



*16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* (Matt 6:16-18)

There is definitely a time and purpose for fasting, else the Lord would not have said, "*When ye fast...*" in the future tense. It is not commanded, but Christ certainly expresses a benefit of fasting. But what does fasting mean? It does is not necessarily relegated to food abstinence as we shall see in today's devotion.

Below is a devotion written by an old friend of mine who faithfully teaches me many times a week even though he lived more than sixteen hundred years ago. His writings are godly, biblical, and full of precious gems of truth:

*Fasting consists not merely in abstinence from food, but in a separation from sinful practices; he who limits his fasting only to an abstinence of meats, is one who specially disparages it. Dost thou fast? Give me proof of it by thy works. It is said, By what works? If thou seest the poor man, take pity on him. If thou seest an enemy, be reconciled with him; if thou seest a friend gaining honor, envy him not. Let not thy mouth only fast, but also the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands, and all the members of the body.*

*Let the hands fast, by being pure from rapine and avarice. Let the feet fast, by ceasing from running to forbidden pleasures. Let the eyes fast, by learning never to fix themselves on curious or unholy delights. Let the ear fast by not listening to evil speakings and calumnies. Let the mouth fast from disgraceful speeches and railing. For what doth it profit if we abstain from birds and fishes, and yet bite and devour our brethren? Thou hast not fixed thy teeth in the flesh, but thou hast fixed the slander in the soul; thou hast harmed in a thousand ways, thyself, and thy neighbor, and many others, for in slandering a neighbor thou hast made him who listens to the slander worse; for should he be wicked man, he becomes more careless when he finds a poartner in his wickedness; and should he be a just man, he is lifted up to arrogance, and puffed up, being led on by the sin of others to imagine great things concerning himself.*

And this from another old friend of Massachusetts (and the bishop thereof in the 1800s), Phillips Brooks:

*Properly speaking, fasting is not so much a duty enjoined by revelation as it is the natural expression of certain religious feelings and desires. There is but one special fast ordained in the Old Testament, and there is none at all ordained in the New. Yet one cannot fail to see that the exercise is nevertheless quite in accordance with the whole tenour of a true religious life of all ages; and that, if it is not expressly commanded, it is only because nature itself teaches us in certain circumstances thus to afflict the soul. These circumstances which would obviously suggest this exercise are twofold.*

I. *Fasting is the natural expression of grief, and therefore the natural accompaniment of godly sorrow. It is a mistaken kindness to press dainties on the heart when it has no appetite for aught but its sorrow. Better let it have its fill of grief—better every way for body and mind. Spiritual sorrow in the same way suggests, and is the better for, this exercise of fasting.*

II. *Fasting is also a wise method of keeping down the law of the flesh which is in our members. Rich and poor will be the better for a fast now and then, to mortify the flesh, to weaken the incentives to evil, to subdue in some measure the carnal nature, and give freer play and power to the spiritual man within.*

III. *Our Lord counsels His people, (1) that their fasting must be real, sincere, genuine—a thing to be seen, not of men, but of God; (2) that fasting in the Christian Church should be altogether private, and even secret, not only not in order to be seen of men, but absolutely hidden from them. Religion does not consist in a sour visage or morose habit—nay, more, religion is not properly a sorrowful thing. The Gospel was not sad tidings, but glad tidings for all mankind, and we are not acting fairly by it unless we strive so to present it, in all its winning and attractive beauty, that men shall be led to seek after Jesus. Christianity has its godly sorrow, has its heart-grief for sin, has its fasting and mortifying of the flesh; yet we do it utter injustice unless we also make it appear that it is, taken as a whole, the only true blessedness and peace and joy, the only walk with God which is gladness everlasting. Phillips Brooks, The Candle of the Lord, p. 200*

Rather than fasting on the reasonable commentaries of biblical fasting above, it will be good to abstain from fasting on a serious and biblical study on these great issues to see if God will render a sure Word to Light our Path.