

Old Testament law, abolished at the cross? Is fasting so associated with the hypocrisy of the Jews in Jesus' day that it has fallen into disfavor? Perhaps so, but if so, the loss is ours.

While it is true that fasting is not *commanded*, it does seem to be *assumed*, from Jesus' statement that began "**when** you fast...." But why should Christians fast? What is the benefit? Those who have had the privilege of totally withdrawing for a day, or for several days, from the demands of the world and of the physical body know the answer to those questions. To have experienced time absolutely alone with God, praying, singing, reading and studying His word, while totally ignoring the physical body, is a spiritual "high" that creates a craving for more such special times. In no other setting is there such single-minded focus on God.

You say, "But we can have the same experience without having to fast." I think not, because part of the experience is *the length of time without being interrupted* to deal with all the day-to-day needs of the body. Have you noticed how much "food" governs the day's schedule?

And as a corporate body, we do enjoy those frequent occasions of fellowship meals together! They *are* good for us, and I would not dis-

courage the practice. But I would like to suggest that we *try* having a day of getting together for singing, reading/studying God's word, and *fasting and prayer*. Or we might have an all-night occasion, filled with such spiritual focus.

Have you noticed that in our times of fellowship meals, almost without exception the conversation covers politics, the weather, family, sports events, and other such topics? But if we had an all-day or all-night praying and fasting session, such as has been described, I would think that the sole topic would be "God" and our love for Him.

Wouldn't such occasions for the church be powerful tools for deepening the spirituality of each one participating, and wouldn't the Family closeness be strengthened through a day or a night spent in worship together — without a single moment devoted to food?

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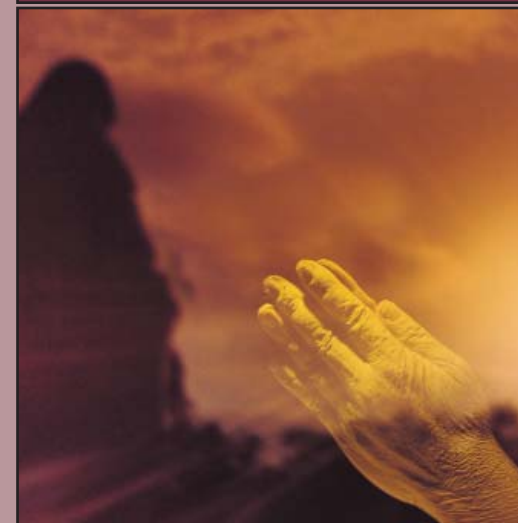
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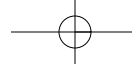
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The Forgotten Tool

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Christians worship. We sing privately and in the public assembly. We pray, we study God's word, we commune in the Supper, we give. We visit and encourage one another. We have fellowship meals. . .

Some among us have learned the blessing of using another tool in our spiritual life. Jesus' words to the disciples, "... **when** you fast..." (Matthew 6:16-18) resonate through the centuries. He said **when**, not **if**. The very wording is an assumption of fact: His followers *would* fast, so He told them how to behave and how to present themselves to the on-looking world in those times of fasting. They were not to put on an outward show of piety and of great spirituality; instead, their fasting was to be a very personal thing of personal spiritual benefit.

The church as a body, and each of us as individuals, are to gather each first day of the week to worship. By example ("... *on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...*" Acts 20:7) and by command ("... *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as*

you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25) we are bound to this practice. To deliberately fail to assemble with the saints is described as a wilful sin in verse 26.

God, in His great wisdom, has divided our lives, not into ages or years or even months, but into seven-day weeks. Can you imagine how difficult it would be if life simply stretched out in front of us, with no systematic breaks? The short cycle of days is a tremendous blessing, with the first day being set aside as a time for devotion and worship. Though our worship is directed to God, *we* are the real beneficiaries, because it should be a sobering time of self-examination.

"... **you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant ...**" (Hebrews 12:22-24)

After the examination, as we come into God's awesome presence, the very exercise of **singing praises** to Him lifts *our* spirits. (Have you noticed that almost every living thing *sings*?) Singing is one of the "earthly" activities that will also be a part of our existence in that

new world, and Zephaniah 3:17 says that even God sings! Singing, therefore, would seem to be embedded in our very nature, and is a vital part of the communion of our spirit with His.

Obviously, **prayer** is another avenue of communion. We are allowed to pour out our hearts to our Father, to thank Him for all that He does, and to ask for those things that we need. We are privileged to follow His thoughts as we **study His word**, and to be guided by His wisdom. We have the opportunity to **give** to Him, as He challenged in Malachi 3:10: "... *prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*"

How blessed we are, that among the billions in the world, we know that Jesus died for the sins of mankind, and we have the promise that as we walk every day in His light, His blood continually cleanses us from our personal sins (1 John 1:7). In order to keep both the sacrifice and the cleansing ever-present in our minds, God has given us the weekly **memorial** of His Son's death — the focal point of our corporate worship.

So, why is fasting not included in worship? Why is there no Scripture that says we have sinned if we fail to fast? Is fasting a part of the

