

FASTING

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The 40 days leading up to Easter, not counting Sundays, are called Lent. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday (this year February 18) and ends the day before Easter (April 4). Historically, Christians have used Lent to remember the 40 days and nights Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). So fasting has been the main thing believers do during Lent. Some traditions are more rigid about this than others. Many take little or no official notice of Lent at all. There's nothing wrong with observing Lent, but there's nothing wrong with ignoring it either. It is not commanded by God in the Bible.

When it comes to fasting it's important to remember that there's nothing meritorious about fasting. And there's nothing at all evil about food or the enjoyment of it. Fasting is done in order to express dependence on God and break our addiction to anything we trust in or rely on instead of Christ. It's a means of teaching ourselves to feed upon Jesus and find our all in him even when we're not fasting. Ultimately it's a way of humbling ourselves before God and seeking him as our hope and trust.

Food just happens to be one of many things we turn to for satisfaction. In finding satisfaction in food we may stop clinging to Jesus.

It's no accident that Jesus frequently compared himself to food. He called himself the bread of life (John 6:35). He said for us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, figuratively of course (John 6:53). He said that he would give us food that endures to eternal life (John 6:27). Many of his miracles involved food (changing water into wine, feeding the 5,000, feeding the 4,000, etc.). So I think fasting is a great way to remind ourselves that Christ is our true meat and drink.

But there are lots of other things we might abstain from that have as much if not more of a grip on our affections. In fact, I'd say that for some people fasting from food is way too easy. What about cell phone use? Some people are addicted to their smartphone. It would be quite a step for some of us to leave our phone at home for a day. My cell phone is an idol if I use it to rely on other people to give me what only God can supply. Many people get a rush from continually texting or talking to other people on the phone. It also cheats us out of enjoying silence and solitude.

What about answering emails? For me, giving a quick answer to someone's email is often a way to establish my own righteousness. And what about Facebook? Looking to anything besides Jesus to give us that ultimate sense of value and worth is idolatry. Maybe a way to put that idol in its place is to visit Facebook just (gasp!) once a day or something like that. The point is, there are lots of things out there that compete with Christ for first place in our hearts. Food is one. What is it for you? Maybe Lent would be a good time to put it in its place.