The Law of the Fast

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One of the most important parts of church work is for us to encourage each other to live those important laws that determine success and happiness. And if I had a sufficient power for reasonable argument, I would try to persuade everyone in the world, both in and out of the Church, to live the law of the fast.

Dr. Henry C. Link once said, “Nothing puts so much order into human life as to live by a set of sound principles.” And the most sound of all principles are the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we lived them as we should, we would be better human beings and far more prosperous in material as well as in spiritual things. Sometimes we think of some of these great eternal laws as minor, or as having little importance to us personally. I would like to present six important reasons why each of us should strictly live the law of the fast.

The first and most important of these reasons is that it is a command of God. What a thrilling quality we could develop in our lives if we would always obey God—if for no other reason than that it is right and that he has asked us to do it. It was a very wise man who said that he did not merely obey God, he also agreed with him.

Reason Number Two: In the program of the Church, we are asked to set aside the first Sunday in each month as Fast Sunday. We are invited to abstain from two meals and to give the value thus saved to the bishop to help him provide food, clothing, medicine, etc., to those in need. And then we go to the house of prayer, bear our testimonies, express our appreciation, and encourage, uplift, and inspire each other.

If we paid our fast offerings on a reasonable basis, just among present Church members this would provide an annual sum of over $50 million that could be translated into some fantastic human benefits. In addition, it would help us to build a substantial reserve for any future emergencies, whereas even with our present high standards of living we are running several million dollars behind each year in the amount necessary to take care of our actual fast offering needs. Even if we did our full duty, it would require a very small sum from each individual, but it would amount to a tremendous total.

The Lord might have said about paying fast offerings what he said about keeping the Word of Wisdom—that it was “adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all Saints, who are or can be called saints.” (D&C 89:3.) And in view of all our many blessings from God, an average payment of 13 or 15 cents per meal must be a serious affront to him; certainly it should cause great embarrassment to us. When this deficiency is called to our attention, it ought to make us feel very bad; and we should immediately take steps to get our actual fasting as well as the payment of our offerings on a proper
basis. This would greatly please the Lord, and every member of the Church would be far more prosperous.

Reason Number Three: Fasting is one of the finest ways of developing our own discipline and self-control. We hear till we are weary about the temptations of our day, and many people are falling before the most trivial sins. However, the very best way to learn self-control is by practicing self-control.

Several polls have been taken in the last few years indicating that Mohandas K. Gandhi is thought to be one of the greatest men of our generation. He is the Indian patriot who won the independence of India from England. At the time of his death he was acknowledged to be the greatest power in India, and probably in the world. And his followers renamed him the Mahatma, or the great soul. Yet his biographer, Louis Fischer, claims that Gandhi started out on a very low level of self-control. He thought of himself as a coward. He was afraid of the dark. He was afraid of serpents. He was afraid of people. He was afraid of himself. He had a very bad temper and some very serious problems.

Realizing the disadvantages that these traits gave him, he deliberately decided to remake himself, and he later called himself a self-remade man. If you would like to have a good phrase to take with you during the balance of this year, here is one of the best. Everyone planning to make something worthwhile out of himself must be a self-remade man, and there should be an intelligent remodeling job going on all the time. One father once said to his son that he, the father, was a self-made man, but the son thought it was a horrible example of unskilled labor.

Gandhi went on long fasts for discipline. He reasoned that if he could not control his passion for food, how could he handle the more difficult situations in life? He said, “How can I control others if I cannot control myself?” Mr. Fischer said that not since Socrates has the world seen Gandhi’s equal for effective self-analysis, with absolute composure and self-control.

Gandhi’s mother believed that eating meat was wrong, inasmuch as it necessitated the destruction of other life, and Gandhi made a pledge to his mother that he would remain a vegetarian throughout his life. Many years after Gandhi’s mother died, Gandhi became very ill and the doctors tried to persuade him that if he would drink a little beef broth it might save his life. But Gandhi said, “Even for life itself we may not do certain things. There is only one course open to me, to die, but never to break my pledge.” Just think what would happen to the Church if every one of us had that kind of integrity and self-control. When we develop one strength it quickly extends itself into other areas; and by a practice of this kind of self-discipline, we can make ourselves stronger than anything that can happen to us.

Reason Number Four: Fasting is one of the most important health procedures. I have at my desk a great book written on fasting by a man who is not a member of the Church. He gives it as his opinion that primarily there is only one disease. We usually talk of our physical diseases under the headings of heart attack, cancer, stroke, hardening of the
arteries, lumbago, gout, diabetes, arthritis, etc. But this man points out that these are all one and the same and consist primarily of the excess wastes and toxins that accumulate in our bodies.

If I have a boil on my hand, there is no particular point in putting liniment on the boil, as the boil is merely the symptom. The disease is the bad blood underneath. If the blood can be purified, the symptom will disappear by itself. When we get too much cholesterol or too much of an accumulation of harmful fatty substances in our blood, it may cause a heart attack or a stroke. We get hardening of the arteries because they get too heavily lined or clogged up with waste. I have never heard of anyone dying of lung cancer from smoking one cigarette. But when we smoke one or two or three packages a day, the system is unable to get rid of the poison fast enough and we soon get sick.

On several occasions in the last few years, my eye doctor has put some fluorescent dye in my blood so that he can find the leaks in the blood vessels of my eye. But immediately after this foreign substance gets into my blood, my body goes to work to throw out these impurities, with their high coloration. After half an hour, the purifying processes of my body are hard at work, and after eight hours the job has been completed. But if these impurities were put into my blood three times a day and no time provided for the cleansing, then I would soon become very sick and would eventually die. Our bodies are the greatest healers. They are the best doctors. They will keep us well if we will just give them a chance.

Reason Number Five: **Fasting** is a means of developing great spiritual power. When the apostles asked the Lord why they could not cast the evil spirit out of the young man who was sorely afflicted, he said to them, “… This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” (Matt. 17:21.) If by prayer and fasting we can get evil spirits out of other people, we can also get evil out of ourselves.

Reason Number Six: Everyone needs to be a part of some good charities, and paying fast offerings is one of the best. Many of the most important things that have happened in our culture have been done by the gifts of others. That is how we got many of our libraries, our hospitals, our universities, and our churches. Much of our medical research and our institutions promoting culture and art come from our charities. Each of us should have a large personal part in some of them. This does not apply merely to giving to the Church. We ought to be involved in several of the most worthwhile charities. For as Jesus said, “… where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matt. 6:21.)

The farmer reserves the best of his crop as seed corn. There are some people who want to take more out of life than they put in, but Jesus said, “… It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35.) And we will be much happier and much more successful personally if we put back into the community and into life more than we take out.

Now I would like to give you six more reasons why the fast offering is one of the very finest of our charities:
1. One hundred cents out of every contributed dollar get to the place where they are intended to go. That is, there is no overhead in fast offerings. Some of our finest charities have a very high overhead, but there is no overhead in fast offerings.

2. It costs nothing. Every other contribution comes out of our pocketbook, but fast offerings come out of the grocery bill and do not need to be replaced.

3. Fast offerings earn a federal and state tax deduction so that you actually make a profit from paying fast offerings. If your family pays $100 a year fast offerings, they may receive a tax return from both the federal and state governments amounting to as much as $50 or $75, and, in addition, the one for whom the contribution was made gets $100 worth of very special benefits.

4. If we really practiced the law of the fast, think how many medical bills we would save. In doing our homework on fasting, we ought to go to the hospital once in awhile and find out what it would cost us to spend a month there as a patient. Or we could find out how much it costs nowadays to have a stroke or a heart attack or be laid up for a few years with some disabling disease that is completely unnecessary.

5. Then think how many years we would add to our lives and how much more healthy and happy we would be during those years.

6. Think how much we could please Deity. He has given us a personal insight into his attitude when he said, through Malachi, “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.” (Mal. 3:8–9.) If men were robbing God then by not paying their tithes and offerings, and we are doing the same thing, then we are robbing God now. And we can greatly please God by changing our course.

It is suggested that we can bring about the greatest success and happiness by building some solid convictions around these principles that put order into our lives at the same time they are paying us a very handsome profit.

And by the right amount of encouragement and leadership, all wards, all stakes, all branches, all missions, and all individuals can be magnificent successes by achieving excellence in this important law of the Lord.

This law of the fast can also be a kind of schoolmaster. If we can learn to live it effectively, it will help us to keep every other law better because of the power and faith that will be generated in us as a natural consequence of our living this important law.

Gospel topic: fasting