

Prayer & Fasting

by Robert F. Turner

When Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church, they “*prayed with fasting*” (Acts 14:23). In 2 Corinthians 6:4-f, Paul wrote of those who were approved as ministers of God in “*patience... labors... fastings...*” etc. The King James version has “*fasting*” in 1 Corinthians 7:5, saying husband and wife should not stay apart “*except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinence.*”

“**Fasting**” *literally* means abstinence from food, not eating; but it also has a religious significance, as seen above. There is no evidence that the ceremonial fasting of Judaism is bound upon the church, but we can see that fasting was practiced by early New Testament Christians. It seems the reference is to time set apart for spiritual matters, probably including the abstinence from food in this context, so that undivided attention might be focused upon eternal rather than upon temporal things.

The repeated association of **fasting** with prayer, both in the Old and New Testament, is not without significance. When one takes “time out” to think of God and eternity, what could be more natural than this quiet intimate communication. And conversely, as sincere personal prayer is neglected, **fasting** would be abandoned.

Some religions have made a mockery of **fasting** by their “Mardi Gras” (fat Tuesday) – a day of uninhibited debauchery in preparation(?) for the **fast** of “Lent.” And we suppose there will always be those who “*fast to be seen of men.*” We can only pity such, and pray that our avoidance of such extremes will not be considered valid excuse for doing nothing whatsoever.

Do we fear to be alone with God? Or is it our conscience we dare not face, in quiet meditation? Is this world so important to us that we can not shut it out, even for an hour of Bible reading and introspection?

Public worship, valid and proper, can not take the place of private communion with God. “*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly*” (Matthew 6:6).

341504