

MATTHEW 9:14-17, FASTING FOR THE BRIDEGROOM

By JOSHUA CLAYCAMP, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2013

“Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”” (Matthew 9:14–17, ESV)

MATURING AND COMING OF AGE

The following is a letter written by one demon named Screwtape, the Under-Secretary for the Department of Tempters, to his nephew, a fellow demon named Wormwood, a very junior tempter fresh from the Training College. In the words of C.S. Lewis, I have no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now read to you fell into my hands.

“MY DEAR WORMWOOD,

So you have ‘great hopes that the patient’s religious phase is dying away’, have you? I have always thought the Training College had gone to pieces since they put old Slubgob at the head of it, and now I am sure. Has no one ever told you about the law of Undulation?

Humans are amphibians – a revolting half spirit and half animal. (The Enemy’s determination to produce such a revolting hybrid was one of the things that determined Our Father Below to withdraw his support from Him.) As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time. This means that while their spirits can be directed to an eternal object, their bodies, passions, and imaginations are in continual change, for to be in time means to change. The nearest approach to constancy, therefore, is undulation – the repeated return to a level

from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs and peaks. If you had watched your patient carefully you would have seen this undulation in every department of his life—his interest in his work, his affection for his friends, his physical appetites, all go up and down. As long as he lives on earth periods of emotional and bodily richness and liveliness will alternate with periods of numbness and poverty. The dryness and dullness through which your patient is now going are not, as you fondly suppose, your workmanship; they are merely a natural phenomenon which will do us no good unless you make good use of it.

To decide what the best use of it is, you must ask what use the Enemy above wants to make of it, and then do the opposite. Now it may surprise you to learn that in His efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, He relies on the troughs even more than on the peaks; some of His special favorites have gone through longer and deeper troughs than anyone else..." (Underline added.)¹

Screwtape wants Wormwood to understand that people go through endless change in this life. We experience an endless cycle of ups and downs, and Screwtape has clued into the fact that these cycles are appointed by God. He intends to use them for a specific purpose. We are looking at the struggle of **despondency** verses **dependency**. In the "troughs", as we go through seasons of spiritual or emotional dryness, *despondency*, we are often tempted (perhaps by demons such as Screwtape and Wormwood) to believe that God has deserted us, that we have been abandoned. We may be tempted to think this way, but God tells us that He has not abandoned us (Matthew 28:20). *So what can we do to fight through our despondency and keep our faith in God's promise, in His Word? What can we do to increase our dependence upon God? How can we strengthen our faith in His immediate presence in order to increase our dependency upon Him, looking to Him to get us through those spiritual seasons of dryness or difficulty? Prayer is the obvious answer. The less obvious answer is fasting.*

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002.), 206-207.

WHAT IS FASTING?

What is fasting? What was its purpose? When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus about fasting, because they were curious to know why Jesus' disciples did not fast, Jesus responded to them that it was not possible for the wedding guests to, "mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them."

"Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Matthew 9:15, ESV)

He goes on to say that, "...days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." In Jesus response to John's disciples, he assumes that fasting is parallel to mourning. Christ teaches that there is a direct parallel between "not eating food," and "grieving." So, fasting is an act of mourning. It is an act of grieving. David writes in the Psalms that when his enemies were sick, he fasted for their recovery:

"But I, when they were sick— I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest." (Psalm 35:13, ESV)

You'll notice in this text that fasting is described as a means of "self-affliction." It is a means whereby we, through self-affliction, strive to bring our physical state into conformity with our spiritual state. God commands one fast to be held in all of the Old Testament. This fast is to be held on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement:

"Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD." (Leviticus 23:27, ESV)

Fasting is when we don't eat food, and that makes our stomach churn from a feeling of emptiness and hunger. Have you ever noticed that when you are deeply grieved and in anguish over something tragic that you feel this same churning in the pit of your stomach? It is very possible that

fasting is a means whereby we bring our physical and emotional state into conformity with our spiritual state. Fasting, in the Old Testament, is clearly a tool that God gives to his people to bring down their physical state to a depth that is consistent with spiritual despair. For example, Moses intentionally fasted to demonstrate his sorrow over the sin of Israel when they worshipped before the Golden Calf. In his farewell sermon, Moses says,

*“And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the LORD your God. You had made yourselves a golden calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you. So I took hold of the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. **I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger.** For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the LORD bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also.”* (Deuteronomy 9:16–19, ESV)

We learn three things: (1) Fasting is tied to mourning, an emotional state of being marked by regret or sorrow over loss, (2) Fasting is tied to self-affliction, and (3) Fasting is tied to Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement, in which the nation of Israel was expressing sorrow for their sin. Mourning, physical-self affliction, sin: these are the elements that make up the practice of Fasting. From this we can define fasting as an act of mourning where we afflict ourselves by refusing to eat food, inducing a state of hunger, for the purpose of expressing sorrow and repentance to God for our sins, bringing our spiritual and physical state into conformity with each other.

Fasting is an act of mourning where we afflict ourselves by refusing to eat food, inducing a state of hunger, for the purpose of expressing sorrow and repentance to God for our sins.

Fasting could be described as the exclamation point at the end of a prayer for repentance, to emphasize one's grief, sorrow and contrition before God.

WHY DID JOHN'S FOLLOWERS AND THE PHARISEES FAST?

“Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”” (Matthew 9:14, ESV)

When the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus, they ask Jesus what is different about His teaching than that of John's or the Pharisees. As disciples of Jesus, the disciples are following the conduct of Christ and adhering to what he is teaching. When John's disciples come to him they note that they engage in fasting as well as the Pharisees. The question they have is why Jesus is not also teaching his disciples to fast similar to John and similar to the Pharisees.

Both John's and the Pharisees' practice of fasting stems from what they believe. It seems clear that the practice of fasting that the disciples of John the Baptist were following is similar to the practice the Pharisees were using. Therefore, in order to understand Christ's response, we need to have a better familiarity with who John's disciples were, and what they believed. We also need to have a better familiarity with who the Pharisees were and what they believed.

THE PHARISEES BELIEFS AND THEIR PRACTICE OF FASTING

Let's look first at the Pharisees. Every time we encounter the Pharisees we see people who are always attempting to derail what it is that Jesus is doing. As a result, we tend to get this notion in our mind that they are the 'bad guys.' This isn't wrong, but we can't embrace the simple caricature of them as the, "bad guys." They are the bad guys. They do oppose Jesus. But the question we have to ask ourselves is, "why?" What is it that they believe which leads them to do what they do? In other words, what is the Pharisees' worldview?

To understand the Pharisees you would need to know from where they came. Two hundred years before the birth of Christ there was tremendous upheaval in the land of Palestine, and a great civil war ensued. This civil war was brought about as the result of foreign influence into the life of Palestine and the interior of Israel. Following the death of Alexander the Great and the decline of

the Macedonian Empire, two of his leading generals began to fight for territory, the leftover remnants of the Macedonian Empire. These two families fought each other tooth and nail for control over Palestine.

One family, the Seleucids from Syria, gained control over Israel and began to aggressively introduce Greek culture and thought into Jewish life. At one point, the ruler of the Seleucids, a man by the name of Antiochus Epiphanies, halted temple worship in Jerusalem, profaned the Holy of Holies by sacrificing pigs on the altar, and he even went so far as to demand that the Jews worship him instead of the Lord. This is elsewhere referred to in the Scriptures as the, "Abomination of Desolation." It was the introduction of pagan Greek culture with its accompanying panoply of gods and goddesses, the corruption of the Temple, the halt of the true worship of the Lord, and the commanded false worship of an ordinary man that brought about a great civil war in Israel.

There were two sides to this conflict: those that argued for the embrace of the new trends from Greek culture and Greek life and the halt of the old worship of the Lord, and the rebels who insisted that the nation reject the new Greek fashions and trends and remain true to only worshipping God. It is from this latter group, known at that time as the Hasideans or the "holy ones," that the Pharisees emerged.²

The Pharisees were born in a time where they had to make the choice between rebuilding and further destruction. They stood at a point in history where they could look back on the faults and the failures of a previous generation that sinned horribly against God and inevitably were lead into exile because of it. At this same point in history they were confronted with the forceful domination of a godless pagan who demanded they worship him. At this crossroads, it is at this

² See F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2000),pg. 44-52.

junction, this decision between repeating the mistakes of the past or being killed for faithfulness to God, that the Pharisees chose to be faithful!

As a result of the pressure that was being exerted by the world and by this ruthless dictator upon them, they had to figure out what they were willing to live for and what was necessary to defend, even at the cost of their own lives. There are things that we are all willing to live for, but then there are some things that it is necessary that we die for. There are some things that are more precious than our very lives, and the Pharisees were trying to figure that out.

As a result of this pressure, they came to the conclusion that they had to reject the demand to forsake the worship of God. They had to reject some of the new trends and fashions of Greek culture that were being forced upon them. They had to do this in order to fulfill the call of God on their lives. The Pharisees came to see their struggle against the demonic forces of this world as necessary in order to be a light to the world.

But the question becomes: for what should I give my life? Nobody wants to die for something that is arbitrary. So how did the Pharisees discern what they should stand for? In order to arrive at a correct understanding of what faithfulness to God meant, they looked at two things in order to discern what was true, and then they developed a formula for how to apply those truths. Berndt Schaller makes the comment,

“They took as their **standards** the **traditions** and **biblical expositions of their leading scribes**. Their eschatologically oriented goal was to actualize the people of God as “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6) by strict conduct in accordance with biblical directions (e.g., keeping the Sabbath and paying tithes) and ***by the applying of laws for priests to the everyday life of the laity*** (Mark 7:1–4; Matt 23:25–26). Pharisaic piety, however, was not exclusively cultic

but involved practical matters (see Matt. 6:1–18 on charitable giving or alms, prayer, and fasting... (italics and emboldened added).”³

So they looked for two things:

1. The traditions of the previous generations.
2. The Biblical Expositions of their leading Scribes.

Did you notice what was missing in their pursuit of truth? The Scriptures. They looked for truth in two places, the traditions and the commentaries of their leading scribes and teachers. And the method they employed for how to apply these things to everyday life came from a passage found in Exodus 19:6, which says that the nation of Israel was to be a, “...kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” So they wanted everyone in the nation of Israel to live as pure of a life as the ritual purity that was demanded of the High Priest.

The inevitable result of this drive to push the nation of Israel into a form of purity consistent with a purity expected only from the high priest was the introduction of a never ending cadre of rules and regulations in order to ensure, if at all possible, the ritual purity of the entire nation of Israel. The Pharisees were aware that people often failed in perfectly implementing the rules of ritual purity, so they devised more rules to account for that. They taught that fasting should not be done merely one day a year on the day of Yom Kippure. Rather, people should fast twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.

When the Pharisees fast, they are fasting as an expression of contrition and sorrow over their sin. Fasting becomes a form of penance where they afflict themselves in the hope that God will reward their efforts for being righteous.

³ See Geoffrey Bromiley and David Barrett, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Volume 4: “Pharisees,” by Berndt Schaller. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2005), 173-174.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S BELIEFS AND HIS PRACTICE OF FASTING

John the Baptist also fasts. But he is an interesting character, because he clearly takes steps to distance himself from the Pharisees and the temple establishment in Jerusalem. He clearly was an ascetic who preferred to live a simple life with simple clothing and a simple diet, eschewing life in Jerusalem despite his priestly heritage. His followers, in the same manner, followed him out into the desert and typically shunned the religious life of the city, abandoning the trappings of the high liturgical practices and ostentatious customs of the Temple compound.

Why? At the heart of John's ministry was the call for people to repent and prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. Luke 3:1-3 tells us that in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 28/29), John came on the scene with his call for "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," (Mark 1:4). Since, according to both the Gospels of Matthew (Matt. 3:11 and 26:28) and John, John's baptism does not actually confer forgiveness, his original call for people to be Baptized in the wilderness had a prophetic (end-of-days) character to it. He wasn't actually forgiving them of their sins, but he was preparing their hearts to receive the soon-to-arrive Messiah *who could forgive them of their sins!*⁴

The Pharisees fasted as an act of contrition in order to show their sorrow for their sin to God. But they believed that in doing the fast of **contrition** they were making themselves righteous before God. John the Baptist's disciples fasted in the same custom as the Pharisees. Exactly like the Pharisees, they fasted as an act of **contrition** in order to show their sorrow for their sin to God, but they did so with their eyes on the horizon as they looked for the Messiah who could actually deliver them from their sins.

⁴ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, The Encyclopedia of Christianity, Volume 3, "John the Baptist." (Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill, 1999-2003), 71-73.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT JESUS?

When John the Baptist's disciples question Jesus, He responds to them that it is not possible to mourn when they are with the bridegroom. When a marriage is underway, feasting and celebrating are in order. Marriage is an event that demands happiness and rejoicing, not gloom and sorrow of heart. To mourn at a wedding would be completely inappropriate.

In addition to this, Jesus uses two examples to further illustrate his point. He mentions the idea of sewing a new patch of cloth on an old garment. Obviously when the old garment is washed the new patch will shrink, and this will make an even bigger tear as the patch pulls the surrounding fabric in on itself, or, in other words causes the garment to implode.

Additionally, Christ uses a further example of wine skins. When new wine that is not fully fermented is put into old, stretched-out wineskins, the fermenting wine will continue to release gas from the process of fermentation, and eventually, pressure will build inside the wineskin in such a way that the skin will explode, since it has lost all of its elasticity.

So these are the two examples that Jesus uses to describe his point: *implosion* and *explosion*. He is responding to John's disciples that their old form of religious mourning and grieving, regardless of whether or not it is old forms of Judaism or a new sect within Judaism such as John's disciples, won't work when it comes to Jesus! If you take the Old Covenant forms of worship and religious practice and attempt to join them with the new beauty that is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you're just going to tear your spiritual life to pieces or blow the whole thing up. Either way, it's not going to be good!

What Jesus was teaching and doing were such that they could not be contained within the accepted Jewish system; to attempt to confine his followers within the limits of the old religion would be to invite disaster. This did not mean that he was rejecting the Old Testament; he came to fulfill the law and the prophets, not to reject them (Matthew 5:17). What he rejected was not

Scripture, but the current religious practices allegedly based on Scripture. He did not even reject those practices all at once and call on his followers to forsake Judaism. But he did reject the suggestion that they should remain confined within the accepted understanding of the old system. His new approach could not fit into those old forms. His followers must find new forms or there would be disaster.⁵

THE FREEDOM OF FOLLOWING CHRIST

We have the freedom to follow Christ into the new covenant. We are free to worship him as we have been set free from the bondage of the law. The early church demonstrated a great willingness to abandon the old forms of ritual purity in favor of new forms that brought them into the family of God. I have two examples in mind of how the early church abandoned the old covenant religious practices in favor of a new covenant personal relationship with God.

1. The Food Laws were abandoned in favor eating all food with a spirit of thankfulness to God.
2. The early church also abandoned worship on the Sabbath in favor of worship on Sunday.

Some will hear this and wrongly conclude that because Jesus has broken the bonds of the Law and thrown off the constraints of the Old Covenant, they are now free to live however they choose and still call themselves Christians. For them, the idea of being a Christian is simply a matter of knowing what Jesus did for you on the cross and receiving with joy the liberation that He brings. They are now free to live as they want in any form or fashion that they now choose.

⁵ See, for example, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1992), 226-227: "The two illustrations effectively make the point that Jesus was not simply bringing in a revised and updated Judaism [i.e. the Pharisees], or even founding a new sect within Judaism [i.e. John the Baptist and his followers]. What he was teaching and doing were such that they could not be contained within the accepted Jewish system; to attempt to confine his followers within the limits of the old religion would be to invite disaster. This did not mean that he was rejecting the Old Testament; he came to fulfill the law and the prophets, not to reject them (Matthew 5:17). What he repudiated was not Scripture, but the current religious practices allegedly based on Scripture. He did not even repudiate those practices all at once and call on his followers to forsake Judaism. But he did repudiate the suggestion that they should remain confined within the accepted understanding of the old system. His new approach could not be fitted into those old forms. His followers must find new forms or there would be religious disaster."

This is not the teaching of Christ. Christ grounds the rejection of the old forms of religion based upon this singular fact: He is the bridegroom. Those who are wedding guests to his wedding are the only ones who are free from the Old Covenant, and they only receive this freedom by holding tightly to Jesus.

What this means is that you cannot consider yourself free from the demands of the Law in the name of Christian freedom unless you are bound to and consequently following Jesus Christ! If you consider the two examples that I've given, you will notice that there is the Spirit of the Law and then there is the Letter of the Law.

In the first example, that of unclean food, Jesus declares all food clean when He teaches in the Gospel of Mark that, "It isn't what goes into a person that defiles him, but what comes out of a person that defiles him." Mark even makes the parenthetical comment that "In this way he declared all foods clean." I am not free to consider myself free from the Old Testament food laws unless I understand that this freedom comes only from following Jesus Christ and holding to Him as the bridegroom, the one that this world has been waiting for. While Christ clearly indicates a new freedom to eat whatever food might be available with gratitude, the issue of purity and health is still important to Him. The spirit of the Law remains in effect, although the old system of observance has been thrown aside.

Or consider the second example, the example of Worship services on Saturday. There is no denying that the early church quickly threw aside Sabbath observance. They did this, probably, because so many extra-Biblical commands were attached to the ritual of Sabbath observance by the Pharisees that it really had become a burden and not a blessing. But the Scriptures indicate, clearly, that the disciples still understood that the true purpose of the Sabbath was to worship God, to spend time with God, and to gather together with God's people for instruction, learning and praise. The spirit behind the Sabbath is still in effect, but the old letter of the Law was abandoned. There is

freedom in what Christ proclaims here, but remember that you enjoy this freedom *only as you follow Christ and are bound to Him!*

Jesus was not concerned with the food laws, but purity, health and standing apart from the rest of the world in a spirit of holiness still mattered to Him. Jesus didn't care for the way the Pharisees demanded that the Sabbath be kept, but resting, worshipping God and gathering together with God's people still mattered to Him. You cannot throw off the Old Covenant unless you are willing to embrace the New Covenant. And you cannot embrace the New Covenant unless you cling to Christ, follow Him and imitate His example. You cannot say, "I am no longer bound by the purity laws," unless you commit yourself to a higher standard of purity in your heart and in your speech. You cannot say, "I am no longer bound by the burdens of Sabbath worship," unless you commit yourself to the new standard of Sunday worship with God's church.

WE NO LONGER FAST FOR MOURNING OVER SIN, SO WHY FAST?

"Then They Will Fast."

You will notice that what allowed the disciples to escape from the old practice of fasting was the presence of the Bridegroom. But then Jesus, the Bridegroom, said, "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." The old forms and the old meanings are passing away, but there are coming new forms and new meanings which, as we follow Jesus, we are *not free to disregard!* This is the key sentence: "Then they will fast." **What new practice is he referring to?**

Jesus is referred to as the Bridegroom. What does this mean for us? Answer: Jesus is our bridegroom. He is our husband. This term can relate simply to the male partner in a marital relationship, and the Scripture does use this term in this way regarding the nature of Christ in relationship to his bride, the church. But what is the significance of this term in the first place? Why

was this term, “husband” chosen to describe the function of a man in the marital relationship? It’s archaic meaning as a verb, as in *to husband*, is to “*till, or cultivate,*” or to manage the house. Christ’s role within the life of the church is to be a husband to her. That means that his purpose, in the exact same way that the role of the husband is defined within Scripture, is to cultivate the life of His bride for her ultimate flourishing. That means that for everyone in here, Christ’s desire is to guide us and direct us in our lives, in our decision-making, in the actions that we take for our cultivation, for our ultimate good.

THE EARLY CHURCH FASTED FOR HER BRIDEGROOM

We know that the early church fasted after the resurrection, (cf. Acts 13:1–3, Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27). Why were they fasting? Here’s one clue as to why they were fasting. In Matthew 25:1–13, Jesus pictures his second coming as the arrival of the bridegroom. In other words, the Bridegroom is taken away until the second coming of Christ.

Jesus is saying: Now while I am here in your midst as the Bridegroom, you can’t fast, but I am not going to remain with you. There will come a time when I return to my Father in heaven. And during that time you will fast. For the disciples who were present at the moment that Jesus says these words, they didn’t need to fast for they didn’t need supernatural direction from God and their longing to be with God was satisfied in the immediate presence of Christ. They had His supernatural direction for their lives, they had the comfort of His friendship, they delighted in the knowledge of knowing Him intimately by knowing the person standing right in front of them. They had it in Jesus Christ. But we have entered a time where Christ is once again removed from us in bodily presence. That time is now.

It’s true that Jesus is present with us by his Spirit. But Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “We [would] prefer to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord.” In other words, in this age there is an ache and a longing—a homesickness—inside every Christian that Jesus is not here as

fully and intimately and as powerfully and as gloriously as we want him to be. And that is why we fast.

Our fasting today serves in a similar way as the fasting of old: to reorient our hearts toward God, not as an expression of mourning over sin but as an exclamation point to the prayer for guidance from our leader, for direction in our lives. It is the exclamation point for His return that we might be with Him in bodily presence forever, and have the wonderful blessing of His leadership in our lives without question or hesitation or uncertainty.

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE NEW FASTING

What's new about the fasting is that it rests on all this finished work of the Bridegroom. The yearning that we feel for revival or awakening or deliverance from corruption is not merely longing and aching. The first fruits of what we long for have already come. The down payment of what we yearn for is already paid. The fullness that we are longing for and fasting for has appeared in history and we have beheld his glory. It is not merely future.

We have tasted the powers of the age to come, and our new fasting is not because we are hungry for something we have not tasted, but because the new cloth, the new wine of Christ's presence is so real and so satisfying. The newness of our fasting is this: its intensity comes not because we have never tasted the wine of Christ's presence, but because we have tasted it so wonderfully by his Spirit and cannot now be satisfied until the consummation of joy arrives. *We must have all that he promised. And as much now as possible.*

THE LETTER FROM SCREWTAPE TO WORMWOOD

Although we know that God is not far from us, let us fast to Him out of a desire and a longing to be with the bridegroom, to see our King face to face. Let us show our hearts to God upon the

emptiness of our stomachs, knowing that when we cry out to Him for His help, this pleases Him most.

Even the demons can plainly see this as Wormwood is instructed by Screwtape in his letter:

"...One must face the fact that for all the talk about His love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on a miniature scale, will qualitatively be like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His.

The creatures are to be one with Him, but yet be themselves; merely to cancel them, or assimilate them, will not serve... sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives and wonderful senses of Himself which they get from time to time. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be. Hence the prayers [and punctuations of fasting] offered in the state of dryness are those which please Him best."

So I urge you to join with me in fasting this January, at the start of a new year, for the salvation of souls in Kamloops. I'm asking you to join me in fasting and longing for Christ's name to be exalted in Kamloops. Not because you haven't tasted the new wine of the New Covenant of Christ's presence, but because you *have* tasted it, and long, with a deep joyful aching of soul, to know more of his presence and power in our midst. The prayers that are offered in dry seasons, punctuated by fasting, are those that please Him best.