

# Festival Days or so-called Holy Days

*“Ye observe days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:10,11)*

**C**HURCH of Scotland, First Book of Discipline, 1560:

“By the contrary doctrine, we understand whatsoever men, by laws, councils, or constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God’s Word; such as .... keeping of holy days... as the feasts (as they term them) of Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, of Christmass, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady. Which things, because in God’s Scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from the realm; affirming farther, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the Civil magistrate.”

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland - subscribed by John Knox, John Craig, James Melville, and a host of others, A Letter to the Very Eminent Servant of Christ, Master Theodore Beza, the Most Learned and Vigilant Pastor of the Genevan Church, 1566:

“This one thing, however, we can scarcely refrain from mentioning, with regard to what is written in the 24th chapter of the aforesaid Confession [Second Helvetic] concerning the “festival of our Lord’s nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension, and sending the Holy Ghost upon his disciples,” that these festivals at the present time obtain no place among us; for we dare not religiously

celebrate any other feast-day than what the divine oracles have prescribed.”

Edmund Calamy, a Westminster divine, An Indictment Against England Because of her Selfe-Murdering Divisions, 1645:

“This day is the day which is commonly called The Feast of Christ’s Nativity, or Christmas day: a day that hath been heretofore much abused to superstition and prophaneness. It is not easy to reckon whether the superstition hath been greater, or the prophaneness. I have known some that have preferred Christmas day before the Lord’s Day, and have cried down the Lord’s Day, and cried up Christmas day...The necessity of the times are great. Never more need of prayer and fasting. The Lord give us grace to be humbled in this day of humiliation for all our own, and England’s sins; and especially for the old superstition, and profanation of this feast: always remembering upon such days as these, Isaiah 22:12-14.”

Increase Mather, Nonconformist Minister, New England, Testimony Against Prophane Customs, 1687:

“It is not a work but a word makes one day more holy than another. There is no day of the week, but some eminent work of God has been done therein; but it does not therefore follow that every day must be kept as a Sabbath. The Lord Christ has appointed the first day of the week to be perpetually observed in remembrance of his resurrection and redemption. If more days than that had been needful, he would have appointed more. It is a deep reflection on the wisdom of Christ, to say, He has not appointed days enough for his own honour, but he must be beholding to men for their additions. The Old

Waldenses witnessed against the observing of any holidays, besides that which God in his Word hath instituted. Calvin, Luther, Danaeus, Bucer, Farel, Viret, and other great Reformers, have wished that the observation of all holidays, except the Lord's Day, were abolished. A Popish writer complains that the Puritans in England were of the same mind. So was John Huss and Jerome of Prague long ago. And the Belgic Churches in their Synod, Anno 1578. The Apostle condemns the observation of Jewish festivals in these days of the New Testament, Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16. Much less may Christians state other days in their room... All stated holidays of man's inventing, are breaches of the Second and of the Fourth Commandment. A stated religious festival is a part of instituted worship. Therefore it is not in the power of men, but God only, to make a day holy."

Thomas Ridgley, Independent Minister, A Discourse concerning the origin and Superstitious Observance of Religious Festivals, 1718:

"If it be enquired when our Saviour's Birthday was first observed, it may easily be proved, that 'twas not known in the three first centuries; and in the fourth, when 'twas first observed, 'twas on the 6th January, which day was first called Epiphany, to signify the appearance of God in our nature."

John Willison, Minister of the Church of Scotland, An Example of Plain Catechising, Upon the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, 1737

"Q. Hath God appointed any other set times to be kept holy to the Lord, besides the Sabbath?

A. None but the Jewish festivals or ceremonial sabbaths, which being only shadows of things to come, they expired with Christ's coming; but the command for the weekly sabbath being moral, it continues still in force, Col. 2:16,17; Gal. 4:9-11; 1 Cor. 16:1,2.

Q. Are we bound to keep the holy-days observed

by others, such as days for Christ's birth, passion and ascension; days dedicated to angels, as Michaelmas; to the virgin Mary, as Candlemas; besides many others dedicated to the apostles and other saints?

A. Though it be pretended that these days serve to promote piety and devotion, yet we have no warrant from God to observe any of them; nay, it appears to be unlawful to do it: for firstly, God doth quarrel men for using any device of their own for promoting his service or worship, without having his command or warrant for it, as in Deut. 12:32; Isa. 1:12; Jer. 7:30. Secondly, the apostle Paul doth expressly condemn the Galatians for observing such holy days, Gal. 4:10,11. Thirdly, It is a disparaging of the Lord's day which God hath appointed, and a usurping of his legislative power, for men to set days of their appointing on a level with his day, as the institutors do, by hindering people to labour thereupon. Fourthly, It is an idolatrous practice to consecrate days to the honour of saints and angels, for commemorating their acts, and publishing their praise; such honour and worship being due to God alone.

Q. Were not these days appointed by the ancient church, and authorized by great and holy men?

A. It was will-worship in them, seeing they had no power to institute holy-days: for, 1st, Under the law, when ceremonies and festivals were in use, the church appointed none of them, but God himself. 2ndly, We read nothing of the apostles appointing or observing such holy-days; not a word of their consecrating a day for Christ's birth, his passion, or ascension; nor a day to Stephen the proto-martyr, nor to James, whom Herod killed with the sword. We read of the apostles observing the Lord's Day, and keeping it holy, but not of any other. 3rdly, These other days are left unrecorded, and uncertain, and so are concealed like the body of Moses, that men might not be tempted to abuse them to superstition. 4thly, These days have not the divine blessing upon them; for they are the occasions of much looseness

and immorality. 5thly, Though the observing of these days had been indifferent or lawful at first, yet the defiling of them with superstition and intemperance should make all forbear them.”

John Brown, of Haddington, Secession Minister and Professor, *An Essay Towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism*, 1758:

“Q. May the church appoint holy days, to remember Christ’s birth, death, temptation, ascension, &c.?”

A. No; as God hath abolished the Jewish holy days of his own appointment, so he hath given no warrant to the church to appoint any: but hath commanded us to labour six days, except when Providence calls us to humiliation or thanksgiving; and expressly forbids us to observe holy days of men’s appointment, Col. 2:16; Gal. 4:10,11.

Q. What is the difference between a fast day and a holy day?

A. The day of a fast is changeable, and esteemed no better in itself than another day; but a holy day is fixed to a certain time of the week, year, or moon, and reckoned better in itself.”

Abraham Anderson, Minister and Professor of the Associate Presbyterian Church, *Lectures on Theology*, 1851:

“Q. Is it innocent and allowable to observe the Passover, (or Easter), the Pentecost, or the Nativity of our Saviour, (Christmas) . . . ?

A. No; Not even when the observance is left optional with the people; because, (1.) The Passover and the Pentecost are, by the introduction of the new dispensation, laid aside, as typical observances. (2.) The observance of them was partly in accommodation to the early Jewish believers, partly to please pagans with outward parade of worship, in compensation for the loss of their heathen

observances, and partly by a declining church, that wished to substitute outward worship for that which is spiritual. (3.) There is no need of them in order to promote religion. The observance of them is will-worship, and will tend to the decline of religion. (4.) Christmas, or the Nativity, is unauthorized. The time is utterly unknown, being left in impenetrable darkness by the Holy Spirit in the divine records; and no doubt this was done because the knowledge of it was unnecessary, and in order to repress will-worship. In a word, while fast-days are appointed on account of the duty to be performed, in set days, or periodical days, the duty is observed on account of the day; and therefore the day must be of divine appointment, or it is sinful.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Minister of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 24th December, 1871:

“We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas: first, because we do not believe in the mass at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or in English; and, secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Saviour; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority.”

Robert Nevin, Minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Editor of the *Covenanter Magazine*, *Misunderstood Scriptures*, 1893:

“[T]hose who quote those portions of Scripture in opposition to the idea of a divine obligation on Christians to observe the Sabbath are found for the most part, in one section of the Church, and as members or dignitaries therein they are very far from being consistent. Their reasoning on behalf of their theory and their practice are diametrically opposed. If the Apostle Paul were permitted to

revisit earth, we might imagine him addressing them somewhat after the following manner:--'Ye men of a half-reformed Church, ye observe days and times. Ye have a whole calendar of so-called saints' days. Ye observe a Holy Thursday and a Good Friday. Ye have a time called Easter, and a season called Lent, about which some of you make no small stir. Ye have a day regarded especially holy, named Christmas, observed at a manifestly wrong season of the year, and notoriously grafted on an old Pagan festival. And all this while many of you refuse to acknowledge the continued obligation of the Fourth Commandment. I am afraid of you, lest the instruction contained in my epistle, as well as in other parts of Scripture, has been bestowed upon you in vain.'

John M'Donald, a Minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, *Romanism Analysed in the Light of Scripture, Reason, and History*, 1894:

“Q. 49. What are some of the festival seasons of the Church of Rome?”

A. They are very numerous; among them the following are the most prominent:-- Christmas, Lady Day, Lent, Easter, and the Feast of the Assumption.

Q. 50. What is the meaning of Christmas?

A. It is a festival held on the 25th of December, in honour of the birth of Christ. On this day three Masses are performed: one at midnight, one at daybreak, and one in the morning.

Q. 51. When was this festival introduced?

A. The spurious decretals attributed its institution to Telesphorus, Bishop of Rome, in the first half of the second century; but the Fathers of the first three centuries make no mention of it.

Q. 52. What is its most probable origin?

A. That it was not Christian is manifest from the fact that the day on which the feast is observed could

not have been the day of Christ's birth, inasmuch as from December to February is the cold and rainy season in Palestine, when the shepherds could not have been "keeping watch over their flocks by night." The festival is to be traced partly to the tendency in the fourth century to multiply such seasons, and, by introducing a festival for each period in Christ's life, to complete "the Christian year," and partly to the growing tendency in the church to conciliate the heathen by adopting their religious customs.

Q. 53. Are there any features in the Christmas festival that point to a Pagan origin?

A. There are several: the name, the time of its observance, and the ceremonies associated with it.

Q. 54. Explain these features in detail.

A. The name "Yule Day," given to Christmas, is Pagan. According to some the word Yule is derived from huel, a wheel, and was meant to designate the Pagan sun feast in commemoration of the turn of the sun and the lengthening of the day. According to others it was the Chaldee name for "infant," and was meant to designate the feast in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian Queen of Heaven. The time indicates a Pagan origin, for it was at the time of the winter solstice that the Pagan festival just referred to was celebrated. The ceremonies of the "Drunken festival" of Babylon have their counterpart in the wassail bowl and the revels that in all Popish countries have been characteristic of Christmas.

Q. 55. Is this festival warranted in Scripture?

A. No. The Scriptures are silent regarding the day and month of Christ's birth, and it is admitted by the best writers that the precise day cannot now be ascertained from any source. Christ commanded His disciples to commemorate His death, but He gave no command concerning His birth."

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church

in the United States, Southern Presbyterians, Deliverance on Christmas and Easter, 1899:

“There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holy days, rather the contrary (see Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-21), and such observance is contrary to the principles of the Reformed Faith, conducive to will worship, and not in harmony with the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

John Murray, Professor at Westminster Seminary,

Letter to Valerie Knowlton, Dec. 24, 1958,” in Collected Writings, Vol. 3, 1958:

“Here I am alone in the library and apparently everyone has gone from Machen Hall until Friday morning. Now it is 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday. You may think this dismal. Well, I love it. It is a delightful change from the usual stir. I have had two good days in the Library. Monday was taken up with committee meetings, forenoon and afternoon. I hope to be here all day tomorrow. I have not even accepted a dinner engagement for what they call ‘Christmas.’ I hate the whole business.”