

EASTER SUNDAY SPECIAL

Christ's Death And Resurrection And High Church Observances Of The Easter Season (Colossians 2:12-22; Romans 6:9-10; Hebrews 9:24-28; Ephesians 2:4-9)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Recently when I was visiting a doctor's office, the receptionist who attends a "high church" that practices Lent and who knows I am a minister, presuming I knew about the subject, asked me, "Why aren't there 40 days in Lent this year between Ash Wednesday and Good Friday? Now I can't end my Lenten fast until after Easter!"

I replied that our Church did not observe Lent, so I did not know what to tell her! Her question was "a wake up call" for me, so I researched the subject on the Internet and learned that Christianity Today, a magazine influenced by Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a major evangelical seminary, had an article on its site (christianitytoday.com, "Lent -- Why Bother?" 2/10/2010) that suggested "why Christians should care about Lent."

I have also heard that a number of area evangelical churches dabble in Lent, so I checked a local evangelical church's web site to find it had a "Holy Week" schedule including the observance of a Passover Seder in the Church.

Unsettled over all of this, I then found the "Pastoral Statement On Penance And Abstinence" on usccb.org, the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops site that claimed "Lent" is "the principal season of penance." I knew one of the sacraments of the Catholic Church by which one is held to gain salvation is penance, so I realized Catholics observe Lent as one of the works by which they seek to enter heaven! However, I also knew they observe other sacraments during Lent, including the Eucharist, or the Mass, where Jesus' suffering on the cross is allegedly re-created.

I also found another Roman Catholic web site (catholicphilly.com) that had posted Navar Watson's article, "Lenten observance becoming more widespread in Protestant Churches" (Catholic News Service, 2/13/2014), and it told how "(m)any Protestants . . . have . . . adopted . . . the predominantly Catholic tradition of Lent" and "some call this a step toward convergence in the global church."

This all left me wondering if evangelicals in their fascination with Lent might be unwittingly warming up to the view that salvation is by faith plus works instead of the historical Protestant faith of justification by faith alone, that such a shift in belief is heading them in the direction of the converging ecumenical world church!

Accordingly, since it has huge ramifications on what we are to believe and practice, not to mention the whole direction of our Church, today, Easter Sunday, as we customarily focus on the resurrection of Christ, we need to recall what the Bible teaches on His resurrection that applies to "high church" Easter Season observances of all kinds!

Need: *So we ask, "What does the Bible teach on Christ's resurrection re: all Easter Season observances?"*

- I. Colossians 2:12-17 teaches that SINCE Christ DIED and ROSE again, those who believe in Him are liberated from observing "high church" Lent and Holy Week as well as the Hebrew Passover Seder:**
 - A. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that "(t)he entire period of Lent . . . is observed as a time of penitence" (The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1986, p. 346), and that penance is a "sacrament" (Ibid., p. 466) that produces "sanctifying grace" unto the salvation of one's soul, Ibid., p. 534.
 - B. However, Colossians 2:12-13 claims that those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior (John 3:16) are positionally risen with Him from the dead, resulting in God's having forgiven them all of their trespasses.
 - C. Consequently, since Christ's death on the cross canceled the debt of sin every sinner owed to God in that Jesus made full payment of that debt on the cross (Colossians 2:14-15; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Col. 2:14), the believer is to let no man judge him regarding what he ate or drank or regarding the observance of holy days, new moons or sabbaths, Colossians 2:16-17. These days were required of God Himself under the Mosaic Law, but now no such requirements of God's original Mosaic Law are applicable to Christians today!
 - D. Thus, those who trust in Christ are liberated from observing Lent, Holy Week and the Hebrew Passover Seder!
- II. Colossians 2:12-21 teaches that SINCE Christ DIED and ROSE again, those who believe in Him are liberated from observing "high church" religious fasts, man-made rules and rituals of every religion:**
 - A. Some evangelicals fast during Lent, and the Catholic Church teaches: "During Lent, for 40 days, excluding Sundays, fasting is recommended for all Catholics according to the laws of fast," Ibid., The Cath. Enc., p. 346.
 - B. Also, many rules and rituals govern observances of Holy Week that starts on Palm Sunday, Ibid., p. 270-271.
 - C. Yet, Colossians 2:12-13, 20-22 claims that since those who trust in Christ as their Savior (John 3:16) are positionally risen with Him, they are not to be subject to fasts, ordinances, rules and rituals that are established by men outside of Scripture and hence outside of God's authority. This directive applies to man-made fasts, ordinances, rules and rituals of every religion, be it of Christendom, of Judaism or of any other religion.

III. Romans 6:9-10 with Hebrews 9:24-28 teach that SINCE Christ DIED and ROSE again, those who trust in Him are liberated from observing the "high church" Eucharist, often called the Mass:

- A. On the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church teaches the "Eucharist" is a "sacramental sacrifice . . . wherein the body and blood of Christ" is "the same offering that took place on the cross," and that the "bread and wine . . . are the permanent sacrament" of "sanctifying grace" for salvation, *Ibid.*, The Catholic Ency., p. 197.
- B. On the other hand, the Lutheran and Protestant "high church" view holds the elements are "the veritable body and . . . blood of Christ in and with the bread and wine, although the elements do not cease to be material," so that partaking of the elements is "a means of salvation," A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 1970, p. 968.
- C. However, Romans 6:9-10 claims that "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin **once**: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."
- D. One may then ask if Jesus only **suffers without dying** each time the Eucharist is observed, but Hebrews 9:24-28 teaches that He **suffered once** in the **sacrifice of Himself** in **contrast** to the Old Testament priest's entering into the holy place "**every year** with blood of others," Heb. 9:25-26. For this reason, Hebrews 9:27-28 reads: "And as it is appointed unto men **once** to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was **once** offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the **second** time without sin unto salvation."
- E. Thus, the **one** and **only** suffering and death of Jesus on the cross for sin so fully satisfied God's demand for the payment of sin that no repetition of that sacrifice is ever needed, a fact seen in the lasting nature of Christ's resurrection! This truth liberates believers from having to observe any "high church" Eucharist to be saved!

IV. Ephesians 2:4-9 teaches that SINCE Christ DIED and ROSE again, those who trust in Him are ALWAYS UNCONDITIONALLY liberated from observing "high church" sacraments and all meritorious works:

- A. The Roman Catholic Church claims there are seven sacraments to perform as necessary to "produce grace" unto salvation -- "baptism . . . Holy Eucharist . . . penance . . . matrimony . . . anointing of the sick [extreme unction] . . . confirmation . . . and holy orders," *Ibid.*, The Catholic Encyclopedia, p. 534 (brackets ours).
- B. All other religions outside of the Bible similarly teach meritorious human works are necessary for salvation.
- C. However, Ephesians 2:4-9 teaches that believers in Christ are liberated from all such "high church" sacraments and all other meritorious works of all religions at all times due to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:
 - 1. Paul wrote that God in His great love and mercy has positionally made believers in Christ alive together with Jesus in His resurrection, saving them by grace, that is, by His unmerited favor, Ephesians 2:4-5.
 - 2. Indeed, in God's estimation, we believers are already positionally raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavens in Christ Jesus for God to display "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" in the "coming ages" of eternity, Ephesians 2:6-7 ESV.
 - 3. Explaining how this has come to be, Paul added: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV)
 - 4. Thus, the believer's positional identification with Jesus' death and resurrection in God's view so fully saves him that no meritorious work by the believer can ever improve on his salvation status before God!
- D. Finally, Ephesians 2:8 reveals the believer's salvation is so secured by God that he **unconditionally** will **never LOSE** it: the Greek verb for "saved" here, *sesosmenoi*, is a perfect passive participle (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 667; The An. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 365), so it translates as "once-for-all-having-been-saved," meaning the believer is not only saved by God alone, but that this makes him unconditionally forever saved!

Lesson: *Jesus' death on the cross as seen in His lasting resurrection so fully, forever saves one who trusts in Him that he is forever free from all Easter Season "high church" observances and all meritorious works to be saved.*

Application: *(1) May we simply believe on Jesus Christ to be saved, John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9. (2) As believers, may we live free of the yoke of man-made bondage to perform works to try to please God to be saved, but rather serve Him in overflowing gratitude for the salvation we possess in Him, Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12-13.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

The great Baptist pastor in London, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in his "Sermon on Song of Solomon 1" delivered in 1886, said of Lent: "Come, then . . . put away the ashes! What if men call this season 'Lent'? We will keep no Lent tonight . . . Our Lord has risen from the dead and He is among us, and we will rejoice in Him!" (mereorthodoxy.com, Keith Miller, "Young, Restless, and Reformed Homeboys on Lenten Fasting," March 5, 2014)

This Easter Sunday as we recall Christ's resurrection, may we joyfully rest by faith alone in His finished work on the cross and so live as liberated from the bondage of all man-made beliefs, rituals and works!