

The feast rituals are helpful reminders

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By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—Although believers should regularly reflect upon the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is the time of the year when we practice rituals that remind us of those powerful events.

As you know, rituals are a part of a religion. Some people define religion as having the following five characteristics: (1) belief in a deity, (2) a doctrine (accepted teaching) of salvation, (3) a code of conduct, (4) the use of sacred stories and (5) religious rituals (acts and ceremonies).

We are aware that rituals should not be done in an effort to impress other people and should not be done as an effort to earn salvation.

But rituals are helpful reminders.

In the writings of the Law, God told Moses that fringes in the borders of the garments of the people could remind them about His commandments (Numbers 15:37-41).

Yet we see that rituals can become sin.

When Jesus condemned some of the actions of the Pharisees, He mentioned their rituals of phylacteries and of the borders of their garments (Matthew 23:5).

God's rituals should be a combination of form and substance. The apostle Paul warned believers against having a form of godliness without the power of God (2 Timothy 3:5).

Not as many

Although the Church of God practices some rituals, I believe that the Church of God has fewer rituals than most of the religions of the world.

Some religions have pilgrimages as a ritual. Pilgrimages are journeys to the sites of holy objects or to places credited with miraculous healing powers.

For instance, Hindus consider the waters of the Ganges River in India to be sacred. Every year millions of Hindus purify their bodies by bathing in the river, especially at the holy city of Varanasi.

Also, one of the five pillars of Islam is the hajj. Muslims are expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca (the birthplace of Muhammad) once in a lifetime.

Some religions have prayer and fasting as rituals.

Prayer and fasting are two of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims are expected to pray five times a day while facing Mecca. Also, they are expected to fast between dawn and dusk during the month of Ramadan.

Roman Catholics have a system of prayer that includes rosaries and recited prayers. Roman Catholics have a system of fasting during the 40 days of Lent.

Suffering and death

Members of the Church of God have rituals as well.

At the annual commemoration of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ (which some call the New Testament Passover and others call the Lord's Supper), believers participate in foot-washing and partake of unleavened bread and wine.

People partake of these three rituals in remembrance of Jesus Christ. If a believer partakes of these rituals in form only, he is merely imitating the religion of the Pharisees that Jesus condemned near the end of His physical life.

The foot-washing helps us remember the general approach of our Savior. The bread and the wine help us to remember the suffering and death of the Christ.

His resurrection

While we should have great respect for the suffering and death of the Christ, we must also have a great appreciation for God raising Him from the dead.

The message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a foundational concept in the gospel message of the apostles. Take some time and read the following speeches.

- Notice what Peter said when God gave His Spirit to the Jews (Acts 2:14-36).
- Check out what Peter said when he and John healed a lame man in the temple (Acts 3:12-26).
- Remember what Peter said when God gave His Spirit to the gentiles (Acts 10:34-43).
- See what Paul said in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:16-41).

Do you have any rituals that help you remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Have you ever considered using the Days of Unleavened Bread to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ? If the New Testament Passover/Lord's Supper commemorates the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, the Days of Unleavened Bread can commemorate God raising Him from the tomb.

Many believers appreciate the biblical rituals of bread and wine helping them to focus upon “the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Philippians 3:10).

Many believers appreciate the biblical rituals associated with the Days of Unleavened Bread helping them (see the same verse) to focus upon “the power of His resurrection.”