

Fasting: Voluntary/Free Will and Commanded

November 2017

Hi Folks,

We are hoping all are well, and rejoicing in your calling. I want to follow up on the subject of fasting today. At the FOT this year Rick gave a presentation of the subject from a very personal and touching perspective. It caused me to think back to the early years of my calling and the regularity that fasting played in it. Sometimes I do not focus on the wonderful blessings that voluntary fasting can have in our growing in favor, acceptance, and knowledge. There are definite and defined blessings associated with Godly fasting.

When reading the scriptures, it is easy for us to recognize there are two basic natures or methodologies to fasting. The proper one is to be seen and acknowledged by God. The improper one is to be seen and acknowledged by men. So, let us examine both today and see what God has to say about each.

In Matthew 4:1-2 we see an example of Christ conducting a voluntary fast to be seen by our Father, completely out of the sight of men.

“Then Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.”

This is actually an incredible setting taking place here which will illustrate one of Satan’s go to methods. We should always be aware of it. Satan will always come at us in our weakest tactics, or what he perceives to be our weakest moments. He likes to prey upon people who are in distress mentally and physically. Here we have Christ willingly denying Himself food and water for 40 days. What Satan sees in this is a state of weakness in which he can use his guile and deception skills to deceive Christ into sinning. The devil can’t understand how this is actually a time in which Christ was going to be able to exhibit great strength, fortitude, and resolve. Christ clearly understood that if you resist the devil, he will flee from you.

:3 “Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, if you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

In the gospel of Luke, (4:2) it tells us Christ was tested during the 40 days as well. We understand that to be a physical testing along the way of denying oneself food and water. Satan underestimated Christ’s resolve while in the flesh. He understood who Christ had been prior to emptying Himself of His divinity. He also understood that it was Christ in the person of The Word who had actually created him. Satan must have been giddy at his good fortune now sensing the kill. In verse 3 of Matthew 4, we see he keeps up the physical testing. Notice he

uses the vanity angle now. In the subsequent verses we read about this battle of wills taking place and how even in a weakened physical state Christ confounded the mighty Satan.

Christ showed all mankind and all the angelic realm that it was possible to overcome Satan even in a completely depleted state, in the flesh, as a man. This is a very big lesson for all of us to take in. This was Satan's big opportunity to take out Christ. Satan had tried to usurp the Elohim authority and roles in the past. To say Christ was weakened physically would be to state the obvious. This is when Satan does his most damage, he loves preying on those who appear to be weak and helpless. The outcome of this encounter was pure folly for Satan. Everything appeared to be in place for his desired outcome of tripping up Christ into making a very bad decision. However, Christ, with the Father strengthening Him, overcame everything Satan threw at Him.

Now to one of the main points we are to take away from this encounter. Prior to making a big decision Christ humbled Himself before our Father through fasting. None of His disciples were with Him. He didn't need an audience other than our Father. There was no vanity in any of it. This is a pattern set for us to follow in Godly fasting! Prior to making key decisions in our lives it is a good habit to enter into a free will, or voluntary fast.

Acts 13:1-3. "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the holy spirit said, now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."

Fasting was an essential part of the life of all those men who served the first century church, and especially relied upon in seeking God's will in a matter. This is not something to be overlooked or diminished in importance. All of us who are called at this time to complete the numbering of the bride are existing in what can be deemed the last century church. Our work individually and collectively is also very important to the Plan of Salvation and the completion of the Bride of Christ. We, too, should really use the tool of fasting in our path to growing in favor, acceptance, and knowledge. The fasting we just read about in Acts was all voluntary, or better termed: Free Will, for we are to be living sacrifices as Romans 12:1 instructs us. "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

2 Corinthians 6:1-10 and 11:27 also stress the importance of conducting Free Will fasts in the life of Paul. "In fastings often."

Matthew 6:16-18.

"Moreover, when you fast, (not if) 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. (Please notice there is a reward associated with fasting which we will

cover in detail later) But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” That to me is a big deal.

This is to the point, instruction from our Lord and Savior. He emphasizes that we are to fast, but to do it in a very specific way, which is completely contrary to the fasting of the hypocrites, or better termed: Pharisees of that age. They seek recognition from their fellow men to puff up their egos and vanity. Christ says not to do that. When we fast, we will do so in a fashion that our fellow man does not know we are doing so. That is tenet of a godly fasting before our Father. And if we do so, He will REWARD us. Do not lose sight of that. It is God’s good pleasure to do so.

Godly fasting is always conducted in the mindset of humility and peace. Ungodly fasting is always conducted in the mindset of no humility: look at me and strife. I categorize fasting as a living sacrifice and thus associate it with the rules and patterns of the Peace offerings in Leviticus 7:11-21. There are 3 of them: thanksgiving, vow, and voluntary/free will. We should be happy to participate in any one of these three types of fasting. When things are going well for you, please consider a Thanksgiving Fast. That will get our Father’s attention quicker than anything else we could do. Just think denying yourself in times of plenty and wellbeing. That cuts across the grain of human nature. Are you seeking something from our Father? Then call a Vow Fast. Let Him know it is important to you and stipulate what you plan to do in response to Him acknowledging it. Then we have the Voluntary or Free Will fast which in many instances is just spontaneous. But when you are seeking a particular answer or direction in an upcoming or current decision to be made, utilize this tool.

These are responses that mature members in our calling should view as part of the process of growing in favor, acceptance, and knowledge in our personal relationship with Father and Christ/Messiah. Do some of you remember our days of infancy in the World-Wide Church of God? I recall how many brethren who walked amongst us dreaded the Day of Atonement, the one commanded fast. They were actually in dread of it. To say the least they put forth the attitude that they were actually being afflicted and tormented by fasting for a day. It was and is a commanded fast. It is involuntary because of that. No decision making on our part; just do it, like it or not. They actually believed the language of the KJ and NKJ translations that states they were “afflicting” their souls. Of course, that is a very bad translation from the Hebrew word “anah” when applied to fasting as we will see shortly.

Let me ask you; do you feel afflicted to fast on the Day of Atonement? Satan certainly hopes so, for that takes you away from what we are to be feeling on that absolutely welcomed day. I personally am very excited for the reality of that day to come and the fulfillment of the wonderful events on it. Of course, Satan, the great deceiver, has been successful with many, even the elect recently, as to confusing the understanding of it being the day he is put away for a thousand years. There are also some brethren who feel they are not commanded to fast on it

under the terms of the Second Covenant. So, on that point let's turn to Acts 27:9-12 and then verse 14. Keep in mind, this is many years after the death of our Savior.

"Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, (a marker in the timing of the year) Paul advised them, saying, 'Men, I perceive that the voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.' Nevertheless, the Centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. (Follow the money, right) And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, (why?) the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there."

This is important for several reasons. The Fast is talking about the commanded fast for the Day of Atonement. Paul still designated it as such. Even the margins in many Bibles note it was a time reflecting late September or early October. This is substantiated by the concerns about the sailing conditions of that time of year in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Verse 14 acknowledges this fact.

"But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon." The notes in the margin state it is a northeast wind that stirs up broad waves; Euraquilion, a northeaster. With a northeaster they would need to harbor in a location that would protect them from the dangers of it. That harbor spoken about is still there today and so is the frequency of the Northeaster in the fall of the year. You can use google earth to look at it and then use the windytv website to observe the actual intensity and frequency of the "nor'easter" in that location in late September and early October at the same time that the Day of Atonement falls from year to year.

There are some teachers of confusion today who instruct we are not to fast on Atonement. Believe it or not they actually attempt to use Luke 5:33-35 as one of their fundamental scriptures to support their doctrine. I kid you not! Let's read it.

"Then they said to Him, why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink? And He said to them, can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."

Yes, He was taken away and as Paul's example clearly shows; he kept the commanded fast of Atonement and many voluntary fasts as well. It is hard for me personally to think that someone can't deny themselves for one day before our Father in their walk to growing in favor, acceptance, and knowledge. If we can't deny ourselves for one day, how are we ever going to be able to deny the devil?

There are three Greek words used for fasting. Strong's says of #3521 *nesteia* "from 3522; abstinence (from lack of food, voluntary and religious): specifically, the fast of the Day of Atonement."

We also have #3523 *nestis*; "not eating."

Number 3522 is *nesteuo* and it is from #3523 above. "to abstain from food."

Let me read a little portion from Vines under fasting. "The answers of Christ to the questions of the disciples of John and the Pharisees reveal His purpose and method. No doubt He and His followers observed such a fast as that on the Day of Atonement, but He imposed no frequent fasts in addition." It does not take the spirit of God dwelling in us to establish this simple fact from scripture. He followed the law of the sacrifices at that time in the flesh. He understood the difference between commanded fasting and voluntary fasting. There was no requirement while they were with Him as He walked in the flesh for any voluntary fasting. That came after His crucifixion and death and resurrection as He just stated. Some actually deny that.

There are also three Hebrew words associated with the function and act of fasting, two are very direct the third is not to some. But it is the very essence of Godly fasting for both voluntary and commanded which we will see in scripture and pattern from the Hebrew language.

Strong's says of *tsom*; from #6684 "a fast."

It says of #6684 *tsuwn*; "a prime root, to cover over (the mouth) i.e. to fast." Please do not lose sight of the meaning of *Kaphar* #3722 which we review during the Day of Atonement for it is a prime root meaning; "to cover over." Not a coincidence!

In addressing #6684 *tsuwm* fast: the BDB adds the insightful understanding of it being for "contrition, intervention, and explanation." Compare the three Peace offerings.

We can read about all of these throughout the First Covenant scriptures and how they are used. Now for the third word used for the function of fasting, Godly fasting. It is #6031 "*nahan*." First from Strong's. "A prime root (possibly rather identical with #6030 through the idea of Looking down [not one's nose so to speak but in humility] or browbeating); to depress literally or figuratively; abuse self, afflict-(ion or self), chasten self, humble self, hurt, ravish.

So here we have two different applications of the word. 1) is to do so to self. It can be in a negative or positive way. 2) is to hurt or ravish another.

Two primary meanings which are diametrically opposite of each other in intent and content as well. Again, one is voluntary and in the heart and very personal, while the other is inflicting dominion and suffrage over another.

Now for the Brown, Driver, Briggs, on the subject. Page 776. Once again two main categories of uses of the word; *nahan*. It also establishes voluntary and involuntary uses. It says it is a verb and means: bowed down, afflicted.

Under #4 humble, weaken; it lists multiple scriptures for relevance. In the personal application of humble, weaken; it lists Leviticus 16:29, (An example of an accurate translation from the JP Green Interlinear: "And it shall be for a never-ending statute, in the seventh month, you shall humble (nahan; not afflict) yourself and do no work, the native, and the alien who is staying in your midst.) 31; 23: 27, 32 (involuntary with a penalty attached) Numbers 29:7; Psalm 35:13, Isaiah 58:3,5 and by an oath, Numbers 30:13. Reading further down it says be humbled by fasting Leviticus 23:29 (involuntary through a command). And then humble oneself in fasting (voluntary) Ezra 8:21, Daniel 10:12.

Let's read Ezra 8:21-23 for the meaning and the context to be heard by God.

"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, that we might humble (nahan) ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, the hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him. So, we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."

With this said we have established or set a foundation for our understanding what is to be involved in a Godly fast and how to recognize such in our lives as well as what are the signs of an ungodly fast. Now, let's listen to the scriptures sum all this up for us in Isaiah 58. From the JP Green Interlinear Bible. These verses clearly define two very different types of fasting; one acceptable and one not.

1-5: "Call out with the throat! Do not spare. Lift up your voice like a trumpet! And show My people their rebellion, and their sins to the house of Jacob. Yet they seek Me day by day, and desire knowledge of My ways. As a nation that has done right and not forsaking the judgment of their God, they ask Me about judgments of righteousness; they desire to draw near to God (in pretense). They say, why have we fasted, and you did not see! We have afflicted our soul, and You did not acknowledge! (These are not questions, they are actually rebuking God here. Now His reply)

Behold on the day of your fast you find pleasure; and you drive all your workers hard. Look! You fast for strife and for debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. Do not fast as today to sound your voice in the high place. Is this the fast I will choose, a day for a man to afflict his soul; to bow his head down like a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes? (Not likely) Will you call this a fast, and a day of delight to Yehovah? Is this not the fast I have chosen: to open the bands of wickedness, to undo the throngs of the yoke, and to allow the oppressed ones to go free; even that you pull off every yoke! Is it not to break your bread with the hungry, that you should bring the wandering poor home? When will you see the naked and cover him; and will not hide yourself from your flesh? (This is foreign to them) Then your light will break as the dawn and **your healing shall spring up quickly**, and your righteousness shall go before you and

the glory of Yehovah gather you (to where and when?). Then you shall call, and Yehovah will answer, you shall cry, and He will say, here I am. (He acknowledges your fast) If you put the yoke away from among you, the pointing of the finger, and the speaking of vain things; and if you let out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted souls; then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall be as the noonday. And Yehovah shall always guide you, and satisfy your soul in dry places, and support your bones. And you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. And those who come of you (because of your example) shall build the old ruins; you shall rear the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to live in. (Now watch what He equates and compares righteous fasting with)

If you turn your foot from treading on the Sabbath, from doing what you please on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, glorified to the holiness of Yehovah; and shall glorify it, away from doing your own ways, from finding your own pleasure or speaking your empty chatter; then you shall delight yourself in Yehovah. And I will cause you to ride on the heights of the earth, and make you eat of the inheritance of your father Jacob. For the mouth of Yehovah has spoken.”

The contrasts here in Isaiah 58 are a summation of what the differences are between Godly fasting, and Pharisaical ungodly fasting.

Pharisaical fasting is all about oneself, dripping with vanity and self-ego. Everyone look at me! I am something special and you had all better take note of that or you are going to endure my wrath. To the one fasting it is an “affliction” and not an act of welcomed humility before our Creators. With such a mindset, the one fasting as such, looks to inflict difficulties on others and to emphasis his dominion. Misery likes company.

Godly fasting is completely different. It is not undertaken to be seen by men. In fact, our activities are to reflect anything but. Folks should not even know we are fasting. We are to be encouraging and give of our sustenance and praise to those who are in need. Yes indeed, we are to serve others and also be a liberator to them in the difficulties they are enduring. And we will be blessed for it.

What is just fascinating here in Isaiah is how Yehovah compares Pharisaical Sabbath keeping to Pharisaical fasting. He then compares Godly Sabbath keeping with Godly fasting.

That is instructing us as to the importance of fasting in our relationship with our Creators. And let’s not overlook the happiness They get from us doing both in a holy manner. Look what blessings are attached to righteous fasting; Your healing will spring up quickly, Yehovah will guide you continually, satisfy your soul in drought, strengthen your bones, you will be like a watered garden, like a spring that does not run dry. And those who do likewise will build the old waste places, as well as those attached to them, raise up the foundations of many generations, and you, yes you, will be called The Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Paths to dwell in. What an absolutely incredible acknowledgement from God/Elohim!

This is all the result of fasting in a humble and happy and holy way before God/Elohim and not men. The same thing applied to keeping the Sabbath in a humble, happy, and holy way. He promises us that if we do this with the focus on Him and His ways then we will delight in Him. He will cause us to ride on the high hills of the earth and feed us with the heritage of Jacob.

We certainly hope that after reading this short study of the subject that we can have a better understanding of the subject as to its importance in our calling, and in our relationships with one another and with our Father and Brother. Our efforts in both fasting and keeping the Sabbath should be a sweet aroma in the nostrils of our Creators. Yes, both Godly fasting and Sabbath keeping, are a means of establishing peace offerings as we grow in favor, acceptance, and knowledge of the way or path of God/Elohim.

Our adversary has been busy confusing many of those called of the Father to take a different direction. That is a shame but long ago was predicted or prophesied to happen. Let us remember to remain small in our own eyes and simply follow the simplicity of Christ in our calling wherever He goes. The Pharisee types or as we know them in our age, the Nicolaitan's, will mock and ridicule us for seeking out our own salvation in Christ and having love for one another in our keeping the Sabbath and in our fasting, be it voluntary/free will or commanded. In short we are commanded to keep the Sabbath and keep it holy and thus we are commanded to keep a fast and keep it holy.

Our Peace we give to you.

Brian and Linda