

## Title: Lent

Lent is a time for coming face to face with our greatest challenge. Lent is a time for coming face to face with our sinfulness. But not only our own sinfulness, but also the sinfulness of the world. In every human there is a desire to be “righteousness before God.” I believe that every human would love it, if the choices they made in life were pleasing to God. But if we are honest with ourselves, we know that they are not. If we are honest, we are forced to admit that the problem is internal, that WE, ourselves, are corrupted. Many times, we like being bad. Many times, we desire to do sin. Many times, we see obedience to God as something keeping us from doing what we want to do. When we hear the 10 commandments, we hear only “thou shalt not...” But the truth of the matter is if you like sin, if you feel like the commandments are a burden, you are a slave to sin.

The struggle with righteousness, the struggle with making bad choices, has been with us since the beginning. In Genesis we are told Adam and Eve had a very important choice. God told them that they were free to eat from any tree in the garden... but that they should NOT eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.” They choose to disobey. Since the beginning, God has been calling his people to be separate, holy, from the corrupt ways of the world. In Deu 30, we are told of a choice which Moses presents to his people. They are about ready to enter the Promise Land Moses knows they will be tempted to assimilate the ways of the Canaanites who presently live there. They will be tempted to turn away from God. Moses knows of their weakness. So, Moses clearly sets the choice before them. “Follow God and His ways...” or “follow you own... and reject God...” Joshua, who inherits Moses’ leadership presents the Israelites with a similar challenge:

*If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:14*

Over and over, scripture records God’s call to follow him. Over and over, it records His people making the wrong choices.

Why is this an ongoing theme in Scripture? Why do humans always make sinful choices? Does God just want these recorded in scripture, so HE can sit high up in heaven and look down in judgement and say all you are bad people you deserve to be punished, you are not worthy. Non-believers say that this is the weakness of scripture. It just tells us that we are weak and unworthy. And this is one of the reasons why they don’t like to read it. However, people who believe this have missed the point of the Bible. Oh, it records our failures, to be sure. It records our inability to be righteous before God. But there is a point to this. It is recorded so that we might understand, “why we make bad choices.” so that we might ultimately understand, “why bad things happen in this world...” It was recorded that we might understand that “it is our nature to make bad choices.” That’s the reason why we fail. That’s the reason why bad things happen in this world.

It all started with Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve made the first wrong choice, when they disobeyed God, sin entered the world. That sin was passed down to all their descendants. It corrupted Mankind. It corrupted Mankind so that we became blind to God... We became unable to do good. It became part of our nature, not to do good. In fact, it was given a special name. This "sinful nature" which we all inherit is called the Old Sinful Adam. Within each of us, is the Old Sinful Adam. That's why all people struggle with making right choices. It is the Old sinful Adam part of them, which wants to sin, which enjoys sin, and likes doing the wrong thing.

Centuries ago, Martin Luther wrote a book called the Bondage of the Will. In it he says the reason people always make sinful choices is because there is no such thing as free will. Humans are physically incapable of making good choices. Now, when I first read that, I was confused. After all, I chose what to eat for breakfast... I chose what clothes to wear... I chose what direction to drive to church... What's the problem? Well, what Luther meant was that "in spiritual things" we do not have free will. Oh, we are free to make choices about eating breakfast and such, but when it comes to spiritual matters, we are incapable of making righteous choices. The reason is that while we are in these mortal bodies, we still carry around the Old Sinful Adam. And the Old Sinful Adam, likes to sin. Hence, we are almost against our will, forced to sin. We cannot help it. This is what is normal for the world. This is what condemns the world to hell and destruction. But as Christians.... we are not entirely lost. As Christians we also have a redeemed side. The redeemed side is called the New Adam, the Saint side. And while we are here on Earth, in these mortal bodies we are under the control of both. Luther calls it being both saint and sinner. as a result... when the sinner side of us is acting we are under Satan's control. when the saint side is acting, we are under the Holy Spirit and we are capable of doing good works, works springing out of faith. As St. James says in his epistle, "I will show you my faith by my works." Good works naturally spring out of a spirit of faith. So being a Christian, means because of Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, the new Adam. We are capable of doing good works.

Now, having said that, being a Christian does NOT make it easier for you. Having the new Adam, the Saint side, does NOT make it easier to resist sin. In fact, the life of a non-Christian is easier because they do not struggle against sin. Or at least they do not struggle against sin for God pleasing reasons. If they struggle, it is for personal gain, or a feeble attempt to earn the love of God. Because they are basically blind to God, because the sinful Adam is all they have. Sinful works is all they can offer to God and these sinful works are nothing more than offerings of dirty rags to God.

On the other hand, as a Christian, as a redeemed person, you are not blind to God. You are willing to call sin – SIN. As a redeemed person, as a new creation renewed by the Holy Spirit, there is a part of you that hates sin, and struggles against it. The life of a Christian is hard because only a Christian will do battle against the sinful self. And how do we do battle against that sinful self? How do we do battle?? Do we try to rehabilitate our old Adam, by working harder to improve ourselves? Or do we tolerate our sinful nature and offer its sinful works to God? Neither of these are acceptable! They are both a waste of time. As Christians, what do

WE do? As our catechism teaches “We desire “to KILL the old sinful Adam.” This is reason, being a Christian does not make our life easier. It makes it harder. When we became a Christian, we entered into a “life or death” struggle with our old Adam. So how does this work? And how does this new creation... this new Adam this Saint side of us deal with the sinful side? As said before: It is not “Try harder not to sin.” “Punish the flesh when it disobeys.” It is not “do works to please God, to make up for the sinful failures of life, to show God that you are sorry for your sins.” No, as Christians, our goal is not to stop the old Adam from sinning. That is a hopeless cause. and it will be a hopeless till the day we die. We KILL the old Adam. We kill the old Adam, by strengthening the New Adam within us. Let me give you an example. When a person sins, condemning him for his sins, accomplishes nothing. The old Adam can do nothing else but sin. We still preach the law to curb lawlessness. We still teach the Ten commandments, so that people would not be ignorant of the way God created this world to work. But ultimately, when a person sins, condemning them for their failures is not our goal.

So, what is our goal? What we seek is - forgiveness. What we seek is reconciliation; reconciliation with God; reconciliation with our brothers. That is how we will kill the old Adam. In forgiveness and reconciliation, we strengthen the new Adam. In strengthening the new Adam, we kill the old Adam. We also seek to strengthen the new Adam in our brothers and sisters in Christ. When a brother sins, he doesn't need the burden of judgment... a reminder that his old Adam causes him to sin. He knows that. When a brother sins, he doesn't need a reminder that the consequences of his sin is eternal death in hell. What the brother needs is rescue. What the brother needs is encouragement, so that he doesn't fall into despair. He needs to be comforted in the knowledge that his sins were forgiven by God because of Christ. His new creation part of him, needs to be encouraged. It needs to be encouraged in its battle against the old Adam.

So, what does that look in practice? What do we say to a brother tripped up by sin...?  
*Brother... that which you have done is sin. But take heart, God has forgiven you your sin. Go and sin no more. May the new creation within you be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in its battle with the old Adam. God be with you my brother for he loves you.* So as Christians, when we see a brother in Christ sinning, we do not speak to the old Adam by condemning him, but rather we speak to the new creation by encouraging them to be faithful to God. We encourage them to make good choices, encourage them to desire good choices, by talking to the new creation in them.

And there is more... Many times bad choices affect others, resulting in brokenness, resulting in broken relationships. However, seeking justice will not bring healing, neither for the sinner, nor for the one hurt. However, healing can come from the new creation within us. It is their new creation within both of them who will seek forgiveness, who will seeks reconciliation. And this is where the Christian is different from a non-believer. Many times in this world, relationships remain broken because the pain given, the injustice given cannot be repaired by feeble human efforts. Reconciliation is beyond human power. BUT, a Christian, through the power of the Holy spirit, can reconcile with others. A Christian can reconcile with others because it will be

the Saint within him who will offer not their own works, but the work of Jesus for reconciliation. It is the new creation who can ask for forgiveness for Jesus sake. They can ask to be forgiven because Jesus died for that very reason. And it will be the new creation in the person hurt, who will give forgiveness, just as they themselves were forgiven by God. That's how Christians deal with broken relationships.

In Summary, with regard to non-spiritual things, man is capable of making choices - good and bad, and simply reaps the consequences of his choices. But with regard to spiritual things, man is either guided by Satan or by the Holy Spirit through faith. As Luther put it, we are simultaneously saint and sinner. For this reason, we don't have the power to stop sinning. But God in his mercy gave us Jesus. When we make bad spiritual choices, and we will, it is the new creation within us who will look to Jesus for forgiveness. While we may seek to make amends for those who have been hurt by our sin, but we do not do it to pay for the sin, for that has already been paid for. Rather we seek to make amends because of love, and a desire for reconciliation. May the new creation within you be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in its battle with the old Adam. May God lead you to good choices. God be with you, for he loves you. God bless you all. Amen