

What About Lent?

Greetings to You All,

How many of you know we are currently in the middle of a “religious season?” Yes, this is what is called the “season of Lent,” or the “Lenten season.” And many, if not most professing Christians observe this season in one form or another. Where do you suppose this idea came from? Let’s remember a couple of key facts: The earliest converts were Jews. And as we well know, they were used to a very rigid set of guidelines for worship, including a detailed religious “calendar” based on the weekly and annual Sabbaths and Holy Days. So somewhere along the line in the early centuries of church history, someone came up with the idea that was partially to appease both Jewish and Gentile converts. The idea was to continue to have “special days, and seasons,” but to have them reflect significant events in the life and ministry of Jesus rather than continue in their former practice. The two primary events in the life of Jesus are of course his birth and his death and resurrection. So the liturgical calendar was basically built around these two, plus the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. “The highlight of the year for Christians is Easter, the day when our Lord rose from the dead. Lent is a forty-day season of preparation for Easter. Why forty days? Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness for forty days. Lent, then, is our time of fasting, prayer, temptation and repentance. Lent is not required anywhere in scriptures, but it has been a custom, which Christians have practiced for most of the last two thousand years.

In many languages, the word "Lent" actually means "fast". This is where the custom of giving up something for Lent originated. In recent years, our church has explained how it is appropriate to recognize the significant events in history such as the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and his suffering and glorious resurrection. Where the line to legalism is crossed is when all kinds of “demands” are imposed on worshippers – like you must NOT eat a certain type of food during this time – or you MUST fast on this day or that you must “jump through certain hoops” to show yourself approved before God or to demonstrate to Him that you are really, really sorry for your sins and want to assure Him of that over and over and over again. The simple answer is, this is just one more aspect of the works mentality found in much of modern Christianity. Even though it is claimed that the “special attention and guidelines” concerning this forty day period leading up to Easter is for such things as “self-examination,” etc., what we really see is just another way to make Christians “jump through hoops” so they will supposedly be more acceptable in God’s sight. But isn’t it interesting that even in the “official” explanation of what this season is supposed to represent, there is a frank admission that this is nowhere found in the Bible – not even mentioned indirectly! But somewhere along the line, somebody had an idea that Christians ought to make this entire season leading up to the memorial of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection something “special.” Consequently, “guidelines” were established for denying oneself certain foods or drink, fasting, etc., to show God one is sincere in one’s beliefs and practices. Therefore, supposedly, one will receive “brownie points” in heaven, which will stand one in good stead when one dies, and have to “give an account” of one’s life before God. The simple truth is, belief in Jesus as Messiah is sufficient, and anything beyond that is not necessary. God help us to avoid getting drawn into the legalistic traps that often surround the observance of religious “seasons” and simply keep our focus on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the supreme sacrifice He gave so we might one day enter eternal life!

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