Should Christians Celebrate Birthdays?

Paper plates and party hats lay strewn across the kitchen table. Some plastic forks and a few napkins have ended up there also. A now-empty ice cream carton sits on the sink. On the table, crumbs on a large plate are all that remain of a chocolate cake. Eleven icing-stained, pastel-colored candles are stacked beside the cake plate.

In the living room, brightly colored wrapping paper lays crumpled on the floor amid several boxes of different sizes and shapes. New clothing is laying across a chair arm. In the chair sits a middle-aged woman wearing an exhausted smile as she watches her son and his friends through the window. Out in the street, the happy, excited cries of a dozen adolescents break the afternoon as they fight over who will have the next turn riding the new bicycle.

A joyous, harmless celebration? After all, it is only a child's birthday party. But would such a scene ever occur in the home of a member of the Church of God?

The Biblical Record

Search your Bible! It reveals God's attitude as opposed to your own human reason or some idea you have allowed Satan to pump into your mind. How many birthday celebrations do you find in God's Word? Only two.

At the first, an Egyptian pharaoh marked the day of his birth by hanging his chief baker (Gen. 40:20-22).

At the second, Herod granted the request of Herodias' daughter and had John the Baptist beheaded (Matt. 14:6-11).

The children of Job may have been holding birthday celebrations when they partied together, "And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them" (Job 1:4).

Notice how perfect, upright Job viewed these "harmless" celebrations and reacted to them: "And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, it may be my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (verse 5).

It was at one of these very feasts that, by God's express permission, Satan caused a blast of wind to flatten the house Job's children were in, killing all 10 of them (verses 18-19).

Job himself actually cursed his own birthday: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" (Job 3:1). Notice the record of the first century historian Josephus:

The Jews in Christ's day knew God's attitude toward birthday celebrations. "Nay, indeed, the law does not permit us to make festivals at the births of our children" (Flavius Josephus, Against Apion, Book II, section 29).

What about Christ's birthday?

But what about the most important holiday in traditional Christianity — Christmas — the celebration of the supposed "birthday" of Christ? Search your Bible again! You will find no mention of the exact date of Christ's birth anywhere in its pages — and no command from God Almighty to observe any such day. The traditional celebration of Dec. 25 does not come from the Bible, but from paganism, as any knowledgeable person must admit and any encyclopedia will show. (For more information, write for our free booklet, The Plain Truth About Christmas.)

The day of Jesus' birth is unknown. But the day of His death is known (Nisan 14, A.D. 31), and His true followers are commanded to observe that day annually in remembrance of Him.

Christ instructed His disciples to show His death by keeping the yearly Passover and partaking of the symbolic unleavened bread and wine (Luke 22:19-20). Paul shows that, just as the original Passover lamb was slain as a type, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Paul went on to explain the proper manner in which to annually observe the day our Savior died as our Passover lamb (verses 7-8).

But most of the world has utterly refused to keep the true Holy Days God ordained. The world has instead followed its own ideas, under Satan's deceptive influence, and produced the mishmash of confusing and conflicting religious beliefs we see around us today. (Write for our free booklet, Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days — Which?)

In response to man's Babylon of religious anarchy, God thunders: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. 1:14-15).

That's what God thinks of worldly customs and celebrations!

The Roman Calendar

We live in a world that is geared to the Roman calendar. We remember the dates of our births, pay our taxes and have our tombstones engraved

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with the day we die in accord with a
pagan system of calculating time.

"But isn't our Roman calendar of
Christian origin?" some in the world
might ask. "Doesn't it have the ap-
proval of almost all the Christian
sects?"

History answers: "Our [Roman] cal-
calendar is not Christian in origin. It
descends directly from the Egyp-
tians, who originated the 12-month
year, 365-day system. A pagan
Egyptian scientist, Sosigenes, sug-
gested this plan to the pagan emperor
Julius Caesar, who directed that it go
into effect throughout the Roman
Empire in 45 B.C. As adopted it indi-
cated its pagan origin by the names of
the months — called Janus, Maia,
Juno, etc.

"The days were not named but
numbered on a complicated system
involving Iedes, Nones and Calends. It
was not until A.D. 321 that the sev-
en-day-week feature was added when
the emperor Constantine adopted [a
false version of] Christianity. Oddly
enough, for his weekdays he chose
pagan names, which are still used" (Jour-
nal of Calendar Reform, Sep-

Men have even applied pagan
to the seven days of the week:
Sunday, Monday, Tiwday, Wod-
densday, Thursday, Friggaday and
Saturnday. The single designation
given in Scripture was the term
"Sabbath" to the seventh day of the
week; all others were called the first
day of the week, the second day of
the week, etc.

In this present world, we are obli-
gated to make use of the Roman cal-
calendar, but let's recognize it for what
it is. The very calendar the world usa
to celebrate its "birthdays" is erro-
neous to begin with!

Birthdays with God-given
calendar?

The calendar given by God to
Israel in the time of Moses was not at
all adapted to birthday celebrations.
Have you pitied (or perhaps envied?)
the individual who was born Feb. 29
and, technically, could receive gifts
and congratulations only once every
four years? This single irregularity
of the Roman calendar affects only
about one individual in every 1,461.
But the irregularities of the calendar
God gave would affect the birthday
observances of one person in every
right.

The calendar still in use by the
Jews is fundamentally the same one
God gave Moses for the children of
Israel. But why isn't this calendar
suitable for birthday observance?

The Roman calendar has a single
month, February, that varies in
length according to a simple one-
year-in-four pattern. God's sacred
calendar, committed to the Jews for
preservation to our time, has three
months that vary in length from 29 to
30 days after a rather complicated
pattern. Three times as many people
are affected.

A still greater deterrent to annual
birthday observance is the insertion of
a 13th month in the third, sixth,
eighth, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th
years of a 19-year time cycle. Im-
agine the confusion of attempting to
schedule birthday parties!

It is true that some Jewish people,
following pagan customs, attempt to
use this ancient calendar to observe
their birthdays. A rather intricate set
of human rules governs whether to
move the celebration ahead or back
one day, or back one month in the
absence of the 13th month. Different
regulations are applied and the prac-
tice is not uniformly followed by all.

What wisdom prompted God to
give mankind such a calendar?

It certainly discouraged the prac-
tice of observing birthdays and other
anniversaries. The net result was to
deprive mankind of the opportunity
to set aside birthdays. God's people
certainly knew the date of their
births, but they kept track of their ages
by calendar years, not birth
dates.

However, for those who under-
stood, the whole purpose of life was
to prepare and look forward to a new
birth — to a resurrection from the
dead.

The correct attitude

In this world, the day of a person's
birth is important. But the Bible
makes a seemingly cryptic statement
that "the day of death [is] better
than the day of one's birth" (Eccl.
7:1). How can this be?

Paul gives us the answer. Writing
near the time of his death, he said, "I
have fought a good fight [in over-
coming in this human life], I have
finished my course. I have kept the
faith: Henceforth there is laid up for
me a crown of righteousness, which
the Lord, the righteous judge, shall
give me at that day: and not to me
only, but unto all them also that love
his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7-8).

The day Paul began this life as a
baby could hardly be compared in
importance with the day he, at death,
made certain his reward by enduring
the problems and trials of a Christian
life to the end.

Job looked forward to the time of
his rebirth: "I know that my redeemer
[Christ] liveth, and that he shall stand
at the latter day upon the earth [referr-
ing to Christ at His Second Coming]:
And though after my skin worms
destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall
I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

Notice chapter 14, verses 14-15:
"If a man die, shall he live again? all
the days of my appointed time will I
wait, till my change come. Thou
shalt call, and I will answer thee [re-
refer to the time when Christ will
call, and all who are in their graves
will hear His voice and come forth in
a resurrection]: thou wilt have a
desire to the work of thine hands."

Instead of looking backward to a
physical birth into this temporary
life where we are composed of dust, Job
understood the true values of life and
looked forward to a rebirth into life
eternal as a spirit being and member
of the Family of God in the Kingdom
of God.

This is the event you should be
looking forward to as well. □