

The principle that a person's relationship to others reveals that person's relationship to God appears in Deuteronomy 15:11, where openhandedness to the poor is commanded, and in 22:1-4, where helping a person in need is incumbent upon one who keeps the law. Ezekiel defines the righteous person as one whose life is characterized by right living that includes giving food to the hungry and clothing to the naked (18:5-9). Job asserts his integrity as a man of faith because of his regard for those in need (31: 16-23). Throughout the OT the principle is reaffirmed.

The NT does not lose sight of the principle. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrates the importance of showing mercy (Luke 10:25-37). In Jesus' parable of the great judgment, compassion for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner is a key to God's blessing (Matt 25:31-46). Paul reflects this teaching when he writes that "the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). And James in his letter warns against faith in Christ that is unaccompanied by works of righteousness (2: 14-26). Throughout Scripture, devotion to God is expressed in active concern for the welfare of fellow human beings.

### Fasting

Fasting as a spiritual discipline occurs throughout the Bible. The Hebrew word for fasting (*tsom*) is used seven times in Isaiah 58. A corresponding Hebrew word (*'anah*), which means *to be bowed down* but in some cases means *to be humbled* by fasting, also occurs in Isaiah 58 (once each in vv. 3 and 5). The Day of Atonement is the only fast legislated in the

OT and includes a calendar of appointed festivals, including the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32). The word *'anah* is used there to refer to self-denial, which is usually understood to mean fasting.

The occasions for fasting are varied in the OT. They include the fast of mourning after the death of Saul and Jonathan (1 Sam 31: 13), David's fast when his child was ill (2 Sam 12:15-23), and Ahab's fast after Elijah's indictment (1 Kings 21 :27). After the exile, fasts are proclaimed before the return to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:21-23) and as a support to Esther before her request to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I; Esther 4: 15-17). There are also fasts of alliance in the books of Joel (1:14) and Jonah (3:5).

Jesus observed a forty-day fast after his baptism (Matt 4: 1-13). His attitude toward this discipline is indicated in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:16-21). Jesus assumed that fasting is a spiritual discipline. Yet his emphasis was not on its utility for energizing faithfulness. Luke mentions that Jesus

prayer together in his account of the expansion of the early church (Acts 13:~; 14:23). In general, the NT is reserved about fasting, not excluding it but also not giving it a place of priority in the life of the church.

### THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

#### True Evangelical faith

Menno Simons in his *Reply to False Accusations* (1552) gives an account of his evangelical faith, inspired in part by Isaiah 58:

All those who are born of God, who are gifted with the Spirit of the Lord, who are, according to the Scriptures, called into one body and love in Christ Jesus, are prepared by such love to serve their neighbors, not only with money and goods, but also after the example of their Lord and Head, Jesus Christ, in an evangelical manner, with life and blood. They show mercy and *love*, as much as they can. No one among them is allowed to beg. They take to heart the need of the saints. They entertain those in distress. They take the stranger into their houses. They comfort the afflicted; assist the needy; clothe the naked; feed the hungry; do not turn their face from the poor; do not despise their own flesh. Isa 58:7, 8. (558)

Here Menno speaks for the church and to the church, urging the alliance of faith and love. Faith and love together do not refer primarily to feelings and sentiment but especially to a commitment that addresses needs beyond self.