

## SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD BY PRAYER AND FASTING



The word "fasting" comes to us from the Hebrew "tsuwm," which means "to cover the mouth," and the Greek word "nesteuo," which means "to abstain from food." Although we have the examples of Moses and Elijah fasting without water in the Old Testament, we have no such examples of long periods of fasting without water in the New Testament, and the root word itself does not convey this meaning. In fact, a person who withdraws himself from food and drink can be said to be fasting and thirsting.

Fasting is never meant to be a legalistic activity. Like giving, it should be done willingly and cheerfully. When accompanied with a heart that is pure, and motives which are correct, prayer, together with fasting, is a key which will unlock doors for us when other methods have failed (Matthew 17:21).

The Biblical promise for revival and restoration is: *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"* (II Chronicles 7:14).

Fasting is associated with both humbling ourselves before God, and seeking His face: *"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us"* (Ezra 8:21).

*"And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes"* (Esther 4:3).

*". . . my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting"* (Psalm 35:13).

*"And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes"* (Daniel 9:3).

Although often in the Old Testament, those who fasted dressed themselves in sackcloth and lay in ashes, outward acts are not sufficient to impress God. Something must take place in our hearts. The prerequisite for the last day outpouring of the Holy Ghost is clear:

*"Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God... Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD"* (Joel 1:13-14).

*"Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God. And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit"* (Joel 2:12-13, 28-29).

God is not interested in our long faces and gloomy spirits. He wants us to humble our hearts before Him and through much fasting and prayer become more like Him. When this takes place, we will also have a ministry more like His!

*"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? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward" (Isaiah 58:5-8).*

Fasting that is effective not only changes circumstances, it changes us! Whether we be preacher or saint, we have a more powerful ministry, because we have purer motives. The "more excellent way" to be used of God is the way of love, not selfish ambitions and carnal desires (I Corinthians 12:31).

### **HOW TO ENSURE OUR MOTIVES FOR FASTING ARE PURE**

Fasting is an extension of seeking the face of God, not His hands. We do not fast and pray in order to force God to do something He does not already want to do. For instance, God already wants to give us a great outpouring of His Spirit throughout the world. We fast and pray in order to prepare our hearts for what He wants to do through us (and to us).

Years ago, while trying to establish a new church in the state of Virginia, I was guilty of not understanding the reason for fasting and prayer. In my mind, I was piling up works like one piles up a heap of stones. When the pile got high enough, surely God would send revival to our church. The problem with that kind of thinking is that if works alone bring revival, the person who does the works can take most of the credit for it.

It was during our ministry in Germany that God helped me to understand the meaning of the words of Jesus: *"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18). *"I will build . . . my church."* The church belongs to Jesus. We must allow Him to build it.

He is the head of the church, the saviour of the body (Ephesians 5:23). Yes, He uses people, but the people He uses are those who humbly submit to His authority. Prayer and fasting helps loose us from selfish ambitions so that Jesus can do the work through us! *ds*