

A Foolish Holiday

MANY SEE the first day of April as a time to perpetrate pranks, practical jokes and even lies, in the name of “innocent fun.” Every year on April 1st, people around the world celebrate April Fools’ Day. Although customs and traditions differ, a common thread runs through the international celebration of this day.

History does not provide an authoritative source to determine this holiday’s exact basis and origin. Notice the following statement about April Fools’ Day (also known as All Fools’ Day): “Al-though it has been observed for centuries in several countries, *the origin of the custom is unknown*. It resembles other festivals, such as the Hilaria of ancient Rome (March 25) and the Holi festival of India (ending March 31). Its timing seems related to the vernal equinox (March 21), when nature ‘fools’ mankind with sudden changes in the weather” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Regardless of its origin, people use April Fools’ Day as an excuse to “play the fool.”

Is April Fools’ Day something Christians should take part in? Is it godly? Would Christ have participated in it? What are the implications of it? What does God’s Word say about the keeping of this day?



Unclear Origin

As the above statement shows, the history of this holiday is clouded in mystery. Consider the following:

“One theory is that April Fools began when Charles IX, following the Gregorian Calendar, decreed January 1, 1562 as the official New Year instead of the end of March/April 1 [Equinoxes]. Individuals who continued to honor... April 1st were teased,

ridiculed and played pranks upon.

“This must have been too much fun, it spread from France to England and then to the US. Now we have a day of havoc for us all to tread and enjoy. Now this story, the dates are all in dispute, proving Time may be the best trickster of all” (*presentpicker.com*).

April Fools’ Day was instituted due to a change in the calendar concerning the beginning of the new year. (To understand more about this change, read our free article “Why Christians Don’t Celebrate New Year’s.”)

Also notice the following statements:

“To coincide with the vernal equinox and other agriculturally significant events, New Year’s Day used to be celebrated in many societies around the first of April. Although Pope Gregory introduced a new calendar for the Christian world in 1562—with the new year

beginning on January 1—there were some people who did not hear of the change (or refused to believe it) until much later and continued to celebrate New Year’s Day on April 1. Others called these traditionalists ‘April fools’ and played tricks on them, sending them on ‘fool’s errands’ or trying to make them believe that something false was true.

“In France today, April first is called Poisson d’Avril. French children fool

their friends by taping a paper fish to their friends' backs; when the 'young fools' discover this trick, the prankster yells 'Poisson d'Avril!' (April Fish!) Even though April Fool's Day is not an official American holiday, it is still recognized by many. Most of us are 'taken in' at some time or another on April 1" (*punctuationtips.com*).

By way of background, it is interesting as to how April 1st came to deserve this dubious "honor."

"In 1752, Great Britain finally changed over to the Gregorian Calendar, and April Fool's Day began to be celebrated in England and in the American colonies.

"Pranks and jokes are of course still popular on this day—not to mention the rest of the year.

"Pope Gregory XIII issued a papal bull, 'Inter Gravissimus' on February 24, 1582 that established the Gregorian calendar as the new and official calendar of the Catholic world. Since the Julian calendar had fallen ten days behind over the centuries, Pope Gregory XIII designated that October 4, 1582 would be officially followed by October 15, 1582. The news of the calendar change was disseminated across Europe. Not only would the new calendar be utilized but ten days would be 'lost' forever, the new year would now begin on January 1 instead of March 25, and there would be a new method of determining the date of Easter...

"In the era after the change, dates were written with O.S. (Old Style) or N.S. (New Style) following the day so people examining records could understand whether they were looking at a Julian date or a Gregorian date. While George Washington was born on February 11, 1731 (O.S.), his birthday became February 22, 1732 (N.S.) under the Gregorian calendar. The change in the year of his birth was due to the change of when the [start] of the new year was acknowledged. Recall that prior to the Gregorian calendar, March 25 was the new year but once the new calendar was implemented, it became January 1. Therefore, since Washington was born between January 1 and March 25, the year of his birth became one year later upon the switch to the Gregorian calendar. (Prior to the 14th century, the new

year change took place on December 25.)" (*geography.about.com*).

God is not the author of *confusion* (I Cor. 14:33). The above statements alone demonstrate the confusion surrounding this holiday, through conflicting historical accounts involving the year the Gregorian Calendar was implemented.

Halley's Bible Handbook dates the papacy of Gregory XIII at 1572 to 1585. Therefore, his authorization of the calendar change could not have taken place in 1562, but rather 1582.

The following lengthy quote from *snopes.com* also shows the confusion surrounding this holiday, and offers a glimpse at some of the foolish customs associated with it:

"Claim: April Fools' Day began in the 1500s when the Gregorian calendar took over from the Julian. Those who forgot the change and attempted to celebrate New Year's (previously celebrated on the 1st of April) on the wrong date were teased as 'April fools.'

"Status: *Undetermined*.

"Origins: It has become tradition on the first of April to pull jokes of the harmless variety on those near and dear to us. We plot and we scheme, and often the yuks are funnier in our imaginings than how they play out in reality, but that doesn't stop us from sending the little kid in us out on a rampage. Even the most staid among us have been known to indulge in a practical joke or two, so beware of trusting anyone on that day.

"How the custom of pranking on April 1 came about remains shrouded in mystery.

"...According to the most widely-believed origin for April Fools' Day, those who could be tricked into believing April 1 was still the proper day to celebrate the New Year earned the sobriquet of April fools. To this end, French peasants would unexpectedly drop in on neighbors on that day in an effort to confuse them into thinking they were receiving a New Year's call. Out of that one jape supposedly grew the tradition of testing the patience of family and friends.

"But that's only one theory. Others are:

■ The timing of this day of pranks seems to be related to the arrival of spring, when nature 'fools' mankind

with fickle weather, according to the *Encyclopedia of Religion* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

■ *The Country Diary of Garden Lore*, which chronicles the goings-on in an English garden, says that April Fools' Day 'is thought to commemorate the fruitless mission of the rook (the European crow), who was sent out in search of land from Noah's flood-encircled ark.'

■ Others theorize it may have something to do with the Vernal Equinox.

■ Some think to tie in with the Romans' end-of-winter celebration, Hilaria, and the end of the Celtic new year festival.

"...In Scotland, an April fool is called an April 'gowk'—Scottish for cuckoo, an emblem of simpletons. In England, a fool is called a gob, gawby or gobby. In France, the victim of a hoax is called a 'poisson d'avril,' an April fish. ('April fish' refers to a young fish, thus one easily caught.) The French delight in shouting 'Poisson d'Avril!' at the denouement of the foolery. Some also insist that all pranks include a fish or at least a vague reference to same within the joke. Asking someone during a phone conversation to hold the line, then later returning to the call and inquiring of the victim if there'd been any bites is a popular groaner. So are pranks which trick the victim into placing calls to fish shops or the local aquarium."

We observe that the phenomenon of April Fools' Day is of relatively recent origin, in the sense that it has become a universal custom. Based upon the adjusted Roman calendar, it is nonetheless a vain custom of questionable origin. But even without an understanding of the history of this holiday, we can see in God's Word that He does not approve of this day and that His people, true Christians, do not participate in it.

God Hates All Pagan Customs and Traditions

Now notice what God inspired the prophet Jeremiah to write: "Learn not the way of the heathen...For the customs of the people are vain" (10:2-3). This is a command from God. Throughout Scripture, God describes "heathens" as those who worship nature (the sun, moon, stars, trees, etc.), man-made idols

or *anything* but the one true God. He calls such people and their practices *pagan*. True Christians understand that God hates any customs, practices and traditions that have pagan roots. He commands, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate” (II Cor. 6:17).

How serious is God about paganism? When He rescued the twelve tribes of Israel from Egypt and led them out of brutal slavery, He commanded them, “After the doings of the land of Egypt, where in you dwelt, shall you not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, shall you not do: neither shall you walk in their ordinances” (Lev. 18:3). God demanded the Israelites not defile themselves with the practices and customs of the surrounding nations (vs. 24-29). God further commanded, “Therefore shall you keep Mine ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that you *defile not yourselves* therein: I am the LORD your God” (vs. 30).

God had explicitly commanded Israel to cast out and utterly destroy all nations that occupied the Promised Land (Canaan); above all, they were not to make political alliances with them or marry into their families (Deut. 7:1-3, 5, 16). “For they will turn away your son from following Me, that they may serve other gods” (vs. 4).

But, thinking they knew better than God, the Israelites decided to do things their own way: “They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions” (Psa. 106:34-39).

To wake them up, and get them back on track to being His model nation, God gave Israel over to their enemies. Israel repented. God rescued them. Then Israel rebelled and pursued other

gods. God punished them again. Israel repented again. So went the deliverance-idolatry-punishment-repentance cycle (vs. 40-46), until finally, God had no choice but to “divorce” unfaithful Israel (Jer. 3:6-11). He used the Assyrians to brutally invade, conquer, relocate and enslave the northern kingdom of Israel (II Kgs. 17), which “disappeared” into history, having forgotten their national identity (even today, the modern-day descendants of those ten “lost” tribes do not understand who they are). Later, God sent the southern kingdom of Judah into Babylonian exile (II Kgs. 24 and 25).

This happened because they lusted after pagan customs, rituals, traditions and ways. As you can see, the one true God does not take pagan practices lightly!

What About April Fools' Day?

Clearly, April Fools' Day is rooted in the ancient pagan customs of this world. It is literally a day for fools! But you may wonder, “Where is April Fools' Day mentioned in the Bible?” Although God's Word contains no direct “Thou shalt not” command against April Fools' Day observance, one can examine certain biblical *principles* and know that God does not approve of this day.

Proverbs 24:9 states, “The thought [devising] of foolishness is sin.” And sin is the breaking of God's spiritual laws (I John 3:4; Rom. 7:14). Also, God is the author of wisdom—not foolishness. He expects His servants to seek His wisdom (Jms. 1:5)—not play the fool!

Christ also condemned *engaging* in foolishness: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, *foolishness*: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23). He also said, “...whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt. 5:22).

The basis for April Fools' Day is also in *direct violation* of one of God's Ten Commandments: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). Pranks played on April Fools' Day (in the name of harmless fun) are set in motion through

lies, often leading to misunderstanding and confusion.

Faithful Christians know that “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (I Cor. 14:33). The original Greek word used here for *confusion* also means “instability, disorder, commotion, tumult”—words that perfectly describe the April Fools' Day scene and the holiday's history.

For thousands of years, men kept changing the beginning of their New Year from spring to fall, from March 1 to January 1 (and in some cases, December 25), to March 25, back again to January 1—the dead of winter!

“January 1 was restored as New Year's Day by the Georgian calendar (1582), immediately adopted by Roman Catholic countries” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1998). Even today, men cannot agree on the same date: “Chinese New Year is celebrated officially for a month beginning in late January or early February” (*ibid.*). “The Muslim New Year falls on the first day of the month of Muharram and commemorates the date of the Hegira (July 26, 622 A.D., on the Gregorian calendar), the starting point of the Muslim calendar. Since the Muslim year is a lunar one consisting of only 354 days, the commencement of the new year fluctuates widely by the Western calendar” (*Encyclopedia Americana*). The Vietnamese New Year, Tet, falls between January 21 and February 19. “The Jewish New Year, a solemn occasion called Rosh Ha-Shannah, is observed during September or early October. Hindus in different parts of India celebrate the new year on various dates” (*World Book*, 2001).

This is what happens when people insist on relying on their *own* judgment rather than trusting the One who designed the entire universe and everything in it.

The spirit behind April Fools' Day is diametrically opposite to the Christian way of life. Christ not only said, “...whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire,” but He also instructed, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). Christ further expounds on this principle in Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” This is

commonly referred to as “The Golden Rule.” It sets the standard by which we are to conduct ourselves toward others—treating others the way we would want them to treat us.

Obviously, April Fools’ Day pranks are not based on love toward others. Such tricks, even if innocent and *physically* harmless, are designed to embarrass or humiliate others. Foolishness is

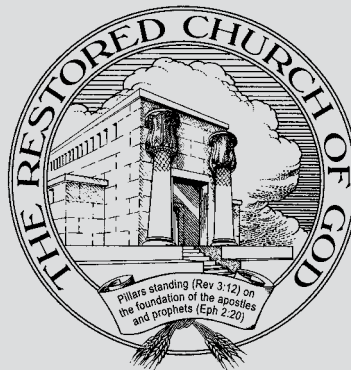
sin. Christians must not engage in it. They must separate themselves from *all* pagan customs, practices and traditions of this world—including April Fools’ Day! □

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