



ceasing (1 Thes 5:17), and fasting, whether it be giving up food or some other sin or vice at least historically was a regular feature of the Christian life. These three things help show us our idols that entice us to keep our money for ourselves, that distract the use of our time with something else instead of prayer, and that lure us to indulge in spending on things that go far and beyond what we need; that might even be harmful to us.

Giving things up for Lent is not just a Roman Catholic thing as I still to this day so often hear. Fasting for the sake of striving to demonstrate self-control, a fruit of the Spirit, however, is 100% a Christian thing, because it's a Bible thing.

Giving to the needy, praying, and fasting are ultimately a benefit to our neighbor. Even though our sinful flesh will always try to find ways for it to benefit, the Christian strives to make sacrifices that benefit our neighbor, because we try to mirror the love of Jesus, who sacrificed His life for the benefit of us all. So, we do the works God has given us to do anyways, despite our sin, because our neighbors need them. If we catch ourselves seeking to glorify ourselves through giving to the poor, praying, or fasting, just repent! And cling to the sure hope that that is precisely why Jesus died for you – to forgive your sins!

Sinful motivations are always going to be there in one way or another, but that shouldn't deter us from striving to bear the fruits of the spirit by the grace of God. If giving up chocolate or sweets or coffee or some food item is an exercise of self-control, praise God! Increasing one's self-control will benefit your neighbor in other ways!

When Jesus warns, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven", He isn't teaching that all our spiritual life should be behind closed doors. How could we ever bear each other's burdens as Scripture teaches us to do if we kept all spiritual matters private? Instead, we should have no shame in telling others our struggles or how we are trying to give something up because we are trying to lead more God-pleasing lives. The danger is if we are doing so to boast about ourselves, or even worse, if it somehow causes us to think that we are better Christians than others, and therefore merit God's favor more than someone else.

We are journeying with Christ to the cross. It is there alone that we find God's favor and the reason for God's favor! It's Jesus! Thus, Lent and whatever customs are attached to it, are all driving us back to daily contrition and faith. For when we repent, we confess that our hearts do seek earthly treasures. Rather than letting that lead us down a road of despair, faith believes the promise that Christ bore our sins. Faith holds onto the promise that Jesus' treasure is all for whom He died. Faith clings to the reality that though we are mortal, in Christ we receive the medicine of immortality. In Christ, though we die, yet shall we live. We sing in the hymn, "Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared" v. 6, "Lord, I believe what You have said; help me when doubts assail me. Remember that I am but dust, and let my faith not fail me. Your supper in this vale of tears refreshes me and stills my fears and is my priceless treasure" (LSB #622). Your heavenly treasures come to you in the Word, and under the bread and wine. Jesus gives you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. By faith we receive such forgiveness; by faith alone can we confess it is such a priceless treasure. Though the Lord remembers that we are dust, this dust will be raised to eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.