

“EASTER – INDEED OF HEAVEN!”

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of those who slept.” I Corinthians 15:20

(This is a reprint of my response to an article attacking the celebration of Easter. I believe the comments are still relevant today)

A few years ago, the minister of a local Church of Christ congregation placed an article in the Thumb Blanket asking the question, “Easter – Of Heaven or Men?” The article, written by those who, ostensibly, want to “use the Bible as our only guide” and “be what Christ’s disciples were in the first century – just Christians,” shows a woeful misunderstanding of the Bible, of what empowered the first century Christians, and of history itself. There are so many errors in that article that I can only address a few of them here.

1. “Easter is an invention of man, it did not originate in the mind of God.” In the New Testament Church, and in a variety of liturgical churches today, every Sunday is considered “a little Easter.” The early Christians (including the Apostles) began worshipping on Sunday, “the first day of the week” (I Cor. 16:2) because it was “the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10).” Sunday was the day that Christ rose from the dead (John 20:1). Indeed, each Sunday they celebrated Holy Communion, in which they received with the bread and wine the true body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:26-28) and “do show the Lord’s death until He come (I Cor. 11:26).” But His death was observed in light of His resurrection. Indeed, the Lord’s sacrifice and death make sense only through His resurrection. And since Christ’s resurrection was a necessary part of His saving work, Easter was “in the mind of God.”

2. “One has to go outside the Bible . . . to find how and when to observe Easter.” The first Easter took place during the Jewish observance of Passover. The Bible speaks of when Passover is to be observed and, in the New Testament, we see the four Gospels spending much time dealing with Jesus’ Passover observance, His instituting the sacrament of Holy Communion, His crucifixion, death and resurrection. The time of Easter is rooted in history and the Scriptures, because it is connected to the time when Passover is observed. There is no mystery here. As Christianity spread, and because Bibles were not readily available to all, the “Church Year” was developed to recount those important events in the life of Christ so that the people could be taught what the Scriptures said on a regular basis. So, each year many Christians observe the birth of Christ (Christmas), His crucifixion (Good Friday), His resurrection (Easter), His return to His throne of glory (Ascension), the giving of the Holy Ghost (Pentecost), among others. These observances were aids, not hindrances, to keeping people in God’s Word.

3. “Jesus instructed first century Christians not to celebrate His resurrection, but His death.” Is the whole Bible, or only parts of it, God’s inspired, inerrant Word? The whole Bible is, of course, therefore the full picture of our hope and joy is found as you study all Scripture, and not just parts to grind a particular axe. Several times Jesus speaks of His impending death and resurrection. St. Paul spends a whole chapter (I Cor. 15) discussing the importance of Christ’s resurrection (“if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.”). In His comforting words to Martha in John 11, Jesus did not say, “I am the death and the Life,” but “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” The idea promoted by the C of C that the early Christians would not celebrate such an important event as Christ’s resurrection in some regular, formal, notable way is mind-boggling and shows no understanding of how God’s people worshipped in the Bible.

Now, if the C of C’s beef is with the way the culture celebrates Easter, with eggs, chocolate bunnies and the misbegotten emphasis on shopping, then I would agree. Those things hardly inspire reverence at the death of the Son of God, or devotion and awe at the miracle of His resurrection. But, when they condemn Christians who mark Easter in praise and thanksgiving for Christ’s resurrection, then I must protest vigorously.

Christ’s death on the cross is the atoning sacrifice for the world’s sin (I John 2:2). We do preach “Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2).” If Jesus, the Son of God, did not die on the cross bearing our sins upon Himself, we would still be under God’s judgment. But, if Christ was not raised from death, we would,

as the Bible says, still be dead in our trespasses and sins (I Cor. 15:16 and Ephesians 2:1).

You cannot separate the cross from the empty tomb. And to condemn the celebration of Christ's resurrection is to condemn God's plan for our salvation. We have, in light of the Gospel of Christ, the freedom to observe, or not observe, such things as are edifying for the people of God. There is no sin either way. But to condemn as sin that which God does not is the grossest form of Pharisaism and is proclaiming a "different gospel, which is no gospel at all (Galatians 1:7)."

If the members of the C of C truly seek to be just like "the disciples were in the first century," then they will need to get rid of all their Bibles (for the average Christian did not possess one). Most first century Christians never saw or heard much of the New Testament, because the books were still being written up until the turn of the 1st century.

Also, no televisions or radios. No cars. No furnaces or air conditioning. No modern medical care. No books. No processed foods of any kind. No credit cards. No manufactured clothing. No, . . . well, you get the point. By worrying about whether it's "Christian" to observe Easter, the C of C misses the whole point of what a Christian is: one who has been redeemed by Christ, and who trusts in Him alone for salvation.

Christianity does not consist in whether or not one observes certain festivals (or whether or not they drink caffeinated beverages or alcohol, eat pork, dance, or smoke). It consists of Jesus Christ, "who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4:24)."

Now, honestly, isn't that something worth celebrating?

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!