

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

WHY DO PRESBYTERIANS NOT OBSERVE HOLY DAYS?

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"But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements wherunto ye desire again to be in bondage; ye observe days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."—Galatians iv. 9-11.

Surrounded by a variety of views and practice as we are, and in these days when there appears to be a prevailing disposition to depart the old and tried paths, it is well to be able to give a reason for our faith and practice. It is the duty, indeed, of all Christians not only "to sanctify the Lord God in their hearts," but also to "be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." The question is sometimes asked, Why do Presbyterians not observe holy days? Why do they not observe Christmas and Good Friday, and saints' and other days? We purpose to give, in answer to this question, the reasons which have hitherto been considered sufficient to induce them to disregard such days so far as any religious observance of them is concerned. It has always been held as reasonable and Scriptural to observe special days of fasting and thanksgiving, appointed by proper authority, as extraordinary dispensations of Divine Providence may direct. But care is to be taken in relation even to such days when they are made stated observances, recurring at stated times, whatever the aspect of Providence may be, lest formality and superstition be promoted rather than the edification of the body of Christ. Under the Gospel dispensation there is but one day commanded to be kept holy, namely, the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. With respect to all other days we remark, 1. There is no Scriptural warrant for their observance. The Word of God is our only rule of faith and practice. But does not the word Easter occur in Acts ii. 4? It does. This is one of those passages in which the proper translation of the original word was changed to suit certain views held by King James and the Court clergy. Any one at all acquainted with the original knows that it is the Passover that is meant. Nor does the observance of set days under the Old Testament dispensation make anything in favour of such days under this dispensation; for the peculiarities of that dispensation are no longer binding or even lawful. It would be just as reasonable on this ground to plead for the use of incense, burnt offerings, and the observance of the Passover. This is our first reason why we do not observe such days. 2. In the second place, we remark that the Scriptures, not only do not warrant the observance of such days, but they positively discountenance their observance. Very early in the history of the Christian Church did professing Christians, who may have been sincere and earnest men, try to bring in not only error in doctrine, but, also, error in practice, and insist upon the observance of the set days, and times and seasons of a former dispensation. They went so far as to say, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved." But what stronger condemnation of the observance of such days and set times than that contained in our text, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain?" And he asks, with apparent emphasis, "Now that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, wherunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" The same erroneous tendency and practice he had occasion strongly to condemn in the church at Colosse; as we see from his letter to the Colossians ii. 16, 20, 23: "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." "Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world (or past dispensation) why as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances after the commandments of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." The observance of holy days and other things after the commandments of men have indeed a "show of wisdom in will-worship."

But we know who has said, "In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." 3. In the third place, the origin of most, if not all of them, and of their introduction into the Christian Church, has always been regarded by Presbyterians, hitherto, as positively against their observance. Most, if not all of them, have had either a Jewish or Pagan origin, and their observance was introduced by mere human policy or expediency. As there was no day except the Sabbath observed during the Apostolic age, and no hint that any other should be observed, and the observance of any other condemned, so there is no evidence from authentic history that the observance of any such days was introduced till about the end of the second century when the celebration of Easter gave rise to a bitter controversy which rent the Christian Church. "The festival of Easter," says Dr. Miller, "no doubt was introduced in the second century in place of the Passover, and in accommodation to the same Jewish prejudice which had said, even during the Apostolic age, 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.' Hence it was generally called pascha and pasch, in conformity with the name of the Jewish festival whose place it took. It seems to have received the title of Easter in Great Britain from the circumstance that when Christianity was introduced into that country, a great Pagan festival, celebrated at the same season of the year, in honour of the Pagan goddess Eastre, yielded its place to the Christian festival, which received, substantially, the name of the Pagan deity. The title of Easter, it is believed, is seldom used but by Britons and their descendants. This festival is evidently Jewish in its origin and Pagan in its name. Although it is wholly uncertain on what particular day our Lord Jesus Christ was born, and pretty certain that it could not have been on the 25th day of December, yet there is no holy day observed in some quarters with more interest and zeal. There is not a month in the year in which a day has not been thought of as the day of Christ's nativity. No hint is given us in all the New Testament that such day should be observed, or that it is even desirable that such a day should be observed. The Word of God is as silent as the grave on this point. And may we not fairly conclude from this that it was not the mind of Christ that any such day should be observed? Or have some of His professed followers become wiser and more considerate of the Church's interests than the Master himself? Or how has it come to pass that this day is so observed as it is? Its very name should be sufficient to indicate this, and sufficient to prevent Protestants, at least, from regarding it religiously. Christ-mas—a mass in honour of Christ. "Its real origin," says Dr. Miller, "was this. Like many other observances, it was borrowed from the heathen. The well known Pagan festival among the Romans, distinguished by the title of Saturnalia, was instituted in honour of their fabled deity Saturn, was celebrated by them with the greatest splendour, extravagance, and debauchery. It was, during its continuance, a season of freedom and equality; the master ceased to rule, and the slave to obey; the former waiting at his own table upon the latter, and submitting to the suspension of all order, and the reign of universal frolic. The ceremonial of this festival was opened on the 19th of December by lighting a profusion of waxen candles in the temple of Saturn and by suspending in their temple and in all their habitations boughs of laurel and various kinds of evergreen. The Christian Church, seeing the unhappy moral influence of this festival, perceiving their own members too often partaking in its licentiousness, and desirous, if possible, of effecting its abolition, appointed a festival in honour of her Master's birth, nearly about the same time, for the purpose of superseding it. In doing this, the policy was to retain as many of those habits which had prevailed in the Saturnalia as could in any way be reconciled with the purity of Christianity. They made their new festival, therefore, a season of relaxation and mirth, of cheerful visiting, and mutual presents. They lighted candles in their places of worship, and adorned them with a profusion of evergreen boughs. Thus did the Romish Church borrow from the Pagans some of their most prominent observances." Other accompaniments of Christmas, which are still observed shew still further its Pagan origin. The Christmas tree was common both in Pagan Rome and Pagan Egypt. In Egypt it was the palm tree, in Rome it was the fir—the palm tree denoting the

Pagan Messiah, as Baal-Tammuz, and the fir referring to him as Baal-Berith. "In many countries," says Hislop in his work entitled "The Two Babylons," "the boar was sacrificed to the god, for the injury a boar was fabled to have done him. According to one version of the story of the death of Adonis or Tammuz, it was in consequence of a wound from the tusk of a boar that he died. Therefore, on Christmas day the Continental Saxons offered a boar in sacrifice to the Sun, to propitiate her for the loss of her beloved Adonis. Hence the boar's head is still a standing dish in England at the Christmas dinner, when the reason of it is long since forgotten. Yea, the Christmas goose and 'Yule cakes' were essential articles in the worship of the Babylonian Messiah as that worship was practised both in Egypt and in Rome." Thus it is evident that Christmas is Romish in its name, Pagan in its origin and many things accompanying it, and superstitious in its observance. The same might be shewn with respect to other holy days. But we proceed to remark: 4. In the fourth place, that if, on the ground of expediency, mere human wisdom, judgment or policy, one day may be observed no human authority can set limits to their introduction and observance in the Christian Church. If one, why not two, five, ten, fifty or a hundred? One man's taste, wisdom and judgment may be as good as those of another, and he has as good a right to have his taste gratified and his wisdom consulted, and his judgment carried out as another. And the taste and wisdom and judgment of the next generation may entirely differ from those of the present. And where would it end, and who can set limits to this thing when once we depart from the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice? "A small number," says Dr. Miller, "were at an early date brought into use by serious men, who thought they were thereby rendering God service and extending the reign of religion. But one after another was added, as superstition increased, until the calendar became burdened with between two and three hundred fasts and festivals, or saint's days, in each year, thus materially interfering with the claims of secular industry, and loading the worship of God with a mass of superstitious observances, equally unfriendly to the temporal and eternal interests of men. Let the principle once be admitted that stated days of religious observance, which God has nowhere commanded, may properly be introduced into the Christian ritual, and, by parity of reasoning, everyone who, from good motives, can effect the introduction of a new religious festival, is at liberty to do so. Upon this principle was built up the enormous mass of superstition which now distinguishes and corrupts the Romish Church." 5. We might further add, in the fifth place, to the reasons already given, that the observance of uncommanded holy days has been found to interfere with the due observance of the Lord's day. Where they are introduced men become more zealous for their observance than for that day of divine authority. This was the case among the Jews with respect to their own traditions and inventions. This is the case in all communities given to the observance of uncommanded rites and ceremonies and holy days. As early as the fifth century Augustine complained that the superstitious observance of uncommanded rites betrayed many into a spirit of irreverence and neglect towards those which were divinely appointed. This is largely the case among Romanists at the present day. Some, however, will tell us that the observance of holy days, devoted to the commemoration of great events in the history of the Church, has a tendency to increase the spirit of piety, and promote the spiritual interests of those who observe them. If this be so, then, might we not fairly expect to find the greatest Scriptural piety among those who most observe them? But is this the case? Do we really find the largest amount of real piety in the Churches in which there is the largest number of holy days and uncommanded rites and ceremonies? Most assuredly not. Such are the reasons, brethren, which led our forefathers to lay aside the observance of holy days; which have induced the Presbyterian Church from the Reformation to the present day to resist the introduction of their observance. Such reasons as these also influenced the Puritans of England in seeking the further reformation of the Church to specify, among other things to be laid aside, holy days. Such reasons as these led them and our forefathers to suffer privation and hardship, and imprisonment and death rather than conform to what was nowhere required in the