

Lent: Preparing for Spiritual Growth

Lent, which comes from an Anglo-Saxon word for “spring,” can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning—a time for taking **spiritual inventory** and then cleaning out everything that hinders a relationship with Christ.

Traditionally, the season of Lent begins with a sign of repentance—placing ashes mixed with oil on one’s head or forehead. This day is known as **Ash Wednesday**.

However, we must realize that any Lenten disciplines/denials we demonstrate before God should be practiced to help us become closer to Christ and become more like Him, not to wallow in our repentance or try to gain favor or earn more love from God.

How Are You Preparing?

For Christians in the early centuries, this sacred season before Easter was usually a time of training for new disciples. However, the Bible tells us that whether someone is a new believer or a seasoned one, intense spiritual training is always in season.

2 Tim. 2:20-22 gives us a healthy example of what spiritual preparation looks like: “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

This passage is part of Paul’s warning to Timothy about false

teachers. In our culture's bent toward what many call a **"prosperity Gospel,"** (the claim that if we commit ourselves to God and live in a way that pleases Him, we will have little or no troubles in life) it is particularly important to heed Paul's warning ourselves.

For spiritual preparation, it is important to get under sound, biblical teaching. How will we know the difference between **sound doctrine** and words spoken to make us "feel" better? The answer is by studying and knowing the Bible, and praying for **wisdom** and **discernment**.

In verse 20, Paul uses the example of the vessels. The gold and silver vessels to which he refers are those used for noble purposes. Those represent the things in our lives that are agents to make us more holy and which can be used to glorify God.

The latter vessels he mentioned, "wood and earthenware," were more than likely examples of vessels used for garbage or excrement. These vessels are representative of the things we need to get rid of in our lives—anything that prevents us from growing closer to Christ and becoming more like him.

What are these vessels – both examples – in your life? It's time to take inventory and become "useful to the Master."

Let's look at one other principle of spiritual preparation in verse 22: "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

Paul was reminding Timothy of his responsibilities as a young leader, in light of the false teaching that was around them. When we give way to the corruption around us ("youthful lusts"), we make ourselves more susceptible to believe lies, whether directly from the enemy or from false teaching.

Furthermore, we should strive for a pure heart through the

pursuit of righteousness (adherence to God's moral law), faith (trust in God and faithfulness to Him), love (attitude and action of commitment to God and others) and peace (harmonious relationship with God and others).

The best way to grow as disciples of Christ is to not limit our spiritual preparation to the Lenten season, but to pursue these things daily throughout the rest of our time here on earth.

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