

Grace Evangelical Free Church
Issues & Answers: Holidays

We see the **Romans 1** downward spiral unfolding in our culture every day, including with respect to holidays and celebrations. I couldn't agree more as to the ungodly undermining of the concept of biblical celebration. In fact, the Bible nowhere instructs Christians to celebrate holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. This leads some to refrain from observing these celebratory days, even those considered uniquely Christian. However, the Bible does not speak against celebrating holidays either, but mentions several "celebrations" that the Israelites, as the people of God, faithfully and joyfully observed: Passover, Pentecost, Purim, New Moon, etc., celebrations which commemorated God's presence and provision for the whole believing community.

Of greater importance than whether or not a Christian celebrates holidays is how he or she glorifies the Lord in all activities (**1 Corinthians 10:31**). For example, Job's children celebrated birthdays (**Job 1:4**) which, in context, underscored Job's godly character. Thus, if a Christian hosts a birthday party, the party should glorify the Lord; sinful behavior should not be part of a birthday celebration – or any celebration, but in this example should concentrate on a child as a gift of God (**Psalms 127:3**) through whom the generations may be blessed.

As to true, biblical celebration, here are points to consider:

1. God loves celebrations. Solomon confirms that there are times to laugh and dance, to harvest, and to enjoy love and peace (**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**).
2. Based on biblical precedents, we should make a joyful noise when celebrating God's goodness (**Psalms 150**). After all, we read that ritual trumpets proclaimed the onset of feasts and festivals as well as wars (**Numbers 10:1-10**). Israel - and King David - encouraged worship in dance and singing, playing instruments of percussion, string, and wood (**1 Samuel 21:11; 29:5; 2 Samuel 6:14; Psalms 87:7; 150:3-4**). Paul encourages songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. Throughout eternity, we will worship and celebrate God's beauty, purity, and goodness.
3. Gladness was God's gift to humanity. **Ecclesiastes 3:13** affirms "**that each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil - this is the gift of God.**" Solomon encouraged a joyful attitude toward life because every part of life - eating, drinking,

work, and relationships - could be pleasurable with God's approval (**Ecclesiastes 9:7-10**). Israel assumed that their worship included joyful celebration (**Isaiah 30:29**).

4. God instituted celebrations that would tie families and communities together in recognition of His supremacy. Celebrations were multi-generational affairs (**Psalm 145:3-7**). God expected cheerful participation by natives and foreigners of all generations, regardless of social or financial status (**Deuteronomy 16:11, 15**). They were often accompanied by music and dancing (**2 Chronicles 23:13**). Special foods were prepared and eaten and wines drunk (**Nehemiah 8:10, 12**).

In short, Christians celebrate all stages of life, knowing God is at the center of all that is good. We mark milestones and events, acknowledging that every day and every gift comes from God's good hand. God is surely pleased when we come together in His name to acknowledge Him as the Center of our human experience. This being the case, we would not wish to offend God therefore, as it relates to any celebration, we should consider:

1. Does the holiday in any way promote false doctrine or immorality (**Galatians 5:19-23**)? There is a difference between a holiday devoid of goodness and one being robbed of it. The redeemed know the difference, unwilling to associate with ungodliness (**Proverbs 4:14**) as well as unwilling to cede anything, including a legitimate celebration, to mischaracterization by standing firm against such attempts (**Philippians 1:27**).
2. Can we thank God for what we observe on a holiday (**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**)? Demonstrating to our community that the 'good' which we are celebrating is actually a gift of the one true God (**James 1:17**) proves exactly what we are called to do. As many struggle to meet expectations including the number and worth of gifts, we provide testimony as to the Giver of everything good in the sense of what is transcendent, fulfilling and truly satisfying. We have traded self-centeredness and exhaustion for Christ-centeredness and peace.
3. Will celebrating the holiday detract from our Christian testimony / witness (**Philippians 2:15**)? Paul was specifically addressing the, "**crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.**" Whether we are lead to abstain or join in any celebration, both actions are undertaken with a witness in mind. Not calling attention to ourselves or our arbitrary likes or dislikes, but underscoring from a biblical perspective as to the appropriate or inappropriate nature of participation opens the door to conversation and ultimately our witness – a light in this culture's world.

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