

Sunday, March 9, 2025 am

LESSONS FROM OUR CALENDAR (5)

The Season of Lent

This past week, Catholics and many others began the season of Lent. As part of our study through the calendar this year, I would like to familiarize us with what is involved in this season and make some Biblical observations.

In this lesson, we will begin by examining the various days of this season. Then we will make some observations based upon God's word. Because we live in Southern California, where Catholicism is the predominant Christ based religion, I believe it is good to be informed about such matters. 1 Peter 3:15 Calls for us to *always be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us with meekness and fear*. This often includes explaining why we do NOT do certain things that are popular and even ASSUMED to be in scripture but are not. It is with this in mind that I present this lesson.

I. The Easter Season.

- a. The season of lent – it is a 40-day period (actually 42 days) of fasting, almsgiving and prayers (which are designed to offset the “love of the world” as described in 1 John 2:15-16) to prepare for the Easter season.
 - i. It had its origin with Catholicism, but many of its observances are practiced by Protestants and other Christ based religions.
 - ii. It begins with Ash Wednesday and ends at sundown on Holy Thursday (actually 43 days – 6 weeks+).
 - iii. Observers are encouraged to give up some luxury and/or vices as a matter of self-control. Included in this period, on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday they are to fast. Every Friday, they are to abstain from meat. It is also suggested they give up some luxurious pleasure for the whole period. It is permitted for observers, should they choose, to exempt Sundays from their abstinence (because the sacrifices are to be voluntary).
 - iv. The purpose of this period is an effort to purify the soul to prepare for Easter Sunday. It is a season associated with reflection and repentance. It is an extended period of time to work on self-discipline, denying oneself of pleasures and to sacrifice while increasing one's focus (or refocusing) on God, Jesus and doing good for others.
 - v. The 40-day period is based upon various Biblical passages that identify it with fasting. Moses on Mt. Sinai (twice – Exodus 24:19, 34:28), Elijah fleeing from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:8), the 40 days of flooding (Genesis 7:12), and Jesus after His baptism (Matthew 4:2). Reference is also made to the 40 day warning of Jonah (3:4) which resulted in the people of Nineveh fasting which resulted in God relenting from their disaster.
NOTE: Typically if you are struggling to overcome some bad habit, 40 days is a good starting point to regain control of your life.
- b. The Easter calendar (NOTE: Most of these details are taken from Catholic sources. I have tried to be as objective as possible in presenting them.)
 - i. **The Calendar** – the dating of the “Easter calendar” is based upon the lunar cycle. “Easter” is observed on the first Sunday after the first full moon (vernal Equinox) on or after March 21st. This is the first full moon of Spring. This means that Easter can be any Sunday from March 22 to April 25th. The Season of lent begins 6 Sundays plus 4 days before that Sunday (Ash

Wednesday - a total of 46 days). NOTE: This dating was established at the Council in Nicaea in 325 AD (not during NT times – TT).

- ii. **Fat Tuesday** (Mardi Gras – French for Fat Tuesday). A day of indulgence before the beginning of the season of lent. The purpose is to remind man of the blessings God has give us to enjoy. It is PROPERLY observed with feasting, such as richer meals and parties, NOT with the depraved, immoral parties we often associate with Carnival and Mardi Gras celebrations. Part of its purpose was to consume foods that would be given up for lent.
- iii. **Ash Wednesday** – this begins the 40 days Lenten season. It is a special day of fasting and repentance. In Catholicism, observers, ages 18-58, are required to keep a limited fast (1 normal meal and 2 snacks). They are to abstain from meat, but they can eat fish. Catholics MAY go to a “mass” (a Catholic worship service where communion is offered) and have a priest put ashes on their forehead. They are reminders of our morality and were symbols of repentance. They can CHOOSE to wear them all day or remove them.
- iv. **Palm Sunday** – commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus on the Sunday of the week of His crucifixion. Matthw 21:7-8 records that as Jesus entered the city, the people spread their clothes on the road and cut down branches of trees to celebrate His entrance. They praised Him and were ready to make Him king. As observed by Catholics there is a “mass” which is a reminder of the events of that day. People are given palm branches which have been blessed. Many take them home and keep them all year as a religious decoration, perhaps weaved into the shape of a cross. Because the branch is deemed “holy”, it is not to be thrown out, but can be returned to the church where they will be burned and used for ashes for the following year.
- v. **Holy Thursday** – a special “mass” recognizing when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper is offered (Luke 22:14-20). This is the beginning of “the most sacred days of the Catholic faith”.¹ During this service Catholics are given holy communion. They are reminded that what they partake of is the literal body and blood of Jesus (transubstantiation).
- vi. **Good Friday** – commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. It is called such because of the result of His death – the availability of salvation (Isaiah 53:5). There is no “mass” on this day, but people are encouraged to think about the death of Jesus. For some it is suggested that people remain silent throughout the day, especially from noon to 3 pm (cf. Luke 23:44).
- vii. **Holy Saturday** – Jesus was in the grave on that day. It is a day of preparation for Sunday. People make their preparations for their Sunday observances. In the evening, churches will celebrate a mass called, “the Easter Vigil.” A bonfire will be lit outside and people will light a candle and enter the dark church filling it with light.
- viii. **Easter Sunday** – celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. I will address this later in the year specifically.
- ix. **Easter Season** – 50 days from Easter Sunday until Pentecost.

II. Lessons

- a. NOTE: I am NOT questioning the good intentions of the various events of this season. In fact, some of the activities would be good things to observe INDIVIDUALLY (cf. Romans 14:5-6). But good intentions alone do not make what we do right. Matthew 7:21-23 – not enough to say, ‘Lord, Lord’. It is always about doing what He says THE WAY He directs us.

¹ A Catholic Guide to Holy Week. <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/lent/holy-week.html> March 6, 2025.

b. **The “Easter calendar” is not found in the Bible.**

- i. While uncertain as to its beginning, the 4th century AD is when we know it was being observed and regulated (ca. Council of Nicaea in 325 AD). IT is NOT found in the NT, either by command, example or inference. YET, many who are uninformed (i.e., they have not studied the scriptures for themselves) believe it is. This is always a concern.
- ii. “Lent” is justified based on 1) The 40 days of fasting that Jesus went through & 2) Matthew 9:15, *And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast,* and 3) Examples of “communal fasting” – Acts 13:1-3, 14:23, and OT examples, etc. Jesus was being asked why His disciples did not fast like the Pharisees and John’s disciples. **Answers:** As you examine these passages:
 1. There is NOTHING said about a period of fasting to be ritualistically established.
 2. What Jesus did in the wilderness was to establish His dominance over Satan (He never gave in to temptations). Furthermore, the “fast” of lent is different (Jesus did not eat for 40 days (Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:1-2).
 3. While Matthew 9:15 does say they would fast, when and why is not identified. There would be times when individuals would fast (either voluntary or involuntary – i.e., no food), but it was not as a church ritual. Based on other passages about fasting, this would have been an individual decision or need.
 4. As to “communal fasting” – the occasions were exceptional and warranted intense prayers by brethren (sending Paul and Barnabas on an extended preaching journey for the first time & appointing elders). Perhaps there are times we need to think about this, BUT it does NOT justify an annual church tradition and festivities as if they were commanded by God.

c. **Traditions** – however good intentioned the various observances of this season are, they are not commanded nor found in scripture.

- i. In my readings, I noticed very specific instructions and regulations as to what is to be done. What dietary rules are to be followed as well as exceptions and suggestions. It is scripted and CONTROLLED by the Catholic church (for their followers). You find NONE of that in scripture.
- ii. Catholicism puts tradition as equally authoritative to scripture. Yet that contradicts what the Bible teaches – 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3, Jude 3, Galatians 1:6-9, 1 Corinthians 4:6, etc.
- iii. The Bible expresses concern about binding traditions.
 1. Matthew 15:1-9.- Jesus noted that their traditions nullified God’s instructions. They placed their traditions above God’s law.
 2. Galatians 4:9-11 – *“You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.”* In this text, Paul seems to be addressing ritualistic observances (he is writing to “the churches of Galatia” (1:2).
 3. Colossians 2:8, *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*
 4. 1 Corinthians 4:6 warns us *not to think beyond what is written.*
- iv. There are traditions we do keep, BUT they must be grounded solidly in God’s word – cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15, *Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.* AND, if it is a personal preference we CANNOT bind it upon others.

- d. ***Lent does not accord with what the Bible says about the work of the church*** – Time will not permit a study of the work of the church. But nowhere do you find churches in the New Testament observing special holidays or seasons. Our worship is governed by the authoritative teachings of scripture. We read about weekly assemblies - Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 11:18 - when you come together, cf. Hebrews 10:24-25. We read about the various acts of worship they did. But we do not find “special Sundays”, feasts or holiday seasons.
- e. ***Personal worship and discipline*** -
- i. While the Bible identifies our worship as a church, we also find personal worship in the NT. Prayers – 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Bible study – 2 Timothy 2:15, etc.
 - ii. There are things you can do as an individual, that the church is not authorized to do. Some of the activities of the Lenten season can be done as individuals and they can build you up spiritually.
 - iii. What about fasting? The Bible does speak about fasting. Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus gave some instructions. Let it be PRIVATE and not to be seen of men. Acts 9:9-11, Paul fasted for 3 days knowing he had offended Jesus (penitent). 1 Corinthians 7:5 speaks of husbands and wives “taking a break” so that they could “give yourselves to prayer and fasting.”
 - iv. Our need for self-control – giving something up is a good way to learn self-control and discipline. In scripture we need self-control – 2 Peter 1:5-6, Galatians 5:22-23. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 describes the athlete and Paul appeals to what he does, “I discipline my body...” But WHY are you doing it? You need to know! WHAT are you replacing what you give up with?
 - v. We need to contemplate Jesus. Philippians 2:5 – “Let this mind be in you...” 1 Peter 2:21, etc. Galatians 6:14, Paul said, *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* We need to think about EVERYTHING Jesus did and taught. We can only do this if we take time away from worldly pursuits and give Him what He deserves in our life. That might mean that as an individual OR as a family, you will pause doing certain things to help you draw closer to Him.

During this time of year, the season of Lent and Easter, many pause to think about Jesus, perhaps more than at other times. As we have seen, some of the events that are encouraged can be productive, IF done with sincerity of heart. But I ask: Does Jesus deserve more than a season? IF we are to have hope of heaven, we must give ourselves to Him EVERY day. That is what being a true disciple is about – Luke 9:23-24. Is He Lord of your life always? Think about it!