

ORIGINS OF THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

by Pastor Andy Thomas

The title of this paper is the subject of this examination. We are evaluating the reality of the yearly events, celebrations, holidays (i.e.: “Holy Days”) on the “Christian Calendar” that purport to be “Christian” or events, celebrations, feasts, holidays that Christians are supposed to observe or honor by attending services and/or performing certain observances and/or religious rituals, etc.

So we start out this paper with a Question: “**From a Biblical View, is there anything in the Bible that would even hint to the Christian that would cause this Calendar to exist or that was given to us by Jesus and/or any of his Apostles or that it can even be found in the Bible at all?**”

Then we ask another Question: “**Is this ‘Christian Calendar’ binding upon the New Testament, born again, disciple of Jesus Christ... that is, binding upon behavior, obedience, observance, etc.?**” (i.e.: “**Should a Christian follow or obey this Calendar... feel obligated to follow and/or obey its Calendar items?**”)

In this examination / evaluation, we will seek answers to these questions, as well as to seeking to find the origins of this “Christian Calendar” and its contents. There may be some that do not care about its origins, or for the findings of this investigation, but God certainly seems to imply greatly that we should. There are many commands, principles and clear warnings in the Bible we are to pay careful attention to, and this type of category of “life” is definitely included in those warnings. The following are just some of the passages that should give us great concern about how we order our life regarding time and calendar observances, etc...: Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 1 Corinthians chapters 8 & 10; 1 John 3:24-4:6; 1 John 5:21; 1 Timothy 4:1-11; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4; 2 Peter 2 (whole chapter); Jude (all); Revelation 2:12-3:6, 3:14-22 (this last set of references from the book of Revelation focuses on these “churches” compromising toward idolatry, false doctrine, and compromise toward popular surrounding culture). These commands (**Precepts**), **Principles**, and **Patterns** (precedence) are **Life Principles** regarding the “boundaries” God has set up for us. We will use these and other principles to guide us in our examination. In fact, this is **not** optional, but we are commanded by God to “**test**” anything that claims to be from God, is “spiritual”, religious, is “Christian”, etc. (see 1 John 4:1-6 & 1 Timothy 4:1-11). This is **obedience** to God, over and above the social pressure of family, local and popular culture, and other pressures that would like us to look the other way. Remember, this so-called “**Christian Calendar**” implies that it has some **control** over our time, and that we as Christians are “**supposed**” to follow it or at least acknowledge that it has some “binding” power over us. And, this is seen and heard when Christians (even those of the Protestant Reformation heritage) say or write something like the following: “during this time of year...” or “during this season...” implying that Christians are all understanding something that we are all **supposed to observe** on a Calendar of some sort that is “Christian” or something like that. Therefore, this subject definitely needs to be **examined** and **evaluated**.

FREEDOM...

We need to first examine the notion or suggestion that Christians, in the New Testament are now **free** to do about almost anything they want to, in the Name of Christ Jesus, for Him and His Cause and that other Christians are to just follow along as some blind sheep falling off a cliff or something like that. Galatians 5:1-6 & 5:13-15 explains, what our **FREEDOM** in Christ → is all about obeying Christ.

Let’s define what a **Biblical “Christian”** is:

→ A real, genuine, **born again**, believer, follower of the Biblical, virgin born, Son of God, God the Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Israel’s Messiah) - God in the Flesh.

That genuine believer has truly **surrendered** in trusting faith personally to Jesus Christ, and has taken Jesus Christ as his/her LORD, Savior, God, Master and King, trusting that what Jesus did upon the Cross (crucifixion and death), His burial, and Resurrection ... that was enough to pay for all of his/her sins (past, present, and future), and was enough to purchase eternal life for him/her ... that real believer is, now, **born again**, a **new creation** in Christ Jesus, **forever**.

Now that we have this definition for what a real Christian is, let’s continue with this evaluation of the so-called “Christian Calendar”. We must lay some foundational principles. The first is **FREEDOM in Christ**. It might be argued that any local church family is free to put together a Calendar that contains

various dates, weeks, etc... of events to celebrate Christ, to Worship God, and to do certain religious observances that help us to Worship God. We are perfectly **"FREE"** to do so. But, we must define, biblically, what we mean here (read 2 Timothy 2:15 & 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4 and you will see why this point is very important to God, for us to understand). We must find out what people mean by **FREE**. We, of course, do not mean things that are outside the scope of normal possibility of normal healthy human beings with normal healthy minds. We are **NOT** talking about someone wanting to be **FREE** to **sprout wings like an eagle and fly to New York from Los Angeles in 1 hour**. Of course we know it would take longer than that -- that would be considered "fantasy", a "fairy tale", or just plain **nonsense**.

Freedom in Christ, biblically, relates to **FREEDOM FROM & FREEDOM TO**

You may wonder if it is, really, so black and white. Maybe it is more grey???

Well, consider the following: As a person jumps off a 90 story building with no parachute or anything to break his fall. What types of **FREEDOM** does he have in the **CONTEXT** of his predicament?

FREEDOM EXISTS WITHIN CONTEXT. FREEDOM IS RESTRICTED TO ITS PURPOSES, PERIOD!!!

For the Christian, **FREEDOM in CHRIST** is **FROM ...**:

Freedom from:

1. the penalty of ones' own sin
2. the bondage to sin's grip
3. the power of the devil
4. the power of this world system of selfishness, evil, and deception

For the Christian, **FREEDOM in CHRIST** is **TO ...**:

Freedom to:

1. live forever in everlasting life with Christ
2. live for God, worship Him, serve Him, obey Him... according to His Word, alone
3. have an intimate personal relationship with God, forever
4. become all that God has created you to be and to do, for His Glory (for His Glory, alone)

Notice that Freedom in Christ has Purpose and Context for the Christian. This means boundaries and restrictions. Freedom in Christ, means we are free to bring glory, honor, and praise unto our God, to please Him and live for Him. We have the Freedom, now, to Obey Him according to His Word. Freedom relates to the **POWER** we have to **OBEY** and **PLEASE** God. When we were controlled by Sin before we were "Born Again" in Christ, we were **in SIN**, we did **not** have freedom to Obey God. We were free to **SIN** (Romans 6). Thus, if someone asks: "Now that I am in Christ, am I free to do anything at any time?" So, by **"free"**, does that person mean, the physical possibility of doing something (like "can" a person kill someone? -- of course people do this all the time... **but** in Christ are we "free" to do this?) So, the real question... really is: **"Am I free to do 'thus and so' - in the sense that I will NOT suffer any punishment, repercussions, discipline, loss of reward from God if I do thus and so. Will God be pleased and/or will He be 'OK' with thus and so... ???"** Isn't that really the heart of these kinds of questions (**NOT**: "can I get **away with** doing thus and so and live to tell about it...") Here are some passages from the Bible that address this topic: Galatians 5:1-6, 13-15; Colossians 3:17,23-25; 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11; Romans 14:5-12.

Many times we think of the concept of **"FREEDOM"** in a different way than how this concept is presented in the Bible. The answer to the question: "In Christ, am I free to anything at any time?" → **NO !!!**

Based upon the Biblical definition of **Freedom** in Christ, **NO WAY**. We are **ONLY FREE** to do that which God wants us to do, within the boundaries of His **PRECEPTS** (commands), **PRINCIPLES**, and **PATTERNS** as recorded in the Bible. That may sound restrictive, but it is **not**. → I am free to ride on Roller Coasters, wear funny looking shoes, drink milk, eat bacon, have messy hair in the mornings, etc. But I am **NOT** "FREE" to **disobey** God. I am **NOT** "FREE" to live a life of **rebellion** against God nor am I "FREE" to live in such a way that **displeases** God, based upon His Word.

In the context of the Great Commission, Jesus commanded all of His disciples, including us, today, "... teaching them (the new disciples) to **obey** all that I (Jesus Christ) commanded you to **obey**..." (see Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, as a part of being a born again disciple of Jesus Christ, we are all to **obey** God's Word. We are to obey that which applies specifically to the New Testament believer of Christ. This means that there are some teachings in the Old Testament that do not apply to the New Testament follower of Jesus Christ. What we are commanded to Obey is that which **ONLY** applies to

us, as New Testament followers of Jesus Christ. We are NOT to make it up, use outside sources (outside the Bible) to add to it, nor are we to just “dream up” certain beliefs and traditions that we are to observe, when we are not supposed to, according to the text of the Bible. 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us that we are to really pay attention, **accurately**, to God’s Word and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that what is **in** God’s Word is **enough** for us. The warnings in 2 Timothy 4:1-4 are for us today, for us to remember to **STICK to God’s Word, alone** (see Jude 1:3) ... for our authority of what God wants us to **be** and what God wants us to **do**... **ONLY**. These principles are the **foundation** of our examination.

Now we focus back on the so-called “**Christian Calendar**”. We will look at this subject through the lens and prism of Holy Scripture, **alone**.

Question: “Do I have the **FREEDOM** as a Christian to **make up** a simple, yearly, tradition to celebrate the time when Jesus was 12 years old and was in the Temple discussing God’s Word with the elders?” (see Luke 2:41-52)

The **Answer** (biblically-based) : “**YES**” - but **within boundaries**:

Here are the biblically-based boundaries:

1. As long as it is **not** somehow construed as “**binding**” upon **all** Christians everywhere from that time forward (since this “new” celebration is **NOT** described and prescribed in the New Testament, in any way...)
2. As long as it is **TRUE** to God’s Word (does it **accurately** portray that particular item you are celebrating - don’t fill it up with false traditions and made-up stories that have no root in reality)
3. As long as nothing in that celebration, remembrance, etc... contains anything that can trace its roots/origins exclusively to **paganistic-idolatrous** beliefs, traditions, and/or practices.

For more on Jesus’ teaching on this kind of thing go to: Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:5-23...

Mark 7:6-8 And Jesus said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; (7) in **vain** do they worship me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**’ (8) You set-aside the commandments of God and **hold to (obey) the traditions of men.**”

Jesus Christ and His Apostles **WARNED** us about man-made, made-up traditions of men that are taught as **IF** they are really the commandments of God or that they are on par with God’s Word. This begs the question of the wisdom of making up traditions, yearly calendar events/celebrations, etc... in the first place (see Galatians 4:10-11).

Since we have these foundational principles we can look at the so-called Christian Calendar.

We started out this paper with the Question: “**From a Biblical standpoint, is there anything in the Bible that would even hint to the Christian that would cause this Calendar to exist or that was given to us by Jesus and/or any of his Apostles or that it can even be found in the Bible at all?**”

➔ **ANSWER: NO!** There is **NO** hint or any shred of anything on any page or chapter in the whole Bible that would even give anyone the idea that a **Christian Calendar** should even exist. That is, no hint of any yearly cycle of various celebrations, Holy Days/Weeks, and or religious/ritualistic observances for the New Testament Christian, that is binding on any Christian.

Then we asked another Question: “**Is this ‘Christian Calendar’ binding upon the New Testament, born again, disciple of Jesus Christ... that is, binding upon behavior, obedience, observance, etc.?**” (i.e.: “**Should a Christian follow or obey this Calendar... feel obligated to follow and/or obey its Calendar items?**”) ➔ **ANSWER: NO!** Since there is **NO** Biblical foundation for such a Calendar ... **FREEDOM** exists for the Christian to **avoid, ignore, act as if it doesn’t exist, make it into a paper airplane**... etc...

So, if this so-called **Christian Calendar** does **NOT** come from the Bible, then where does it come from? **Answer: ROME ➔ THE CHURCH IN ROME.** Starting with the Roman Emperor **Constantine** marrying the church to the STATE of the Roman Empire... he along with various church leaders started to eradicate anything Jewish (even the hint of Judaism) from anything that was officially state sponsored Christianity within the Roman Empire. This is clearly seen in the **Edict of Milan** in which

Constantine clearly argues for this and puts the State's power behind this eradication. In the process, the Biblically-based Hebrew Calendar items of 7 Feasts of Israel as seen in Leviticus 23 were eliminated. **Did you know that for over 200 years**, much of the early church celebrated some of those feast days, not as a binding order, but **out of remembrance of Christ** as seen clearly in those Feasts? Most Christians celebrated Passover (Pesach, or Pascal) and Pentecost (Shavuot) ... but did so in **light of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ** of Nazareth. Thus, in the process of this eradication, by Constantine, of Jewishness out of Official Christianity within the Roman Empire, within a few decades a **New Set of Traditions** and **New Set of Yearly Celebrations** developed. These new traditions were **supposed** to be New Testament and **"Jesus Christ focused"** celebrations of worship. The motivation was **somewhat good**. But, in the process of seeking to win more and more "converts" to Roman Christianity (i.e.: **Roman Catholicism**), the church sought to be relevant to win converts (per 1 Cor. 9:19-23). In the process to be relevant, they **compromised biblical principles**. They forgot the principles found in **Jude 3** → to earnestly contend for **the FAITH once for all** delivered unto the church. **"once for all"** implies that they were **not** supposed to ADD to that **FAITH** any new beliefs, practices, traditions, nor calendar items, especially those that are of **pagan/idolatrous** origins. But, that is **precisely what they did**. In order to add more converts, they allowed those new "converts" to **keep their pagan-idolatrous traditions and beliefs**, but were **"Christianized"** in the process. Yet, they kept the same **"trappings"** of their **origins**. **TRUTH PRINCIPLE**: Eventually, if the celebration has its **origins in paganism**, it will always leak out and let you know that it is really **pagan**, originally.

Thus, the **ROMAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS CALENDAR** came into existence. Of course, it is, now, called the **"Christian Calendar"**. It mostly has its origins from the Roman Church. Yes, it is true that some items on their Calendar include some traditions from the church of England and other "high" churches. Those other "churches" did "kinda break off" from the Roman Catholic church, **but** not completely. Many of them kept many of the original Roman Catholic Traditions.

These kinds of things that were going on in the Roman Catholic church were some of the main reasons why the **Protestant Reformation** occurred, in the **first place** (in the late 1300's and onward). These Protestant Bible believers wanted the church to **return** to her roots. They wanted her to get rid of all of these **paganistic-idolatrous traditions, beliefs, and practices** along with the many **false doctrines and man-made doctrines**. Many **Protestants** lost their lives and much blood was spilled over these things. Most of the Biblically-based Protestant Reformers rejected all of the Roman Catholic Calendar, **all of it, completely**. They wanted **only** what the Bible taught.

The Roman Catholic Calendar is **filled** with **"saints"** days, celebrations relating to Mary, praying to Mary and praying to the saints (think of St. Patrick's day, St. Valentines' day, etc...), days relating to church leadership and the Pope, and a **few** celebrations many of us are familiar with, including Christmas and Easter (typically the only two that modern-day "Protestant" Evangelical churches still observe, today). We have an extensive section on our website regarding these so-called Christian holidays, please go to: <http://NLFJl.org/html/christiancontroversies.html#ChristianHolidays>

The BIGGYS on the Roman Catholic Calendar.

(If you wish for a complete Roman Catholic Calendar go to <http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Saints/bydate.aspx>)

1. **Christmas** (December 25th in most parts of the world, **but** in some parts it is earlier or later)
 [Origins exclusively from Paganistic-Idolatry regarding the date, the trappings of the decorations, the reasons why it was celebrated - Saturnalia, Ancient Norse Pagan worship (YULE), etc... → Paganism mixed in with some Christianity (regarding the Birth Narratives of Christ)]
2. **Epiphany** (January 6th → the 12th night of Christmas?)
 [Not sure where this tradition came from... but supposedly relates to the baptism of Jesus]
3. **Lenten Season (40 days** - starts in February and ends with Easter Sunday)
 - a. **Mardi Gras** (sin all you can [Carnival - Festival of Meat] before "confession" starts the next day)
 - b. **Ash Wednesday** (confessional time - yes confession in the booth with a Catholic "priest")
 - c. **Lent** - lasts for 40 days [similar to Ramadan in Islam.... exclusive pagan origins with the cult of Tammuz (Baal & Ashtoreth, (son) Tammuz (or **Mithras** in Persia))
 40 days of weeping for Tammuz, no eating of red meat ...

baking raisin cakes for the worship of the Queen of Heaven (Ashtoreth)
(yummy **hot cross buns**... during Mardi Gras, Lent, etc...)
see Ezek. 8:14; Jeremiah 7:17-18; Jeremiah 44:17-25]

d. **Palm Sunday** (celebrates the triumphal entry of Messiah on a colt of a donkey)

e. **Good Friday** (celebrates the Crucifixion of Christ...)

[Origins... not so Christian. Jesus was crucified on Passover, and for 3 days and 3 nights was in the tomb, that is a full **72** hours. Do the math → Christ could not have been Crucified on Friday and then raised from the dead, before sunrise on Sunday.

That would **not** be full 72 hours. Also, since the Israeli / Hebrew reckoning of a day... is from sunset to sunset, it even causes more problems.

The mother of the false god **Mithra** [Persian/Roman cult] (i.e. **Tammuz**)

is Freyja (Norse version of Mithra's mother)... her symbol is a **FISH**.. her Priests wore a "Fish-Head Hat" same shape as the modern **Mitre** (hat) that the **Pope** wears today.

The word Friday has its origins from the goddess Freyja, the fish goddess... thus **Fish Friday**. Oh what a coincidence, eh?]

f. **Easter** (always follows Palm Sunday, is called "*Paschal*" in most other languages except Germanic and English based languages)

Supposed to be the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Its origins are based in the Pagan worship of Easter (Oestre), her Middle-Eastern names include Ishtar, Asherah, Astarte, and Ashtoreth. She is also called Diana, Artemis, and Freyja who all are also known as the "**Queen of Heaven**". Rabbits and Eggs are the symbols for these pagan goddesses. They are female fertility goddesses.

This title "**Queen of Heaven**" is the official Roman Catholic title of Mary, mother of Jesus (she is also called the **Mother of God**).

For these many **pagan** trappings of this season and day, many Protestants in the past just simply did not celebrate anything related to this day. Other Protestants rename it to be "**Resurrection Day**" - relating to the Resurrection of Christ.

For more on the **pagan origins of Easter** please go to

<http://NLFJI.org/assets/documents/PaganOriginsOfEasterFromCAN.pdf>

Just for historical context, we must remember **WHO** gave us this calendar. It comes from **the church** that teaches its people that in **order to be saved you must** have faith in God **AND** the "church" **AND** its traditions, **AND** you **must** do certain rituals. This means that the efficacy of Christ's death, burial and resurrection is **NOT** quite enough for anyone to be saved or to have full assurance of salvation. The Romans Catholic church still teaches that it is OK to bow down to statues, burn candles to the "saints", to pray to the "saints" and to pray to Mary, **ALONG** with praying to God. And just so we all understand, we are not talking about individuals in the paper, but **beliefs**, practices, traditions, etc. We are not called to be legalistic or paganistic, but **BIBLICAL** and obedient to God based upon His word, showing God grace to others.

Should the Roman Catholic Church have created this so-called "Christian Calendar"? Did they have the "Freedom" to do so in Christ? Based upon what we have already studied, what do you think?

How you, the reader, approach your observance or non-observance of this **Roman Catholic Calendar** is between you and God. As you have seen, Biblically, **NOT** one of these dates, celebrations, holidays, and seasons can be found in the pages of the Holy Bible, God's Word. And, we have found that **NOT** one date, celebration, season, feast, is **BINDING** to any follower/disciple of Jesus Christ. Yet, we are not called to condemn people, but we are called to preach and teach God's Word and help to set the captives free. Being bound to something we do not have to **DOES NOT** seem biblical, since Christ **SET US FREE** by **His Truth** (John 8:31-36) from the Lies of Satan, already.