



I

God's Word Our Guide

**T**HERE is a fasting ordained of God. Such fasting has been practised by the people of God throughout all history.

In the early centuries of Christianity it remained pure. Later it degenerated; its meaning and essence were distorted until it was little more than a superstitious rite.

But in the sixteenth century, along with all the other reforms, fasting regained its true place. Then, for a time, it was commonly practised among Christians of the Reformation.

Today there are still some found among the godly who fast. But very few. The practice has gradually died out.

We no longer have congregational fasting. We have become estranged from fasting, and we do not count it among the means of edification. Our leaders seldom if ever suggest or recommend it. And what our fathers thought of it is not even known among us. In fact, the very mention of fasting suggests Roman Catholicism.

That is why we wish to bring before you the teaching of God's Word in regard to fasting — fasting as our fathers taught and practised it, and as it applies to us.

Do not let the desires of the flesh turn you away from these our earnest words. It is so easy to label "superstition" anything that thwarts those desires!

## THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



But, as Calvin says, “Let us talk a bit about fasting, since many believe it is quite unnecessary, failing to appreciate the benefits they may derive from it; some have discarded it entirely, as if it had no value; and if we do not use it rightly, we may easily fall into superstition.”

In our day very nearly all of us have the opinion which “some” held in Calvin’s day — that fasting is quite unnecessary. And most of us have discarded it entirely.

Yet in these times of spiritual poverty not one means of grace or one channel of closer fellowship with God should be neglected.

Therefore Christendom should return to fasting.

Not because Calvin taught it. But because he taught it on the basis of God’s Word.



God’s Word is our guide.

For some, orthodoxy consists in seeking out passages in the Word to support their own opinions. At the same time they probably hold to other ideas which are contrary to the Word, and they ignore that with which they do not agree.

That is a perverted approach to the Word of God.

For the Word of God and human ideas are in opposition to each other. God’s Word gives us a view of the world and of man and man’s soul that is quite different from the purely human opinion.

Nevertheless there are many, ministers as well as laymen, who view man and his problems from the viewpoint of the world. They know no other anthropology or psychology than that of the world’s scientific thinkers, and they build



## GOD'S WORD OUR GUIDE



a system of religious thought upon ground which differs from the Word. Their foundation is not Scripture, but human insight.

For the Christian, God's Word is source-book. He bases his thoughts and opinions upon that Word.

Even so we may err. But at least our starting point is valid. While if we seek to support our own pre-conceived ideas from Scripture we reverse the divine order.

God's majesty and sovereignty require that we believe God's Word not because of what it says, but because *it is His Word* Not because we think it beautiful and true, but because *He has spoken it*.

Now in regard to fasting...

The question before us is not whether we shall profit from fasting; or whether there is danger of its becoming a superstitious practice; nor whether our leaders approve of it.

But only: *Is it Scriptural?*

We may put it thus: Does God speak of fasting in His Word? And if so, how does He evaluate it?

Does He disapprove? Does He speak of fasting as harmful to spiritual life and as something to be avoided?

Then our church fathers who recommended it were in error.

Or is the Word of God indifferent to fasting, speaking of it as a harmless but worthless custom?

Then the subject is not important enough to discuss. It does not touch our consciences.

Or does God speak of it as praiseworthy, as emanating from true spiritual life, as appropriate to His worship and befitting godliness, and of value to those who seek God?

## THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



Then our church fathers were right and we are in error; then it is the duty of the child of God to restore fasting to its proper place of honor.

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Before continuing, let us make clear that by fasting we do not mean mere temperance or moderation, but actual abstinence from food for a longer or shorter period.

Temperance and moderation are required of a Christian always. Intemperance is sin.

Fasting, however, is occasional. Nature itself forbids continual fasting. It must be an exception, not a rule.

We would then define fasting as: *a temporary abstaining from customary food or drink, for devotional reasons.*

To quote Calvin once more, "That we err not, let us describe fasting. We do not understand it to mean merely a frugal partaking of food. For the life of godliness is always temperate and sober. But there is besides that a temporary withdrawal from our usual manner of living, perhaps for a day, or for a period, when we allow ourselves less food and drink than usual — less in amount, in quality, and in frequency."

What, then, does the Word of God teach concerning such lasting?

## BIBLICAL FASTING



### II

## Biblical Fasting

FIRST of all let us note three significant passages of Scripture: Exodus 84, I Kings 19, and Matthew 4.

There we read of three men, each of whom passed through a remarkable forty-day fast. These were the three who appeared to the disciples in glory upon Mount Tabor; these were the three through whom God revealed Himself pre-eminently.

We read of our Saviour that *when he had fasted forty days*, he hungered.

Elijah, having been fed by the angel, "*went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights* unto Mount Horeb, the mount of God."

And Moses, when he was upon the mount with the Lord forty days and forty nights, "did neither eat bread nor drink water." As he himself relates it. "When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I abode in the mount *forty days and forty nights*, *I neither did eat bread nor drink water*" .

These fastings were very exceptional. We are most surely not called upon to emulate such a fast of nearly *six* weeks. It would require miraculous intervention, and nowhere in Scripture are we led to expect such a wonder to be wrought upon us.