

## January 26

*When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance. Matthew 6:16*

FASTING is specially commendable to the Lord's people at times when they find themselves lacking in spirituality and exposed to severe temptations from the world,

### OUR TEXT

*Mat 6:16-18 KJV 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."*

R4858 "When the Pharisees fasted, many of them did it to be seen of men..."

The followers of the Lord are to practise such fasting as will be seen of the Lord and not of men. The Father, who knows the heart, will appreciate our efforts to draw near to Him and will grant our desire. But these things should be hidden to the outside world and known only to God; and the joy of the Lord should be manifest in the countenance." [See the last page for full article]

### 2HG153 "TRUE IMPORT OF FASTING

Fasting, like baptism, may either be a mere form, injurious rather than beneficial, or it may be observed with spiritual profit. Just as a man might be sunk five fathoms deep into the ocean without being baptized, so he might voluntarily die of starvation without having fasted from the divine standpoint. No honest person, for instance could have the least sympathy for the man who affected an outward countenance of the Lenten restriction to one cup of coffee by providing himself on the occasion with a bowl which really held two cups. And this is but an illustration of how forms of godliness are observed while the heart is far from a fasting attitude in the Lord's sight. To the class called in the Scriptures, "New Creature" in Christ Jesus, the essence of fasting in any event must be measured in the Lord's sight by the condition of the heart.

We may safely conclude that all "abstaining from fleshly lusts" or desires is real fasting, the kind most approved in the Lord's sight. The apostle explains that these fleshly desires war against the soul, against the Spirit begotten New Creature, which is seeking to walk in the footsteps of the Lord in the narrow way. Every denial of appetite for food and drink or the lusts or appetites of the mind for worldly pleasures, whether sinful or innocent, if practiced with the desire thereby to glorify God and to advance our new minds in a spiritual way, must surely have the Lord's approval and result favorably to the upbuilding of the New Creature and to the bringing of the old nature more and more into subjection to the new. This is the real fasting, the important fasting, the essential fasting, without which none can hope to enter the glorious Kingdom for which we hope, and for whose reign of righteousness over the world we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Outward forms and outward fastings and kneeling in prayer, water baptism, etc.,

the flesh and the devil; for by impoverishing the physical force and vitality, it may assist the full-blooded and impulsive to self-control in every direction. We believe that a majority of Christians would be helped by occasional fasting--a very plain diet for a season, if not total abstinence. But fastings,

as enjoined by the example of the apostles, undoubtedly are assistances as well as illustrations of the spiritual matters which they illustrate; but whoever sees and appreciates no further than the outward forms will never make his calling and election sure to the glorious things which the Lord has set before the elect Church of this gospel age. He may indeed enjoy some of the blessings and divine favors that are for the world in general during the next age, but he will miss the high calling, the heavenly calling of this age. It is for this reason that the Lord continually referred to the true fastings, true sacrifices, and never commanded and only incidentally commended the outward fasting.

### THE FASTING WHICH OUR LORD COMMENDED

As illustrations of the kind of fastings our Lord declared necessary to those who would be his disciples, to those who would be joint-heirs with him in his kingdom to come, to those who would sit with him in his throne, to the "little flock" to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, he said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself (fast in the true sense) and take up his cross, and follow me (follow my example in this)." "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart"—learn of me complete self-denial, renunciation, complete consecration, complete giving up of the will that the Father's will might be done in me. "I came not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me." "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "If a man love not less father and mother, houses and lands, yea, and his own self, less he can not be my disciple."

Again self-denial, self-renouncing and fasting in the highest and fullest sense of the word is enjoined with fasting from fleshly desires both good and bad in the interests of the New Creature and for effective service in the ministry are the highest forms of fasting. Matt. 16:24; II:29; John 5:30

R3659 "Fasting, as we have seen heretofore, signifies self-denial. The thought is not the weakening of the body by absolute abstention from food, but rather a disciplining of the body by abstaining from delicacies, relishes, etc. No doubt such fastings are profitable to us in other ways than one. They not only relieve the physical system of over pressure, but with many tend to clarify the mind and make it more acute, more spiritually inclined. We all recognize this as a fact whether we can explain the philosophy of it or not. To all believers, especially to all starting upon a course of consecration, of self-devotion to the Lord and to his cause, we commend fasting in reasonable and proper ways, the denying to one's self the gratification of natural passions, and in general the living moderately, abstemiously, using this world and its comforts and blessings as not abusing them -- the using of them in so far and in such a manner as will be to the highest advantage as new creatures in Christ. With the consecrated

to be seen and known of men or to be conjured up in our own minds as marks of piety on our part, would be injurious indeed, and lead to spiritual pride and hypocrisy, which would far outweigh their advantages to us in the way of self-restraint. Z. '98-45 R2260:5

Christian this is not only the incident of a day but the course of a life. His every day is a fast day, a day of self-denial as respects any and everything sinful, and as respects any and everything that would not inure to the spiritual advantage of himself or others.

### CONTINUOUS BAPTISM AND FASTING

Our fasting is like our baptism -- it has a definite point of beginning and definite point of ending. It begins with our baptism even unto death and it ends in death. These self-deniers, these fasters, are the self-sacrificers, the overcomers of the world, to whom the Lord has promised his special blessing of spiritual favors, peace, joy and all the fruits and graces of the spirit in the present life, and by and by the everlasting blessedness fellowship with himself in all the joys and perfections and completeness of the kingdom condition -- glory, honor and immortality."

### FASTING AS SELF-IMPOSED DISCIPLINE

(1 Cor. 11:31 KJV) "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

### 2HG165 "SELF-IMPOSED DISCIPLINE

Another step in connection with this judging of ourselves is the imposition of restrictions and sometimes of penalties. This, however should not be considered in the nature of atonement for sin. Such a suggestion would be repugnant to the entire plan of God as set forth in the Scriptures...

After having received divine forgiveness we can properly manifest our disapproval of sin and our penitence of heart and our thankfulness to the Lord by putting restrictions upon ourselves, upon the flesh, along the lines of the disobedience, with a view to strengthening character in those particulars, with a view to being more guarded when next a temptation shall come to us along that line, with a view to impressing upon our flesh the lesson which the new mind desires it to learn...

In every avenue of life we may see opportunities for judging ourselves, and the apostle's assurance is that these will be pleasing to the heavenly Father: that if he sees us thus intent upon the establishment of righteousness in all the interests of life, he will approve such a course and bless it, and in consequence it will not be necessary for him to send special chastisements or punishments for such errors."

### STAIN REMOVER PLUS SELF-DISCIPLINE

R2159 "As the robe covers all the repented-of blemishes of the past, so it likewise covers the unintentional and unwitting imperfections of the present; so that only those things to which we give more or less of mental consent are reckoned as ours--either good or evil. Thus seen, under this arrangement it is possible for the Lord's people to walk so carefully, so circumspectly (*looking all around*) at every step, as to keep his

garments unspotted from the world. But alas, how few there are, if any, who have ever lived up, in all the past of their lives, to this high standard,--so that at no time in all the past, since they accepted the robe of Christ's righteousness, could it be said of them, that in no sense of the word had they ever, either outwardly or mentally, given any degree of mental consent to anything that was sinful.

Seeing that the vast majority, if not all, have at some time or other given at least a partial mental assent to sin (however regretful and repentant of the thing they may afterward have been), and seeing that any such deflection from purity of heart would constitute a stain or spot upon our robe, we inquire with great concern, Is there any possibility of having such stains or spots removed and getting the robe white again? Thank God, yes; there is a way by which the spots and wrinkles may be removed from our robe and leave it once more as white and clean as at first. The stain remover is the "precious blood." As the Apostle says, "If we confess our sins he is just to forgive us our sins and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness."

While all of our efforts (groaning of spirit, tears, fasting, etc.) could not remove a single stain, which the precious blood alone can remove; yet, nevertheless, it is expedient for ourselves that while realizing our Lord's forgiveness and the cleansing of the robe, we should promptly seek to discipline ourselves in repentance, fasting and tears; otherwise we may expect that while our Lord will hear our earnest prayers and cleanse our robe, he nevertheless would put upon us certain *chastisements* for our correction in righteousness and for the strengthening of our characters in respect to the points of weakness. The Apostle teaches thus, when he says, "If we would judge [correct, chastise] ourselves, then we should not be judged [corrected, chastised] of the Lord; but when we are judged of the Lord we are chastened, that we might not be condemned with the world."

While our robe covers all our unwilling personal blemishes and uncleanness in our Lord's sight, and in the sight of brethren who see each other from the Lord's standpoint, yet the Lord desires and requires that we shall come into such close sympathy with absolute purity and righteousness in thought, word and deed that we will "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting* holiness in the reverence of God." (2 Cor. 7:1) And to this end he grants his sanctified (consecrated) and white robed ones the cleansing power of his truth, that thus his elect bride might be cleansed by "the washing of water, by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."-- Eph. 5:26,27.

But oh, how few of the consecrated have so great a love for purity, so great a desire to keep the garment unspotted from the world, that they are thus careful to have every wrinkle quickly removed, and thereafter to guard the robe more zealously than ever."

#### LOYALTY ALSO DEMONSTRATED AFTER A BATTLE

R1985 "When...a battle is ended, and the new will sits down to reckon the damage inflicted by the raid of the old will, there

must be some self-crimination--"Oh! why was I not more watchful? I knew from experience that I was quite vulnerable at the point from which the attack came. Nor did I repel the attack with proper diligence. I almost fear that I was willing to have the attack, and that I encouraged the enemy, Sin; and if so, was it not disloyalty to the Lord? And was it not also a wilful sin, since the new will did not repel it with sufficient energy?"...

"If any man [in Christ] sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"; "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 2:1; 1:9.) But to the extent that the will consented to sin, even for a moment, it was *unforgivable*; and for that measure of responsibility we must expect to suffer "stripes"; i.e., chastisements...

Whenever we find that we have been overcome of evil, we should "judge ourselves;" we should scrutinize our own course, and not only feel contrite toward God, and resolved to be more vigilant and more faithful in the future, but we should right the wrong to the extent of our ability, and humble ourselves before the Lord. The Apostle says, "If we would judge [reprove, correct] ourselves, we should not be judged [reproved, corrected, by the Lord]; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord [punished with "stripes"], that we should not be condemned with the world."--1 Cor. 11:31,32; 1 Tim. 5:24."

R5101 Titled: "THE NEW CREATURES RESPONSIBILITY TO DIVINE LAW... The new creature is represented by the *will*, the *mind*; but there can be no New Creature without a body. God does not give the New Creature its own body in the present life, but permits it to practise on the old body. And according to the New Creature's faithfulness in the old body will be its reward--either as a member of the Little Flock or of the Great Company or--for unfaithfulness, its punishment, Second Death.

The New Creature owns the mortal body, possesses that body. The body is not the New Creature's body except in a possessive sense. If one were living in a cabin temporarily while his house is being built, and someone else were to ask, "Is that your house?" he would say, "No; I am staying here merely until my house is built." So the New Creature occupies the old body. That body is dead because it has been devoted to God in connection with the Sin-offering.-- Col. 3:3; Gal. 2:20.

The Lord knoweth our frame. He knows that we are all fallen, imperfect--mentally, morally, physically. His message to the New Creature is, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.) This means perfection of will, of intent, of endeavor. But God knows that we have this treasure of the new will in a mortal body, which is imperfect. Through Christ He has made provision that every imperfection of our flesh may be forgiven on condition that we come to Him for that forgiveness in the name of our Advocate, Jesus. This arrangement is to our advantage, for it leads us to watch the more carefully in respect to our trespasses and to note the more carefully that they cannot be forgiven except through the merit of our Redeemer.

#### THREE BLESSINGS RESULTING FROM FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

The experience of the New Creature in coming to the Throne of Grace for help is, therefore, educational. It will strive the more diligently, the more earnestly, the more perseveringly, to live according to the will of God, not only in mind, but also in body. The result of faithfully following this course of daily scrutinizing our thoughts and words and doings must be the strengthening, the fortifying of the New Creature against the wiles of the world, the flesh and the Adversary.

Additionally, this course must mean not only a higher and nobler earthly life, even though still imperfect, but a great sympathy for others of the human family and for the Church, who similarly strive against the weaknesses of heredity in the flesh, and also a general enlightenment of the heart sympathetically toward the members of the human family--born in sin, "shapen in iniquity." It must mean thus much of preparation for the future Kingdom --for helping poor humanity up out of the degradation of sin and death.

#### CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL DECLINE

Although the New Creature cannot consent to sin, cannot sin wilfully, cannot sin with deliberation, and still be a holy mind, it can become slack, careless, inattentive, overcharged with the cares of this life--not sufficiently loyal and alert to fight against the Great Enemy. In this condition it may become more or less stupefied, while the will of the flesh may gain the ascendancy in some particular. The flesh has its cravings, its demands; and it has a plausible way of urging what it thinks to be its rights and privileges. Sometimes the flesh is very persistent along these lines.

If the New Creature become overcharged, become weak through a *failure to eat* the strengthening food which the Father has provided, it may be almost helpless for a time, until at last it becomes non-resistant to sin. To whatever extent the New Creature is to blame for this condition, it will receive stripes, not merely as a matter of justice, but also as a matter of correction, for if it were not corrected it might go on to greater carelessness as to its responsibilities.

We all need to be disciplined in order that we may stand firm for the principles of righteousness. To whatever extent the New Creature fails to resist the flesh, there will be stripes, punishment of some kind, retribution. But even when those punishments come, there will be also manifestations of the Lord's favor.

The experiences of the Prophet David were not altogether like those of the saints, for he was on a different plane from us. But we may apply the general principles deduced from his experiences. David sinned and the Lord allowed certain chastisements to come upon him. David was contrite and asked forgiveness for those sins. Although he had the light of the Lord's favor, yet the Lord declared that he must be punished for doing those things which he knew were wrong, even though all the while his heart was set on the Lord. The after experiences of the man proved his contrition. He committed sin; he repented; he was forgiven; he was restored to the Lord's favor. Yet in due time he received chastisements for those very sins; and when he received those chas-

tisements, he recognized that they were a just recompense of punishment upon him...

#### SELF-IMPOSED DISCIPLINE RECOMMENDED

Sometimes God's people, appreciating their own weaknesses, the blemishes of their flesh, properly feel themselves unworthy of the glorious things which God has in reservation for the Elect. It is their duty to do the best in their power, but not to attempt to judge, to decide their own cases. There is One that judgeth them, even God. Whatever the sin, whatever the circumstances, it should be taken promptly to the Throne of Heavenly Grace in the name of Jesus, to obtain the mercy of God provided thus, and to find increasing help for future times of need.

We must not become discouraged and lose faith and hope, even though obliged to come to that Throne, repentantly, seventy times seven times. To whatever extent, however, the sin be repeated as the result of earthly weakness of heredity, to that extent there is forgiveness, in the Divine arrangement. But to whatever extent the sin contained a measure of wilfulness, or to whatever extent we failed to use our knowledge and ability to resist it, to that extent the New Creature will be held responsible, and will have certain chastisements imposed. Happy are those people who seek to punish themselves by some discipline, such as fasting. The Apostle says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" [chastened of the Lord].--I Cor. 11:31,32.

We should all keep in memory, however, the fact that God expects of us a demonstration of loyalty to Him and to the principles of Truth and Righteousness--in an overcoming degree. It will not do simply to

stand still from week to week and from year to year and to say, "These are my weaknesses and I take them to Jesus." Overcoming is the gaining of some victory by the New Creature over besetting weaknesses as well as over trespasses. Only such as *strive* will be *crowned* and acknowledged of the Lord as overcomers. And their overcoming will be, not of themselves, but of God's grace and the assistance of the Great Advocate.--1 John 5:4."

R5440 "Our daily trespasses are to be acknowledged to the Lord, and forgiveness sought and obtained..."

If these trespasses are merely weaknesses of the flesh, or of ignorance or stupidity, they are sins which will be fully forgiven of the Lord on application. If they be sins in which the new mind has been slack, in which it has been more or less culpable, through lack of sufficient positiveness, then to that extent the New Creature must be held responsible. And for all such trespasses, for which the New Creature is in any way at fault, there will be stripes...

A Christian might have a natural tendency to anger, and it might be impossible for him fully to control this tendency. Before he as a New Creature would be able to realize the situation, his natural tendency to lose his temper would involve him in trouble. The New Creature in such case should do everything possible to overcome this, through prayer and persistent effort, and if necessary, by imposing upon himself a penalty for every failure in this direction--some self-denial, perhaps. But if the New Creature should say, Well, that is my flesh; I cannot help it, he might receive stripes, and an earthborn cloud might arise between him

and the Lord; and that one would be spiritually sick until he should return to the Father and make proper amends and be re-instated. If this attitude continued, it would seem to make against his ever becoming a member of the Little Flock. He would have to decide *positively* for or against the right."

R5854 "We can never attain perfection in the flesh; but from the beginning our heart, our intention, must be wholly loyal, and day by day this heart intention must become more and more crystallized, fixed, in the way of righteousness. We must continue the work of bringing our body into subjection, and enlisting in the service of the Lord."

#### ANTITYPICAL FASTING

R2592 "Fasting has a typical significance -- it means self-denial. So long as the Master was with his people, and especially so long as he was honored by the multitudes, it required comparatively little self-denial to be one of his followers--it was in many respects an honor to be called to follow him, and an honor to sacrifice something of earthly interests to be a follower; and this made his kind of self-denial or fasting really a feast of pleasure. But later on trials came, when the Master got into the toils of his enemies, when his cause was unpopular, and the multitudes clamored for his death -- then it required self-denial (antitypical fasting) to confess him and follow him; and so it has been all through the Gospel age -- none can be a follower of the Lamb without self-denial, fasting, refusing the desires and appetites of the flesh -- sacrificing some and mortifying others in the interest of the new creature and its spiritual development."

R2260 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0)

#### "THEY THAT BE WHOLE NEED NOT A PHYSICIAN"

--FEB. 13.--"FOLLOW ME!"--MATT. 9:9-17.--

HERE we have Matthew's own account of his acceptance to the apostleship. He had undoubtedly been acquainted with the Lord and his work, and the Lord acquainted with him, prior to this call. The Lord had evidently seen in his heart an honesty of intention that made him worthy, not only of the truth, but of this great favor--the apostleship. It is worthy of note that Matthew tells us of himself that he was a publican (Matt. 10:3), while none of the other evangelists make this comment, doubtless because the occupation of a publican was considered a very dishonorable one--unpatriotic. Publicans were usually men of some ability as business men, sharp, shrewd, quick at accounts and discerning. Their occupation was that of collecting taxes for the Roman government, and it must be said that, while there may have been honest publicans who collected their taxes with justice, both to the Roman government and to the tax-payers, yet the class as a whole had the name of being tricky, unscrupulous, dishonest. It was claimed on the part of the taxpayers that they were frequently oppressed and made subjects of extortion by the tax-collectors who thus accumulated wealth not only as foreign emissaries, but as leeches and parasites upon their own suffering countrymen.

Hence, for Matthew to tell us of his previous occupation as a publican may be esteemed an evidence of his humility, and his desire not to represent himself more honorably than was truthful. On the other hand, our Lord's choice of a publican to be one of the favored apostles indicates the impartiality of his selections; and implies that Matthew could not have been one of the dishonest publicans. It shows us also that our Lord passed by no Israelite indeed merely because there was prejudice amongst the people against him or his class. As an evidence of the detestation in which the publicans were held by their Jewish brethren, we note the fact that they were classed with sinners and harlots in New Testament usage, and that the Hebrew Talmud classes them with murderers and thieves, and regards their repentance as impossible.

Matthew was known by the name of Levi, while he was the publican (Luke 5:27), but his name was changed when he changed his occupation and became a member of the Lord's company. His new name, Matthew, signified "the gift of God," just as Simon, the son of Jonas, had a new name given to him, namely, Peter, "a rock." But how great a change the gospel of the Kingdom produced upon Matthew, to lead him to forsake all--the profitable income of his occupation, leaving it to others--and to become a follower of the despised Nazarene!

The influence of the fact that our Lord would accept a publican to be his disciple, was far-reaching, and no doubt inspired an interest in our Lord amongst the degraded and outcast classes. We are not surprised, therefore, when we are told shortly afterward, that many publicans and sinners resorted to our Lord, and gave ear to his teachings. Nor did he treat them after the manner of the scribes and Pharisees, but on the contrary received them as the children of Abraham -- as some of the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

This breach of the rules of etiquette amongst the Jews was a great surprise to the scribes and Pharisees who, however much they opposed the Lord, recognized him as a great teacher; hence, they did not think of him as demeaning himself or degrading himself by receiving sinners, but asked the question, Why he did this, and promptly received the answer that the more sick a man is, the more need he has of a physician. They were ready to admit that the publicans and sinners were in need of a physician, but many of them did not realize their own need of a physician: hence, Jesus was certainly giving his services where they were needed. This furnished our Lord with an opportunity to preach a very short sermon from a text in Hosea (6:6) to the effect that his message was not a message of destruction, but a message of mercy, and that his call to the Kingdom was not a call of the righteous, but of those who realized themselves to be imperfect. And herein lay the distinction between the two classes and the reason why publicans and sinners were more attracted

than the self-satisfied Pharisees: the latter trusted in themselves that they were righteous and spurned to ask or accept mercy; the former admitted that they were unrighteous and had need of mercy. Humility and a realization of the need of a Savior, and a great one, are essential to all who would come unto the Father through Christ and his atonement.

The influence of Jesus' ministry was beginning to be recognized; it was increasing while John's work had for some time been decreasing, and comparisons were naturally instituted. One of these was respecting the fact that Jesus had given his disciples no specific directions respecting fasting; and the inquiry as to why this was so. Did our Lord disapprove of fasting? The answer came promptly to the effect that fasting is a concomitant of mourning and sorrow, and that our Lord's disciples could not consistently fast and be troubled at this time;--because the Bridegroom was with them and their joy was at its full. He pointed out, however, that, later on, times of trial and sorrow and fasting would come to his disciples.

<sup>(1)</sup>Fasting is proper enough when intelligently done and from a right motive, but it is certainly worse than useless when done as a formality or ceremony, or to be seen of men, that they might think us holy. Fasting is specially commendable to the Lord's people at times when they find themselves lacking in spirituality and exposed to severe temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil; for by impoverishing the physical force and vitality, it may assist the full

blooded and impulsive to self control, in every direction. We believe that a majority of Christians would be helped by occasional fasting,--a very plain diet for a season, if not total abstinence. But fastings, to be seen and known of men or to be conjured up by our own minds as marks of piety on our part, would be injurious indeed, and lead to spiritual pride and hypocrisy which would far outweigh their advantages to us in the way of self-restraints.

The Lord wished his disciples to recognize the difference between the work he was doing in starting a new dispensation, and the work that John the Baptist and the Pharisees had been doing in attempting to reform the Jewish nation. He illustrated this under the figure of patching an old garment with a piece of new cloth, or putting new wine that had not yet fermented into old wine-skins whose strength and elasticity were gone and which would be sure to burst under the pressure of the fermentation. This was perhaps the first intimation our Lord had given of the fact that Israel as a nation would not be found worthy of the Kingdom and would be rejected. Likewise, it was the first intimation that the class which he was gathering was not being gathered with a view to reforming the nation or readjusting its affairs, but with a view to constituting the nucleus of a new nation, "a holy nation, a peculiar people," which, when fully developed, would be fit to be his joint-heirs in the Kingdom and to engage with him as his bride in inviting all the families of the earth to receive divine favor, symbolized as "water of life," which will be offered free.--Rev. 22:1,17.

<sup>(1)</sup> Jan. 26 Manna, Mat. 6:16

R4858 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0)  
**THE PROPRIETY OF FASTING**

*"When ye fast be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance."--Matt. 6:16.*

IN OUR TEXT our Lord is not expressing any disapprobation of fasting; quite to the contrary; He is endorsing it as a propriety. Undoubtedly it is better for the health to fast somewhat at times rather than to eat to satisfaction. The Master's comment, according to the context, seems to be based upon the improper conduct of the Pharisees. The fasting was supposed to be good not only for physical health, but also for mental and spiritual health. The Pharisees, professing to be very holy, made manifest their holiness by fasting, subordinating the flesh that they might be spiritually strengthened.

Our Lord does not dispute the propriety of such a course, but it was the *wrong spirit* that He condemned. For when the Pharisees fasted, many of them did it to be seen of men, in order to seem holy and given over to spiritual things. Hence our Lord's suggestion that when His disciples fast they should not be as the hypocrites, whose fasting and long faces were to show men their piety. In the same connection our Lord proceeds to say that when His disciples fast they should do the very reverse; that they should anoint their heads and be as cheerful as possible.

We can see the philosophy of this course. If their fasting had brought them nearer to the Heavenly Father it should have made them more gracious and luminous. It should have had a happy effect, which would have shown itself in the countenance. The thing reprimanded, then, was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who assumed a sadness of countenance to be seen of men. They delighted to have people say, "What a holy man! He has fasted so much! He is always thinking about holy things and, in order to do this, he is even denying himself the necessities of life. He is a *very* holy man!"

The followers of the Lord are to practise such fasting as will be seen of the Lord and not of men. The Father, who knows the heart, will appreciate our efforts to draw near to Him and will grant our desire. But these things should be hidden to the outside world and known only to God; and the joy of the Lord should be manifest in the countenance.

**HOLINESS OF THE HEART  
NOT A MERE OUTWARD FORM**

Our Lord's frequent reference to the Pharisees, no doubt, was in part owing to the fact that the Pharisees were a very large and influential class; and in part because their name signified that they were the *holy people*. Hence, when our Lord was teaching special obedience to God, the question in the minds of the people would be, "Is He not a Pharisee, and do not the Pharisees teach all these things?"

So it became necessary for our Lord Jesus to show wherein some of these things that the Pharisees practised were not proofs of their special nearness to God, and that they were not leaders to holiness, but that it was very evident that many of the Pharisees were hypocritical. Their holiness had become a mere form; it had degen-

erated into a custom--as the Scriptures say, a "Drawing near to the Lord with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him," and thinking merely of the general attitude they had toward the world, the people in general.

We remember that there were *some* very noble Pharisees-- Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, who buried our Lord, and St. Paul, who tells us that he was a Pharisee. But evidently the greater part of them had made broad their phylacteries and were more anxious in respect to what men would think of them than what the Lord would think of them. Perhaps some of the hypocrisies of the Pharisees have been practised since by some in the Monastic Order, where they wished to show their special separation from the world by the wearing of a peculiar garb, by a special cut of the hair, by seclusion, etc. There is danger along this line in the observance of the Lenten season by some of the Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans. But it may not be hypocritical with all.

**ABSTEMIOUSNESS SPECIALLY  
HELPFUL DURING LENT**

In many respects it would be a very good thing for all the Lord's people to follow the Lenten custom of fasting, doing so with as little outward demonstration as possible, practising it as unto the Lord, without considering it a thing to be mentioned, without attracting attention, but merely as a privilege. The Lenten season comes at a time when abstemiousness in food seems particularly appropriate. As the cold of winter sharpens the appetite, in order to the resistance of the lower temperature of that season, so, in the spring, less carbon is needed, as there is not so much cold to resist; hence it would seem advantageous to practise fasting, more or less, in the Lenten season.

We have in mind the fact that the Lenten season represents the forty-day period of our Lord's experiences just preceding the crucifixion. We might enter sympathetically into this matter and think of the trying experiences that were upon the Master when He knew that He was drawing near to the time of His death. As we try to think of Him it will enable us better to realize what a privilege it is to endure hardship as good soldiers for the sake of His Message.

Fasting is specially commendable to the Lord's people at times when they find themselves lacking in spirituality and exposed to severe temptations from the world, the flesh and the Devil; for, by impoverishing the physical force and vitality, it may assist the full-blooded and impulsive to self-control in every direction. We may believe that a majority of Christians would be helped by occasional fasting--by a very plain diet, if not total abstinence, for a season. But fastings to be seen and known of men, or to be esteemed in our own minds as marks of piety on our part, would be injurious indeed and would lead to spiritual pride and hypocrisy, which would far outweigh any advantage to us in the way of self-restraint.