

Should Christians Honor Father's Day?

By Terry Moore

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All Scriptures are from the New King James Version.

The first attempts to establish a national holiday for fathers in America began early in the 20th century. The intent was to complement Mother's Day by honoring the man's parental role in the family. However, fear of commercialization led the United States Congress to resist these efforts for nearly 50 years. Finally, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued the first presidential proclamation honoring fathers in 1966, and designated the third Sunday in June as Father's Day. This became a permanent national holiday when President Richard Nixon signed it into law on April 24th, 1972. Today nearly every country around the world has set aside one day each year to honor fathers. But should Father's Day be honored by Christians? Some question the origin of the day believing that it is connected to ancient worship of the sun simply because the holiday falls on Sunday. Others believe that Father's Day is derived from the Catholic invention of Saint Joseph's Day.

First, just because a holiday occurs on a Sunday does not automatically mean that it is connected to ancient worship of the sun. Like the observance of Mother's Day, Sunday was chosen because it is the one day of the week when most people are not required to work and can spend time with their fathers.

History books reveal that Catholic priests created Saint Joseph's Day sometime in the 10th century and it was observed on March 19th. The observance was well established in Rome by the mid 15th century, but has since become an optional memorial due to it being reduced to the lowest rank for a Catholic saint's day. Those who observe it today know it as the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, and it is held on May 1st. Because the holiday honored Christ's stepfather, some associate it to the creation of Father's Day. However, there is no evidence that the two observances are connected in any shape or form.

Liturgical traditions of Saint Joseph's Day include attending Mass, wearing red clothing, carrying dried fava beans, adding breadcrumbs to various foods which represent sawdust in honor of Joseph's presumed trade as a carpenter, and assembling at altars dedicated to Christ's stepfather. None of these traditions are found in the observance of Father's Day as kept in America and many other western nations.

In addition, the Catholic observance took place during an entirely different month of the year. Therefore, before concluding that we should not participate in Father's Day, consider the fifth commandment in which God said:

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 5:16).

The Bible explains that we should honor our mothers and fathers all year long. It is also written, "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I *am* the LORD" (Lev. 19:32). The honor due to those of age is directly related to

their contributions to the family and to society. In addition, there is normally a strong sense of wisdom associated with those of age. This fact inspired Solomon to write:

My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and *when* you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment *is* a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot *A man is reduced* to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life (Proverbs 6:20-26).

This proverb was written in the context of obedience to God the Father's commandments. Solomon's reference to a harlot and evil woman is literal, but is also symbolic of that which leads to immoral values and false doctrine (Rev. 17:1). The instruction we should set our minds and hearts to follow comes from the Father of all creation. As divinely declared:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:5-7).

Just as God rules as the head of all creation, a father was designed to rule as head of the family. Therefore, a father's instruction and admonition to his children is to be based on the laws and love of God? As Paul wrote:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

The "law of your mother" is comparable. The wife in this relationship portrays God's Church who nurtures and instructs her children (Gal. 4:21-31). Sadly, this is not the case in many families. We live in a world in which the costs have risen to the point where mothers are often required to work outside the home. Combined with the selfish ideals of western culture, our entire society is moving further and further away from God's standards.

When it comes to honoring parents in this modern age of western society, adherence to the fifth commandment is greatly lacking. Even many Christians do not fully obey God's instructions and dishonor our Father in heaven.

Therefore, Father's Day can serve as a reminder for families to set aside special time for the fathers in our lives who deserve recognition. This should motivate us to continually remember our heavenly Father who deserves honor each and every day of our lives.

Consider for a moment the family structure. This institution was divinely designed to portray several profound truths. A husband was created to be a type of priest to the household. He was to be a Christ-like figure teaching and upholding God's law within the family unit. Like Christ sacrificed all for the sake of others, the husband is to make personal sacrifices for his wife and children so that they will have those physical things that they need and enjoy—including their father as a proper example to follow.

The wife is symbolic of the Church who raises her children to revere the Father's command. She also teaches God's laws and utilizes her God-given nurturing qualities. This comparison was made by the Apostle Paul while addressing foundational characteristics of a relationship between husband and wife:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself... This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband (Ephesians 5:22-32).

The marital relationship can help us realize how much Christ cares for us, and how much we should revere Him. It also helps parents understand how much they should care for each other and their children. Essentially, we are all potential children of God and the loving care we have for our family extends toward others.

In fact, child rearing is not solely for the benefit of the young. This unique relationship between a parent and their children was designed to be of enormous benefit to adults. By carrying the responsibility of a mother or father, parents learn how to correctly uphold God's law in the spirit of love and with mercy. Parents are to learn the value of sacrificing their own desires to enable those they love to have what they need.

Until they are older, most children do not comprehend the amount of care and devotion mothers and fathers dedicate to them. Many parents have given up personal ambitions, hobbies, even food and clothing in order to provide for the well being of their children. These are just some of the reasons that Father's Day can be beneficial for Christian's to acknowledge.

However, if you are a Christian who believes that we should not participate in any secular holidays, consider a holiday observed in Judea during Christ's ministry. Known by many as the Feast of Dedication, this holiday was kept as a memorial to the zealous uprising led by Judas Maccabeus. During the time of a zealous family known as the Maccabees, God's people reclaimed the temple and rededicated it to faithful service on the 25th of Kislev in the year 164 B.C. (1 Maccabees 4:52-59). This significant triumph became a national holiday that occurs during the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah. While it was not an observance declared by God, Christ recognized it as a suitable holiday to acknowledge. Notice the words of the Apostle John:

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch (John 10:22-23).

The Feast of Dedication was instituted by Jewish leaders and fell into the category of a secular observance. There was no "holy convocation" nor were there commanded offerings required on this day. Nevertheless, even though it was men who established the holiday, Christ did not reject it. If Christ did not approve of honoring in the Feast of Dedication, He would not have been seen at the temple during the time of its observance. Christ offered no words of rebuke and His mere presence can be considered a stamp of approval. The reason is because of its

association with the activities of God's faithful people that greatly impacted the course of history. While this may no longer be true regarding some of the modern traditions found in today's Hanukkah celebrations, in Christ's time, the Jews had not corrupted the observance by attempting to make it something holy and required.

It certainly appears that Christ was in favor of some secular holidays that do not violate the Scriptures. There are times when it can be helpful and respectful to pause and remember significant events and people as long as these moments are not considered to be a part of God's commanded holy days. A few examples of appropriate secular observances are Thanksgiving Day, Independence Day, Mother's Day, and Father's Day. These are not religious holidays, but are times that may be acknowledged by Christians.

Other examples of secular observances recognized by God are various fasts that were observed by the nation of Israel marking the solemnity of their suffering down through the ages. These were man-made observances and yet God indicated that they will be kept after Christ returns, but with a far different approach:

Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain... The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets... The fast of the fourth *month*, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace' (Zechariah 8:3, 5, 19).

This prophecy of the millennium declares that the annual fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will be observed. These days of fasting were not established by God, but were setup by men as a reminder of tragic events that took place during the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem (2Kgs. 25:3; Jer. 52:12-13; 41:1-2; 52:4). These fasts are still solemnly kept by some devout individuals today, but God declared that these days will be observed after Christ returns, but they will be kept in a new light. A reason that God will retain these holidays is because none of them are of pagan origin, and while they relate to days of suffering in the history of His people they will be times of rejoicing in the world to come. This fact does not mean that we believe God will retain the observance of Father's Day. The point is simply that the Almighty does not condemn all secular observances—especially those that pertain to keeping His commandments.

The assertion that Father's Day throughout much of the world reflects a Catholic invention is false. God's admonition to not observe holidays of pagan origin cannot be applied to Father's Day. Acknowledging this holiday does not violate the Scriptures. Certainly, many do not honor their parents as often as they should. Therefore, on Father's Day, it is appropriate to do something to show fathers that we are grateful for the sacrifice and service they have provided for each of us.

Whether a Christian chooses to honor this holiday or not is a personal choice. This article was not written in an effort to promote the observance of Father's Day, but to demonstrate that it is not a sin. If an individual strongly believes that the holiday should not be kept then, for conscience sake, they should not keep it. As Paul wrote, "whatever is not done in faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). However, this does not mean that those who oppose honoring Father's Day are correct in their opinion and such a belief certainly should NOT be forced upon others.

Our research of the subject, combined with a thorough understanding of biblical principles, has led the Eternal Church of God to verify that the observance of Father's Day is not a sin and it can be a positive experience for the entire family.