

Should we celebrate pagan holidays made Christian? 1 of 2

Hi all,

Easter, Christmas, Halloween, and we might add Valentine's Day, are all formerly pagan holidays made 'Christian' to one degree or another by the Roman Catholic Church centuries ago. To what degree if any, should we partake?

Did Paul deal with such issues? What can we glean from the writings of the New Testament?

First, a little history

I think it is common knowledge that Jesus was born in the autumn or spring. I've written previously proving that from scripture and history. And I think we understand that Mary and the other women were not looking for Easter eggs when they went to the cemetery that Sunday morning so long ago.

Most also realize Halloween had pagan roots, generally believed to be Celtic, that were 'Christianized' over the centuries by various Roman Catholic edicts and practices.

Valentine's Day had no romantic element until the 'Father of English literature', Chaucer, wrote a poem in the 1300's about Valentine's Day. Many trace its roots to the Roman pagan festival of Lupercalia which was held February 15, where young men were said to select women to go off together and....well, you know.

In ancient Greece birthdays were celebrated by making a round cake and putting candles on it. Birthday's were celebrated to honor Artemis, goddess of the moon (Diana was the Roman equivalent, see Acts 19:24-35). The cake was round like the moon, and candles were lit as an offering. Then the one celebrating would say a silent prayer to Artemis/Diana and blow the candles out, believing the smoke carried their prayer up to the (moon) goddess.

The question therefore is....

Just on the basis of principle: Are any of us worshipping the gods or goddesses of ancient people when we wish someone a happy birthday? When granny makes a wish and blows out the 93 candles on her birthday cake, or the 2 year old does the same, are they saying a prayer to the moon goddess?

By taking our special person to dinner on February 14 and expressing our love or friendship, are we worshipping a fertility goddess? Does something which started as a pagan symbol like a Christmas tree mean we endorse the pagan German god Oden by decorating a tree in our home? By giving gifts are we automatically worshipping or honoring the Roman god Mithra's birthday on December 25?

Is it possible to honor the Lord and each other without linking our heart and actions to some ancient practice of pagans from 1,000 years ago?

By letting our children or grandchildren hunt Easter eggs are we endorsing the pagan goddesses of fertility? At what point if any, may we allow the ancient customs of pagans that have since passed into meaningless history, into our modern lives? Can we separate pagan history from our hearts and modern practice?

Is our hypocrisy exposed if we blow out the candles on our cake or attend a birthday party honoring a loved one where they blow out candles, while at the same time we refuse to celebrate Christmas?

Perhaps honoring someone on their birthday, or celebrating the Lord's birthday doesn't mean we endorse or agree with the pagan roots of such holidays. Maybe we are honoring the Lord in our hearts and actions having not attached any pagan meaning to our celebrations.

Maybe it just means we are honoring the Lord's resurrection on Easter or His birth at Christmas - without any other attachments in our hearts. When some object with 'But He wasn't born on that day', I ask if they or anyone they know have ever had a birthday party on a day other than their actual

birthday? When they say yes, I ask if they honor themselves or another with a day of their choosing, why can they not honor their Lord with a specially chosen day for Him?

Opinion versus morally right

A moral absolute has no argument against it. It is wrong to murder, for instance. That isn't opinion, it's fact. Human life has value. Flowing from that are other truths; If it is wrong to murder because we honor man made in God's image and the life He gave them, then it is also wrong to dishonor those who gave us life in this world, our parents, and flowing still further, wrong to steal, lust, covet, lie to someone. We honor life and those truths are absolute.

An opinion however is defined as: "A belief or conclusion held with confidence, but not supported by fact or personally witnessed evidence, or a personal judgement made about a person or thing."

An opinion has no absolute. It is up to each person to control their emotions and thoughts when it comes to the life of others. Paul wrote in II Corinthians 10:4-6, v5: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion that raises itself against the knowledge of God, and take our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ." (ESV)

We get angry at someone because they are doing something we don't agree with. We get hurt or read hurt into something someone says contrary to our opinion. We hear or read thus and so, so we connect dots that are not there to come to yet another opinion that only makes us more angry.

We get angry or hurt because they believe differently than we do about....fill in the blank...politics, elections, color of the church carpet, what a person watches on tv or movies, what kind of house they live in, what they wear...and on and on it goes. We form an opinion, someone goes against it, we get angry or hurt or break fellowship feeling fully justified because they hold or do something we don't agree with.

The reasons are varied which open us to a life of forming strong strong opinions: They are overbearing like my mom was. They are controlling like my old boss. The yell like by uncle did to me that hurt me so deeply. They are like the old pastor who....and on it goes. To grow in Christ we must not justify our opinion based on our own past experiences, but just on the merits of the issue at hand. Separate conclusions drawn from the facts. Just the facts.

And none of that is based on absolute moral truth. It's just what we believe. Truly, when that happens, our issue is with our Lord, not the other person. It is up to us to hold no opinion to the extent that opinion would cause strife or separation with the other person.

James would later write in 3:14: "When you have envy or strife in your hearts, don't be happy in that, don't lie against the truth." In other words, you know what the Word says, don't lie against what you know by your actions and opinions justifying your strife/division - you know the truth, admit it and get your heart right.

These verses tell us that the knowledge of God stops our opinions, and we are to adjust our opinions when they differ from what the absolutes of scripture and our Lord teach us.

On a practical level though, when we keep our opinions to ourselves, what do we do when we celebrate Christmas but a friend or family member doesn't? If we don't celebrate Christmas but we need to go to Christmas parties and dinners? What if the kids want to hunt eggs but we want to emphasize the Lord's resurrection? How do we walk in love in these things? How do we keep our opinions to ourselves so that we don't sin, yet don't honor some demon from an ancient pagan celebration? And how should we advise friends who ask what to do?

Next week some practical answers on how to walk this out...until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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Should we celebrate pagan holidays made Christian? 2 of 2

Hi all,

Picking up where we left off, asking: Should we celebrate former pagan holidays turned Christian?

How do we walk it out when holidays come and we hold one opinion and someone we love believes something else? In the US we have an expression of 'taking the high road', which means refraining from that which could cause strife, for the sake of the moment. It means to walk in love and overlook differences for the sake of the relationship. Wow, that's being a Christian! It's so crazy it might just work!

Go to the Christmas party for 2 hours and honor your boss or relative, you aren't endorsing Christmas if you don't believe in it; you're endorsing your relationship with the other person or people. Be the bigger person. People confuse love. They don't realize loving a person isn't an endorsement of them or their lifestyle, it's just loving them because God created them.

Is your cause righteous?

In Romans 14 Paul confronts the opinions in the local church. Remember, like everyone from Acts through The Revelation, they all met in homes. Paul is writing to people meeting in homes for 'church'. But some had strong opinions about how those who sat across from them in some 'living room'. "I don't agree with..." echos from the pages of Romans 14.

"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to the point of argument." Right there in v1 Paul enters the arena of the opinion. He says talk about your differences, but not to the point of argument. He is making a distinction between the absolute moral truth and the personally held opinions of those involved. Opinions must be brought into obedience of Christ. How is that done?

The issues were three:

Some said to eat only vegetables and they don't agree with those who eat meat. Some chose one day of the week as the day to worship, and they didn't agree with anyone else. The third issue was wine, mentioned just once here, in v21. Some said it was okay to drink wine, some said it wasn't. These same issues were covered in I Corinthians 8 and 10. Some connected to idol worship, some connected to Jewish Sabbaths and diets, some just personal choice.

Through v10 he tells them each one of us is a servant of the Lord, and He accepts us both, no matter our opinion on special days or our diets. He asks: Why are you judging another man's servant? Ouch. The other person is the Lord's servant, and if He accepts them, then it is none of our business. If He wants them to change, then He will deal with them, it isn't any of our business. That's between them and the Lord.

He also says if a person celebrates a day on which to worship, they do so unto the Lord. For the person who has no particular day that is special, that too is unto the Lord. Don't judge another man's servant.

In Colossians 2:10-23 Paul tells of the complete work of Jesus on the cross, and how we are complete in Him. Then he says 'Therefore don't let anyone judge you about food or drink or sabbath days...' Why? Because you are complete in Christ. It's that simple. To me, every day is a special day to worship Him. To me, every bite of food is special because it was given by Him. I'm complete in Him, so I have the freedom to worship on any day I want, and the freedom to eat or not eat what I want. I live life from the position of having already won, for Christ is in me. Wow.

Christmas? Easter?

Don't miss the point. Paul said it isn't anyone's business when it comes to personal opinion. He told those in Romans 14 to 'be fully persuaded in your own mind' - we should not act as defender nor evangelist for our particular opinion. The other person lives and dies for Christ. We do too. So it isn't our business.

Years ago I heard Kenneth E. Hagin tell of how some man in his church criticized his wife's hat. KEH told him something along the lines of 'Mind your own business, she dresses for herself and me, not for you.' lol.

It really is that simple. This principle if understood, will set a person on the path of bringing opinions into the obedience of Christ in every area of life. You can say "I would do things differently" or "I don't believe like that" and then let it stand at that. That means your opinions never get to the point of strife or division in your heart.

So what if there are things in their life you don't agree with? So what if they handled things differently than you expected or wanted? When we form opinions and others don't agree with our opinions, we have a choice. When we discover the Word says here and elsewhere to not judge someone else's servant, we must command our emotions and thoughts into obedience of Christ. When Jesus said first remove the log from our eyes before picking out the splinter in some else's eyes, He actually meant living like that. It means disciplining the thoughts and feelings.

If a family member or friend has a Christmas tree up, you don't have to show your disgust or disapproval, nor shun them. They celebrate Christmas with all the trimmings unto the Lord, or because it is just tradition, and you don't celebrate Christmas unto the Lord - so you're equal. Grow up and learn to live in peace with each other.

If someone wants the kids to hunt Easter eggs they aren't worshipping a pagan goddess, they are just having fun and not even thinking of some pagan from 1,000 years ago. They are just coloring eggs which actually goes back 1,000 years when the Eastern Church colored eggs red to remind them of new life in Christ and His blood shed for them.

Building on these things:

Paul said to make allowances one for another in Ephesians 4:2 and Colossians 3:13. The word translated 'forbear' or 'make allowances' means 'to endure, put up with, make allowance for, patience with, fortitude and persistence with'. How many Christians exhibit that towards one another? Towards a church?

Aren't Christians notorious for church hopping or online, criticizing or unsubscribing or talking against someone who believes differently than they? Hasn't Covid and the US elections demonstrated the immaturity of many believers in this area of character?

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11 was about some of the 'white collar' believers not wanting to have the meal where they celebrated the Lord's Supper with the 'blue collar' believers. So they would eat at someone's home before and even get drunk, before joining the rest for the meeting. Paul told them because of their prejudice they had not rightly discerned the body of Christ and it had affected their immune systems (as we would put it today), and many were 'weak and sickly among you and many have even died early'.

In 11:19 he told them this prejudice revealed those who were mature and complete and who were immature. That's a good lesson for today's world. When you see a person forming opinions and withdrawing in strife or hurt, know in the big picture, this shows who is mature and walking in the things of God and who is not. The opportunity to grow is every event in life. If taken as a challenge where ego doesn't matter and only Christ does, we grow quickly.

On a practical level

Let me share something the Lord shared with my wife, Barb, years ago when our children were young and the issue of Halloween and costumes was a question we had to answer. We have lived since teens throwing our opinions against the wall of God's absolutes, and whatever falls off we let fall off, and we keep what sticks to His wall, if that makes sense. We might say that no matter what we believe, we want Him to have the final vote and correct us.

She was struggling with our boys wanting to dress up and get candy, but she couldn't quite put her finger on what marked Halloween with its modern celebration of all things evil and dark as different

from the other holidays with pagan roots. Then she had it: "The other holidays have successfully been made into celebrations of Christ, but Halloween never has. It remains a celebration of the devil and all that is evil and dark." and words to that effect.

We couldn't change national culture on Halloween, but we could and did affect our family and church culture. Kids playing dress up is neither here nor there, though we've stayed away from darker themes, and kids will always want candy. So we found different ways to celebrate life in Christ during Halloween - as harvest festivals celebrating people coming to the Lord in His harvest, giving thanks for bountiful crops from the garden, and other family and church oriented parties and celebrations.

Should we celebrate former pagan holidays made Christian?

That's an answer for each heart. I've learned that false religion hates freedom. It tries to put every element of life into a well defined order of behavior. Whether it be Old Testament sacrifices - if I did this then it's 2 pigeon doves and x shekels, or if I did that it's a goat and some grain to be offered - religion tries to define every possible action and consequence in life.

Grace is much harder than the Old Testament law. The law measured action but not the heart. Grace measures the heart, the Lord Himself in us, measuring and critiquing our thoughts and motives (Hebrews 4:12-13). Each of us is accountable to Him as a Person.

It has been observed we judge others by their actions but we judge ourselves by our intent. Walk in love. Refrain from forming opinions of things that are none of your business. It's easy once you get into the habit of catching yourself, realizing they answer to the Lord, not us... It sure takes the pressure and stress off...it's their story.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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