

A Better Easter

Introduction. Although the word "Easter" can be found in a mistranslated passage of the King James Version, clearly there is no such annual observance in the New Testament by the apostles and early disciples.

The modern celebration of Easter is a combination of secular bunnies, eggs and chocolate with an often temporary and always misguided religious zeal. Easter does a disservice to the gospel because it drains away its daily glory in order to provide people an once-per-year outlet for their faith and hope. We are going to see how Easter would actually be more by being less.

I. *The History Of Easter*

A. It was learned from paganism, adopted by Catholicism, promoted by Protestantism.

1. One will find reference to Easter in the King James Version (Acts 12:4). Many Bibles contain a footnote which concedes that this is actually a reference in the Greek to the Jewish Passover, still commemorated while the temple yet stood in Jerusalem.
2. About the King James Version translation of Acts 12:4, Albert Barnes, a Presbyterian commentator, says, "There never was a more absurd, or unhappy translation than this. The original is simply 'after the Passover.' The word Easter now denotes the festival observed by many Christians in honor of the resurrection of the Savior. But the original has no reference to that, nor is there the slightest evidence that any such festival was observed at the time when this book was written. The translation is not only unhappy, as it does not convey at all the meaning of the original, but because it may contribute to foster an opinion that such a festival was observed in the time of the apostles."
3. Although many decades of church history are recorded in the Acts, there is not one legitimate reference to Easter because Easter was not derived from the will of Christ in the New Testament, nor from apostolic tradition, nor even an overt attempt by Christians to modernize their worship.

B. The commemoration of Ishtar.

1. One of the most beloved pagan holidays commemorated the goddess Ishtar with a 40-day period of fasting, followed by a grand feast. Ishtar, or Ashtoreth, was the mother goddess and wife of Baal whom the idolatrous Canaanites introduced to the Jews (Judges 2:11-15).
2. Paul S. Taylor wrote, "The Mother goddess was frequently worshipped as the goddess of fertility -- and as a sort of Mother Nature and goddess of Spring and sexual love and birth. She was

- also worshipped as a mediator between god and man. Sexual orgies and temple prostitutes were often used in her worship and in attempting to gain her favor.”
3. Rather than cast off this bit of paganism entirely, it was sanctified by the state church and altered to celebrate Christ at the same time, and in A.D. 325 the council of Nice decided when Easter should be celebrated.
 4. Israel could never seem to shake her weakness for the idols of Canaan (1 Kings 11:29-33), and the danger of Easter is that people will continue to cling to remnants of paganism, or at the very least, the delusion that they can legislate for God and presumptuously add their own will to His.
- C. We can plainly do better than this, and do so within the authority of God’s word.

II. **A Better Easter**

- A. A better Lent.
1. We can have a better Lent by having no Lent at all, for Lent is another concentrated but temporary effort at diligence, leaving the other 325 days of the year free for sin.
 - a) The very foundation of Lent is unbiblical and in violation of scripture (1 Timothy 4:1-5).
 - b) Whether meatless Friday is year-round or only for six weeks, it conflicts with the Holy Spirit’s vision for the church (Colossians 2:16-23).
 2. Abstaining from something harmless might give the appearance of willpower, spiritual determination and self-imposed religion, but it is powerless against the real and permanent force of temptation.
 3. Abstinence from sin for a few weeks a year does not make up for months and months of indulgence.
 4. The Lenten attitude needs to be permanently applied only to sin and not just to habits or harmless joys (Romans 13:11-14; Colossians 3:8-10).
- B. A better commemoration.
1. Today, many so-called Christians will acknowledge Christ for the first time in a year, and many for the last, and that is wicked and ungrateful.
 2. We can have a better celebration by observing the Lord’s death in the way that Jesus indicated and the apostles exemplified (Luke 22:14-22).
 3. Unlike the Passover feast that they consumed that day, the communion supper was not intended to fill the belly, but the heart.

- a) The bread was to commemorate His body, which was about to be tortured and killed (1 Peter 2:21-25).
 - b) The cup was to commemorate the blood He would shed on the cross for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 9:11-15).
4. As soon as the church was established on the day of Pentecost, a Sunday less than two months after Christ's crucifixion, the metaphorical "breaking of bread" was observed (Acts 2:40-42).
- a) Each Sunday immediately became a day of worship for the disciples, so that we find them gathering with purpose on that day to have fellowship with one another and their Savior (Acts 20:7).
 - b) By inspiration, Paul deeded every Sunday to Jesus and only the ungrateful would insist that He accept but two percent of them instead (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
- C. A better imitation.
- 1. Some have gathered today at sunrise or will watch Easter plays in order to witness some pale imitation of the resurrection, but we can do better than that, for the New Testament shows that each Christian's baptism is a recognition of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:1-5).
 - 2. Sadly, though, this is the very element of the resurrection story that most want to remove because it is messy and time-consuming, but it is clearly a scriptural and therefore better resurrection imitation (Colossians 2:11-13). It is also better because it is intended to last beyond lunch (Colossians 3:1-4)!
 - 3. It is connected to a bodily resurrection that exists between our life and death here on Earth and our hope of reaching Heaven (1 Corinthians 6:14).
- D. A better dedication.
- 1. For some, Easter Sunday will be a day of dedication -- of joining a denomination or committing to greater faithfulness.
 - 2. But this better dedication can begin with a commitment to obeying God's will (Matthew 15:1-9). It must always be emphasized that the kingdom of heaven requires true dedication (Matthew 13:44-46; Romans 6:13, 16, 19).

Conclusion. While you may read in your Bible the mention of "Easter," you do not find that the Bible tells us to observe this "holy day" in memory of the resurrection of Christ. It is human in origin and constitutes a change in the gospel; it is not in the teachings of inspired men. If we abide in His teaching, we have fellowship with Him and the Father. But if we do not abide in His teaching, we do not have that fellowship (2 John 9). Galatians 1:6-9 says that those who preach a different gospel are accursed.

The Lord's day is special because it is different from other days of the week. This is not a day for serving ourselves. The activities of this day are to honor the Lord, and we are to treat this day different than the rest of the world. May God help us to better appreciate that the first day of the week is truly the Lord's "holy day." If you appreciated the commemoration of the death of our Lord with His supper, come back next Sunday and remember that this is to be done every Lord's day.

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