

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Spiritual Necessity of Regular Fasting

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Dear Brethren,

Does your life lack real godly spiritual influence? Are you bogging down in countless problems, trials, difficulties and frustration? If so, there are causes for that. Are you growing the way you should as the called of God—in God's nature, mind and character, in God's law-fulfilling love, in the fruits of God's Holy Spirit, in your service to others, and in fulfilling your spiritual responsibilities? If not, it may be because you are not using a powerful spiritual tool that God has put at your disposal to prove your sincerity in wanting to obey Him. Regular monthly fasting is an often neglected key in building God's spiritual temple. God commands His called—those who seek Him—to fast.

Why fast? We fast because Christ put the same emphasis on fasting as He did on prayer. He said, "*when* you pray" and "*when* you fast" (Matthew 6:5, 16)—not *if* you pray or fast. Christ taught His disciples that there would be a time when they would fast. Since Christ was with His disciples most of the time, it obviously was not necessary for them to fast in order to draw close to God, for God was actually with them in the flesh. However, when Christ ascended to heaven He was no longer with His disciples in the same intimate, physical way. So in order to draw close to God now, who is spirit and in heaven, the disciples would have to practice following the teachings of Christ on fasting often to become spiritually closer to God. Fasting is necessary for a physical human being to truly humble himself and really draw close to God in prayer.

How do we become humble and draw close to God? Are the called of God naturally humble? Do their minds have a humble approach to Almighty God by nature? Of course not! Romans 8:7 tells us that our carnal minds are hostile to God. James 4:5

tells us the natural proclivity of our human nature lusts to envy the ways of this world. Galatians 5:19–21 tells us that all the things we do by nature are habitually characterized by the sins and vices of these verses. Envy, strife, jealousy, pride and concepts of our own minds come from our stubborn, carnal, unyielding nature which is anything but humble! The natural mind is not and cannot, of itself, be truly humble.

Some might think of themselves as naturally humble. But Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that our minds are out to deceive, trick, fool and bluff at every turn. This means your mind can trick you into thinking you are humble when you are not! If a person thinks he is naturally humble, without using the spiritual tool of fasting often, he has already totally deceived himself, lacking the meekness or humility necessary for intimate, close contact with God.

James 4:6 tells us that God resists the proud—those who refuse to humble themselves. But He gives more grace (more unmerited pardon to fulfill their spiritual responsibilities) unto the humble. What are we, therefore, commanded to do? Well, James 4:7–8 tells us:

Submit yourselves therefore to God [meaning to develop your love of the will to obey Him]. Resist [stand against] the devil [through the continuous use of God's spiritual tools], and he will flee from you [because God's law-fulfilling love will be flowing in you]. Draw nigh to God [prove your sincerity by fulfilling your spiritual responsibilities], and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners [those who practice transgression of God's physical and spiritual laws]; and purify your hearts [minds], ye double minded [those who are vacillating between natures] (James 4:7–8).

God wants us to become humble in order to be in control of our carnal natures and to draw close to Him. How do we do that?

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up (verses 9–10).

James prescribes fasting. Compare the use of the words afflict (Leviticus 23:27; Isaiah 58:5), mourn (Matthew 9:14–15), weep (Zechariah 7:1–5) and humbled (Psalm 35:13). They all indicate fasting.

In the Bible "fast" and "humble" often mean the same thing. Often it will be expressed "he humbled himself before God." This means that he fasted before God. So when you see the command to humble yourself, it usually means to fast (to go without food and water for a determined period of time). James links the process of drawing closer to God with the need to fast.

God resists the proud (including those who refuse to fast) and gives grace to the humble (those who fast regularly to fulfill their spiritual responsibilities). Meekness or humility is a fruit of God's Holy Spirit. We cannot work it up. God gives it to those who prove their sincerity in wanting to be humble through fasting. When we fail to fast regularly, we are telling God that we are not interested in humility. God only exalts the humble, those who prove their desire to want to be so, through fasting.

Jesus taught that no one will be accepted of God until he becomes humble. In Luke 18:14 Jesus said: "he that humbleth himself [through fasting] shall be exalted." He will become a born son in the God Family.

The purpose of fasting is to humble ourselves—to prove the sincerity of our love to want to be humble. When God sees our sincerity, then and only then will He allow that fruit of His Holy Spirit to be manifested within us. Fasting is a humbling experience. It cuts us down and lets us know how weak and insufficient unto ourselves we really are. We learn real humility and self-abasement. We learn that we are merely very physical human beings. We learn that if we do not get that supply of physical food we will eventually die of starvation. We learn the same is true with our spiritual lives. We will shrivel up and die spiritually without a constant supply of the spiritual "food" of God's Word and the energizing power of His Holy Spirit and His *agape* law-fulfilling love.

Without fasting, you may mentally admit that you are not much, but you do not really comprehend it—you don't feel it! You do not see how really weak and insignificant you are until you begin to go without food and drink for a period of time. Then the lesson is driven home—to the pit of your stomach. Not only do you learn how weak and worthless you are when you fast, but you are made aware of the greatness of God.

Being human, and as long as you feel strong and sufficient of yourself, you will by nature trust in yourself. God is not so important to you. But when you fast, God becomes very important. You begin to feel in your innermost being how much you need and depend upon God. Fasting brings you to grips with reality. You see and feel yourself as you really are.

Therefore, the purpose of fasting is to prove your sincerity and desire to want to be humble before God, during which time you draw closer to God by spending a great deal of time in the study of God's Word, meditation and prayer. You fast, study, meditate and pray to demonstrate your desire to be close to God and humble. When God sees your sincerity in wanting to be close to Him and humble, then God will manifest within you His love and the fruit of His godly humility. We humble ourselves through fasting, but God is the only one who grants humility. It is a fruit of His Holy Spirit. God matches effort for effort. The degree to which we study, meditate and pray when we fast is the degree to which we will draw close to Him and receive the fruit of humility.

Fasting alone can become nothing more than going on a hunger strike.
In Isaiah 58:3 we find what is not an acceptable fast:

Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

The most effective fasting requires time—time away from your everyday responsibilities. You need time to get close to God.

Failure to set apart this time can defeat the purpose of fasting. Ideally, you should use time away from your regular job. Of course, some duties have to be performed. But the point is, do not fill the time with unnecessary work projects or entertainment. Remember, fasting is done to draw you close to God. It is done to prove your sincerity in wanting to receive the fruits of God's Holy Spirit.

When was the last time you fasted? Do you just fast "once a year" on the Day of Atonement when God commands it? If so, God knows how spiritually weak you really are. You may not even realize it—but it is true. The longer you go without fasting, the farther you tend to drift away from the reality of God and the fruits of His Holy Spirit. The farther you drift from a close intimate contact with God the weaker you will become spiritually.

In this end-time, we have witnessed probably the worst failure of Spirit-begotten human beings in the history of man. The fact that most of God's called have now turned their backs on Him, is proof that proper fasting was never a part of their physical lives. Only prayer and fasting often can give you the temperance you need to stand against what you are by nature. Paul fasted often for self-control. So should we. Notice what he said in 1 Corinthians 7:5. Paul is primarily talking to married couples here, but it does include all of us.

Defraud [deprive] ye not one the other [meaning in the desires of a sexual relationship], except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency [or your lack of self-control or inability to contain].

What about spiritual incontinency? It was prophesied to take place in the last days during perilous times (2 Timothy 3:3). Many would be incontinent, lacking the power or strength to resist the influence of Satan and society and their own carnal minds. To be incontinent means: a powerless condition or a want of self-restraint—in other words, not even wanting to resist. When I think of someone who has a problem with incontinency I think of an elderly person who has the tendency to wet their pants. It is embarrassing to have no strength over the control of the bladder.

Spiritual incontinency is to lack the divine power to hold fast to the spirit of truth, keep God's commandments and overcome what we are by nature. A lack of fasting can allow us to enter into a powerless condition spiritually. When we fail to stand against the influence of Satan and society and the inclinations of what we are by nature, we wet our pants spiritually. And that should embarrass us. Our sins should be an embarrassment to us. When we fast, God helps us resist. Fasting puts God in the picture and Satan, self and society out of the picture. Fasting helps us obtain the fruits of God's Holy Spirit.

We need to fast regularly (monthly is a good practice). We need to seek God and draw close to Him by fasting and prayer to keep ourselves in a good spiritual condition. If we draw close to God, acknowledge our need for Him and depend on Him through fasting, He will strengthen us by filling us with the fruits of His Holy Spirit. He will give us the Spirit of power, His law-fulfilling love—the strongest force in the universe—to give us sound minds to think as He thinks. We will receive joy, peace, patience, gentleness, humility, faith and self-control to master what we are by nature (Galatians 5:22–23).

God will literally transform our natures with His Holy Spirit—provided we renew His Spirit daily—by fulfilling our spiritual responsibilities in the proper use of His spiritual tools. Through obedience and daily renewal of God's Holy Spirit, we can become God's own spiritual creation. We are in a spiritual war. How do we survive? Fast! Stay close to God in the way that we were taught.

God instructed Noah how to build an ark that could save him from the first death. Likewise, God has instructed us how to build a spiritual temple that will save us from the

second death. He has given us spiritual tools to build that temple: prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting. By the way we use these tools we prove our sincerity in wanting to receive the fruits of God's Holy Spirit.

Remember, we are in a cooperative venture with God. Paul graphically describes this venture—this unique two-fold process of matching effort for effort, a blending of human effort and divine power in Colossians 1:29:

Whereunto I also labour [fasting, praying, living by God's Word, meditating on it], striving according to his [God's] working [the working of God manifesting within Paul the fruits of His Holy Spirit], which worketh in me mightily.

It is a team effort. God works only as we study, meditate, pray and fast. He matches effort for effort. We must initiate a struggle to overcome through the use of His spiritual tools to obey God. We prove our sincerity by how often we fast to draw close to God. When He sees our willful involvement to build our spiritual temples in the way He has instructed us, then, and only then, will God manifest within us, through the power of His Spirit, the fruits that will fulfill that salvation process.

By fasting, studying the Bible and praying, we recharge our "spiritual batteries," so to speak, by receiving more of God's Holy Spirit and His *agape* law-abiding love—the strongest force in the universe. Through this universal power we can literally alter and change our whole lives. We will be blessed beyond our wildest imagination because the fruits of God's Spirit will be flowing in us.

Mr. Armstrong had a routine that produced incredible results. During the waking hours of the fast, he divided his prayer time, his Bible study time and his meditation time on the things he studied into three equal parts. Following that routine can be the means for many to conquer obstacles in their Christian lives that cannot be mastered in any other way.

Do you sincerely want God to intervene in your life on your behalf? Do you really want to receive more of God's Holy Spirit? Do you desire to have close, intimate contact with your Creator who bestows every good and perfect gift? Do you desire to have the greatest power of the universe in your life? Do you want to be filled with the fullness of God, to have a spiritually sound mind filled to the full with all the fruits of His Holy Spirit? Do you desire to walk with God as Christ did? Then seek God by chastening and humbling yourself before Him with fasting. That is the key to growing to spiritual

adulthood in this life. We must walk worthy of our calling with meekness and with all lowliness (Ephesians 4:2).

May God bless you in your efforts to build your spiritual temple in the way that God has instructed. May God bless you with more of His Spirit and His law-abiding love as you fulfill your spiritual responsibilities. Remember, fasting often is necessary to cultivate a mind that will grow to spiritual adulthood in this life, to be born into the God Family.

Sincerely, with law-abiding love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert J. Litz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and "L".

Robert J. Litz