the earth at the time of the second coming of Christ, the Holy Spirit, through Luke, says, "And as it was in the time of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man, They did eat * * *." "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot. They did eat, * * *."

Fasting was unknown in those days, and we are to have conditions, when He comes to get His church, "as it was in the days" of Noah and Lot.

One of the signs of His imminent return is eating, satisfying the physical appetite, instead of fasting and prayer for a blind and deaf world hastening to the precipice of eternity.

The teaching today in almost every church about fasting is, "Fast when the Lord lays it on you." Does God carry on His work in such an indefinite and haphazard way? Do we do other things, such as paying the grocery bill, or going to our daily task, just only and when "the Lord lays it on us?"

Ezra, when returning from captivity, with a large group of people and much wealth, found himself in an emergency. Ahead was the unbroken wilderness, infested with robbers. What could he do? His testimony to the king about the mighty God he served made it impossible for him to ask for soldiers. He called a three-day fast, and God heard their cry and protected them.

Nineveh, facing God's judgments, proclaimed a fast by command of the king, who said, "Let neither man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; let them not feed or drink water." God spared the city for some hundreds of years in answer to their fasting and prayers.

History teaches us that both nations and individuals have fasted when threatened with disaster or judgment; but has God left us anything in His Word which encourages us to fast under ordinary and everyday conditions?

All the doctrines of the New Testament Church are found in the types of the Old Testament.

The atonement, justification, sanctification, and all other doctrines of the church in the church age are clearly found in the sacrifices and annual feasts of the Hebrew nation, during the centuries preceding the coming of the Messiah.

Was fasting as clearly commanded, in any of the national feasts as the sacrifices (atonement) were?

If fasting was enjoined definitely and regularly on the Hebrews, then the church today is failing to live up to the standard set forth in the types.

The Great Day of Atonement, one of the annual feasts of the Hebrews, was a day of national humiliation. On that day the people went with bare feet and abstained from all food and drink. Any Hebrew who would only "fast when God laid it on him" would be cut off from among his people.

In Leviticus 16:31, and 23:29, we have a portion of the Hebrew law dealing with this great national feast. "It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls by a statute forever." "For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day,

he shall be cut off from among his people." "Afflict" refers to fasting.

This annual festival was sometimes spoken of as "the fast." Paul, when a prisoner, on his way to Rome (Acts 27:9), spoke of "the fast." Adam Clarke says of this Scripture, "It is generally allowed that the fast mentioned here was the Great Day of Atonement."

Fasting is definitely established in the types, and should be found in the anti-type.

The Great Day of Atonement was the day when the great high priest went, alone, into the Most Holy Place with the blood of sacrifice, which he sprinkled seven times before the mercy seat, and it was as regularly celebrated as the Feast of Passover.

The New Testament church fasted much in the day when she enjoyed the most intimate relations with the Holy Ghost.

In Acts 13 we read, "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Then, after they had done this, apparently at a later date, this record is given, "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." In Matthew 17:21 Jesus tells His disciples that their failure to cast out certain demons was due to their lack of prayer and fasting.

That Jesus expected His followers to fast there can be no question. In teaching them concerning fasting He says, "But thou, when thou fastest," showing that He expected them to fast. At another time, speaking of His going away and leaving them, He says, "Then shall they fast."

Dr. J. G. Morrison, who has, probably, studied the lives of all the outstanding saints of the Christian era as much as any other man, says, "Every great leader who has moved his age mightily for God was a faster."

Martin Luther was a regular weekly faster, and God used him to lift the curtain of night that had hung over the world during the "Dark Ages." Luther is criticized for fasting too rigorously, to the probable injury of his health, but he moved the world toward God and is still blessing the world of today.

John Knox fasted regularly, and history tells us that "Bloody Mary," queen of Scotland, said that she feared the prayers of Knox more than the army of England. Knox prevailed with God, and Mary's wicked head came down to the block and Scotland was saved from the awful blight of Catholicism.

John Wesley fasted two days each week. The church which God used him to raise up also had two weekly fast days in her early history, when she was on fire for God and a successful winner of souls. John Wesley says in a sermon as follows: "While we were at Oxford, the rule of every Methodist was (unless in case of sickness) to fast every Wednesday and Friday in the year, in imitation of the primitive church, for which they had the highest respect." Again Wesley says, "The man that never fasts is no more in the way to heaven than the man that never prays." Ephiphanius, an ancient writer (quoted by Wesley in a sermon), says, "Who does not know that the fast of the fourth and sixth days of the week (Wednesday and Friday) are observed by the Christians throughout the world?"

The martyr, Latimer, Ridley, and Cramer, are among the number who were regular fasters.

Charles G. Finney, probably the greatest

soul-winner since the apostle Paul, fasted regularly each week. He declares that when he detected a diminution of the Spirit's presence in and through him, he would fast three days and three nights, not tasting food or water, and as a result he would see the revival power restored and many return to God.

In early colonial days Jonathan Edwards was a regular faster. It was under his ministry that sinners would seize the pillars of the church and backs of the seats under the mighty conviction of the Spirit, feeling that they were in danger of dropping into hell.

Sammy Morris was a regular weekly faster, and who can read the life of this Spirit-filled African without being blessed?

The late Rev. Seth C. Rees, a successful soul-winner, probably never attempted to hold a revival without appointing one or more days of fasting.

Is it not a fact that, in the last twenty-five years, the decline in real old-time revivals and the increase in wordliness in the churches is in about the proportion that fasting has been neglected?

If it is true that every outstanding soul-winner in the last nineteen hundred years was a regular weekly faster, and it cannot be successfully denied, might it not be profitable for us, in this day of spiritual dearth, to practice this scriptural example?

Emergencies and impending disasters drive us to fast and seek God; why not seek Him regularly, for are we not in a terrible spiritual famine?

World conditions now and imminent events at our door point to world disaster unparalleled in history. The powers of darkness are spreading over the nations and none shall escape!

Winning souls is becoming increasingly difficult. Nation is destroying nation. Christianity is only a form in most churches. The love of many is waxing cold. The fires of martyrdom are kindled in many parts of the world and will, undoubtedly, reach every nation.

In these closing days only those Christians who are desperately in earnest to win souls are worth anything to God!

In the earlier times when conviction was deep, restitutions and confessions were thorough, conversions were genuine, and sanctifications were clear, the Methodists, Salvation Army, and Holiness Movement fasted regularly and prayed mightily, and God gave them revivals; should not we do likewise in this time of unprecedented spiritual decline, when the boundary line between righteousness and worldliness has disappeared and the church and the world have joined hands; when to be "saved and sanctified" means little more than to live a good moral life; when a "burden for souls" and "praying through" are almost unknown; and when the standards taught by the Book and believed by our fathers and mothers have all but disappeared from the earth?—Free Methodist.

Is it not a suggestive fact that the word fret is closely related to the word friction? Is it not indicative of the absence of the anointing oil of the grace of God? Commit thy way unto the Lord. Don't worry. Whatever happens just refer it to the Lord. If it be anything injurious He will suppress it. If it be anything containing helpful ministry He will adapt it to our need. This is the cure of care.—J. H. Jowett.