

victory. The good effects of such results would be felt in all our churches and throughout the church year that has just begun.

Fasting

by Rev. W. L. Fernley*

"To fast is an abstinence from food, partial or total. To practice self denial. To afflict soul or self."

Fasting has been practiced all through the years by various individuals, groups and organizations, religious and non-religious. The heathen practice fasting as well as the civilized people of the world.

To get this subject before us in some detail we will consider fasting and confine it to that which appertains to the Religious. We will therefore examine it under 4 main headings.

I. THE PRACTICE OF FASTING

Fasting has been practiced since time began. The first record we have of an individual fasting is in Exodus 34:28 when God made His covenant with Moses and Israel, and Moses hewed out the tables of stone.

In I King 21:4, we read the account of Ahab the king and Naboth the man who owned the vineyard. Remember that Naboth would not give it to Ahab and consequently Ahab went into a pouting spell and he laid down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no bread.

David demonstrated his grief at Abner's death (2 Sam 3:35, by abstaining from eating until the sun had gone down.

Then we have the classical example of fasting in the life of David, who after the child was born to him through Uriah's wife, took sick. "David, mourned and fasted seven days" for the child that his life might be spared. But the record says the child died, after which David appeared in public and began to feast again, and when questioned as to the reason why he began to eat and drink now that the child was dead answered; "while the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefor should I fast."

He defended his fasting while the child lived on the ground that His fasting might influence his petition to God to spare the child's life.

Then fasting was practiced on a national scale. In the time of War when Israel lost 18,000 men in battle, (Judges 20:26) "all the people went to the house of God and wept and fasted until the evening."

In time of God's judgments God sent among His People in the days of Joel, the people in their time of national calamity were admonished to call upon the Lord and fast.

In the case of Ninevah, in Jonah 3 the whole city fasted before God, and this was the means of staying God's hand of wrath.

Then coming to the New Testament we find in the Gospels the indication that Religious Groups had in their religious duties time and days of fasting. The Pharisee fasted. "I fast twice in the week," he said.

The disciples of John fasted. Math 9:14.

The prophetess Anna. Luke 2:36-37

The Lord Himself. Math 4:2

The Apostles and early Christians. Acts. 10:30. 14:23. 27:33.

The Apostle Paul speaks of His experiences. 2 Cor. 6:5. 11:27.

Early church fathers and Christians up to this present day have practiced fasting.

II. THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Unless there be a specific aim in our fasting, it will not prove beneficial to us or to God's work. If we are exhorted to do "all to the glory of God" then it would seem that fasting ought to be a part of our spiritual life. It should at least be counted in the realm of those things which we do to honour God and to further His cause. This being so, I would suggest three things on the purpose of fasting.

a. To Discipline Ourselves. We live in days of physical indulgences. Desires and wants of the flesh seem to be paramount in the order of Living. Great stress and effort is expended by the world in general to entice us to give in to the lusts of the flesh. The body is the ruling factor in most spheres of living these days. The desires of the flesh often overcome or overtake the desires of the Spirit. A warfare is fought between the flesh and the Spirit and very often the flesh is victorious.

I believe a work of real spirituality is the control that we exercise over the desires of the flesh. There are times when we could without doubt give in to the flesh legitimately—but we do not do so because we feel by our giving in, we might be enslaved to live according to what our flesh says, rather than the spiritual good that might come, if we refrained. Paul said, "I keep under my body".

b. To DELIGHT Ourselves in the Lord. Fasting should bring to us a further revelation of the joy of real intimate fellowship with the Lord. Our hearts set upon Him. To know Him more and to serve Him better. To take ourselves before God and to feast upon Him and His Word. To realize that you think more of Him than the material things of this world is a delightful and soul-nourishing experience. This kind of drawing near to God, to bring ourselves to His table, feed upon His Word, receive His Promises, sense His love, His kindness, and His Mercy, is too uncommon in the area of our Christian living. Just He and us, where we simply give ourselves without distraction to Him so that our lives can be enriched by Him and that intimate knowledge of His Will be given to us.

c. To DEVELOP our Spiritual Sensibilities. Self-indulgence never develops a spiritual aim. Without question, most people who have been instrumental in seeing things accomplished for God have been people of spiritual perception, and some of this perception has come through the exercise of fasting. Clearness of vision comes when we have our spiritual sensibilities moved upon by God. Nothing is more rewarding than to feel you are in the Presence of God without thought or desire for material things and that He speaks to you on the basis of things entirely spiritual. We have seen too little because we have been too little with Him. How sensible are we, and sensitive of, the great issues of our own lives, churches, denomination, and the world of dying men, when we are in His Presence!

III. THE POTENTIAL OF FASTING

What could be the outcome of our fasting? Nothing should be entered into unless we can visualize some net result or gain. It would be fruitless for us to enter into a Spiritual exercise without being convinced that the end of our efforts would be rewarding.

Prayer has a great potential we know. We pray because it influences God, us, and others. Fasting has the same Divine purpose. It moves God, us, and eventually others. If fasting has a potential for the Christian what does this potential consist of?

a. Fasting will bring about a spirit of sacrifice. We do not know what fasting will achieve until we set about doing it. To begin is the difficult thing. It will take much of self-control and make demands upon the human that will of necessity take us into another realm of Christian

(Next Page, Col. One)