

INTENTION OF YOUR HEART

Another holiday has come and gone now. But it is just one of those minor holidays – you know, they type that the banks are still open, we still get mail, and all of the businesses stay open.

What goes through your mind when you think about St. Patrick's Day?

Well, we all know we need to wear green, we think of the luck of the Irish, kissing something called the Blarney Stone, whatever that is, eating corned beef and cabbage, and for many people, drinking green beer.

But what is the purpose of this holiday? What is the reason we celebrate it, and what is the deal with a Shamrock?

Well, Patrick, before he was called St. Patrick, was sent out by the Pope as a missionary and landed on the shores of Ireland in the year 430. On Easter Sunday, March 26th, in the year 433, St Patrick used a three leaf clover as a way to explain the concept behind the Holy Trinity – three leaves, yet one leaf – and Ireland's National Symbol, the Shamrock, was born.

So St. Patrick was a wonderful missionary that brought the Gospel of Jesus to Ireland. He died on March 17th in the year 464. So St. Patrick's Day is celebrated to remember this great missionary.

So St. Patrick's Day is a religious holiday.

But for some reason, over the years, here in America we somehow lost the meaning behind this holiday.

But doesn't that happen a lot?

Look at Christmas and Easter. For many people, it has nothing to do with Jesus, but instead with an old guy with a white beard and some reindeer, and a bunny rabbit with a bunch of colored eggs.

So all of this got me thinking about the message of these holidays and how we celebrate them.

Then I was listening to the radio a couple of weeks ago and I heard some of our Fundamentalist brothers and sisters discussing how we shouldn't celebrate Easter at all.

It is common theory that a Pagan ritual celebrating a goddess of Spring or fertility was combined with the Christian celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus so Pagans would more readily accept the Gospels into their lives a little easier.

So what about the colored eggs? Well, many people believe that this goddess, there are at least 20 different names that I found, but the English version of her name is basically Easter, that this goddess was hatched from this huge egg that dropped from the heavens into the Euphrates River.

An egg symbol was used for years in the worship of this goddess because she was the goddess of fertility and an egg is representative of that.

Okay, so maybe we should get rid of our Easter Holiday because it has some connection to a Pagan goddess.

Well if we do that, then I suppose Halloween should go as well, right?

After all, Halloween was based on an ancient belief that the dead would rise up on that day and try to find their way back home – but if dead humans would rise up, so could demons and such – so you had to dress up as a demon so you would just blend in with the rest of them and they wouldn't bother you.

Of course you had to set some food out on your front door step as a peace offering to any of them that found their way to your house.

Okay, so Easter is out, so is Halloween, how about Harry Potter? Shirley and I were just watching a movie called "Jesus Camp" where the camp counselor basically told the kids that Harry Potter would burn in Hell because the Bible says all Warlocks are bad.

Okay, so no Easter, no Halloween, no Harry Potter, I guess no more magic or magic shows for that matter. That is too bad – the comedian Steve Martin got his start in show biz by working at the Magic Store in Disneyland.

Disneyland, Tinkerbell uses magic – so I guess no Disney either.

Let's just look at this again – No Easter, no Halloween, No Harry Potter, No Disney.

How about Valentine's Day? Well, we might think it was named after St. Valentine, but actually, before St. Valentine, it was a day to honor Juno, the Queen of the Roman gods and goddesses.

So there goes yet another holiday.

At least we have Christmas right? About the last holiday that should be safe.

Well, the Christmas tree we have in our homes – it has its origins from several different pagan cultures – The Egyptians worshiped evergreens, the ancient Romans used them to honor their god of agriculture, and Druids in Europe used Holly and Mistletoe as symbols of life.

So kill Christmas as well.

It makes you wonder why we have so many Pagan traditions mixed in with all of our Christian religions.

We do. We have Pagan rituals as part of our Christian celebrations. And the main reason was for the easier acceptance of Christianity into people's lives when Christianity was first introduced into these Pagan cultures almost 2,000 years ago.

So why do we keep them? Why not get rid of them all together?

Why did our church have a Christmas tree in it? Why do we celebrate Easter?

Several Fundamental Christian Churches would call us the church of the devil. Now nothing against them, I used to be a Fundamental, Evangelical Christian.

There are many websites out there that speak to this issue. One read, and I quote,

“We know that the Bible tells us in John 4:24, ‘God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.’

The truth is that the forty days of Lent, eggs, rabbits, hot cross buns and the Easter ham have everything to do with the ancient pagan religion of Babylon. These are all antichrist activities!

Satan is a master deceiver, and has filled the lives of well-meaning, professing Christians with idolatry.

These things bring the wrath of God upon children of disobedience, who try to make pagan customs of Baal worship as Christian.

You must answer for your activities and for what you teach your children.

These customs of Easter honor Baal, who is also Satan, and is still worshipped as the "Rising Sun" and his house is the "House of the Rising Sun."

How many churches have "sunrise services" on Ishtar's day (Easter) and face the rising sun in the East?

How many will use colored eggs and rabbit stories, as they did in ancient Babylon.

These things are no joke, any more than Judgment Day is a joke.”

Wow – How do you respond to that? Are they right? The Bible does say worshiping other gods and idols is bad.

So, maybe we shouldn't have a sunrise service for Easter this year.

Maybe we shouldn't have a Christmas tree next year.

Maybe we shouldn't endorse trick or treating.

Maybe we should cancel Easter all together.

As a matter of fact, some believe that the colors we use to represent the Christian year have Pagan origins.

In ancient Greece and Rome, only Barbarians wore robes with sleeves, so I guess I shouldn't have that on either.

But what then? What about the Christian message? Where does that leave us?

According to our Fundamental Brothers and Sisters, that leaves us only the word of God.

So maybe they do have a point. I mean, if there is nothing to get in our way between us and the Word of God, then so much the better right? It sounds perfectly valid.

So the Word of God – okay – that is what we will focus on then. And what does the Word of God say?

Well, Dave read us a couple of scriptures earlier. It is the Word of God, so let's look at them again – {READ Deuteronomy 8:1-2 and Hebrews 4:12-13}

So the Word of God is living and active? God knows what are the intentions of our hearts?

So when we look at the word of God – it tells us that God knows the intentions of our hearts.

So let me think about this for a second – if God knows the intentions of our hearts, wouldn't he know that we use different colors in church to help us reflect on and remember Jesus' life? Not to worship the colors but to help us grow in our faith.

Like the purple during Lent and Easter – Purple is used for two purposes – one as a darker color for the mourning of Jesus' persecution and death, but also a color to represent nobility and the Kingship of Christ.

Then we use white at times to represent purity, happiness or joy. This is used usually on Easter, Christmas, and on Communion Sundays.

Then there is green. During the summer and fall months that is about all we see. But green is used to represent the life, growth and hope which Jesus reflected during his ministry.

Red is worn on Pentecost to remind of the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Now there are a few other colors that we use occasionally, but they are all to help us reflect on the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. So if our intentions are to grow in our faith using colors, wouldn't God be okay with that?

Okay, colors are okay – how about magic then? The Bible does say some things about divination – conjuring up demons.

But what is in our hearts when we watch Tinkerbell, or Harry Potter? How about when we make a quarter come out of our kids ears? Are we trying to conjure up demons? Are we trying in our hearts to worship the devil?

The Bible tells us, in at least 10 different places, that God looks at the intentions in our hearts.

Yes, we need to honor God – Yes we need to follow him every way we can. But watching Harry Potter, does that dishonor God in our hearts? How about pulling a rabbit out of a hat?

In my opinion, Halloween goes right along with this same concept. Are we making our children dress up as demons because we don't want the demons walking this earth to notice us? Or are we dressing up our children in different costumes because it is something they are excited to do and we want to spend time with them?

Again, what's our intention?

How about the Christmas tree? This one lady who I knew many years ago told me that she wouldn't have a Christmas tree in her house because she was a Christian.

Martin Luther, who was credited with reforming a lot of Christianity, well, he was known for decorating Christmas trees. So when we set up that tree, are we placing it there to worship it? Or are we using it to bring a little light and joy into our lives?

I admit, holidays have become watered down and commercialized. The Christian message is missing from many homes and only the commercial version remains.

But if we remove these things from our lives, stick our nose up at those who celebrate these holidays this way, how can we relate to them? How can we reach out to them?

Go tell that family of four that came to your church for the first time that we don't think you should give gifts anymore on Christmas because the ancient druids gave gifts under the fir tree.

This same reason is why many of these customs became intermingled with Christian customs and beliefs in the first place. You could convince someone to stop worshiping trees, but what about the love towards each other that surrounded it? Or was there a place in Christianity for that same love?

So Easter – here we are. Just a few weeks away.

Many of you will be decorating eggs to celebrate the goddess of fertility. Then I am sure after that you will put the egg up on an altar and bend down and worship that egg, right?

Or, is it more likely that many of us will color eggs with our kids or grandkids, or even our spouse. Spend some good, quality family time together. Or just skip the whole egg thing altogether because it is a pain messing with all of the food coloring.

Then, most of will come here for one of our two Easter services. The Sunrise service is meant not to worship some ancient Babylonian god, but to celebrate the Son rising, the Son of God that is.

I am going to ask Caeley and Kristine to come forward now and take these two baskets.

Please pass them up and down the aisles and take out an egg – but don't open it yet!

We celebrate Easter as a time to remember that Christ not only died for our sins, but through his resurrection, he overcame death and assured us everlasting life. As Christians, it should be our most joyful holiday.

So if a pastel colored egg finds it way into your life, ask yourself, what are the intentions of your heart? For most Christians, it is Joy knowing that we have everlasting life. So inside your egg are two things. The first thing I will tell you – it is a Jellybean – because to me, jellybeans bring me joy.

In my opinion, it doesn't matter if we celebrate a little with colored eggs, because it is what is on the inside that matters more. Go ahead and open your egg and see what is on the inside because that does matter more.

Everyone should have a coin in their eggs. I invite you to place it in your pocket or in the change portion of your purse. And when you reach inside and touch it, take a second to remember what the coin reads.

There are two different coins – some read, “I carry a cross in my pocket, reminding no one but me, that Jesus Christ is Lord of my life, if only I’ll let him be.”

And the second one, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference.”

Some of you might agree with everything I have shared today, and some of you might not. If what you feel - on the inside, deep in your heart, says you shouldn’t have colored eggs, or Christmas trees or Harry Potter, then don’t. It’s okay.

But if deep in your heart these things aren’t preventing you from focusing on God, you aren’t worshiping anything or anyone but God, and you use these holidays as times to come together as a family or friends and show the kind of love Jesus asked us to show each other, then don’t worry, God knows the intention of your Heart.

Thanks be to God!

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