

The Duty of Religious Fasting

Adapted from Professor Samuel Miller's booklet on *Fasting*. Miller was a professor of ecclesiastical history and church government at Princeton Theological Seminary in the early 19th century.)

“*And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting.*” Daniel 9:3

INTRODUCTION

Few of Us Have Had Any Instruction in the Area of Religious Fasting.

- We vaguely know what fasting is i.e., going with out food for a period of time. It is not, however, every *kind* of abstinence that constitutes a *religious fast*.
 - Some abstain from their usual aliment because, from indisposition, they loathe it;
 - others, because they cannot obtain it; and
 - a third class, because abstinence is enjoined by medical prescription.
- But the *Christian*, as such, refrains from choice, denying his appetite from religious principle, and with a view to spiritual benefit.
 - But we are not sure it is something we need to be doing
 - We are even less sure as to what its purposes and benefits are.
 - And, if we are to be doing it, we are left with the question of how we should go about doing it.
 - These are all questions I hope to cover in the next two sermons.

A Warning:

- We must understand what religious fasting is and how it is to be performed, since the Pharisee also fasted, but to no avail; there was no fruit for their fasting.
- The Publican did not fast; and yet he was accepted in preference to the one who had fasted.
- The Ninevites fasted, and won the favor of God.
- The Jews fasted too, and profited nothing, nay they departed with blame.
- “Since then the danger in fasting is so great to those who do not know how they ought to fast, we should learn the laws of this exercise, in order that we may not “run uncertainly,” nor “beat the air,” nor while we are fighting contend with a shadow.” (John Chrysostom).
- John Wesley tells of a national day of prayer and fasting proclaimed by the King of England in 1756 because of an impending attack by France.

- The churches were filled to overflowing, for everybody realized the danger.
- Their prayers were answered, and the attack was averted.

Examples from the Bible

- When worshiping the Lord (Acts 13:2)
- When sending out missionaries (Acts 13:3);
- When elders were elected (Acts 14:23);
- When believers were in danger (Esther 4:16);
- When specific prayers were called for (Psalm 35:13).
- In the Sermon on the Mount it is clear that Jesus expected his disciples to fast at times. In Matthew 6:16-18 He says, “and when you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do...”
- So we also read in the Didache, a Christian document written in the first century AD, that Christians of that period fasted every Wednesday and Friday.

Is it for Christians Today?”

- Fasting, in the biblical sense, is the abstaining from food and drink for a *spiritual* reason.
 - In the Old Testament era, the Jews fasted frequently, though there was only one fast prescribed by the law.
 - Once each year, on the Day of Atonement, the Hebrews were to “afflict” their souls (Lev. 16:31), which meant fasting (cf. Isa. 58:3).
- Though there are no compulsory fasts required of Christians today, the New Testament seems to take for granted that children of God would see the need to fast occasionally.
 - When the Lord’s disciples were criticized for not fasting, Jesus responded by suggesting that it was hardly appropriate for them to fast while he was yet with them.
 - The time would come, however, when he would be taken away from them; then they would fast (Lk. 5:35).
 - Too, in cautioning against improper motivation in worship, Christ warned: “*Moreover when you fast, be not, as hypocrites . . .*”
 - It is significant that He did not say, “if,” but, “when” you fast—reflecting the expectation that they would.
- Fasting, for the Christian, is strictly a *voluntary* matter.
 - It should arise out of a feeling of intense need, not as a result of mere formality.

“And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting.” Daniel 9:3

- This is the language of the prophet Daniel.
 - He is speaking of that which occurred in Babylon, where he and his brothers were in captivity.
 - It was a very dark and distressing day.
 - Religion was at low ebb among the people of God.
 - Even their deep adversity had not led them to repentance and reformation.
 - And idolatry, along with moral corruption, was dominant among the heathen around them.
 - But this holy man trusted in God; and in the exercise of faith, saw, beyond the clouds that hung over him and his people, a ray of light which promised deliverance and glory.
 - He saw nothing among the Jewish people that indicated a speedy end of their captivity;
 - Rather, he “*understood by books*” (Dan. 9:2) that is, he firmly believed, on the ground of a recorded prophecy delivered by Jeremiah that the period of their liberation was to end soon.
 - In this situation, what does he do?
 - Instead of being depressed, he “*encourages himself in the Lord his God*” (cf. 1 Sam. 30:6).
 - Instead of allowing himself to indulge in a spirit of presumption because of the certainty of the approaching deliverance,
 - He turns to fasting, and prayer; to humble himself before God under a sense of the deep unworthiness of himself and his companions in captivity;
 - And to request that their unmerited liberation might be come quickly.
 - It was when this man of God distinctly understood that the desolations of seventy years were coming to an end, that he “*set his face to seek unto the Lord God by prayer and supplications with fasting*” (cf. Dan. 9:3).

The Duty of Fasting

- Fasting is not one of those binding duties that we must regularly perform, no matter what.
 - There is no command in the Word of God that requires the observance of a particular number of fast days in each year.
 - It is to be considered as an *occasional*, or perhaps, more properly speaking, a *special* duty, which, like seasons of *special prayer*, ought to be regulated by our circumstances.
 - Nevertheless, even though the times of religious fasting are left to the judgment and the conscience of each individual, we must remember that it is a divine institution.
 - It is a duty to which all Christians, as they are able, should practice at some times.
- Consider these two things:
 - The light of nature seems to recognize this duty.
 - Abstinence from food, either as an aid or an expression of devotion, has been common in all ages and among all nations.
 - Those who have studied the various forms of paganism know that in all of them fasting has had a place, and in some of them a very prominent place.
 - How did this practice of fasting become so general—even universal—among men?
 - Was it a *dictate of nature*—written in their hearts?
 - Abstinence from food is a natural expression of deep humiliation and mourning.
 - Or perhaps it was the result of *tradition* handed down to all generations from our first parents or from Noah.

Examples of Religious Fasting in the Word of God.

- Joshua and the elders of Israel evidently kept a solemn fast when their people were defeated by the men of Ai; for they remained all day, from morning till evening, prostrate on their faces before the ark, with dust on their heads, exercising the deepest humiliation and prayer (cf. Josh. 7:6).
- David, fasted and prayed while he humbled himself under a heavy judgment of God, sent on him for his sin in the matter of Uriah (cf. 2 Sam. 12:16).

- Even the hardened Ahab fasted and cried for mercy when the judgments of God were announced against him by the prophet Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 21:17).
- The godly and public-spirited Nehemiah, while he was still in Babylon, set apart a season of special prayer accompanied with fasting when he heard of the desolations of the city and people of God (Neh. 1:4);
 - After that, when he came to Jerusalem, he proclaimed a public and solemn fast, to denounce the poor state of the faith of the nation and to pray for pardoning and restoring mercy.
- Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, appointed a day of fasting and prayer throughout his kingdom when the confederated forces of Ammon and Moab came up against him (cf. 2 Chron. 20:3).
- The inhabitants of Nineveh, though pagans, when the prophet Jonah proclaimed God’s approaching judgments, immediately set apart a season of special prayer and fasting, in which not only all the adult inhabitants, but also their *infants*, and the very *beasts* which served them, were required to abstain from all food.
 - It was proclaimed and published 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*” (Jonah 3:7-8).
- When Queen Esther felt herself and her people to be in danger from the conspiracy of Haman, she set apart a season of solemn prayer and fasting:
 - As she explains it, neither eating nor drinking for three days in succession, in which all her maidens in the palace, and all the Jews in Shushan, were united (cf. Esther 4:16).
- Ezra, when setting out on his important mission to Jerusalem, assembled the returning captives at the river Ahava, and there “*proclaimed a fast, that they might afflict themselves before God, and seek of him a right way for themselves and their little ones, and for all their substance*” (cf. Ezra 8:21).
- The blessing of God attended the exercise of fasting in every one of these cases.
 - The armies of Joshua were, thenceforward, victorious.
 - David, though deprived of the child for whose life he prayed, was forgiven his great sin.
 - Nineveh, though exceedingly guilty, was spared.
 - Jehoshaphat was made to triumph over his formidable enemies.
 - Even the impenitent Ahab was favored with the delay of that dreadful judgment which had been denounced against him.
 - Esther and her people experienced a signal deliverance.
 - And Ezra obtained the blessing which he sought with such humble importunity.

The New Testament

- After the coming of Christ, we find the same practice continued.
 - Jesus Himself entered on His public ministry after a long season of preparatory fasting (cf. Matt. 4:2).
 - We find also the apostles, in almost every instance of setting apart candidates for the gospel ministry, accompanying the ordination with fasting (cf. Acts 14:23).
 - Anna the prophetess, was engaged in “*servicing God, day and night with fastings and prayers*” (cf. Luke 2:37).
 - When the Lord appeared to Cornelius, the “*devout*” centurion, and imparted the knowledge of His will to him, we are informed he was engaged in fasting and prayer (cf. Acts 10:1, 30).
 - And the apostle Paul speaks repeatedly of his habit of waiting on God by fastings, as well as by prayer, and other means of divine appointment (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).
 - In summary, we hardly find in all the biblical record, either in the Old or New Testament, an example of an extraordinary season of humiliation and prayer that is not accompanied by fasting.

- Now, how could something that is so frequently repeated concerning godly people in so many different situations, from the earliest periods of the Bible history to its very close be unimportant?
 - That which is sanctioned by the example of the people of God in all ages, and by God Himself, is surely not a human invention.
 - In fact, we must infer that religious fasting is a divine institution, found in various parts of Scripture.

- In the Old Testament, in addition to the stated fasts, occasional ones were ordered by the express command of God.
 - Thus Jehovah proclaims to the people of Judah, by the prophet Joel, in a day of great political and moral turmoil: “*Sanctify of yourselves a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord*” (Joel 1:14).

- In the New Testament.
 - Consider the passage in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. “Moreover when you fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But you, when you fastest (evidently taking for

granted that they *must* and *would* fast), anoint your head, and wash your face; that you appear not unto men to fast, but unto your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly” (Matt. 6:16-18).

- Jesus, in speaking of some of the more difficult things to accomplish (in this case casting out demons) says, “*However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting*” (Matt. 17:21).
 - And again, when some people asked Him, “*Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples fast not?*” (cf. Matt. 9:14-15).
 - He replied, “*Can the children of the bride chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*”
- We also find a number of striking examples of fasting, on occasions of special prayer, after our Lord ascended to heaven, and before the close of the Bible.
 - The apostle Paul, in the 1 Corinthians 7:5, in speaking of Christian husbands and wives, says that they can refrain from sexual relations for a time “*that they might give themselves to prayer and fasting.*”

Practical Applications

- It is Clear that the Duty of Religious Fasting Much Neglected.
 - No doubt this is due in part to the fact that it is a self-denying duty.
 - It is an unfashionable duty.
 - We simply don’t like to do it.
 - It is doubtful that it is observed *in private*;
 - And when it is recommended by some public authority, either in church or state, the *honest* and *faithful* observance it is likely limited to a very small number of those who profess to take the Word of God for their guide.
 - This is a shame.
 - It argues that we have a low standard of godliness in the church generally.
 - If the spirit of the apostolic days were more prevalent, then there would be much more frequent fasting.
 - Wouldn’t it be great to hear of churches across the land making better use of fasting, being added to special times of prayer?
 - Until this happens, how can we expect to see godliness return to a place of prominence in our churches and in our nation?
 - Brothers, we must pray for the universal spread of the gospel and the dawn of millennial glory.

- Like Daniel, we *have* the highest encouragement from the Word of God.
- But we have no reason to expect that we shall receive these blessings,
 - And certainly shall not be suitably prepared for their arrival, unless we are found waiting for them with that deep contrition and humiliation,
 - Let us fast and pray.

THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

- John Calvin says one should fast for three reasons:¹
 - To avoid being controlled by the flesh (your sinful nature);
 - For prayer and meditation;
 - As part of repentance and confession of sins.
 - He stresses especially that a time of fasting and prayer should be called for whenever intercession for an important matter is needed.
- When, then, might fasting be of value?
 - Fasting may be beneficial in times of personal sorrow.
 - David and his men mourned and fasted upon hearing of the death of Saul (2 Sam. 1:12).
 - Nehemiah did similarly when he was informed of Jerusalem's decimated condition (Neh. 1:4).
 - Fasting and prayer would certainly seem to be appropriate when a loved one is critically ill (2 Sam. 12:16).
 - Fasting frequently accompanied repentance as an outward and genuine indication of contrition for spiritual rebellion (1 Sam. 7:6).
 - The people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast when brought to a recognition of their sins (Jon. 3:5).
 - Fasting was practiced in connection with great and important religious events.
 - Moses fasted during that period when he was receiving the Law (Ex. 34:28).
 - Christ fasted prior to his encounter with Satan in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2).
 - The church fasted before sending Barnabas and Saul on that perilous first missionary campaign (Acts 13:2-3).
 - Fasting was certainly a component in the ministry of Paul (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).
 - Admittedly, however, fasting can be abused.

¹ *Institutes* 1V:X11:14-18

- The practice must never be used as a substitute for personal godly living.
- Isaiah delivered a blistering rebuke to those who fasted, then pursued their own pleasures (Isa. 58).
- Moreover, fasting must not be an occasion for the flaunting of our religion.
 - The Pharisees were guilty of this very thing (Mt. 6:16-18).
- We should always be on our guard against the temptation of superstition.
 - For “*meat,*” as the inspired apostle expressly tells us, “*commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse*” (1 Cor. 8:8).
- Therefore, in estimating the benefits of religious fasting, we ascribe to it no magical powers.
 - There is no merit in fasting; nor can it make expiation for sin, or serve, in any form, as the price of our acceptance with God.

THE PROPER METHOD OF FASTING

- How Do We Fast?
 - There are different ways of fasting:
 - By avoiding certain foods (Daniel 10:3).
 - By eating less than usual.
 - By avoiding all food, but drinking liquids (Luke 4:2).
 - By abstaining from all food and drink (Acts 9:9). (The latter is exceptional, since a normal human cannot live for more than three days without liquid intake.)
 - Christian fasting is always combined with prayer, since fasting on its own does not have any value in God’s eyes (Joel 2:13; Isaiah 58:5; Colossians 2:23; Zechariah 7:5).
- What about the *frequency* with which we ought to fast, and the *extent* to which we ought to carry it out?
 - The Bible does not prescribe particular answers to either of these questions.
 - These questions are left to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.
 - While it is clearly a duty, nevertheless, the degree of abstinence which is helpful for one person might be injurious to another.
- Consider the Goal of Fasting:
 - God “*will have mercy, and not sacrifice*” (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; cf. Hos. 6:6).
 - Fasting, like the Sabbath, was made for man, and not man for fasting.
 - No one should fast to such an extreme as to damage his bodily health.

- We have no more right to injure our bodies than we have to enfeeble our minds.
 - Of course this is not the extreme to which most Christians are likely to commit.
 - Rather, the tendency in general is to *not fast at all* rather than fall into the problems of extreme fasting.
- Abstinence in religious fasting may either be *total* or *partial*.
 - When we fast for one day only, in most cases it will be *total*.
 - But when the fast is continued through several days, as it sometimes ought to be in a great crisis of life, then it is obvious the abstinence should be only *partial*.
 - The prophet Daniel, in a period of protracted humiliation, tells us that he “*ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into his mouth*” (cf. Dan. 10:3).
 - Now we should not think that it is not our duty to fast, because it makes us feel bad.
 - This is not a valid objection to the duty.
 - In fact, one of the main purposes of fasting is to “*afflict the soul*” (cf. Isa. 58:3, 5),
 - To humble us under a sense of our weakness and dependence, and to remind us, by a feeling of need, of the purpose for which we are going without.
- Seasons of devout fasting ought, undoubtedly, to be observed by:
 - INDIVIDUALS, in private, with a special reference to their our personal sins, needs, and trials;
 - FAMILIES, who often have special needs for humiliation and prayer.
 - PARTICULAR CHURCHES, whose circumstances are frequently such as to call for seasons of peculiar mourning, penitence, and supplication;
 - WHOLE DENOMINATIONS OF CHRISTIANS, who have very often occasion to humble themselves before God on account of the absence of His Spirit, and the prevalence of some great evils in the midst of them.
 - NATIONS, when suffering under the righteous displeasure of God, or when aware that, due to their sins, they are exposed to His judgments.
 - We have examples of all of these in the Word of God.

THE METHOD OF FASTING

- **First, Fasting will be in Vain, Unless the Heart is Sincere in the Service.**
 - Let pagans, Muslims, and nominal Christians flatter themselves with the false notion that the mere physical observance of fasting will commend them to God.

- In fasting, as well as praying, the engagement of the heart is the essential matter.
- There is no godliness in merely abstaining from food apart from the spirit and purpose with which it is done.
- Like the observance of the Sabbath.
 - A man could isolate himself from world on that day, or spend the whole day at church.
 - But if his mind is still on the world he does not sanctify the Sabbath at all in the most important sense of the term.
- So it is with fasting.
 - We might fast on many days with great discipline and yet be no better for having done so.
 - In fact, instead of receiving the benefits, we might incur guilt instead.
 - God might say to us as He did to His people of old:
 - *“Is this such a fast as I have chosen?”* (cf. Isa. 58:5).
 - *“Have you fasted to Me, even to Me, saith the Lord?”* (cf. Zech. 7:5).
 - *“This people draws nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me”* (Matt. 15:8).
 - *“Their appointed fasts are an abomination unto Me; I am weary to bear them”* (cf. Isa. 1:13-14).
- The primary consideration, then, in keeping a religious fast, is that the whole soul be truly engaged in the work;
 - While we use the outward symbol of humiliation, we labor to have our minds deeply occupied and affected with the humbling realities that we express with our lips.
 - The more deeply the heart is engaged in the service, the more pleasing it is to God, and the more profitable it is to us.
- **Second, as Much as Possible We Should Come Apart from the World.**
 - One of the great objects of fasting is that we pause from our regular routine and focus on the needs of our concern (ourselves, our families, our church, our nation).
 - We are setting aside our normal appetites and passions that are our normal focus.
 - In fasting, we are trying to get away from the usual hustle and bustle of daily life.
 - When a public fast is proclaimed, it is recommended that all unnecessary labor and recreation be set aside.

- This is also useful when an individual or family determine to fast in private.
 - Anything that might tend to draw our attention from the goals of the fast.

- **Third, Days of Fasting Should be Focused on a Deep and Heartfelt Remembrance of our Sins and Genuine Repentance.**
 - In all prayer it is true that God's *mercies* as well as our *sins* ought to be remembered and acknowledged.
 - Therefore, in fasting *thanksgiving is* by not inappropriate or to be forgotten.
 - It is a matter of thankfulness to a sinner, no matter what, that he is out of hell.
 - There is no greater reason for gratitude than when the sinner thinks about quantity and aggravation of his sins before God.
 - And when he remembers that to such a rebel, life and glory are offered.
 - Nevertheless, it is clear that the primary object of fasting is humiliation before the throne of God.
 - To attempt to fast without entering deeply into the consideration of our sins, and mourning over them, is to forget the most prominent reason for fasting.
 - This is peculiarly "*a day for a man to afflict his soul*" (Isa. 58:5)
 - For all the corruption of his sinful nature.
 - For all the actual sins he has committed.
 - For all the wickedness that is around him.
 - Here is a special time when we should call to our minds:
 - Our personal sins.
 - Our family sins.
 - The sins of the church, and of the nation.
 - To repent, as in dust and ashes; and

- **Fourth, Meditation on Our Sins Must be Followed by Genuine Reformation.**
 - To confess our sins without a change of behavior is worse than empty.
 - It is heartless, and only adds sin to sin.
 - Where the heart is really broken and contrite on account of transgression, that transgression will be sincerely hated and forsaken.

- Therefore, if a season of humiliation and fasting leaves us as much in love with sin, and stuck in our bad habits, then not only has the fast failed, but we have actually added guilt by fasting.
 - We find that God expresses His righteous displeasure, and declares His severest judgments against His people, because, while they wearied Him with their fastings and prayers, they remained as obstinate and disobedient as ever.
 - He declares, *“When they fast, I will not bear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence”* (Jer. 14:12).
- **Fifth, in Keeping a Fast, Making a Public Display, or Any Self-Righteousness, Must be Avoided.**
 - The Jewish hypocrites, in the days of our Lord’s ministry, were show-offs.
 - As they loved to *“pray standing at the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men”* (cf. Matt. 6:5);
 - So even in their *private* fasts, they put on *“a sad countenance, and disfigured their faces, that they might appear to men to fast”* (cf. Matt. 6:16).
 - And when the Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, it was one of the grounds of his boasting, and his confidence toward God, that he *“fasted twice in a week”* (cf. Luke 18:12).
 - In both these cases, our Lord denounces the spirit that they demonstrated as diametrically opposed to what pleases God, and Jesus warns His disciples against it.
 - If ever there was a time when such a proud self display ought to be avoided, it is when a man is bowed before the throne of mercy,
 - Professing to mourn over his sins, and acknowledge his unworthiness the sight of God.
 - The only language ever becoming the redeemed sinner, and especially in such a season as this, is *“God be merciful to me a sinner?”* (Luke 18:13).
 - *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”* (Gal. 6:14).
- **Sixth, Christian Fasting Should Always be Accompanied with Sympathy and Kindness Toward the Needy.**
 - The Bible stresses the connection between fasting and the our consideration of the poor.
 - *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?”* (Isaiah 58:6-7).

- There is no better occasion to sympathize with those who are *hungry from necessity*, as when we submit to a fast by *choice*.
 - It is an aid to prayer, in approaching God, Who is the common provider for the rich and the poor?
- With many people, it is more difficult to give a little to the poor, than it is to abstain from food.
 - It is especially good to make our seasons of special prayer occasions of liberality in some form.
 - Surely it is appropriate that while we are engaged in mourning over our sins, and confessing our unworthiness of the least of all our comforts, that we should practically show mercy to others, as our heavenly Father has done to us.
 - This is also a good time to set things right with others.
 - To make restitution to those whom we might have injured.
 - To forgive those who have sinned against us.

Practical Reflections

- **It is Evident that the Great Duty of Religious Fasting is Very Much Neglected.**
 - It is a self-denying duty, that has nothing in it to gratify our appetites or the our love of praise.
 - It is an unfashionable duty.
 - Even many serious Christians do not like fasting.
 - Fast days are rarely observed *in private*; and when recommended by public authority, either in church or state, the *honest* and *faithful* observance of them very limited.
- **As a Duty, Fasting is a Reasonable Service.**
 - None of the commandments of God are burdensome.
 - Everything He requires of us has just and adequate reason, and is for our own welfare and happiness as well as for the His own glory.
 - Fasting is not required for its own sake;
 - Or because it has any inherent power to commend us to God; or because He likes to inflict us with pain.
- **Finally, We Have no Less Reason for Fasting and Humiliation Than Our Fathers Did.**
 - There was nothing special in the people of God of ancient times that would make fasting more of necessity for *them* than to *us*.
 - Human nature is the same, the Faith is the same, and the causes of Christian mourning are the same now as they were when Joshua, David, Nehemiah, and Paul fasted and laid in the dust before God.

- How many personal, family, ecclesiastical and national sins weigh upon us as a people, and cry for the judgments of a righteous God!
 - Think of the abounding atheism and various public expression of wickedness we see all around us.
 - Consider all the pride, the indulgence and the profaning of the Lord's Day.
 - Remember the countless forms of moral corruption that go unchallenged.
 - Think of these all these sins; and then consider to what a small degree the many professing Christians seem to be awake to the great responsibilities and duties of their high calling in Christ Jesus.
 - And then answer the question: Do we have a reason for special humiliation and prayer?