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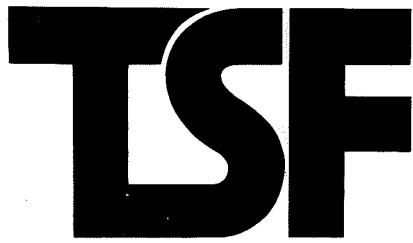
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BULLETIN

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14. In this story was evangelism carried out by word alone, or were the deeds and lifestyle of the believers also evangelistic?

Summary questions (10 minutes)

A. If this story speaks, as we have maintained, of personal evangelism, what can we infer about personal evangelism from it? Look back at Preliminary questions 1 & 2. Has any new light been shed on them?

B. Do you think the story supports what is said about personal evangelism in the Policy Statement? Are there aspects of the story which go beyond personal evangelism?

Prayer

SESSION TWO

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:3

Preliminary discussion questions (20 minutes)

1. How does Jesus Christ relate to people?
2. Have you seen persons come to new life when they have committed themselves to him?

Study of the Text: Corinthians 5:17-6:3 (60 minutes)

In Chapters 3-6 Paul is speaking of his work as an apostle. Most of what he says can be applied to those who engage in evangelism as well. We have chosen just a few verses of this section, in which Paul speaks of what happens to people who have become joined to Christ—how their relationship to God changes—and how God uses apostles for his work (vv. 17-20). In v. 21 Paul also speaks of God's goal in his activity on behalf of humankind. In 6:1-3 he pleads with the Corinthians to accept God's grace.

1. As many people have pointed out, the expression "born-again Christian" is not found in the New Testament. The words translated

"born again" in some versions of John (as in Jn. 3:3) really mean "born from above." In our own day many people are suspicious of the claim that a person coming into relationship with Christ is totally transformed. What do verses 17-19 say to this question?

2. The Policy Statement says, "Growth in church membership and calling people to Christian discipleship are not necessarily the same." It speaks of people's coming to discipleship in terms of a "significant change of attitude or behavior." What do these verses say about that?

3. Who is the agent of human transformation? If such transformation does not take place in the process of evangelism, can evangelism be said to have taken place?

4. How can we become better ambassadors for Christ?

5. From v. 21, what would you conclude is the goal of evangelism? What does it mean for people to "share the righteousness of God"? Can you translate that into everyday speech? Is it an individual virtue or a social virtue? What synonyms does *righteousness* have? Do some translations use a different word?

6. In 6:1-3 Paul goes on to relate what he has been saying to salvation. Are people who are successfully evangelized saved thereby? From what? For what? What is the significance of the fact that Paul is addressing this appeal to Christians?

Summary questions (15 minutes)

A. Review preliminary discussion questions 1 and 2 and the preliminary questions from Session 1. Do you now have anything to add to them?

B. How well does what the Policy Statement says with respect to personal evangelism express what Paul says here?

Prayer

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Fasting: Twentieth Century Style

by Richard J. Foster

The disciplined person is the one who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Now I can take a basketball and I can get it into a basketball hoop—eventually, but I cannot take a basketball and get it into the basketball hoop when it needs to be gotten into the basketball hoop! You see, I am not a disciplined basketball player. This ability to have the power to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done is so crucial in all of life, but it is never more central than in the life of the spirit. It is this life that impregnates and dominates and infiltrates literally everything that we do.

My topic is "Fasting: Twentieth Century Style," but please to not turn that into another soul-killing law because there is a time to feast and there is a time to fast. It is the disciplined person who can feast when feasting is called for and fast when fasting is called for. In fact, the glutton and the extreme ascetic have exactly the same problem. They cannot live appropriately in life. They cannot do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.

In a world dominated by pizza temples and shrines to the golden arches, fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times. In fact, fasting has been in general disrepute in the church for a very long time. In my research I have not found a single full-length book written on the subject of fasting from 1861 to 1954, a period of nearly 100 years. What would account for such an almost total disregard of a discipline so frequently mentioned in Scripture and so ardently practiced by Christians throughout the centuries?

Two things, at least. First, there has been a reaction, and rightly so, to the excessive ascetic practices of the Middle Ages. Second,

there has developed a prevailing philosophy that literally dominates American culture, including American religious culture, that it is a positive virtue to satisfy virtually every human passion. We have developed this style into a theology today, buttressed with verses of Scripture. Whole churches have been created around the worship of these little tin gods of affluence and good feelings. If fasting is used at all today, it is usually either to lose weight or for political pressure; that is, its function is either vanity or manipulation. Fasting as a Christian, spiritual discipline has had tough sledding in our day.

The list of biblical fasters runs like a Who's Who of Scripture: Abraham's servant when he was seeking a bride for Isaac, Moses on Mt. Sinai, Hannah when she prayed for a child, David on several occasions, Elijah after his victory over Jezebel, Ezra when he was mourning Israel's faithlessness, Nehemiah when he was preparing the trip back to Israel, Esther when God's people were threatened with extermination, Daniel on numerous occasions, the people of Ninevah (including the cattle—involuntarily, no doubt), Jesus when he began his public ministry, Paul at the point of his conversion, the Christians at Antioch when they sent off Paul and Barnabas on their mission endeavor, Paul and others when they appointed elders in all of the churches, and on and on it goes.

Not only that, but many of the great Christians throughout church history have fasted: Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, Charles Finney and many, many others.

Of course fasting has not been confined to the Christian faith. Zoroaster fasted, as did Confucius and the Yogas of India. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle—they all fasted. Now the fact that these people both in and out of Scripture fasted does not make it right or even a good thing to do, but it ought to stop us long enough to take another look.

Richard J. Foster is Associate Professor of Theology and Writer in Residence at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas.

The Purpose of Fasting

At this point I want to respond to the crucial question: Why should we fast in the first place? The first answer to that, and in an important sense the only adequate answer, is because of the call of God upon the heart. There is an urging, a prompting, a sense of rightness that this is what we are to do. We've heard the *qol Yahweh*, the voice of the Lord, and we must obey.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "when you pray . . . when you give . . . when you fast . . ." You notice that he did not say, "if you pray . . . if you give . . . if you fast . . ." He was assuming that the children of the Kingdom would be doing these things and was giving instruction in how it could be done with spiritual success. It has always amazed me that we will unquestionably accept giving as a spiritual discipline; but we reject fasting. Why? The biblical evidence in the New Testament is at least as strong for fasting as it is for giving. I have wondered if the reason for our bifurcation is not that in an affluent culture the giving of money involves far less sacrifice than fasting.

But then second, we fast because it reveals the things which control us. We cover up with food and other good things what is inside of us, but in experiences of fasting these are the kinds of things that begin to come to the surface.

The first thing I learned about myself in experiences of fasting was my passion for good feelings. I was hungry and I did not feel good. All of a sudden I began to realize that I would do almost anything to feel good. Now there is not a thing wrong with feeling good, but that has got to be brought to an easy place in our lives where it does not control us.

The second thing I learned about myself in experiences of fasting was my anger. People think of me as such an easygoing kind of person. Nothing ever seemed to bother me. I love to work under pressure. And then I would say, "Lord, I'd so appreciate it if you would reveal what is inside of me." And the Lord would say, "Delighted . . . how about a little fast?" And I would fast. And pretty soon I am exploding with anger. At first I thought, "Well, I'm angry because I'm hungry." (And I understand all about low blood sugar.) But then I began to realize I was angry because there was a spirit of anger within me, and I had to deal with that spirit. There are many other areas. Take pride: do you have any idea how many religiously respectable ways there are for letting everybody know how good we are? Bitterness, hostility, fear—these are the kinds of things that begin to surface in experiences of fasting. This is wonderful news for the children of the Kingdom because then God can heal these old, broken wounds.

It is the disciplined person who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.

Third, we fast because it helps to give us balance in life. It makes us more keenly sensitive to the whole of life so that we are not so obsessed by our consumer mentality. It is something of an inner alarm to help us keep our priorities straight, to give us a sense of spiritual sensitivity.

Fourth, we fast because there is a need, an urgency. There are certain drastic situations which demand drastic means. Remember, it is the disciplined person who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. I have discovered that people who are not trained in these things cannot do it when the emergency comes.

The Central Idea in Fasting

If we ever expect to fast, we need to understand the basic notion in the first place. *The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.* When we see it from that perspective, we can understand both the reasonableness of fasting, as well as the broader dimensions to it.

Contrary to what you may have been thinking, I do not want to deal in this article specifically with fasting from food. That is the ordinary way that Scripture deals with this subject, and I have written on that, as have others, and it is an important discipline to experience. But here I will take a careful look at contemporary culture and see how fasting can speak to issues—fasting twentieth century style.

Fasting from People

First, I think there is a great need for us in modern society to learn the discipline of fasting from people. We have a tendency to devour people, and we usually get severe heartburn from it. I suggest that we learn to fast from people not because we are anti-social or because we do not like people, but precisely because we love people intently, and when we are with them we want to be a help to them and not a distraction.

Thomas Merton observed, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. It is pure affection and filled with reverence for the solitude of others. Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a very important little book entitled *Life Together*. Perceptively he entitled the first chapter "The Day Together" and the next chapter "The Day Alone." The discipline of community. The discipline of solitude. Until we have learned to be with people, being alone will be a dangerous thing, because it will cut us off from hurting, bleeding humanity. But until we have learned to be alone, we cannot be with people in a way that will help them because constantly we will be bringing to those relationships our own fracturedness, our own scatteredness, our own muchness. We will not be able to listen because we will be so caught up in who we are and in how we come across that we cannot be really present to another person.

Have you ever taken a day just to be alone? The president at Friends University where I teach heard me talk this way once and he said, "I'll try it." He took a day. This was not a time to work on the five-year plan or faculty recruitment or student retention. This was a time to hear God's speech in his wondrous, terrible, loving, all-embracing silence. He told me it was one of the best days he had ever experienced. It gives perspective. It gives discernment.

The responses at this point are predictable: "I don't have time . . . besides, I don't need it!" Elijah needed it. David needed it. Peter needed it. Paul needed it. Jesus Christ himself needed it. And if we need it, we will find the time.

Fasting from the Media

My second suggestion is that we learn times when we can fast from the media. It is an amazing thing to me that many people seem to be incapable (or at least unwilling) to go through an entire day concentrating on a single thing. Their train of concentration is constantly interrupted by this demand or that—the newspaper, the radio, television, magazines. No wonder we feel like such scattered people. Some reading this article are so enslaved to television that if it were taken away from them, they would go through withdrawal. We now have radios that we can put over our ears like mufflers or put on our wrists like a watch so that we will never find ourselves where—horror of horrors—we are without noise. That is slavery, and the Apostle Paul said, "For freedom, Christ has set us free. Submit not again to a yoke of slavery."

We send our teenagers off to camp in the summer and they come back to a Sunday evening service and exclaim, "God spoke to me!" When they get back into the press of life does God stop speaking? No, they stop listening. What happened at camp was incredibly simple. All they did was rid themselves of enough distractions for a long enough period of time in order to concentrate. It is as simple as that. We do not need a camp. We can do that in the course of our daily lives, taking up many simple disciplines that will help us to focus our lives. There is a place for the media. There is also a place to be without it. Remember, the mind will always take on an order conforming to the order of whatever it concentrates upon.

Our family had a wonderful time in a cabin on the Oregon coast

awhile back. It was rather isolated. There was no television in this cabin. The only visitors were sea gulls. There was no telephone. There was a radio, but it did not work. But there was a record player and two records. One was a children's record, *Johnny Appleseed*, and the other was the theme score from *Oklahoma!* I thought, "How wonderful—one record for the children and one for the adults." In that week's time, I suppose we played those records fifty times and for months after that, I would be in the shower singing, "Oklahoma!" I would dream of it! What was happening? My mind was simply taking on the order conforming to the order of what it had given itself to. Are we willing to give our attention to the Lord?

Fasting from the Telephone

Third, let me suggest that we learn times of fasting from the telephone. The telephone is a wonderful instrument if it does not control us. I have known people who will stop praying to answer the telephone. Can you think of anything more absurd than that?

***Pastors and professors and politicians
—all those who make a living by being
good with words—so desperately need
to fast from conversation.***

We had a friend, a pastor, in our home awhile back. We were visiting after dinner and the telephone rang. Because what we were talking about was significant, I said to him, "Let it ring. If it's important, they'll call back." He looked at me and he looked at that telephone and he looked back at me and he said, "I have never done this in my entire life!" Then he turned to the telephone and stuck out his tongue as if to say, "You can't control me any more."

In our home when we are eating a meal together or when I am reading stories to the boys, we do not answer the telephone. The reason is that I want those boys to know that they are more important than anything that can be on that machine. Too often people will come to see us in our home or in our office, perhaps at some distance or sacrifice, and then we will insult them by interrupting what we are doing to answer the telephone. I know it is hard to believe, but people have lived for hundreds of years without that instrument. Let it ring sometime and monitor your own feelings—"Ahhh, I'll miss that chance of a lifetime." I used to think that I had to be available to everyone twenty-four hours a day. Then I suddenly realized, "What kind of arrogance is that, anyway?" If it is right and good for me to be with my wife or with my children with uninterrupted time, it is quite possible that God could raise up some other minister to care for that need. If it is important, they will call back.

Fasting from Conversation

My fourth suggestion is that we consider times of fasting from conversation. Some people just foam at the mouth constantly, and the discipline of silence is one of the most needed disciplines in modern culture. Pastors and professors and politicians—all those who make a living by being good with words—so desperately need this spiritual discipline.

There are reasons we find it so hard to remain silent. One of those reasons is that silence makes us feel so helpless. We are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others.

If we are silent, who will take control? God will take control, but we will not let him take control unless we trust him. That is why silence is so intimately connected with trust. Remember Isaiah, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

The tongue is our most powerful weapon of manipulation. A frantic stream of words flows from us because we are in a constant process of adjusting our public image. We fear so deeply what people think about us, so we speak in order to straighten them out, to make sure that everybody knows that we are okay.

Silence is one of the deepest disciplines of the spiritual life precisely because it puts the stopper on all of that self-justification. James tells us that the tongue is a fire, and it is indeed. Our words should be few and full. Bonhoeffer wrote that when the tongue is under our authority, "Much that is unnecessary remains unsaid. But the essential and the helpful thing can be said in a few words."

Fasting from Billboards

Fifth, let me suggest times of fasting from billboards. I remember the day I was driving the Los Angeles freeway system when I suddenly realized that my mind had been dominated by the billboards for a solid hour. Now honestly, the notion that you are in good hands with Allstate is a first-class heresy. The idea that Pepsi is the real thing or that Coke adds life is pornography of the first magnitude; that is, it is a complete distortion of what is actually the case.

Now when I suggest that we learn to fast from billboards, I do not mean that we refrain from looking at billboards, but that the billboard be a signal to us of another reality. When the advertiser shouts out to us that four-letter obscenity, "More, more, more," maybe that can trigger in our minds another four-letter word, a rich, full-bodied word, "Less, less, less." When we are bombarded with bigger-than-life pictures of well-fed babies, maybe that can trigger into our minds another world, a world in which 460 million people are the victims of acute hunger—10,000 of them will be dead before we go to sleep tonight—a world in which a million hogs in Indiana have superior housing to a billion people on this planet.

Fasting from a Consumer Culture

That leads me to my sixth suggestion. We will discover times when we can fast from our gluttonous, comfortable consumer culture. For our soul's sake, we need times when we can be among Christ's favorites: the broken, the bruised, the dispossessed—not to preach to them, but to learn from them. Like Kagawa, we need to go in Franciscan-like poverty into the slums of our cities to hear the whimpering, moaning, *Songs from the Slums*. Like Stan Mooneyham, we need to step into the hovel of Sebastian and Maria Nascimento. We need to force ourselves to look around and see the three-year-old twins lying naked and unmoving on the small cot. They will soon die, the victims of malnutrition. Like me, you want to turn away and forget that world, but we need to stay there and see the little boy. He is a two-year-old whose brain is already vegetating from marasmus, a severe form of malnutrition. Maria, the mother, tries to speak to us, but words do not come. Tears do come, the tears of a brokenhearted mother.

I say that for the sake of our balance, for the sake of our sanity, we need to be among those who, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, live an "eternal, compulsory fast."

Can we with renewed courage, born out of the power of the Holy Spirit, take a fresh look at our relationship to people, the media, the telephone, our own conversation, billboards, and our consumer culture? Remember, the disciplined person is the person who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.

EVANGELICAL WOMEN'S CAUCUS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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