

God transforming you into a new person

By Bec Eastman 28th February 2016





Peninsula City Church

Things We Do

Why Lent?

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Contents

Why Lent?	4
Introduction	4
1. What is Lent, and why be part of it?	4
2. So, what has lent got do with me?	5
Some concluding thoughts.....	6

Why Lent?

Introduction

Q. What did you give up for Lent?

If someone were to ask you this, what would you say to him or her? Has anyone ever asked you this question? I have not personally been part of the Lenten season, but that is mainly due to my Protestantism. Most Protestants do not take part in the time of Lent, as it is not mentioned in the Bible. However, is there anything that we can learn from Lent? Let us have a look at this event and see what it is all about.

1. What is Lent, and why be part of it?

Q. What is the meaning of Lent and when did it begin?

It has been pointed out that Lent is one of the oldest observances within the Christian calendar.

“Like all Christian holy days and holidays, it has changed over the years, but its purpose has always been the same: self-examination and penitence, demonstrated by self-denial, in preparation for Easter. Early church father Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130-c.200) wrote of such a season in the earliest days of the church, but back then it lasted only two or three days, not the 40 observed today. In 325, the Council of Nicaea discussed a 40-day Lenten season of fasting, but it’s unclear whether its original intent was just for new Christians preparing for Baptism, but it soon encompassed the whole Church.

How exactly the churches counted those 40, days varied depending on location. In the East, one only fasted on weekdays. The western church's Lent was one week shorter, but included Saturdays. But in both places, the observance was both strict and serious. Only one meal was taken a day, near the evening. There was to be no meat, fish, or animal products eaten. By the 800s, some Lenten practices were already becoming more relaxed. First, Christians were allowed to eat after 3 p.m. By the 1400s, it was noon.”¹

It has been said that,

“Lent is the span of time in the church calendar that starts with Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Sunday. Ash Wednesday commemorates the beginning of Jesus’ 40-day fasting and temptation in the desert, and Easter Sunday commemorates Jesus’ resurrection from the grave after his crucifixion.

Lent, then, is generally observed as a time for Christians to reflect, repent, and pray as a way of preparing their hearts for Easter... Because Lent is not officially instituted in Scripture, observing it isn’t in any way a ‘requirement’ of Christianity. However, Christians from many different theological persuasions choose to observe it as a way of focusing their thoughts on Jesus Christ during the Easter season.”²

Many Protestants point out that fact that the word Lent is not found in the Bible. That is true, but neither are words like ‘Easter,’ ‘Trinity,’ ‘Rapture,’ nor ‘Fall,’ as in the fall of creation to give some examples. However, many Christ-followers believe and hold to these truths. So, although many Protestants do not take part in the time of Lent, is there anything that we can learn from it?

¹ Olsen, Ted. “The Beginning of Lent.” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/beginning-of-lent.html> (17th February 2016).

² “What Is Lent?” <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2012/02/what-is-lent/> (17th February 2016).

2. So, what has Lent got do with me?

Q. Is Lent for me?

It has been suggested that the word Lent came from,

“The Old Anglo-Saxon words *lencten*, meaning ‘Spring,’ and *lenctentid*, which literally means not only ‘Springtide’ but also was the word for ‘March,’ the month in which the majority of Lent falls.”³

Although it obviously has a northern hemisphere background, since, the season of Spring is not in March for Victorians, but autumn. Nonetheless, the suggestion that Lent is a time of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial, in preparation for Easter may actually be a good thing, regardless of who we are as a Christ-follower. One thing that needs to be said though is that this internal evaluation should not only be at Easter, but daily. The concepts of self-examination, repentance, and self-denial (possibly self-discipline is more biblical) are healthy aspects of our faith.

Two beneficial features that need to be appreciated here are in something that, Jesus Christ taught and was followed up by Paul. For example, Luke recorded in his Gospel,

²³ “Then He (Jesus) said to the crowd, ‘If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.’²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake, you will save it.²⁵ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?” (Lk 9:23-25 NLT).

The context here is that, Jesus was prophesying regarding His death and resurrection. As, Jesus’ death was going to be by the means of crucifixion, He used this as a graphic image of the death of the person wanting to follow Him. Although, we are unfamiliar with the process of crucifixion (other than what we read or Hollywood), we all still know that it was a gruesome and agonising death penalty. There are a number of things that stand out within these verses that Jesus Christ said regarding becoming a Christ-follower. For example,

- You must turn from your selfish ways: That is, learn to say no to self and self-interests, which can be demanding.
- You are to take up your cross: That is, you have picked it up once and for all time, and realise that daily you have already died to self. You are to be aware that you are carrying it on a continual basis. You are not the center of the universe, so it is not all about you.
- This initiates the continual life style of becoming a Christ-follower on the road that Jesus Christ is on, that is, the Kingdom of God road. In fact, this is a command that Jesus gave to follow Him. That is, this command is to be ongoing and there is not the option to wriggle or bail out as you see fit or get tired of following Him.
- Accept the death sentence, which was handed down to you. Specifically, you died, so, continue to declare that you are dead. Remember, that giving up on your self-life is for Jesus Christ’s sake not your own sake.
- Consequently, you can either live in the now in self-domination or die to self and save your life into the future. The choice has eternal consequences.

Jesus had already said that He was willing to lay His life down and would be raised again, (Lk 9:22). In light of this, He was requesting the same of anyone who will follow Him, but from an otherworldly perspective. Die to this world and live in His kingdom.

³ “History of Lent.” <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/history-of-lent.html> (23rd February 2016).

The second example is from Paul's letter to the local church in Rome. He continued to outline the cost of being a Christ-follower after the beginning of new life. So, Paul said,

¹ “And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all the instrumentality and aforementioned merciful things that He has done for you. Live as presented living and holy sacrifice that was made once and for all, the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him (This is your spiritual worship; or This is your reasonable service). ² Don't copy the outward behavior and customs of this world that does not come from within you, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:1-2 NLT).

Paul began this chapter by pleading with the Christ-followers to reflect intentionally on what he had said in the previous eleven chapters, as he has laid a historical and theological foundation in chapters 1-11. The context here is that Paul was building on what he had already taught about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He laid this foundation to be able to say what he said by way of application in chapters 12-16. There are a number of things that stand out within these verses that Paul said regarding becoming a Christ-follower. For example,

- Paul sincerely called attention to the truth that Christ-followers need to understand that, they had already given their physical bodies to God as a living and holy sacrifice.
- The word used here for the presented sacrifice of their bodies meant, they had already yielded up their bodies in Jesus Christ (who was the ultimate sacrifice). This took place the moment they were born again, but this yielding would still need to continue intentionally daily. This daily obedient yielding is due to the ongoing work of the Spirit of God in the life of the Christ-follower.
- Paul made it clear that, to yield their bodies was their acceptable and true way to worship God.
- Consequently, Paul commanded them to stop pretending to be something that they were not. Rather, they were to consider their renewed inner life in Jesus Christ. In other words, they were to grow up! Namely, they were to obey His leading and grow up into Christ. This was as His Spirit continually renewed them through the gradual metamorphosis.
- However, regardless of their perspective as Christ-followers they had been told to, “let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” In other words, if you are a Christ-follower, this process has already begun when you were first born again. Wonderfully, it is continuing and will do so until you pass from this life to the next.
- This change in thinking to think from a Kingdom of God perspective will prove and continue proving what God's good and pleasing and perfect will is for His church.

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. What did you give up for Lent?

Maybe a better question would be,

Q. What did you give up to become a Christ-follower?

Do you know that when you became a Christ-follower that you gave up everything? You actually gave up all your rights when you died and took up your cross to follow Jesus Christ moment by moment. It was on that day that, you ceased to exist as the old you and have any rights of your own. You died to your: self, traditions, goals, wishes, needs, ethics, desires, and future. In other words, the

old you does not have the right to exist anymore. It was on that day that ownership of you went to Jesus Christ. It was purchased through His sacrifice on the cross and sealed by His resurrection and sending of His down payment of His Holy Spirit into your life.

¹³ “And now you non-Jews have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom He promised long ago. ¹⁴ The Spirit is God’s guarantee that He will give us the inheritance He promised and that He has purchased us to be His own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify Him” (Eph 1:13-14 NLT)

Your heavenly Father does not want self-made people. He wants what is His purchased possession. He wants to give His own the inheritance that He promised. Why sell yourself short with your own self, traditions, goals, wishes, needs, ethics, desires, and future, when you can have the Father’s inheritance that He has for you.

To become a more Christ like in your daily life, you need to surrender your innermost thoughts and desires. You are part of a family, workplace, uni, school, local church, street, and club etc., what do you think about or desire for them? Let the Holy Spirit continue to transform you into a son or daughter that displays mercy and love, because that is what need to be on the inside. How is your heart, do you want to see God in a way that you never have before? It is important that you live and help others to live from the perspective that you have died to self and are being renewed by the work of God’s Spirit. The new life needs to touch and change everything right to the root of your being. So that your outward life is the true expression of what lies within you.

So, looking within yourself, to reveal what kind of person you really are and match it up with the life you are living outwardly. In all honestly, are you being forced to conform to this pattern of the age? Well then,

- Firstly, let Paul provoke you as a Christ-follower not to be conformed to adopt an outward appearance that does not reflect the renewing life of Jesus Christ within you, but instead be transformed
- Secondly, let Paul provoke you if you to live a life that reflects this life to those around you so that their transformative journey of renewing may begin