

EASTER SUNDAY INTERLUDE
Living The Liberated Life Of Christ's Resurrection
(Colossians 2:13-3:4)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Today, Easter Sunday, we Christians historically rejoice in Christ's resurrection, but many in Christendom -- Roman Catholic, Protestant or evangelical -- bear heavy religious burdens due to the Easter Season itself:

(1) On Tuesday, a Catholic priest called Brad Davis' "The Talk of Connecticut" radio show, reminding him it was "Holy Week" and urging Catholics at least to observe the "holiest" day of the week, Maundy Thursday! The priest's concern arose from his belief that Jesus on that day at the Last Supper instituted the Mass, a sacrament of the Catholic Church, that he holds one must observe to be saved! (L. Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 168-195)

(2) However, the Easter Season brings many burdens for people in all realms of Christendom in the realm of observing holy days, diets, mystical contemplation and Easter Sunday traditions:

(a) Hans J. Hillerbrand's article on "Easter" in britannica.com (April 4, 2017) states, "Easter follows Lent, the period of 40 days (not counting Sundays) before Easter, which traditionally is observed by acts of penance and fasting. Easter is immediately preceded by Holy Week, which includes Maundy Thursday, the commemoration of Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples; Good Friday, the day of His Crucifixion, and Easter Saturday . . ."

(b) Chris Gehrz's article, "Baptist Stations of the cross" (pietistsschoolman.com) tells how at the Central Baptist Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, Baptists can practice what historically has been practiced in the Roman Catholic Church, that of mystical contemplations at the Stations of the Cross, 14 alleged stages in Christ's passion that end with His death where the devout pause in the church before 14 artistic presentations of these stages subjectively to contemplate in mysticism their meaning to gain merits or blessings for the soul.

(d) Even evangelicals can feel burdened by a host of usually innocent traditions regarding Easter that can carry even a religious obligation to them -- things like feeling pressured to host the extended family at the Easter Sunday dinner and serve them lamb or a pork roast or to buy chocolate bunnies for the children to hard boil and die eggs, etc.

Need: *So, we ask, "How does God want us to handle the religious burdens we face during the Easter Season?!"*

- I. God has given us NO actual SCRIPTURE DIRECTIVES regarding the EASTER SEASON ITSELF:**
- A. Only at Acts 12:4 in the KJV does any word having to do with Christendom's Easter Season appear, and that word is the term, "Easter" (James Strong, The Exhaust. Conc. of the Bible, n. d., p. 293).
 - B. It translates the Greek word *pascha*, what usually means "Passover" but in later Christian usage came to mean "the Easter festival," Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 638-639.
 - C. Yet, in Acts 12:4, the meaning of *pascha* can only mean the Jewish Passover due to the context where Herod was seeking to please the Jews by executing Peter after the Jewish *pascha* (Passover) had passed, Acts 12:1-5.
- II. However, God DOES instruct us in Colossians 2:13-3:4 on issues that APPLY to Christendom's Easter Season OBSERVANCES, and He does so in RELATION to CHRIST'S DEATH and RESURRECTION:**
- A. Paul taught that everyone who trusts in Christ as his Savior apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9) is positionally forgiven his sins and made alive together with Christ by way of His death and resurrection, Colossians 2:13.
 - B. This positional truth has **profound** applications to the burdensome requirements that are promoted in Easter Season observances in Christendom, Colossians 2:14-23 (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 678-679):
 - 1. The believer's position in Christ's death and resurrection removes him from the rule of the Law, Col. 2:14.
 - 2. The believer's position in Christ's death and resurrection removes him from the dominion of Satan who utilizes religious rules to put people under ungodly bondage, Colossians 2:15 (Ibid., p. 678):
 - a. The words "principalities and powers" (KJV) as in Ephesians 6:11-12 refer to demonic spirits. (Ibid.)
 - b. These demons "inspire legalistic rules about foods and festivals" (Ibid.), so the believer need not fear violating legalistic rules about such matters.
 - 3. Then, being free from the Law's jurisdiction and from Satan's dominion, the believer in Christ is removed from any obligation to heed any religious requirements of any religious entity in this world, Col. 2:16-23:
 - a. The believer is freed from all man-authored legalistic requirements, Col. 2:16-17: (1) He is freed from man-made regulations regarding food and drink (Col. 2:16a) as occurs with Lent or Easter Sunday diets for many evangelicals. (2) He is freed from man-made obligations to observe holydays (Col. 2:16b), meaning he is free from Lenten Season holy days all of the trappings often associated with it! (3) All the regulations in the Mosaic Law that provided God's requirements of observances as to days and diets were a

shadow of Christ Who was to come, but now that He has come and fulfilled the Law in His life and death, now that Christ is risen, the believer is to live in newness of life free from all such obligations, Col. 2:17!

- b. The believer is also freed from all man-authored mysticism, Col. 2:18-19: (1) Some heretics at Colossae promoted an artificial, subjective spirituality of false humility, the worship of angels and supposed visions, Col. 2:18 (Ibid., p. 678-679). (2) Paul countered that such parties failed to hold to Christ's Headship, from Whom the whole body of believers is spiritually nourished and united to grow by God's growth, Col. 2:19. This stance counters subjective mystical contemplations such as "practicing the Stations of the Cross."
 - c. The believer is also freed from all asceticism, abstaining from gratifying natural drives to gain holiness, Col. 2:20-23: (1) Paul in Colossians 2:21 NIV mentioned three general classes of restrictions in the Law ("Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!") to identify restrictions promoted in asceticism by which one inhibits the gratification of a natural drive out of guilt (Ibid., p. 679). He (2) claimed that if a believer is positionally dead with Christ from the basic principles of this world, he should not live subject to such ascetic rules in his positionally resurrected life in Christ, Col. 2:20. This stance counters all Lenten fast restrictions while also not condoning thereby the often gluttonous excesses of Mardi Gras. (3) The futility of these rules are noted as Paul claimed (a) they were man-made, not God's rules (Col. 2:22b), (b) they were destined to perish with use (Col. 2:22a) and (c) though they impressed others by outward appearance, they were of no value in restraining sensual indulgence (Col. 2:23 NIV), as seen in the rise of Mardi Gras!
- C. Accordingly, God wants us believers not only in the Easter Season, but at all times, to live in spiritual liberty. He wants us to focus on our position in our risen Savior, Jesus Christ Who is in heaven, to set our affection on Him, for in Him we have our life and hope of glory in the coming rapture of the Church, Colossians 3:1-4.

Lesson: *Due to his spiritual position in Christ in His death and resurrection, every believer is free from man-made legalism, mysticism and asceticism associated not only with the Easter Season, but with all times. He should set his affection on his positional resurrected status in Christ, His Head, his life and his access to future glorification.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ to be saved and be positionally spiritually identified with Him in His death and resurrection, John 3:16; Colossians 2:13. (2) May we then realize that this spiritual position totally liberates us from all man-made legalism, mysticism and asceticism, not only as it relates to Christendom's Easter Season, but to all religious observances at all times, that we live liberated lives, focusing on our union with our Risen Lord!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

The Lord led in making the lesson of this message applicable to us even as this sermon was being prepared.

Last Sunday night, two of our members and I marveled at how The New American Bible For Catholics, 1986, at Ephesians 2:8-9 in its footnote amazingly teaches "justification by grace through faith . . . not from works."

However, later I read a statement in this version's introduction by Pope Paul VI that cited the Second Vatican Council that had prescribed this version be "produced in cooperation with our separated brethren," namely, in cooperation with Protestants and evangelicals, "so that 'all Christians may be able to use' it!

That statement made me feel uneasy, and since I was preparing this morning's message out of Colossians 2, I checked this Bible's Colossians 2:16 footnote and found it claiming the holy day observances Paul taught there were no longer obligatory were "observances determined by religious powers associated with a calendar set by the heavenly bodies," Ibid., p. 1295. This claim allows for the Catholic Church to make Lenten Season leading up to Easter Sunday obligatory since its days were not determined by religious powers as set by the heavenly bodies.

However, this is not so! (1) Israel's holy days were determined by **God** (Ex. 12:1-2, monthly new moons; Lev. 23:1-44, all the other days), **not religious powers!** (2) Also, most were set **free** of the heavenly bodies: (a) Firstfruits came on the 2nd day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ryrie S. B., KJV, 1978, fn. to Lev. 23:10-14), (b) Pentecost came 50 days after that (Ibid., fn. to Lev. 23:15-23), (c) the Day of Atonement came on the 10th day of the 7th month (Lev. 23:26-32) and (d) "the seven-day week as a unit of time" with its Sabbath is "the only calendar unit that does not trace its origins to astronomy." (John Boslough, "The Enigma of Time," National Geographic, Mar. 1990, p. 127)

This ecumenical Bible had looked "evangelical" in the passage evangelicals would most likely first check -- at Ephesians 2:8-9 -- but it kept the door open at Colossians 2:16 to promote Catholic obligations to observe Lent!

So, to heed this sermon and let no man judge us re: holy days, diets, legalism in general, mystical or ascetic rules, instead of citing this ecumenical Bible as a positive resource, I will stick to the Bible's original language texts.

May we trust in Christ to be saved. Then, may we rely on the Holy Spirit to live FREE in our Risen Lord from all of the religious expectations that are set by any and all religious authorities of this world!