

I. Overview

- A. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the 40 day Lenten fast leading up to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. So in other words, Ash Wednesday is part of Lent and the two go hand in hand.
1. Ash Wednesday - This day is dubbed Ash Wednesday in light of the observers placing ashes upon their foreheads. This year, Ash Wednesday will be observed on February 18th. It is a day set aside for fasting, abstinence, and mourning. It's the day an estimated 1 billion Christians worldwide set aside to remember and meditate upon the truth that all men are but dust and will return to dust. The heart of this day is to call to mind the truth of humanity's helplessness and hopelessness under the curse of sin and death apart from the resurrection of Jesus.
 2. Lent - Old English word for the spring lengthening of days - A period of 40 days of fasting in a spirit of mourning over sin and death leading up to the holy week of Passover. Well over 1.5 billion believers worldwide and 26% of American adults participate to some degree or another in this season of fasting and mourning.

II. Biblical Significance

- A. Though there is no specific biblical command to recognize and observe Ash Wednesday or Lent, there are abundant biblical exhortations to observe the things that these holidays focus upon. In fact I would go as far as to say that if you don't have a time during the year that you specifically set aside to focus on these things, you are neglecting clear exhortations of scripture.
1. Intentional Fasting - There is clear scriptural exhortation and evidence that seasons of fasting and abstinence will mark and be a part of the life of a believer. In His address to all disciples, Jesus taught on fasting and said "when" you fast indicating every one of his disciples would fast as part of their walk with Him. It is of note that the scriptures emphasize intentional seasons much more than spontaneous seasons and multiple days rather than one day.
 - a. 40 Day Significance - Forty days is a very significant number biblically and I think is very appropriate considering the focus of the Lenten fast.

- The Flood - 40 day and nights is the duration God chose to flood the earth to cleanse it from sin and death in the days of Noah.
- Moses - 40 days on Mt. Sinai receiving instruction for replicating the dwelling place of God and receiving the law. The bible tells us Moses did not eat or drink during this period.
- Israel’s Judgment - God's people wandering in the desert 40 years before entering the promised land for their disbelief.
- Jesus Fast - The Holy Spirit led Jesus into a 40 day fast to be tested by Satan prior to His public ministry.
- Resurrection to Ascension - Jesus remained with his Disciples for a period of 40 days after his resurrection to both teach them concerning the coming Kingdom and give them “many proofs” of his resurrection before his ascension to heaven.

1. Intentional Mourning - The idea of intentionally stirring ourselves up to mourn or feel sadness is absolutely foreign to 21st century western culture. However, it is absolutely biblical and I might add we are explicitly exhorted in the Word to intentionally mourn or feel sadness.

- Wise Living - Ecclesiastes tells us that the individual who lives wisely and soberly will embrace mourning in this age and allow the sting of sadness to do its work in our hearts so our joy can come to its fullness.
- Heart of Jesus - Jesus listed mourning as one of the eight heart conditions of those who are blessed in this life. It is only those who mourn who will know the love and nearness of the comforter.
- New Covenant Believers - James, in his letter to the new covenant believers of his day, exhorts not just to be intentional to look for and to admit the sin in our lives but to stare at it until it breaks our hearts so that we can be healed.

2. Ashes - Putting ashes on one's head may be countercultural for modern day believers, but it's extremely grounded in the Word. In the Bible, ashes were a powerful outward sign of mourning, deep sorrow, and humility before God.

III. Traditional Observance

A. Participation in some season of fasting leading up to the memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection is deeply ingrained in Christian tradition. So deeply, in fact, that you can find records of Christian observance as early as AD 100. This practice was so universal within the body of believers that it was recorded in the council of Nica in AD 325 as a proposed official Christian holiday. In AD 363, at the council of Laodicea, the 40 day Lenten fast was officially put into place as “a matter of strict necessity” for the Christian.

1. Ash Wednesday - The Lenten fast was always carried out and framed in a spirit of mourning with symbolism including sackcloth and ashes. In AD 601, Pope Gregory is credited with starting Lent on a Wednesday (Ash Wednesday), 46 days before Easter. This ensured exactly 40 days of fasting by excluding the six Sundays, which were considered feast days.

B. Traditional Cautions - In my opinion, there are a couple of cautions that I would offer if you consider participation in accordance with tradition.

1. Receiving Ashes from the Priest - Traditionally there is much weight given to the office of the Pastor or Priest who needs to be the one to place the ashes on the head of the believers.

- a. We believe that the role and place of the high priest among the people in the old covenant worship has been abolished by the installation of the new covenant by The High Priest of all, who forever remains High Priest, who is Christ Jesus. To look to any pastor or priest to absolve you of sin or mediate between you and God for any reason is heresy.
- b. We also believe this contradicts the clear teachings of scriptures for the church to be led by a plurality of elders who are accountable to the body.

2. To be seen by Men - The growing social media trend to "show off your ashes" in my opinion seems to contradict Jesus' clear teaching to not draw attention to yourself to be seen by men while you're fasting.

IV. Suggested Observance and Lifegroup Discussion

A. Restoration Fellowship will be

B. Lifegroups

1. Fasting Practicals