

"And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" Alma 5:14

## Chapter 13 – The Hated Principle – Fasting

### CHAPTER 13

#### THE HATED PRINCIPLE — FASTING

*“And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save HE SHALL PREPARE A WAY FOR THEM, that they may accomplish the thing which he commanded them.” (1 Nephi 3:7)*

Of all the principles that challenge the integrity of the saints, fasting is at the top of the list. You see, it is not a requirement for a temple recommend. No one checks up on you to see if you are doing it. Your free agency is completely unchallenged as to whether you obey the law or not. You can sit in fast and testimony meeting month after month and no one will ever ask you if you have completed an honest fast. In fact, no one seems to know what constitutes an honest fast.

In the previous section we discovered that fasting played an important role in bringing Alma to the crossroads. If it is so important, perhaps we should inquire into our own attitude toward this principle. As with any other commandment, a proper attitude is absolutely vital in fasting. If we complain or do it reluctantly, we cancel our effectiveness.

Why does Satan hate fasting? Because it strips him of his power over us. Not only does Satan hate fasting, he actually fears fasting. Yes, he is actually afraid of this principle. The tragic thing is that many saints hate fasting also. I mean that just the way I said it. Many of the saints hate fasting. Many believe they can't fast. One gets severe headaches. Another suffers stomach cramps. Spells of dizziness inflict another fast. The medical profession advises the next one not to. To another, Satan whispers, “You don't get much pleasure out of life, and food is the one thing that you really enjoy.” Perhaps it is about time to explode some of these attitudes by asking a very important question. AM I TRYING TO FIND WAYS TO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD OR AM I TRYING TO FIND WAYS TO GET OUT OF KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS? Now we have the picture in focus, don't we?

Cliff, a good friend, paid a visit to my home one day. He was concerned about his health. He had colitis. Do you know why he was concerned? He couldn't fast. Now that's a switch, isn't it? I asked him simple question.

"Do you want to observe the law of the fast?"

"Yes," he answered.

I said, "Why don't you go before the Lord in mighty prayer and explain your situation to the Lord. Explain to him that you can't fast, but that you don't want to miss out on the blessings of fasting. Say to the Lord, 'I want to make a bargain with you. If you will heal my colitis, I will observe the law of the fast.'" Now a bargain is nothing more than a covenant. Do you think that the Lord would turn down a prayer like that? Several months later Cliff paid another visit to my home. We chatted for a while before he came to the point of his visit, saying, "Incidentally, the Lord healed my colitis. I'm now able to observe the law of the fast." I wasn't one bit surprised, were you? This true experience is the exception. Here's how it usually happens.

"Do you want to observe the law of the fast?" I say.

"Well, it's awfully hard."

"Listen, why don't you go before the Lord and say to him, 'If you'll heal me I promise to observe the fast the rest of my life.'"

He answers, "You don't seem to understand, I don't want to fast. I hate fasting. As long as I'm sick I don't have to fast. Besides, I like being sick."

If you are in this latter category, I suggest that you quit reading right now, because when you are through with this particular chapter you are going to be the sickest you've ever been in your life. You're going to need all of the latest advances in medical science just to keep you alive long enough for the elders to get there and administer to you. And you had better request that they heal your attitude before they heal your body.

Perhaps it's time to get serious. Fasting is the pathway to Eternal Life. Enos fasted all day and into the night to obtain a remission of sins. Alma called a two day fast that his son might also receive a remission of his sins. The Lord fasted forty days in preparation for his ministry. To paraphrase the words of Nephi relative to baptism, "If He being holy, have need of fasting, how much more have we, being unholy, need of fasting?" I don't know how a person can get close to the Lord without learning to fast and pray properly. Isaiah said it well:

*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.*

*Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God;. they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.*

*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 labors. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness; ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard from on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul, is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?*

*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? TO LOOSE THE BANDS OF WICKEDNESS, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*

*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not from thine own flesh.*

*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine HEALTH SHALL SPRING FORTH SPEEDILY; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.*

*Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, HERE I AM. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and SPEAKING VANITY;*

*And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday;*

*AND THE LORD SHALL GUIDE TREE CONTINUALLY, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*

*And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. (Isaiah 58:1-12)*

Health is the promise of the Lord for proper fasting and yet it is the lack of health that is used as the excuse for not fasting.

#### FASTING STRIPS THE DEVIL OF HIS POWER

If we were able to catalog all of the works of the devil I'm sure that we would be surprised. There isn't a person, country or organization that doesn't bear the scars of Satan somewhere or other. In the New Testament there is the story about a boy who was called a lunatic. In our day and time I suppose that we would call him mentally ill. Here is the account:

*And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic, and sore vexed; for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.*

*And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me.*

*And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.*

*Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?*

*And Jesus said unto them, BECAUSE OF YOUR UNBELIEF: for, verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, YE SHALL SAY UNTO THIS MOUNTAIN, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; AND NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE UNTO YOU.*

*Howbeit this kind GOETH NOT OUT BUT BY PRAYER AND FASTING. (Matt 17:15-21)*

Had the disciples understood the principle of fasting and prayer they could have cast Satan out themselves. Apparently there is a class of evil spirit that is so mean and ornery that it takes fasting to subdue him. The meaner they are the more humble we have to be. We gain humility by fasting.

The Savior chided them because of their unbelief and told them that if they had faith as a grain of mustard seed they could command the mountain to move and it would move. It isn't quite clear whether the Lord was pointing to a real mountain or whether the mountain was the problem that the disciples had not been able to solve. In either case His statement would be true.

The evil spirit which possessed the lad was his and his father's mountain or problem, and the Lord did remove it hence. He solved it for them. Now do you begin to see the importance of fasting? Fasting helps us to strip Satan of his power over us. It makes you want to shout praises to the Holy One of Israel, doesn't it? If you have had Satan on your back, you know what I mean, don't you?

### THE LORD'S CALL

One of the most perplexing problems for leaders in the church is who to put in that position. When considering anyone for a position there is only one question that has to be resolved. Who does the Lord want? When the Lord tells you who he wants, it is easy to convince that person that the call comes from the Lord. But what if the Lord calls someone that is unworthy? That is the Lord's business. Don't you think the Lord knows the person better than you do? And isn't every call a personal call to repentance? Well, if I can't convince you maybe the Lord can —

*And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, AND CONTINUED ALL NIGHT IN PRAYER UNTO GOD.*

*And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles. (Luke 6:12-13)*

I want to suggest to you that He not only prayed all night but He fasted along with His praying. Now, I can't prove this, but I doubt that He had a midnight snack.

I think He was fasting right along with His praying. And what was He praying about? What did He want to know? He wanted to know who to put into the quorum of the twelve apostles. That's right. And do you think that the Father told Him? Surely. Did not the Master so testify?

*I have many things to say and to judge of you; but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I HAVE HEARD OF HIM.*

*They understood not that he spake to them of the Father.*

*Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know. that I am he, and that I DO NOTHING OF MYSELF; but AS MY FATHER HATH TAUGHT ME, I speak of those things. (John 8:26-28)*

Now that should be enough to convince anyone, but just in case it isn't, there is more.

*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I SPEAK NOT OF MYSELF; but the that Father dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. (John 14:10)*

Apparently the apostles understood this principle well. Through the death of Judas appeared the first vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve.

*And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men shew whither of these two THOU HAST CHOSEN. (Acts 1:24)*

First, they acknowledged that the Lord knew the hearts of all men. In that acknowledgment they realized that they didn't know the hearts of all men. Then they prayed simply, WHO DO YOU WANT, LORD?

There is a simpler way to call people. Make a list of names. Cancel out those who break the Word of Wisdom. Cross out the non-tithe payers. Cross off Sabbath breakers. That shortens the list, doesn't it? Now get rid of those you don't like for some reason or other. Now make the selection from the "worthy" ones, and don't bother fasting and praying about it anyway because that would take too much time and effort. Don't ask the Lord. After all, aren't you the one in authority? That's the easy way, but it isn't the Lord's way.

I'll never forget the story Paul Royal told several years ago. He was the Bishop of a ward. He needed a Relief Society President. He fasted and prayed and asked the Lord who He wanted. The Lord told him. He went to her home. She met him at the door with a cigarette in her hand. He told her that the Lord had called her to be the Relief Society President. She got a little flustered and said, "Why me? I'm not worthy. You could have called anyone in the ward and they would be more worthy than I." Bishop Royal answered and said, "That's right and if I were doing the calling I would have chosen anyone but you, but I'm not, and the Lord wants you." To make a long story short she gave up smoking and accepted the call six weeks later. She later became the Stake Relief Society President. Don't you see? Worthiness is not a factor in calling. The Lord would call many unworthy persons if we would ask Him. It is only a factor in accepting the call. Would they remain unworthy? Of course not. They would repent. They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick.

Fasting to see who the Lord wants in a position is not new. Do you remember the account at Antioch?

*As they ministered to the Lord, and FASTED, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

*And when they had FASTED and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost departed....(Acts 13:2-4)*

Do you see the role that the Holy Ghost played? He gave the instructions after the fasting and prayer. The others simply followed the instructions, but it is the fasting that's hard, isn't it? Now perhaps you're beginning to catch the vision. Very seldom does the Lord give instructions unless we ask Him. When we fast and pray this demonstrates to the Lord that we really want to know. When we really want to know, the Lord makes His wishes known.

### FASTING — SACRIFICIAL SUFFERING

Let us consider just for a moment the mission of Jesus Christ. His mission was to voluntarily lay down His life for His sheep. Of this, He said,

*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.*

*No man taketh it from me, but I LAY IT DOWN OF MYSELF. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*

*This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17-18)*

Yes, He gave His life. It seems so simple, but was it? In it He was called to go to the outer reaches in pain, degradation and suffering. He was accused and brought before an earthly tribunal of scoundrels. Their intent was nothing but mischief. They placed a robe and a crown of thorns on His head and mocked Him as a fraudulent King. He was flogged and beaten. In this weakened condition they spit upon Him and forced Him to

carry a cross until His strength gave out. Here Simon the Cyrenian was commanded to carry the cross the rest of the way. Then they laid the cross down. They stripped the Master of His clothes and laid Him out, naked, on the cross. Then they took nails and drove them into His hands, then into His wrists and then His feet. They dug a hole and lifted Him and the cross to the sky and let them fall. His body fell forward, tearing cruelly at the flesh in His hands and feet, but the nails held. Even then the taunting and mocking didn't end. It continued until He gave up the Ghost. However, even this suffering was not as intense as what He suffered in Gethsemane. Of this suffering the Master said:

*Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit — and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink. (D&C 19:18)*

Do you begin to see what was entailed in the Savior's mission? His mission was to go through indescribable suffering for you and me, besides being embarrassed, inconvenienced and attacked by some of the most malicious people that ever lived.

Now, just assume that fasting does cause us a small degree of suffering or inconvenience. Could it ever approach the suffering that the Lord went through for us?

On one occasion I was invited to participate in a special fast. I readily agreed and then it was suggested that the fast would last two days. I swallowed hard. I hadn't been on a two day fast since leaving the mission field fifteen years before, but I agreed. After forty hours I was finished. Never had I voluntarily suffered such agonizing discomfort in my life. When Sunday School ended I went to the home of the fellow that had asked me to fast. I told him that I had had enough, that I was going to break the fast and save myself from starvation. He said, "Not until the appointed hour." Well, the appointed hour was sundown — eight hours away. I went home, laid down and tried to sleep the rest of the way through the torture. That didn't work. At five in the afternoon I staggered upstairs and chastised the Lord in prayer for my suffering. He answered quickly. "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than He?" That didn't bring me any comfort. My suffering was so great I wasn't thinking of the Lord's suffering and it continued right to the end. When the sun sank in the west the fast was over. I warmed up a few leftovers, broke the fast and fell into bed, exhausted. Then the phone rang and in the next two hours, I discovered the purpose of the fast, and was I glad that I had suffered to the end.

That's right, I didn't even know the purpose of the fast. I had never been told. Now, when you don't know the purpose of a fast, Satan can boggle the mind trying to get you to call it off before it is finished. Sometimes the Lord instructs a person to fast for a period of time, and He doesn't tell him why and he doesn't find out until he has completed the fast.

Now don't let the description of the above fast frighten you. That is the only fast that I've been on that was that bad. Many of them fall into an entirely different category.

*And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy FASTING may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy JOY may be full. Verily, this is FASTING and prayer, or in other words, REJOICING AND PRAYER. (D&C 59:13-14)*

Do you see that? Fasting is a day of REJOICING. Isn't that beautiful? Now listen to the Lord describe the proper attitude of fasting.

*And inasmuch as ye do these things with THANKSGIVING, with CHEERFUL HEARTS and countenances, not with much laughter, for this is sin, but with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance — (D&C 59:15)*

You mean I'm supposed to be grateful for the law of the fast, and I'm to be cheerful about it, and I'm to have a radiant countenance also? That is what the Lord is saying, and you'll be surprised at the next fasting attitude. If you fast correctly the Lord promises:

*Verily, I say that inasmuch as ye do this, the FULLNESS of the earth is yours, the BEASTS of the field and the FOWLS of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees and walketh upon the earth.*

*Yea, and the HERB, and the GOOD THINGS which come from the earth, whether for FOOD or for RAIMENT, or for HOUSES, or for BARNS, or for ORCHARDS, or for GARDENS, or for VINEYARDS;*

*Yea, ALL THINGS which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and use of man, both to please the eye and gladden the heart;*

*Yea, for FOOD and for RAIMENT, for TASTE and for SMELL, to STRENGTHEN THE BODY and to ENLIVEN the soul.*

*And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgement, not to excess, neither by extortion. (D&C 59:16-20)*

Yes, when we finally learn how to fast and pray properly, fasting becomes a joyous experience. If fasting is less than that in our lives, we just haven't learned how to do it properly. But consider the promise again.

1. The fullness of the earth is yours. (D&C 59:16)
2. Thy health shall spring forth SPEEDILY. (Isaiah 58:8)
3. The Lord shall guide thee continually. (Isaiah 58:11)

When the third promise begins to come into play in a person's life, then things really get interesting. A good friend of mine was in the temple. He was sixty-nine years of age and had had two severe heart attacks. The Spirit of the Lord whispered to his mind, saying, "Fast three days." The reaction of most of us would be panic. We would say, "Lord, why me? You know that I've had severe health problems. You know I can't fast. I'm too old. Why, it might even kill me." However, this was not the reaction of my friend. He went home, knelt in humble prayer and told the Lord that he had received the communication and humbly thanked the Lord. You see, he trusted the Lord and he had forty years of fasting experience behind him. He would rather have died than to be disobedient to the Lord. He planned the fast for the long weekend. Near the end of the fast, early in the morning, he was awakened by the Spirit and given instructions pertaining to a heavy burden that he had been carrying. He followed those instructions and the burden was lifted.

I don't want to be dogmatic about fasting. I know that there are some people who can't fast, but for every five people who really can't there are ninety-five who just think they can't. And for those that really can't, perhaps it's because they didn't want to live the law in the first place. Ponder it and then inquire of the Lord if you are one of them.

For you that want to serve the Lord I'll issue you a small challenge. Get serious with the Lord and ask Him in earnest prayer, Lord, teach me how to fast and pray properly. If you haven't been used to having your prayers answered you are in for a shock. Try it and see.

The tragedy about fasting is that it has developed into the “crisis” principle. Seldom is it used except in time of deep trouble or desperation and often not even then. Fasting is something that has to be learned and practiced consistently. When we approach the Lord in the spirit of desperation because of a crisis, often our faith is lacking and when that happens we severely handicap the Lord because He works by virtue of our faith. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we knew how to fast and pray properly so that when a crisis came we would already have experience. We would know exactly what to do. Fasting is something that we don't learn in one fast. Let me illustrate.

A number of years ago a woman said to me: “I've been married 16 years and I'm no closer to going to the temple than I was 16 years ago.”

“Do you Want to go to the temple?” I asked.

“Yes,” she responded.

I said, “Are you willing to pay the price?”

She answered, smiling, “How much is it going to cost me?”

“Nothing to me,” I said, “But to the Lord — PLENTY.”

The challenge was made and accepted. It was an old story one that has been told in the church thousands of times. Her husband was inactive. He just wasn't interested in the gospel. He had no desire to take her to the temple. Before the discussion ended this woman decided that she would start fasting and praying for her husband. Now she didn't know a great deal about fasting except that it was usually remembered in their home about the time that they sat down to breakfast on Fast Sunday. That's usually about eighteen hours late, isn't it? She decided, in order to show her determination to the Lord, that she would fast once a week. That's pretty heavy. Why, she could turn into a religious fanatic. You know what a religious fanatic is, don't you? That's someone that is trying to live the gospel better than I am.

Six months of fasting once a week went by, and to tell the truth, not much seemed to happen. One day I said to her,

“As you continue to fast, the Lord is going to turn your thoughts away from your husband, and you are going to start concentrating on yourself.”

That drew a blank stare. I could see that she didn't understand. The statement was completely premature. Six more months of fasting once a week went before it started to happen. She began to get interested in personal repentance. I reminded her of the statement that had been made six months earlier. It took one year's fasting (52 fasts) before she was able to begin on the subject of repentance. I fear she is not the only one in this category. Confession of sins to the Lord was discussed at great length. I didn't teach anything else. I trusted in the Lord to fill in the blanks in personal revelation. What I want to illustrate here is what happens when a person is prepared through much fasting experience.

One day this woman received a phone call from a serviceman that had returned to Utah from Guam. He had a problem. He had two little children, a boy, two, and a girl, three years of age. His wife was a black. He alleged that she had been unfaithful and was now involved in the drug scene. The marriage had deteriorated. Divorce was the solution the serviceman had decided upon. His request was simple. Could she take care of the little children for four days while he obtained a divorce. Hesitantly, she agreed. The four days stretched into ten but she didn't seem to mind. She had fallen in love with the little children. When the father finally

came and took them she felt prompted not to take any money for her service. That stumped the father, but after discussion, he reluctantly agreed. In a couple of weeks the father called again and asked if she would take them again. She readily agreed. This time she took care of them for about a week.

A couple of weeks later, the lady who took care of the little children received a prompting. The Spirit said, "Fast today." She was in Ogden shopping when the prompting came and she didn't pay much attention, but when she started to put food in the oven for dinner, the Spirit of the Lord said to her, "Fast today, I mean it." Remember, she had been fasting once a week for four years. It came through loud and clear this time. She served the family dinner, but she didn't eat. She started to fast immediately. That evening her seventeen year old daughter had a date with one of the town drug pushers. The daughter had arranged for one of the young men in the ward to front for the drug pusher so her mother wouldn't know her intentions. The drug pusher did not meet her due to a small rumble in Ogden that developed later. You would expect the story to end there but it didn't. Two fellows drove up and invited this lonely girl to go for a ride. Foolishly, she accepted, as she was acquainted with one of them. The next four hours they drove around Ogden and Salt Lake City. One of the men invited her to go to California with them. They made it sound very inviting. Finally they ended up back in town. The driver went into a drive-in to get a package of cigarettes. His partner turned to the girl and said, "Honey, if you want to get out of this, you'd better get out now. This guy is on parole from the state penitentiary and he'll cause you nothing but trouble." Wisely, she fled.

When she got home her mother was waiting up for her. It was ten minutes after one in the morning. The mother asked a few questions. Finally the daughter told the above story to her mother as I've told it to you. A heart to heart talk followed. About two-thirty in the morning, after the mother had knelt in prayer to thank the Lord for having protected her daughter, and as she lay in bed pondering the events of the day, the Spirit of the Lord spoke to her, saying, "You took two of my little ones in and gave them love, care and protection and because you did this for my little ones, this night I have taken care of your daughter for you."

These things seldom happen when we don't know how to fast and pray properly. Isn't it wonderful to be prepared. How would you like that kind of protection for your daughter? There are three ways that this crisis could have been met.

With EXPERIENCED fasting and prayer,  
With DESPERATE fasting and prayer, or  
Without ANY fasting and prayer?

**How do you handle the crises in your life?**

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