

Templates of Truth with Rick Smith
Audio Script – December 10, 2009

Health surveys reveal that more than half the American adult population will gain 1-2 pounds between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays each year. Crash diets usually follow. Some of these suggest fasting – an ancient practice that becomes the focus of this week’s Templates of Truth.

While therapeutic fasting can serve effectively to reduce caloric intake, contribute to weight loss, and cleanse the system of certain toxic elements, it does little for spiritual health unless it is God-centered and Biblically-based. The issue of fasting was raised by the Pharisees to Jesus in Mark’s Gospel: *And John’s disciples and the Pharisees...came and said to Him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”* (Mark 2:18). Being God incarnate, Jesus answered and explained that while He was physically in their presence, they had no need to fast. There would come a day, however, when He would be absent and that is when they would need to seek Him and His will through prayer and fasting. Jesus established fasting as a God-centered practice.

If you Google “fasting,” over 4 million links will result! Everything you ever wanted to know about spiritual or medically initiated fasting is at the click of your mouse. If you prefer a more simplistic approach, I recommend the Bible. Fasting was a Biblical practice long before health professionals made it a weight-loss or medical procedure. The people of Israel fasted with Samuel at Mizpah in order to confess their sins (I Samuel 7:6). When the Moabites and Ammonites were coming to war against God’s people, Jehoshaphat proclaimed a national fast in Judah to seek God’s help and direction for the war (II Chronicles 20:3). David and his men fasted until evening as an expression of grief upon the news of the death of Saul and his son, Jonathan (II Samuel 1:12). When the child Bathsheba bore to David became terminally ill, David fasted all night for the child’s healing (II Samuel 12:16). Jeremiah instructed Baruch to read aloud God’s Word in the temple during a day of fasting, establishing attention to the Bible as an integral part of fasting (Jeremiah 36:6). The prophet Joel called for a fast as part of the solemn assembly for the public confession of sin (Joel 2:15-16). These are just a few examples of how the patriarchs of our faith engaged in fasting in order to seek God’s face through His Word in response to war, death, sickness and sin.

In the response Jesus gave to the Pharisees, he neither commanded fasting nor did He prohibit it. But, fasting was a regular practice of Jesus’ earthly life and ministry. Matthew tells us that Jesus fasted 40 days before Satan tempted Him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2). He taught His disciples about the power and effectiveness of fasting. When Jesus had cast a demon from a man’s son, His disciples asked Him why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus cautioned them that this kind of power could come only through prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21). Jesus also warned that fasting should be a very private and personal matter between God and the person. If respected so, God would honor the time of fasting with His blessing (Matthew 6:18).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God defined the kind of fast He approves of: *Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the*

oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from you own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard; you will cry, and He will say, "Here I am." (Isaiah 58:6-9). So, God-centered fasting is not only denying self in order to seek God's face, it is also sacrificing self in order to serve and minister to others – the kind of self-sacrificing love demonstrated by the four men in Mark 2, who lowered their friend through a hole in the roof so that Jesus could heal him.

We don't hear a lot of teaching & preaching on the subject of fasting these days, especially among Baptist circles. One has to wonder why, when the Bible emphasizes its abundant benefits, and our Savior made it a part of His personal prayer life. Perhaps we need to consider how humbling ourselves in an act of self-denial will engage us in a more intimate time with the Lord and enrich our personal relationship with Him, since He humbled himself in the ultimate self-sacrifice on the cross. No food, no work, no play – just me and God alone together in an intense time of seeking & discovering more of Him and less of me. Could this be a key that unlocks revival and spiritual-awakening which has gone amiss in so many of our lives?

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in Christ Jesus.

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