

CHAPTER 18

Weapons Of Offensive Warfare (Part IV, Fasting And Faith)

We come now to a subject that is one of the most forceful weapons for fighting spiritual battles that we have at our command—fasting. Fasting often is spoken of in conjunction with prayer, and the two do go hand in glove. However, Jesus mentions each as an individual act:

And when thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men ... Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast ...

Matthew 6:5,16

As we stressed earlier, many weapons overlap and interface. As we do well to use the whole armor of God in our defense, it is equally important to use the entire arsenal of God's weapons for the offensive tearing down of Satan's strongholds.

Jesus' disciples were commissioned to go out to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, and cast out devils. They did this with such success that they returned rejoicing, *even the devils are subject unto us* (Luke 10:17). Despite their commission and the delegation of His authority to carry out the commission, and despite successful ministry in the past, there came a time when the disciples found themselves powerless to cast out a demon. This incident took place as Jesus was returning from the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter,

James, and John. There was a great tumult among the multitude awaiting Him. The account of this is given in Matthew 17:14-21 and also in Mark 9:14-29.

And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

Mark 9:14-18

Though the disciples were unable to cope with the need, Jesus was not ...

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.

Mark 9:25-27

Before Jesus rebuked the devil, however, He rebuked those around as a faithless and perverse generation.

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.

Matthew 17:17

When the disciples asked Jesus why they had been unable to cast the demon out, He told them it was because of their unbelief (Matthew 17:20). Since Jesus told the disciples that they could not cast the demon out because of their unbelief, and then declared that this kind came out only by prayer and fasting (v. 21), it is obvious that prayer and fasting were the remedies for the unbelief. Prayer and fasting would have given them that added impetus and power needed to meet the need.

If such a demon could be cast out only by prayer and fasting, and yet Jesus immediately did it, it is equally obvious that He already had prayed and fasted. The Scriptures report of Jesus' prayer life time and again, that He often spent time with God.

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

Mark 1:35

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

Matthew 14:23

When Lazarus died and was buried for four days, Jesus spoke the Word of power that brought Lazarus forth from the grave, but it was obvious that Jesus had been in prayer long before the need for ministry arose. Before He called Lazarus forth, Jesus turned His eyes heavenward and said, ... *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me* (John 11:41). Notice the past tense. The preparation for ministry had already been made. When the need arose, the work could be accomplished on the spot.

As a Christian ministers the things of the Lord, he must be careful to tarry before God to replenish his spiritual supply for coming needs. This preparation must include not only prayer, but fasting as well, for there are some things that can be accomplished through no other means.

Fasting can be of great physical benefit to the body and is generally recognized throughout the world today as a means of cleansing and purifying the system. Of far greater benefit to the Christian, however, is the spiritual strength provided through scriptural fasting. It is of such benefit as a spiritual weapon that Satan fights very hard to prevent true fasting.

Our spiritual battles often involve our physical senses and needs, and fasting is no exception. To fast unto God as a spiritual exercise is one of the hardest exercises of godliness that is known, for to do so is to deny one of the fundamental appetites of the flesh.

Galatians 5:17 tells us ... *the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

Matthew 26:41 says ... *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Still another verse, Romans 8:7, tells us that the carnal or fleshly mind is *enmity against God* The pull of the world and of the flesh is constantly a downward pull. The pull of the Spirit in Christ Jesus is up - a lifting into the heavenlies - a strengthening of might in the "inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). It is through fasting that we have the most effective means for loosing the transcendence of the flesh, and bringing the body under submission so that we may operate and minister in spiritual realms.

There are several kinds of fasting, different lengths of fasts, and several reasons for fasting detailed in the Bible. There is a fast from God which permits drinking of water, there is a complete fast which includes abstinence from water, and there is a partial fast which, in effect, is a restricted diet. There are private fasts which are between the seeker and God alone, and there are public fasts which are called by religious or governmental leaders. All of these are honored by God when scripturally applied.

It seems clear from the Scriptures that the fast of Jesus recorded in Matthew 4:2 and Luke 4:2 was a fast from food only. At the end of 40 days, Jesus was hungry but the Bible does not say that He

was thirsty. Since the need for water is much greater than that of food, and since Satan tempted Jesus with something to eat, not with something to drink, it stands to reason that Jesus had water during this wilderness time.

Moses was on two nearly consecutive 40-days fasts with neither food nor water:

When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water:

Deuteronomy 9:9

He was supernaturally sustained by God, because going for more than three or four days without water normally harms the body. There are several fasts without water listed in the Bible. Ezra did it:

Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

Ezra 10:6

When Queen Esther made her valiant plea for the salvation of the Jews before King Ahasuerus, she requested Mordecai to call a fast of the Jews in Shushan. This is one instance in which prayer is not mentioned in connection with the fast, though it must be assumed that the people already were praying for deliverance.

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Esther 4:16

Immediately upon Paul's conversion, he went on a three-day abstinence from food and water: *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink* (Acts 9:9).

Daniel was seeking God at the time of his great visitation, as related in the tenth chapter of Daniel. He went on a partial fast, probably the barest necessities, for three weeks:

In those days, I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Daniel 10:2-3

In another instance he says:

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

Daniel 9:3

These are all examples of individuals fasting before God. There were times, however, that battles were turned because of organized fasts called by leaders. Nineveh was spared for annihilation through a fast called by the head of the government:

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God:

yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

Jonah 3:4-10

The children of Israel won a great victory against overwhelming odds when King Jehoshaphat called a fast:

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

II Chronicles 20:3

When a spiritual authority calls a fast, those under that authority should never use the excuse, “I do not feel led to fast.” They should exercise obedience as group fasting has been mightily used even to the changing of God’s mind (as in the case of Nineveh).

There are several dangers inherent in fasting that are not exercised under the control of God. One is that a regularly scheduled fast, such as every Friday, may get to be a ritual devoid of real meaning and power, unless an attitude of worship is maintained. In that respect it could also become a matter of pride or self-righteousness.

Jesus gave the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, where the Pharisee claimed, *I fast twice in the week ...* (Luke 18:12). The publican would not even lift up his head, but could only pray, *God be merciful to me a sinner* (verse 13). However, he was the one who went home justified, not the man who fasted twice a week. That is why Jesus enjoined us not to pray to be seen of men (Matthew 6:5).

During the time of Isaiah, the people were fasting, and God turned a deaf ear. Isaiah had this to say:

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. 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 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 thyself from thine own flesh?

Isaiah 58:3-7

The fast that God chooses is the one that brings liberty to the captive and help to the needy. When this type of fasting is sincerely employed, the results are almost staggering. The Christian is strengthened with might in the inner man - capable of waging spiritual warfare with great power - with this kind of testimony behind it:

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 noon day: And the LORD shall guide thee 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.

Isaiah 58:8-11

When such a prepared vessel is brought into the arena of confrontation with Satan and all of his power, Satan will have to flee - a defeated foe.