

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS

The Israelites failed, as did Adam. They longed for Egypt.

The enormity of their sin is not clear to us except by thus tracing their history. Their hankering after the fieshpots of Egypt was a disobedience, a disloyalty, a lack of faith—with special significance.

It became evident that Israel could not save itself, that there is salvation only in Him who should come, who would also be *tempted by hunger in the wilderness*; but who, withstanding the temptation, would be victorious where Adam fell and Israel failed.

SEEK YE FIRST



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Seek Ye First . . .

THE mystery of contentment lies in childlike faith *that God cares for us.*

Anxiety is then superfluous, if not *sinful.*

Our children set us an example of such faith. They are busy at school or at play, without thought of preparing meals or earning a living. Father and Mother take care of that! When dinner time arrives, the children take their places at the table fully confident that there will be food.

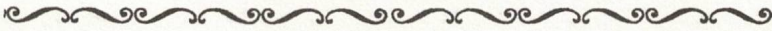
They know food can be withheld as punishment; yet when they sit down to eat they do not look upon food as a reward for service. They are members of the family, and each must simply do what he ought to do, in his or her particular position. That is all. Their needs *are supplied.*

This golden rule of life Jesus applies to those whom He has redeemed. They are not to be servants, working for reward; they are to have the freedom of children.

The good people of Galilee, too, worked in the sweat of their faces. Enjoyment of today's food was spoiled by worry about tomorrow's. "What shall we eat tomorrow? What shall we drink, and wherewith shall we clothe ourselves tomorrow?"

Jesus disapproves. "That is after the manner of the heathen," he tells them. "It does not befit a child of God. You have a Father in heaven, and He knows that you need all these things!"

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What then must they do?

They must trust, simply and humbly, as children in the spacious home of their Father, as free from care as the lark that soars into the sky or the lily blossoming in the valley.

*7 say to you," says Jesus, as if He wishes them to feel that *the world* teaches differently, "be not anxious for your life. Look at the birds. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feeds them. Surely you are of much greater value than the birds! And why be anxious about clothing? Look at the lilies! They do not work; they do not weave or spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as beautifully as one of these. Well then, my friends, if God robes the lily of the field with such beauty, a lily that is almost hidden in the grass and that will last perhaps only a day, shall he not most surely clothe you, oh ye of little faith?"

Jesus then draws a conclusion which is contrary to all our mundane busyness: Don't be concerned about these things. Only seek the Kingdom of God first, and His righteousness, and all the rest will take care of itself; it will be thrown into your lap; He gives to His beloved as in sleep!

It is a beautiful truth, which we must not underestimate. Jesus did not warn against *over* anxiety and *great* worry. In the face of His statement we may not argue that little worries are natural and that we must be concerned about the welfare of our families or we may bring about our ruin.

Jesus' word will be of comfort to you only if you take it as it stands.

Live within the will of God, doing your work according to His will—not because the law demands it, nor to earn your daily bread as if your livelihood depended upon it; but for God's sake, as serving Him, always motivated by the desire to

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honor Him. Let your life be one continuous service of love, a service which never grows irksome, a service which will hallow even the smallest task. Seek not the external, the visible, that which the world chooses as its goal. But that which is invisible, the hidden power behind the things which we see—in short, seek the Kingdom of God, where God is enthroned and self is denied; seek all that, is right, all that is in conformity with His righteousness; seek these things not only in seasons of prayer and meditation and worship, but always, in every situation, in every daily task.

Try Him, and see if His Word will not then prove true! See if He does not give you ample strength for your service of love, so that you accomplish more with less fatigue, so that you run without growing weary. See if He does not increase your joy, give abundance upon your table, and fill your heart with an exhilarating peace such as you never knew before.

Israel experienced a carefree life in the wilderness. The Lord caused water to flow from the rock, the quails to fly low, and the manna to fall upon the ground each morning. Their clothes did not wear out, nor did the soles of their shoes wear through.

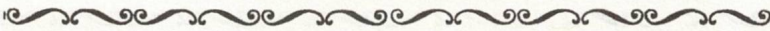
Elijah enjoyed' a foretaste when the angel brought him food.

The widow of Zarephath was given a few days of such blessed provision when the Lord performed a wonder upon her oil and flour.

Our Saviour demonstrated it for us when He fed the multitude by the sea of Galilee; when He made the wine at Cana; and when He bade the sea fill the net with fishes.

The day is coming when that inexpressibly glorious life will be ours in full measure, when in the mansions which He

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has prepared for us we shall find the table bounteously supplied.

If you are too concerned about the things physical, you make of these your god. Or, like the prodigal son, you are eating husks far from the house of your Father.

He who lets the Lord take care shall have a feast prepared for him.

The world has no conception of such a carefree life. They say, "If you want a thing, you must work for it."

Yet the butterfly draws sweet nectar from the flowers freely.

But the world prefers to cite the industrious ant as our example. The world chooses to live by the strength of its own hands.

Faith forgets self effort and sees only the work of God. Faith recognizes God's almighty care and our insignificant needs. Faith peers through the curtains and sees a world quite different from that which others see.

Faith that lives from the hand of God will understand the meaning of fasting. When peace of heart is disturbed, when a deep sense of unworthiness oppresses the Christian, he is like a child ashamed to take his place at father's table because he has in some way forfeited that privilege.

He whose soul is thus deeply humble before God is receptive to His grace. Never have we needed it more; and never have we been farther from the practice of fasting.

IN THE HOME



VI

In the Home

OUR purpose in this discussion of fasting is twofold: First, to prevent others from monopolizing that which is always ours. And secondly, to lay before our people a means of edification which can be to our spiritual enrichment.

That fasting is also for us can hardly be denied. The testimony of Scripture is clear. Therefore we ought not to identify fasting with Roman Catholicism. Such a view is evidence of three errors: biased reading of the Word, ignorance of the practices of our forefathers, and lack, of earnestness in the pursuit of a godly life.

Who can read the words of Jesus with unbiased mind and yet deny that Jesus placed fasting alongside of alms-giving and prayer in the godly life? He tore away the pharisaical externals, but not for a moment did He condemn fasting or make light of it.

And who, knowing the history of the church, can say that the Reformation discarded fasting with other errors? Merely the reading of *Calvin's Institutes* will convince to the contrary.

As to the earnest pursuit of a godly life—in the face of all that is written of Christian mysticism, and the witness of sincere children of God today, we cannot well close our eyes to the spiritual blessings derived from the practice of fasting.