

The Freedom to Celebrate God

I. God expects that we celebrate Him.

- Galatians 4:8-11
- The days and months and seasons and years did not refer to Christ-honoring observations but to pagan festivals and godless celebrations.
- God is to be celebrated and everything else we adore must be celebrated in a way that glorifies Him. Of course we must never worship anything to the degree that we worship God.

II. God defines the heart posture in which we are to celebrate Him.

- Isaiah 1:14-15; Luke 16:15; Matthew 15:3
- When the Jews followed God's instructions for sacrificing, He wasn't pleased because their hearts were not in it. Jesus gives us a similar example in the New Testament when He referred to the Pharisee tithing and praying in a way that everyone could see. Jesus made it clear that the Father was not pleased and that the Pharisee's reward was nothing more than the pitiful adoration of men.
- Yes, we can do the right things in the right ways for the *wrong* reasons . . . but that's just as much a sin as doing the *wrong* things for the wrong reasons.
- So, what should our heart posture be? It starts with loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths, and then we exhibit that love by pouring it onto others. Those are the two greatest commands, and they have everything to do with our hearts. We could also say, "our minds" — the place where we choose to follow God or go our own way. Augustine basically said to love God and do whatever you want because he knew that *any* action motivated by biblical love would be pleasing to the Lord.

III. In some cases, God expects us to do certain things in order to celebrate Him correctly.

- Genesis 4
- God expects the local body of believers to assemble for the purpose of loving God and loving each other — specifically through the communal practice of the one-anothers. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to say that a Christian can glorify God by never assembling with the church.
- Jesus was also very clear that the Lord's Supper should be practiced by all of His followers. He illustrated for us the method, but it's also important to note that He didn't give much more detail. He didn't provide dates or times or frequency.
- Of course, in the broader discussion of celebration and worship, we understand that the entire Bible is filled with expectations for our life and godliness. When we're commanded to be honest, being honest is one way we can worship God. When the Bible says that we need to admonish and rebuke and come alongside a sinning brother, He's prescribed for us certain steps that absolutely must be taken if we don't want to fail our Lord. But, again, there's a bunch of additional information He doesn't prescribe.
- God does expect us to celebrate Him, and He expects us to celebrate Him in spirit and in Truth. And — in many cases — He's extremely clear what we should be doing and how we should be doing it. But what does it mean that Jesus didn't script out for us how to conduct a baptism? What does it mean that nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to follow a certain order of service for our church gatherings?

IV. In the vast majority of cases, God gives us liberty to celebrate Him with various words, actions, and traditions as long as they are motivated by the correct heart posture.

- **At times, men of God initiated celebrations that had not been previously initiated by God Himself.**
 - Nehemiah 8:9-10; Esther 9:20-22
 - This is cool because it gives us the freedom to institute for our families or congregations or ourselves special opportunities for celebrating God — even if it’s not specifically outlined in Scripture
- **However, nothing we institute is allowed to contradict what God commands.**
 - Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13
 - We’re not allowed to take our selfish desires and our worldly philosophies and baptize them in spiritual language or hang it off an obscure proof-text.
 - This goes back to one of our previous points . . . nothing we celebrate should dethrone God from our hearts in word or in deed.
- **When it comes to things that God didn’t specifically command, we have freedom to observe it to God’s glory or *not* observe it to God’s glory.**
 - Colossians 2; Romans 14
 - Paul provides a beautiful treatise on the motivation of our worship of God. It needs to be rooted in Him, and whether a man is telling us to do something or not to do something, we must stand firm in what we know will glorify God.
 - To be transparent, we must acknowledge that we don’t have the freedom to refuse to worship God. Sure, He may allow us to worship ourselves, but there will be consequences. We also don’t have the freedom to neglect the direct commands of God.
 - But where God has *not* been specific as to how and what should be done, He provides *everything* we need to decide what is best. And the basic foundation stone of that choice must be that everything has to be done in faith without regard to what *others* are doing.
- **God has given us everything we need in the Scriptures to make Christ-honoring decisions of liberty.**
 - **The Principle of Obedience:** When God commands, we must obey every time.
 - **The Principle of Freedom:** When God doesn’t command, He gives us the freedom to decide.
 - **The Principle of Wisdom:** This is the key step. In Truth.Love.Parent.’s “Teach Your Chidden to Learn” series I unpack the biblical concept of “The Circle of Learning” from the book of Proverbs. Knowledge is possessing a fact, understanding is comprehending the fact along with its implications, and wisdom is the ability to use that fact in practical situations. When God doesn’t specifically command us — but He’s provided illustrations, examples, principles, and the like — we are to learn as much as we can, understand it to the best of our abilities, and then wisely — by faith — use the information to the honor and glory of God. Of course, many may say, “But, Aaron, how do we know we made the best or wisest decisions?” And that’s where the fourth principle comes in . . .
 - **The Principle of Humble Trust:** Faith is trusting God and His methods. When we’ve searched the Scriptures, gotten as much biblical counsel as we can, counted the cost, and prayed a whole bunch, we can trust that God will do the rest.

We have tremendous freedom in Christ — not to sin, but to celebrate Him.