

Christian Living and Lent

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Lent is the period of forty fast days from Ash Wednesday (the day marking the beginning of Lent) to the Saturday immediately preceding Easter. This time is intended to be a time of penitence, abstinence, prayer and works of charity. Of course, all of these things are important in the Christian life if they are kept in a Biblical frame of reference. So let us develop a Biblical mindset by reflecting upon four truths in light of the season of Lent.

First, no person can gain any merit or standing before God based upon his human achievements or earthly works during the season of Lent. The Bible is very clear about this. Titus 3:5 states, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Nothing could be clearer than this. Human attempts to give up certain practices at the time of Lent does not bring a lost sinner into God's favor or into a right standing before God. This can only happen through Jesus Christ and His saving work upon the cross. Romans 3:24 clearly states: "Being justified (declared legally righteous in God's sight) freely by his grace through the redemption

that is in Christ Jesus.” The way of human works cannot give us acceptance before God. We can have ashes without acceptance before God and practice Lent without receiving the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Second, we must also remember to make a distinction between penitence (sorrow over sin) and repentance (change of mind about our sin) before God. A person might be sorry for his sin during the season of Lent but not really have a change of attitude about his sin and possess a willingness to break from his old sinful practices in the days that follow Lent. We must remember that sin offends the presence of the holy God. Habakkuk 1:13, “*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...*” This is why we must not only be filled with contrition or sorrow over our sins but actually repent of our sins before the presence of a holy God. David prayed in Psalm 51:3-4, “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight ...” True repentance involves a change of mind about how wicked our sin is before God’s holy presence. The fruit of true repentance also means that we will seek to forsake the sin beyond the season of Lent.

Third, we must remember that abstinence from immoral and indecent things is honorable to God. The Bible says we should “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). But abstinence from such things such as tea, coffee or certain kinds of meat really does not impress God. I don’t think God really cares whether or not Christians refrain from eating certain kinds of meats and other items that do not have any bearing on spirituality. 1 Timothy 4:3 reminds us that there is no reason, “... to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

Let us also remember that spirituality in the Christian life does not pertain to giving up certain non-essential items. The idea of “touch not; taste not; handle not” (Col. 2:21) has no spiritual significance in relationship to the real meaning of Christian living. Rather, walking in the Spirit’s power on a daily basis and relying upon His power for victory, fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) and blessing is what’s important to God. Galatians 5:25, says, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” The Christian should possess a moment-by-moment walk by the Spirit’s power and also enjoy a close intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ

...” In Philippians 3:10 Paul’s desire was, “That I may know him” (Jesus Christ). The Christian life is all about a loving relationship with a Person – Jesus Christ. It is not about going through certain rituals or giving up certain items, which have no connection with true spirituality.

Fourth, Christians must always remember that possessing a right relationship with God and walking with God is what’s important all year long – not just during the season of Lent. James 4:8 states, “Draw nigh (near) to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded.” There are those who try and “live it up” before the season of Lent. They want to “sow their oats” as many say today. But this is not the Christian way of living, which involves commitment to holiness on a daily basis (1 Pet. 1:15). The Christian mindset and attitude everyday of his life must be to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11). This kind of living should not just be practiced during the Lent season.

In summary, Christians must not lose sight of what living the Christian life is all about. It is not a seasonal thing. It should not focus on Lent but a consistent walk with God throughout the entire year. It

involves walking in the Spirit's power daily. It involves a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with rituals or giving up non-essential things in life in order to appear more spiritual before God. Furthermore, it involves true repentance over sin and the forsaking of sin whenever it invades our life and seeks to control us. It involves enjoying the salvation we can have through Jesus Christ without trying to gain merit before God through outward acts of human goodness and kindness (Rom. 3:10).

Let us not forget what it means to really live for the Lord on a daily basis and experience His power in our lives. Jesus said that we must take up a cross "daily" and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Although many observe the season of Lent for various reasons Christians need to refocus on their relationship and commitment to the Lord everyday of their lives. God's people must remember that living the Christian life involves commitment 365 days a year.