

# Valentine's Day And Real Love

by Staff

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How can we say, "I love you"? Let me count the ways!

On their wedding anniversary, a husband might give his wife a nice card and a gift, perhaps some flowers and maybe even a romantic dinner at an upscale restaurant. He is saying, "I love you"!

On Father's Day, his wife might give him a card and a gift. She is telling him that she loves him!

But our society, urged on by the greetings card industry and other merchants, tries to tell us that it is not enough for family members to declare their love for each other on anniversaries, Mother's and Father's Days. You must do it all over again—on Saint Valentine's Day!

But God's people say, "No!" The members of God's church do not keep Saint Valentine's Day. Why not? With a little tongue-in-cheek humor, let's search out the reasons by answering five questions one by one.

## **Question 1: *Who was Saint Valentine?***

"Valentine" was apparently a very popular name among the so-called saints of yesteryear, as history records a considerable number by that name! The most famous "Valentines," however, were two martyrs whose festivals both fall on February 14. That's right, there were two Saint Valentines! Most people never realized that!

One was a Roman priest. The other was the Bishop of Terni, a town in central Italy. Apparently, these two men had quite a lot in common: They lived at the same time, around the second half of the third century AD; died on the same day; and are supposedly buried on the same street, the Via Flamminia. No one knows why they were not buried in a cemetery like civilized saints!

Except for the setting of their feast day, the historical record gives absolutely no indication at all why either of these men are connected with love and romance. That is as it should be—as long as they were behaving themselves as all priests and bishops are supposed to!

This, in a nutshell, is about all we know about the two Saint Valentines. Not much, is it?

## **Question 2: *What are the real origins of the celebration of this day?***

As far back as documented history goes, we can trace the celebration back to two ancient Roman fertility festivals: a lesser-known one on February 13 called the "Faunalia," in honor of the god Faunus, and the better-known one on February 15 called the "Lupercalia," honoring the god Lupercus. The Romans considered Faunus and Lupercus to be closely related, and some historians even think they are one and the same god, named differently by ancient Italians living in different regions.

The main center of the ancient Lupercalia celebrations was the cave of the Lupercal, on the Palatine Hill in Rome, where Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome, were supposedly nursed and brought up by a she-wolf. The Greek word for "wolf" is "lukos," and the Latin name for the gray wolf is "canis lupus," hence the terms "Lupercal," "Lupercus" and "Lupercalia." Some traditions even say that Romulus and Remus actually instituted the feast of Lupercalia.

Space restrictions forbid going into the details of all the strange rituals that were performed at the Lupercalia, but a few are worth mentioning. One ritual had two young priests running almost naked (this is in mid-February, remember!) around the old city walls, slapping any bystanders they met with thongs cut from animals that had been sacrificed earlier. A smack from one of these thongs was supposed to cure sterility.

Another rite was a purification ceremony held during the Lupercalia at which Roman women were purified by the priests of Pan Lyceus. Please refrain from asking for the details of how this happened! Suffice it to say it should not be repeated in mixed company!

### **Question 3: *How did the Lupercalia transform into Valentine's Day?***

The feast of Lupercalia was very important to the Romans, and the feast of Faunalia to other Italians. It is regarded as the oldest of the Roman festivals and, along with the Saturnalia, was among the most important. The significance of this festival is borne out by the fact that the primary function of two of the most prominent families of the ancient Roman nobility, the Fabius and Quinctilius families, was to organize the annual Lupercalia festivities.

A modern parallel of this would be if a nation's President or Prime Minister were to dedicate two of his top cabinet officials and their entire staffs to the organization of the annual Saint Valentine's Day celebrations! Sound ridiculous? Nevertheless, that is how important the ancient Romans thought the Lupercalia was.

Lupercalia was firmly entrenched in Roman life, surviving even the arrival of Christianity in Rome. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states, "The annual celebration of the Lupercalia went on until AD 494, when it was changed by Pope Gelasius I into . . . the feast of the Purification."

Remember that a major ritual during the Lupercalia was the purification of the Roman women by the priests of Pan Lyceus. Now a pope substitutes his interpretation of God's post-pregnancy purification ceremony as a direct replacement for a heathen one!

The Roman Church originally held the feast of the Purification on February 14, forty days after the Epiphany (January 6), and the Armenian church still keeps it on that date. Later, it was changed to February 2, forty days after Christmas (December 25), and the empty day on the calendar was filled, apparently arbitrarily, with the dedication of February 14 to the two Saint Valentines (or should that be "Saints Valentine"?).

As an aside, in the Roman church virtually every day is a feast day in memory of one "saint" or another. Emperor Justinian established February 2 as the feast of the Purification in AD 542, and today some call it "Candlemas." It may be significant—and it seems too much of a coincidence not to be—that February 2 is also a very prominent day for those who practice witchcraft around the world.

**Question 4: *What does God think about it?***

God warns His people literally hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testaments to stick to His ways, His laws and His feasts, and to stay away from the pagan ways of the surrounding world. Here are just a few of these:

Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. You shall make no molded gods for yourselves. (Exodus 34:12-17)

Then, right after this instruction, God commands His people to keep *His* feasts: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (verse 18), the weekly Sabbath (verse 21), Pentecost and the fall feasts (verse 22). Now notice Numbers 25:1-3:

Then Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

The Bible is full of warnings for God's children to stick to His ways and to avoid pagan ways like the plague. Just look up all the scriptures containing the word "gods." Warning: There are hundreds of them! But probably no scripture in the whole Word of God puts it better than Deuteronomy 12:29-32:

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you have displaced them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise." You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

**Question 5: *What should we do about it?***

The Scriptures, even the few verses we have included here, are quite clear that we in God's church should not be keeping Saint Valentine's Day. It is an ancient pagan festival covered with a very thin "Christian" veneer. The alternatives are also made quite clear. We must keep God's holy days, and we should keep them with joy and zeal.

God gave the ancient Israelites the authority and the responsibility to go into their new homeland and to tear down all the places of pagan worship. He, of course, has not given us that authority and responsibility. We must make the best of living in the middle of all of this thinly disguised paganism!

For most adults in God's church, Valentine's Day celebrations present few problems. In the unlikely event that you receive an invitation to a Valentine's party, a simple "No, thank you" usually suffices. To avoid getting into a major—and probably unnecessary discussion—plan in advance a couple of good reasons (true ones, of course!) why you cannot attend.

The ones who have the most problems with avoiding Valentine's Day celebrations are our children, particularly the younger ones. High-school-aged children should be able to do their own advance preparations as the adults do. Most teens have been through it often enough to know what to expect and how to avoid it, but we cannot expect our younger children to handle it on their own. They need help, parents!

Warning: Please do not rely on that 10-minute chat you had last August or September with your child's new teacher, during which you told her all about the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, Halloween, Christmas, New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Easter and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Take some extra time shortly before Valentine's Day to drop by the school to have a friendly talk with the teacher (or teachers, as may be the case).

If you definitely cannot get to the school to see the teachers in person, write a friendly little note of explanation to each of them and send it along with the children. Remember to be nice! It is not the teacher's fault that the school's curriculum is built around the world's celebrations and holidays. Remember also that they have not been given to understand these things as we have. It was not that long ago that we, too, were "in the dark" on these matters!

### **Love for God**

Most importantly, how can we tell God we love Him if we compromise with His instruction and observe this day, especially considering our understanding of its origins? He specifically commands:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (I John 2:15-17)

We can be glad that God has freed us from the modern versions of the old pagan holidays. Paul reminds us, "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier" (II Timothy 2:4). As we take care not to entangle ourselves in the affairs and holidays of this world, we can instead focus our thoughts on God's true holy days and appreciate how their observance gives us a unique understanding of God's plan for both us and the rest of mankind.

This should make us realize how much He has given us, motivating us to keep His true Sabbaths and holy days more effectively and appreciatively. So how can we show God we truly love Him? His Word in I John 2:3, 5 tells us, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. . . . Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him." And that love is *real* love!