

Thursday, April 9, 2020 - Is Easter a Religious Celebration?

The question is often asked, "Have any big plans for Easter?" I never really give the subject a lot of thought. Our kids are grown so it's not like we hide easter eggs. I am both to old, and certainly don't need, to be given chocolate, though I wouldn't turn it down. However, many people, throughout the world, would normally be attending the "church of their choice" to remember the resurrection of Jesus. It wouldn't be the "normal service," but rather a "special service" focused on remembering the resurrection of our Lord that no doubt would include different plays, skits, and dramas. The world calls this day "Easter Sunday", the day our Lord was supposedly resurrected from the grave.

I don't recall reading anywhere in the Bible of a special celebration of the resurrection being mentioned. Yet, as with Christmas, many "good intentioned people", honestly believing that they are commemorating the resurrection of Christ, by celebrating this "holy day" when they have no biblical authority whatsoever for the practice. Because of tradition, most people today believe that Easter has always been observed from apostolic times and is authorized in the scriptures.

The word "Easter" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "Eostre," the name of the goddess of Spring. The celebration of Easter originally referred to this pagan goddess and the occasion, annually, when she was worshipped. The pagan feast occurred each year near the time of the Jewish Passover. Sacrifices were offered in her honor at the first full moon that came at the time of the vernal equinox. By the 8th century, the term came to be applied to the anniversary of Christ's resurrection. There has been much controversy about the time of this celebration. But as time passed an increasing number of people celebrated the anniversary of the resurrection on the first day of the week annually. By the 7th century the practice of religious groups had become universally uniform. The agreed upon time is now the first Sunday following the full moon that comes on or after the vernal equinox.

The Catholic Church, desiring to distinguish its annual commemoration of Christ's resurrection from the Jewish Passover, adopted the name of the pagan feast for its own use. The term "Easter," in the King James Version of the Bible (Acts 12:4), is a mistranslation. The Greek word is pascha, correctly rendered "Passover" in later translations. In fact, though pascha is found twenty-nine times in the Greek New Testament, it is only rendered "Easter" once, in the KJV.

When correctly translated "Passover" in Acts 12:4, and understood correctly, not one day but a number of days are meant. This refers not to Passover day, but to the whole celebration of Passover which lasted eight days." Incidentally, the reference to "Easter" in the KJV or "Passover" when correctly translated had no reference to any Christian activity. It was merely (1) a convenient reference to a particular time in the year, and (2) the Jewish feast days only after which Herod could proceed to execute another apostle without offending Jewish sensitivities; after all, the purpose of seizing Peter and planning his execution was for Herod to endear himself to the Jews.

Neither the feast known popularly as "Easter" nor the name "Easter" itself is biblically authorized. That is, the Bible does not prescribe an annual commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ. Rather, the New Testament teaches that the first century church, which was led by inspired apostles, met on the Lord's Day (Sunday on our calendars), which occurs once weekly. On that day of the week, Christians are to meet for worship, to include singing, preaching, the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7) and the contribution (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

The focus of the Lord's Supper or communion, which should be observed each Sunday, is not the resurrection of Christ, but his suffering sacrifice for our sins on the cross. His Resurrection is understood to represent an assurance that we can have forgiveness from our sins. Paul contended: "If Christ hath not been raised, our faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). The reverse of the apostle's affirmation would be this: if Jesus was raised, sins will be forgiven when we obey the gospel (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

The Lord's church does not celebrate "Easter." Members of the Lord's church celebrate the death of Jesus Christ on the first day of every week as we are instructed in the New Testament. We can turn to the book of Acts and read: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7). We have an approved example from this text that lets every Christian know when one is to partake of the emblems which represent Christ's shed body for us. It says the first day of the week. It does not say "The first day of the week, once a year!"

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, we can further understand the significance of this memorial feast that we partake of weekly. We learn that it represents the body and blood of Jesus and it says: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." Again, how often should a Christian eat the bread and drink the cup? The first day of the week!

There are many religious denominations out there today that do not partake of the Lord's Supper once per week. Some will do it bi-monthly, others monthly, still others just once or twice per year. Any individual that is striving to do "all the oracles of God" (1 Pet 4:11), must understand that God sets the standard (rules) that we must go by today - not man (Acts 5:29). The New Testament is our standard. I urge you to examine the Bible, and then look at what you may be practicing in your religion, and then determine whether it is from God or from man.