

July 13, 2023

Dear Brethren and Friends,

With summer here and with the children out of school, there is an increase in activity. For those who have gardens, they have to be maintained and most of us have lawns to cut because of the increased growth, due to the warm weather. Some have to deal with the planning of activities for the children this summer. With all the increased activities, it is easy to get so caught up in all of this that we begin to neglect one of the tools for maintaining a right relationship with God, and that is fasting.

As unpleasant as it may seem, it is a crucial element to maintaining a close relationship with God, and it also helps in getting closer to God. Notice the admonition in Matthew 6:16: "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

This is not an excuse not to fast, nor is it a recommendation or suggestion to fast, but it is an admonition. It does not say, IF you fast, but it says, WHEN you fast. There are only two individuals specifically recorded in the Bible who fasted for forty days and forty nights, without eating or drinking anything, and these are Moses and Christ.

When considering Elijah, he received twice nourishment from the angel of the LORD. Then, in 1 Kings 19:8, we read: "So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God." Technically, it does not say that Elijah fasted 40 days and 40 nights, even though most commentaries conclude that he did not eat and drink during that time. But some have a different point of view.

For instance, *Barnes' Notes on the Bible* writes: "The old commentators generally understood this to mean that Elijah had no other food at all, and compared this long fast with that of Moses and that of our Lord. But the words do not exclude the notion of the prophet's having obtained such nourishment from roots and fruits as the desert offers to a wanderer, though these alone would not have sustained him."

Exodus 34:28 speaks about Moses: "So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."

Matthew 4:2 speaks about Christ: "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry."

To fast that long is not recommended today, since it could very well be fatal. Without food or water, you can normally survive about a week. With water, you normally could survive for one to two months; so this shows how heathy and strong both were, but in all probability, that they received supernatural strength from God to survive such a long and unusual fast. In case of Elijah, we can see clearly, in any event, God's supernatural intervention.

Other than at the beginning of His ministry and on the Day of Atonement, which was a requirement of the law, there is no record of Christ fasting more often than that, which is not to say that He did not; only, that it has not been recorded.

The disciples of John the Baptist fasted, and they were somewhat critical of Christ's disciples for not fasting enough in their view. We read in Matthew 9:14: "Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?'"

Here is Christ's response, in Matthew 9:15: "And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'"

They were in His presence all the time, but they would fast after His death.

Fasting is probably the tool we could use more frequently. We have examples in the Bible of people fasting often—some for the wrong motive of being seen by men, and others for the right purpose of drawing close to God.

When and how often we should fast, other than on the required fast on the Day of Atonement, is not mentioned in the Bible, but in order to maintain a close relationship with God, it should be more than once a year. (We understand of course that young children or people with health issues should not be required to fast. God will see to it that they can and will have a close relationship with Him by other means.)

In general, through fasting, we can maintain a healthy relationship with God and move forward in our responsibility to grow in grace and knowledge, looking forward to receiving the greatest gift ever offered to man, and that is to become God beings as His sons and daughters. Reading our recent booklet *God Is Our Destiny* will reinforce that reality for us.

This gift of becoming a God being in the Family of God was not offered to angels or to animals, and thus it should motivate us to continue in our task of finishing the Work given to us of preaching this gospel to the world as a witness, which includes warning the nations, so that Christ can return and end the madness that we witness under the direction and influence of Satan, the god of this world.

His return cannot happen soon enough, so let's hang in there, continuing to do the Work because Christ's return does not appear to be too far away.

In Christian Love



Rene Messier (Canada)