

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“I Gave It Up for Lent”

By Harry R. Osborne

A few years ago about this time of year, a story appeared in the newspaper about a strange occurrence in France. It seems that a thief cornered a man in a dark place. He threatened to slash the man's throat with his knife unless he handed over his money. As the victim reached for his wallet, the light caught him in such a way that the thief saw his victim was a priest. The robber quickly apologized for his behavior explaining that he was unaware of the fact that he had preyed upon a priest. The priest, still shaken from the incident, pulled out his cigarettes to calm himself with a smoke. As he did, he offered one to the thief. The thief replied, “No thanks, Father. I gave them up for Lent.”

A strange sense of scruples, wouldn't you say? The incident well depicts the moral hypocrisy seen in this season. This man had no problem with his practice of robbery and violence, at least on anyone except a priest. As long as he “fulfilled his responsibility” in some ritualistic sense by giving up smoking for a forty day period, everything was alright. Evidently, he gave little consideration to the moral consequences of his every day life as a thief!

When we stop to think of the system that fosters such values, we ought not be surprised about such incidents. On the night before Lent begins, this system condones the celebration of “Fat Tuesday” which is nothing but drunken, licentious revelry. It is the culmination of a period called “Mardi Gras” which is full of the same decadence. Just down the road from us in Galveston, the Mardi Gras is advertised as a big party with participants in various stages of undress, drinking plenty of alcohol. New Orleans bills its Mardi Gras celebration as a bigger party with more liquor and less clothing. Rio de Janeiro is famous for a Mardi Gras celebration which is the synonym for licentiousness.

Where in the world do people get such a perverted set of values? It certainly does not come from the Bible. The Bible clearly and repeatedly condemns such sinful actions at any time. In 1 Peter 4:1-5, notice the writer's clear denunciation of such things:

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

In Romans 13:12-14, the Bible again condemns such “works of darkness” as inconsistent with the life of a Christian:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

One is not made righteous because he ceases to do a few things for forty days while continuing to do other things that are just as sinful. Nor is one more pious because he gives up all sinful practices for Lent with the full intent of resuming the actions the day after “Easter.” God's standard for conduct is much higher.

Notice God's command: *“But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct”* (1 Pet. 1:15).

Not forty days worth, but all of the Christian's conduct must conform to the commands of God. Or consider the question raised by the apostle Paul in Romans 6:1-23. He talks to those who had been cleansed and justified by the blood of Christ and asks if they should continue in sin. His answer is simple, ***“God forbid! We who died to sin, how can we live any longer in it.”*** To the Christian, sin should be a disgusting and detestable path. It should be intolerable for another second!

The contrast is really very clear. The system which proposes Lent advocates a forty day vacation from sin—and then only some sins, not all. God's Word commands that the practice of sin be put to death:

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them. But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:5-9).

There is a big difference between those two approaches to sin!

Oh yes, it is a more convenient religion for the worldly person to conform to certain outward rituals while one continues to live a life of sin. One might asked, “Then why not choose that kind of religion?” As far as I can see, there are only two reasons to be given:

1. Regardless of how we feel about it, the Bible says such a practice is wrong!
2. Such a religion will lead one to be lost eternally (Matt. 7:21-23).

Let's follow what God says every day and put sin to death in our lives. We must not desire to join in the sins of the world around us. The Word of God gives this exhortation:

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light....And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret” (Eph. 5:6-12).

We must always seek to expose the darkness of sin, examine all things in the light of the Gospel and exalt the path God directs in everything that we do. – ***Guardian of Truth***, April 2, 1992. ■



A Skydiving Lesson

By Roger Burner

A skydiving instructor looked out over his class and said, *“He who wears a parachute and opens it will live; but he who does not wear a parachute will die.”*

Can we understand what one needs to do to survive skydiving based on this statement? Does this statement make opening the parachute any less essential to surviving skydiving than wearing the parachute? Is it necessary (and does it make any sense) to add *“and does not open it”* to the second phrase so it would read *“he who does not wear a parachute and does not open it will die?”* Is opening the parachute even possible on the part of the skydiver if he or she is not wearing one?

How easy these questions are to answer—so why do we complicate it when it comes to the scriptures?

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). ■

Service Times — Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM — Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Tommy Glendol McClure, Editor and Evangelist - 925-759-4357

Web Site: www.lodicachurchofchrist.com — Email: lodicachurchofchrist@gmail.com — Phone: 209-365-9250