

PARENT QUESTION

TOUGH QUESTIONS – WEEK 9

IF JESUS WAS JEWISH, ARE WE CONSIDERED JEWISH, TOO?

This week youth will ask you, “If Jesus was Jewish, are we considered Jewish, too?” Remember, if they don’t ask you, you should ask them. The lesson that will be covered answers this question, “How are we ‘related’ to Jesus in the family of God?” In that lesson we will discuss Galatians 3:26 – 4:7, which reveals that we have been adopted into the Family of God as His children, giving us as believers the legal spiritual standing in His family as God’s heirs. The question asked of you is very much related, and the notes below should help you explain it.¹

A quick answer to the question is that no, we are not Jewish just because we are Christians. This topic, though, could be related to either religion (Jewish faith) or nationality (Jewish ethnicity), and that’s how it will be broken down.

JEWISH FAITH

The early Christians did not see themselves as separate from the Jewish faith. After all, Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament Law. They continued worshipping in the temple (Acts 2:46). Eventually persecution from the Jewish religious leaders and further understanding of what Christ did for them allowed these believers to see that Old Testament sacrifices were not necessary. They would have remained very much Jewish, however, because that was how they were raised.

When salvation was first documented among the Gentiles (non-Jewish people), the Jewish Christians had to figure out what that meant – could they be saved and where did Jewish faith tradition come into play (Acts 10:43; 11:18)? The Apostle Paul’s letters and missionary journeys reveal that he was not concerned with the Gentiles adopting Jewish faith practices. Actually, he tended to stress the opposite. The reason was that it was easy for the Gentiles to get confused into a works-based mentality for salvation. The book of Galatians is actually a warning from Paul for those Gentile believers to not get circumcised. Some Jews were pressuring them to do this in order to be “real” Christians. Paul told them that if they were to get circumcised to be

¹ This might go deeper than students really care, but it is worth noting that this question touches on two opposing beliefs, dispensationalism and covenant theology. The notes above are general enough to apply to either view, but deeper, spin-off questions might enter this territory. In a nutshell, dispensationalism sees the church as spiritual recipients of Israel’s promises. Covenant theology views the church and Israel as one people, with only separate covenants distinguishing them. To study this further, read this online article: <http://www.gotquestions.org/covenant-theology.html>. It explains both sides pretty well and has follow-up links to dig even deeper.

like their Jewish counterparts, then Christ's sacrifice would be of no value to them (See Galatians 5:1-6 for a summary).

JEWISH ETHNICITY

We also do not become Israelites in race through salvation. We do receive their spiritual promises, however, and Romans 4:13-25 reveals that we become spiritually part of God's chosen people, calling believers Abraham's descendants through faith. Again, this is spiritual participation children of faith, which means we do not physically become Jewish in our ethnicity.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Is it wrong to celebrate Jewish customs? Arguably, no. Jesus Himself appeared to have celebrated Hanukkah (John 10:22-23).² He also celebrated in the Passover (John 13:1) during the Last Supper. Some Christians celebrate Passover each year, and in it they find spiritual significance to the rituals of the meal that point to Jesus' death and resurrection.

It would probably not be a good idea to observe Jewish sacrifices, especially because they could lead to faulty thinking of a works-based salvation, just as Paul warned many times. However, it is important to understand the significance behind all of the Jewish faith, because it is the foundation for our Christian faith. In a very real sense, the two cannot be separated. That is why Christians have the Old Testament in their Bibles. God has entwined the two parts of His Word together, Old and New, making them tied to each other. A tremendous amount of truth and significance would be lost if Christians were to reject the Old Testament.

As believers we are not Jewish, but our spiritual heritage, our roots, go all the way back to Abraham as our spiritual father (see above "Jewish Ethnicity" section).

² While John records Jesus as being present at the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah), he does not clarify that Jesus was celebrating it. He probably was observing the holiday, however. It is also worth noting that this festival was not a Scripturally mandated celebration for Jews, but an additional national celebration.