



BE Still.

Having proved the great value and blessing of fasting over many years, I was concerned that so many earnest believers had apparently never given the subject any serious thought.

Fasting is important—more important, perhaps, than many of us have supposed. For all that, it is not a major biblical doctrine, a foundation stone of the faith, or a panacea for every spiritual ill. Nevertheless, when exercised with a pure heart and a right motive, fasting may provide us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; a spiritual weapon of God's providing, 'mighty, to the pulling down of strongholds'. May God awaken us to all the spiritual possibilities latent in the fast that God has chosen.

WHY FAST?

For nearly a century and a half fasting has been out of vogue, at least in the churches of the West. The very idea of someone actually fasting today seems strange to most twentieth-century Christians. As a spiritual exercise it is confined, they would think, to believers who appear to be a little extreme or fanatical.

There are others whose misgivings concern the practical aspect. To them fasting and starving are synonymous terms, and they fear it will have harmful results.

Why such attitudes to a practice that is so obviously scriptural? Among great Bible saints who fasted were Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, and Daniel the seer. In the New Testament we have the examples of our Lord and His apostles. It clearly had its place in the life of the early churches. Nor was this biblical practice confined to men, for we find the names of Hannah in the Old Testament and Anna in the New in the ranks of the intercessors who fasted as well as prayed.

The doings of the great can scarcely be hidden. They are barely cold in their graves before their biographers are ferreting out their journals and private diaries. But only the opening of heaven's records will reveal the numbers of anonymous saints, who had no diaries and no biographers, but who prayed with fasting to the God who sees in secret. They too shall surely shine among the galaxy of these illustrious saints, 'even as the stars for ever and ever'.

In New Testament times, fasting was a channel of power. As spirituality waned and worldliness flourished in the churches, the power and gifts of the Spirit were withdrawn. With the loss of that inward power men could only cling to what they had left, its outward accompaniment. More and more emphasis was placed upon the outward act of fasting, though bereft of the inward spirit that alone could give it

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION

God's CHOSEN FAST

Excerpts from the book by

ARTHUR WALLIS

*"Lord, wean me from the earth.
Lord, take me within the veil"*

**"WHEN I AWAKE I AM STILL WITH THEE."
PSALM 139:18**

value. Paul's prediction about 'the form of religion but denying the power' (2 Tim. 3:5) was being fulfilled.

God is determined to have a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle, a bride fit for His beloved Son. It is the conviction of the writer that, in the travail that will bring to birth, we shall rediscover one of the lost secrets of the early Church, the power that is let loose through the truly biblical practice of fasting unto God.

WHEN—NOT IF

When you give alms . . . when you pray . . . when you fast (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16).

In the great commission, Christ commanded His apostles, "Make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). There has been for a century or more a tendency to emphasize and elevate the teaching of the Epistles in such a way as to suggest that it supersedes the teaching of Christ as we have it in the Gospels. Some have even asserted that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount has no direct application to believers today, that it is basically Messianic and Jewish, to be fulfilled in a future age. This is a serious error, and in direct conflict with Christ's commission just quoted. If these words have any meaning it is surely that what Jesus taught His disciples was to be taught to every successive generation of disciples, and obeyed, even to the consummation of the age (see also 1 Tim. 6:3, 4a).

What did our Lord teach His disciples concerning fasting? "*When you fast . . .*" He left us in no doubt that He took it for granted that His disciples would be exercised to obey the leading of the Spirit in this, as in praying and giving when the occasion demanded it.

It is significant that the Lord dealt with fasting as a spiritual exercise distinct from praying. Though fasting and praying are often linked in Scripture and in experience, this is not necessarily the case. Fasting stands on its own grounds, and may on occasion serve a spiritual purpose all its own.

Just as there may be praying without fasting, so there may at times be fasting, truly acceptable to God, without praying—at least in the sense of intercession. There is no mention of prayer accompanying the fast we read of in Esther. In the fast of the prophets and teachers in Antioch, they were giving themselves to worship rather than prayer (Acts 13:2).

THE TIME IS NOW

When the bridegroom is taken away from them . . . then they will fast (Matt. 9:15).

A new day had dawned. The kingdom of God had drawn near. The old order with its rites and ceremonies and legal bondage had gone forever. Even when the Bridegroom was taken from them there would be no return to the legalism and asceticism of the old order. Though His disciples would fast again, it would be for different reasons and in a different spirit from that which characterised the fasting of the Pharisees, or even of John the Baptist. As Jesus went on to explain, the old Judaistic wineskin was not a suitable receptacle for the new wine of the Spirit.

It is this age of the Church that is the period of the absent bridegroom, to which our Master referred when He said, "Then they will fast." The time is *now!*

These words of Jesus were prophetic, but where are those who fulfil them today? How can we recover apostolic power while neglecting apostolic practice? How can we expect the power to flow if we do not prepare the channels? Fasting is a God-appointed means for the flowing of His grace and power that we can afford to neglect no longer.

The fast of this age is not merely an act of mourning for Christ's absence, but an act of preparation for His return. The Church still awaits the midnight cry, 'Behold the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him' (Matt. 25:6). **It will be a fasting and praying Church that will hear this thrilling cry.** Tears shall then be wiped away, and the fast shall be followed by the feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

THE REGULAR AND PUBLIC FASTS

We have already noted that normally fasting is undertaken occasionally, as the need arises, and that it is a personal matter between the individual and God. The *regular* and *public* fasts, of which Scripture gives a number of examples, are obvious exceptions (2 Chron. 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Jer. 36:6; Joel 2:15).

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had developed this practice of regular fasting, and had turned it, like every other spiritual thing they touched, into a legal bondage. Thus Christ presents us with a picture of the typical Pharisee as a man who boasts in his prayer, 'I fast twice a week' (Luke 18:11, 12).

Provided we watch this danger, and see to it that the habit does not become a form devoid of spirit and life, and that **we do not try to force our personal exercise of heart upon others**, there is real value in the regular fast. It can be a tonic for both soul and body, which could also be an instrument for the blessing of others.

Robert Chapman (1803-1902) permitted himself the luxury of spending every Saturday fasting. He did not see visitors on this day, but shut himself up in his workshop, alone with God and his lathe—a time of recreation, communion, as well as preparation of his soul for the coming Lord's day. It is recorded that someone who had to make an emergency visit to the workshop one Saturday said, 'His face shone as the face of an angel.'

Many would desire to attain to Robert's sanctity

of heart and life without a willingness to tread the path he trod. 'Why are we not more holy?' asked John Wesley, another regular faster, addressing his preachers. '**Chiefly because we are enthusiasts, looking for the end without the means.**'

Paul evidently knew a good deal of *involuntary* fasting (2 Cor. 6:5 and 11:27). Paul had no difficulty in reconciling such experiences of want with the promise, 'My God will supply every need of yours.' He knew that finding himself temporarily without food, and without the means to obtain it, was a necessary trial of faith permitted by God for his ultimate blessing.

FASTING UNTO GOD

When ye fasted . . . did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? (Zech. 7:5) They ministered to the Lord and fasted (Acts 13:2).

So much of our thinking is ruled by that self-centred principle, 'What do I get out of it?' Even in our spiritual desires and aspirations self may still be enthroned. The cross must work in us if the life is to be centred in God. Only so can our spiritual motivation be altered and become Christward instead of self-ward. 'He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him' (2 Cor. 5:15).

God is not merely concerned with what we do but why we do it. A right act may be robbed of all its value in the sight of God if it is done with a wrong motive. The danger of this is acute in the realm of outward religious exercises. 'Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not?' asked the perplexed religionists of Isaiah's day. Swift was heaven's answer: "Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure" (Isa. 58:3). The fasts they undertook, with all their show of piety, were motivated by self-interest and self-seeking. No wonder God asked indignantly, "Is this the fast that I choose?" (v.5). This same self-centredness under a cloak of piety was seen in all its shameful hypocrisy in the fasting of the Pharisees. It was against this that Jesus lifted up His voice in the Sermon on the Mount, telling His followers that when they fasted they were not to be like the hypocrites. The Pharisees were not ministering to God, but to the pride in their own hearts. Fasting must be done unto God, before the eye of the Father who sees in secret. Our basic motive must be the glory of God.

In Isaiah 58, God reminds His people that the acceptable fast is one which *He* has chosen. Fasting, like prayer, must be God-initiated and God-ordained if it is to be effective. Prevailing prayer begins with God; He places upon us a burden by the Spirit, and we respond to that burden. Prayer that originates with God always returns to God. So it is with fasting.

All this does not of course relieve us of our responsibility. On our part there must be the recognition of the rightness and need of fasting, the willingness for the self-discipline involved, and the exercise of heart before God; but in the final analysis the initiative is His. We are not to be in bondage to rules, even spiritual ones. 'If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law' (Gal. 5:18). There will be times when we shall forget the matter of our personal gain, and find ourselves like Anna the prophetess, 'worshipping with fasting' (Luke 2:37), or those leaders of the church in Antioch who

'ministered to the Lord, and fasted' (Acts 13:2 R.V.). Then fasting will be only secondarily to us a means to secure certain spiritual ends.

Says John Wesley, 'Let it be done unto the Lord, with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let us beware of thinking we *merit* anything of God by our fasting.'

God's chosen fast, then, is that which He has appointed, that which is set apart for Him, to minister to Him, to honour and glorify Him, designed to accomplish His will. Then we shall find, as though it were heaven's after-thought, that the fast unto God rebounds in blessing on our heads, and the God who sees in secret is graciously pleased to reward us openly. **In this way we are preserved from ever permitting the blessings to mean more to us than the Blessor.**

FOR PERSONAL SANCTITY

How is it that fasting can help us here? On the negative side, pride and a too-full stomach are old bed-fellows. What was the sin of Sodom? Not primarily homosexuality: the Bible says, "This was the guilt of your sister Sodom . . . pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease" (Ezek. 16:49). When we look at the nations of the West today where the sin of Sodom is rampant, we can discern the same root causes. History cannot help repeating itself. Given the same conditions, the same malaise inevitably follows.

God foresaw that pride and full feeding would be one of Israel's pitfalls when they entered into the land of promise. "God has led you these forty years in the wilderness," Moses reminded them. "He humbled you and let you hunger . . ." (Deut. 8:2, 3). Now those days of discipline were over, and the land of plenty that they were about to possess would provide new temptations, so Moses went on to warn them, "Take heed . . . lest, when you have eaten and are full . . . your heart be lifted up" (verses 11-14). Hosea tells us that this is exactly what happened (Hos. 13:6), despite the warning. **Fasting is a divine corrective to the pride of the human heart.** It is a discipline of the body with a tendency to humble the human soul. There is a natural sequence as we move from self-humbling to the mourning of repentance and contrition. Israel fasted in repentance in the days of Samuel, and so did the returned exiles in the time of Nehemiah. Sanctification is facilitated by fasting.

However, God wants us to bring us beyond the place of mourning only for our personal sins, to where we are moved by the Spirit to mourn for the sins of the Church, the nation, and even the world. It is of the deepest concern to God to find those who share His feelings for the spiritual situation that exists on every hand.

Ezekiel was given a vision of the judgment of God coming upon Jerusalem because of its abominations. Before the heavenly executioners were permitted to destroy the inhabitants of the city, a man was sent before them to "put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it". The executioners were then commanded to go forth and slay without mercy all except those who had the mark, and to begin at God's sanctuary (Ezek. 9:4-6). Heaven marks the men who feel with God the sins that break His heart and turn away His face

from us. The same abominations are still being committed in sanctuary and in city. If today God put a mark on those who sigh and groan because of this, and then sent His executioners to destroy all but those with the mark, would we escape? The eyes of the Lord are still searching the earth today for the Ezras who will confess the sins of a faithless remnant, weeping and casting themselves down before the Lord; or the Nehemiahs who will weep and mourn, fast and pray for the walls that are broken down. If restoration and renewal are to come from the presence of the Lord, it is men and women like these whom God will use to turn the tide.

In the fasting for personal sanctity, the best example of its positive aspect of *consecration to God* is the forty day fast undertaken by our Lord prior to His public ministry. Though he received the Spirit at His baptism in measureless fullness, by His acceptance of those six weeks of fasting He was reaffirming His determination to do the will of His Father even unto the end. It was His final preparation and consecration for His heavenly mission, after which the works of God in the power of the Spirit were manifested in Him.

Something of this is seen in the setting apart of Barnabas and Paul for their apostolic ministry. 'Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.' Not a tea-meeting but a **consecration fast** marked the first missionary valedictory. Little wonder we lack strong spiritual leadership and the sheep tend to drift.

If you have been brought low through personal defeat; if there is a call in your soul to deeper purifying, to a renewed consecration; if there is the challenge of some new task for which you feel ill-equipped—then it is time to enquire of God whether He would not have you separate yourself unto Him in fasting.

TO BE HEARD ON HIGH

So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He listened to our entreaty (Ezra 8:23).

Fasting is designed to make prayer mount up as on eagles' wings. It is intended to usher the suppliant into the audience chamber of the King and to extend to him the golden sceptre. It may be expected to drive back the oppressing powers of darkness and loosen their hold on the prayer objective. It is calculated to give an edge to a man's intercessions and power to his petitions. Heaven is ready to bend its ear to listen when someone prays with fasting.

How often have we made earnest prayer to God for some specific need, with the assurance that this was in the will of God, and yet there has been no answer from heaven. Why? It could well be, and often is, that God is saying to us "When you seek me *with all your heart*, I will be found by you" (Jer. 29:13, 14). When a man is willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, he is demonstrating that he means business, that he is seeking with all his heart, and will not let God go unless He answers. "Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting . . ." Joel 2:12.

Says Andrew Murray, '**Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice**

ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.'

Of course, we must not think of fasting as a hunger strike designed to force God's hand and get our own way! And prayer is much more complex than simply asking a loving father to supply his child's need. There are spiritual cross currents—prayer is warfare, prayer is wrestling. There is opposition that must be overcome. This is a realm of deep mystery. Scripture states the facts but does not explain them. Persistence is needful in the spiritual realm. **Often pressure has to be maintained before the breakthrough comes in the heavenly warfare.** *The man who prays with fasting is expressing his earnestness in a divinely-appointed way.*

Fasting was sometimes the climax of earnest and prolonged prayer. When the heavens remained as brass despite earnest and persistent prayer, men were sometimes driven in their desperation to fasting as the only solution. The Benjamites committed a terrible crime and God told the other tribes to go up against them. These tribes were twice defeated, though they prayed and wept before the Lord. The third time they also fasted, and God gave them overwhelming victory (Jdg. 20). Again and again the Israelites fasted in times of national emergency, and what appeared to be certain disaster was averted. Are there no occasions today when we are threatened, that we so seldom employ this means of grace? **In giving us the privilege of fasting as well as praying, God has added a powerful weapon to our spiritual armoury.** In her folly and ignorance the Church has largely looked upon it as obsolete. An hour of impending crisis for the Church and for the world demands its recovery.

TO FREE THE CAPTIVES

'Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness . . . to let the oppressed go free . . .' (Isa. 58:6).

The fast that God has chosen is not to bring men into bondage but to free them from it. The discerning eye can recognise that many that we meet in life are oppressed by the devil, bound by forces they do not understand and from which they cannot break free. In many cases they loathe themselves for their actions, weep with sheer frustration at their own impotence to break the chains, and pray as best they know how for deliverance. Worse still there are Christians bound by fear, resentment, jealousy and uncleanness, who know full well that they are a complete contradiction to the liberating gospel they profess—but how to get free?

Forgiveness was only one part of Christ's message—He "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). It is certain we need to obtain heavenly anointing for such a ministry: we cannot afford to be without our Master's equipping. **Satan is a stubborn foe, and will not relinquish his grasp on the spirits and souls, minds and bodies of men, unless compelled to do so. Fasting seems to provide that compelling.** It is a powerful auxiliary weapon, appointed by God. To break the enemy's hold, a 'softening-up' process by prayer is often necessary. A fast undertaken at God's direction will strengthen the intercessor to maintain the pressure until the enemy is

compelled to loosen his grasp of the captive. Then fasting will also give the authority, when God's moment comes, to speak the commanding word that effects the release.

THEY FASTED TO DELIVER

'Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant shall be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you' (Isa. 49:25).

Chinese Pastor Hsi was truly a man of God in the real sense of the word. His simple, child-like faith, which yet was strong and unshakeable, was astonishing. **He took the New Testament as it was and put it into practice without any hesitations or reservations.**

Delivered at conversion from the awful tyranny of opium smoking, God used this man in a ministry which brought deliverance to hundreds of his fellow countrymen from opium, sickness and demon possession. The hearts of multitudes were thus opened to the gospel and churches sprang up throughout the region. His ministry was characterised by tremendous conflict with the powers of darkness. Whatever the crisis that arose—the need of guidance in some important decision, wisdom in handling difficult people or situations, the deliverance of opium addicts or those possessed by demons, the withstanding of persecution or opposition—Hsi had only one remedy. He gave himself to prayer and fasting. God wrought mighty victories and deliverances for him and through him.

The Lord surely wants us to know His own deep compassion for tormented souls, and has given us the authority to deliver them (Mark 16:17). **Do we care enough to fast and pray for their deliverance?**

It is true that deliverance is seldom possible unless those bound desire it and are ready by repentance and confession of any sin which has opened the door to Satan to deprive him of any rights within them. **But so often there is this desire, yet no one to whom they can turn** who will use the God given authority and pay the price if need be in prayer and fasting. God give us the vision and the faith in this hour of need.

FOR REVELATION

'I Daniel . . . turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting . . . Gabriel . . . said to me . . . I have now come out to you to give you wisdom and understanding' (Dan. 9:2, 3, 21, 22).

Without doubt there is a very close connection between fasting and the receiving of spiritual revelation. Many religions practice fasting because they know its power to detach one's mind from the world of the senses and to sharpen one's sensibility to the spiritual world. From time to time, John Wesley saw the supernatural at work in his ministry and acknowledged it as of God. His warning is therefore all the more acceptable:

'Do not ascribe to God what is not of God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, revelations to be from God without sufficient evidence. They may be purely natural: they may be diabolical. Remember the caution of the apostle, "Believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God." Try all things by the written Word and let all bow down before it.'

We have not found anything in Scripture to suggest that we are to *seek* visions, dreams or supernatural revelations, but the point is that those who give themselves to seeking God with fasting may find God rewarding them with such manifestations of His presence. But these are not the only, or even the most important aspect of revelation—constantly we need revelation concerning the will of God for our lives. Pastor Hsi was faced with a serious crisis in the early days of the opium refuge work when the supply of foreign medicines failed. These were vital for the treatment of the patients. The thought came to him that maybe God would use his knowledge of native drugs to compound a medicine to take the place of the foreign supply. He sought the Lord with prayer and fasting to show him the proper ingredients. Mrs. Howard Taylor records the sequel: ‘Very simply it all came to him just how those pills were to be made. The drugs were at hand in his store, and, still fasting, he took the prescription, compounded the medicine, and hastened back to the Refuge. It proved a success and entirely changed the aspect of opium refuge work.’

Why is it that we do not apply this age-old prescription of prayer and fasting to meet our desperate situations?

Finally there is the question of revelation upon the written Word. We all tend to be bound by traditional viewpoints and urgently need fresh light to break out from God’s holy Word on controversial subjects such as the Church, its nature and function, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the prophetic scriptures and God’s future programme. We may read and study, discuss and argue, champion this view-point or that, but the need of these challenging days is for that ‘spirit of wisdom and of revelation’ that is still given to those who seek God with prayer and fasting. Daniel did this and the heavenly messenger gave him wisdom and understanding. Light will surely be given if we prize it enough to seek it as he did. The promise given long ago to those who keep God’s chosen fast is still true:

“Then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (Isa. 58:10, 11).

TO BUFFET THE BODY

‘I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified’ (1 Cor. 9:27).

Many Christians seem oblivious that here is a leakage of spiritual power. They mistake the lust that enslaves them for a natural and healthy appetite. Many who have fasted would admit that it was the call of God to abstain that found them out. As Martin Luther, an inveterate faster, quaintly expressed it, ‘the flesh was wont to grumble dreadfully’.

Where there is a failure to deal with this lust for food, the life is opened to attack along other lines. The connection between over-eating and the stimulating of sex desire is common knowledge. God said of Israel, “When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery” (Jer. 5:7). Paul insisted on the importance of disciplining the bodily appetites and not making ‘provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires’ (Rom. 13:14). To Paul’s mind there was not merely the danger of temptation, if the body was not buffeted, but of loss of power in the great contest of life, just as an athlete who failed to train seriously would be hampered on the day of the race and lose the prize. He therefore made it his business to take what practical steps should be necessary to subdue the appetites and desires of the body, that the spiritual might be kept in the ascendancy. **How could he expect to conquer while continually conquered by his insatiable appetites?**

Our Lord knew what it was to be hungry and thirsty and weary, but He ever displayed that perfect self-control which is the fruit of the Spirit. When the disciples urged Him to eat at Sychar’s well, certain that He must be as famished as they were, He quickly replied, “I have food to eat of which you do not know . . . My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work” (John 4:8, 31-34). What perfect mastery of the physical by the spiritual! But had He not fasted forty days and nights, and repulsed the tempter’s attack when urged to turn stones into bread? Man is not to live by bread alone, but sometimes he may have to live by the Word of God alone. Was not the life of Him who ‘pleased not Himself’ one of perpetual self-discipline? Does He not still call us to follow Him in the path of self-denial? But how is it to be done?

‘It is a perfectly simple matter,’ someone replies. ‘The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Let Jesus live His life in you, and this fruit will be the sure result.’ This of course is the truth, but it is not the whole truth, as many have had to learn through the discipline of failure. There are often outward and practical steps God requires us to take before this fruit can be produced. **Self-imposed discipline is basic to the whole biblical concept of fasting.**

By stated fasting, constant watchfulness, habitual temperance in all things, the early Wesleyan preacher William Bramwell kept the body in subjection, and thereby increased his spirituality and power. Writing to a friend in 1809 he said: ‘The reason why the Methodists in general do not live in this salvation is there is too much sleep, too much meat and drink, too little fasting and self-denial, too much conversation with the world, too much preaching and hearing, and too little self-examination and prayer.’

WHAT ABOUT ASCETICISM?

Perhaps we are wondering if all this emphasis upon fasting may not lead to an unhealthy

asceticism, or even fanaticism. Behind the erroneous practices of medieval asceticism was erroneous doctrine. There was a false view of God as One who takes pleasure in pain, suffering and hardship. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that God would have mercy and not sacrifice. Wesley declared, ‘Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.’ **In studiously avoiding the one let us watch against the other.** The much more prevalent error of our day is an easy indulgence which permits us to pamper the flesh when we should buffet it, to feast and enjoy ourselves when we ought to fast and to pray.

FASTING AND THE BODY

It is strange that any who believe in the biblical revelation should ever have thought that a practice so scriptural as fasting, taught and exemplified by Christ Himself, could ever be harmful to the body, provided it is carried out in accordance with scripture. The fact is that the very reverse is the case. Fasting makes possible a process of physical therapy, fully releasing the body to operate its own natural system of cleansing and healing. The curative power of fasting has been recognised and practised since ancient times.

Our physical condition can often influence our spiritual lives more than we realise. The body of a believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Is God glorified when it is weak or sickly through neglect of the divine laws that govern its well-being, or become casualties in the fight through over-working, over-feeding, or undernourishing our bodies, and failing to give them their ‘sabbath’ of rest and relaxation? There are multitudes of diseases which have their origin in fullness and might have their end in fasting. Without a doubt there are ills that could be cured, or better still prevented, and a better state of health enjoyed, if fasting coupled with reformed eating habits were practised. **Oblivious to this, man still continues to dig his grave with his knife and fork!**

In an age of pressure, when the breakdown of mind or body, even amongst professing Christians, is becoming all too familiar, even the physical value of a fast of God’s choosing becomes a matter of some importance.

We cannot agree with those who would have us believe that fasting is either easy or pleasant, something which our nature may enjoy. Nor can we see anything in Scripture to suggest that God ever intended it to be; rather the reverse. **It is a physical and spiritual medicine.**

Whether we are healthy or not, we need to get the mind of God before undertaking any fast, especially a prolonged one. Further, we need to have our aims and motives clear, and make sure that, whatever we may hope to gain in health and healing, the glory of God and the spiritual issues at stake are our major concern. ☞

Oh, what vacillating, halfway slovens, dolts, and boors we are when it comes to careful and practical application of the more delicate demands of our Christianity. I have found that fasting is a tool for use as a ‘pry’ on the Great Inscrutable’s heart; when He sees one earnest enough in his pursuit of holiness that he neglects his daily food for prayer, He must be amazed and cannot help but honour such simple sacrifice. — JIM ELLIOT