



## Birthday Celebrations?

### Taking A Look At Examples

I have listened to and read all kinds of reasons and excuses for why birthdays are bad, and a few proclaiming that there is nothing wrong with celebrating one's birthday. From 1979 through the early to mid 1990's I was a member of a church that strictly forbid the celebration of birthdays – The Worldwide Church of God – led by Herbert W. Armstrong. Although I believe my time spent with that organization to be of indescribable value, I also must admit that I was never fully convinced that birthday celebration was bad.

For the most part, the most common arguments against birthday celebration is given by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Their stance is based entirely on the behavior of noted personalities when their own birthdays were celebrated. They are as follows:

**1.) The Pharaoh of Egypt on his birthday killed his baker (Gen 40:20);**

**2.) King Herod on his birthday killed John the Baptist. (Matt 14:6).**

Beyond these two points, I'm not real sure what their viewpoint is based on. My point here is that you cannot set scriptural truth on the behavior of people when there is no biblical foundation for that belief and especially when the behavior, in the first place, is based on the actions of people who obviously had absolutely no respect for God!

Basically they are saying that because pagans did something wrong, we can't participate in an event and do so with respect toward God. The truth is, they had no respect for God at any time in their lives. Their birthdays were just an excuse to exalt themselves.

That last comment is the only one I've ever heard that made any sense to me, but I still found it weak and mostly meaningless. That teaching came by way of Herbert Armstrong. He taught that birthday celebrations tend to make the birthday person feel better about themselves than they should, and quoted Paul's remarks about not placing more importance on one's self than we ought. I agree, in principle, with the remark Paul made. We all tend to think more highly of ourselves than we should, but who needs a birthday to do that?

Also, in an article published in the Plain Truth Magazine in 1980, Mr. Armstrong gave examples pointing to the idea that it is best to look forward to our rebirth into the Kingdom of God than to look back at our birth into this life. This, too, is a good idea, except when it is taken to the extreme of diminishing the significance of this life to practically nothing. The truth is, this life is desperately important, and how we live our lives now will determine whether or not we will even have the next life to enjoy! To me, that makes this physical life pretty important.

## A Couple Of Excuses

Okay... I'll be honest with you. I tried to skip this section, and was already well into the next section before I decided to roll back and insert this area into my document. I call this "Excuses" because that's exactly what they are.

People love to use days, weeks, years and calendars as excuses for why someone should or shouldn't do a particular thing. In this case, its calendars; but not just the Hebrew calendar, but the modern day Roman calendar as well.

The argument goes something like this:

The Roman calendar seems to allow for birthday celebration, until you get to February 29. Now you have a date that occurs only once in four years. Now you have a problem with those born on that date because their birth date shows up only once in four years. I've personally wondered why they don't take advantage of it and just age one year in four, but then I wasn't born on a leap year date. Perhaps they'd live four times as long as the rest of us? Just a thought...

This phenomenon affects roughly 1 in 1,416 people. However, when you look at the Hebrew calendar, the affect is much more dramatic! The Hebrew calendar throws a wrench into birthday celebration for roughly 1 out of every 800 people! WOW!!! Does that mean 1 in 800 could live longer? Again, just a thought...

Seriously, the Hebrew calendar on some years has 12 months, and on other years has 13 – depending on the year, the moons, etc. Keeping track of a birth date can become complicated, but not impossible. God set up annual Holy Days and Festivals based on the calendar He gave them. He began certain times on specific days of certain months, and used the reference of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> month, instead of giving a name to the month for the celebration. One's birthday could be calculated the same way. I was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the year. Whenever the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month occurred, I could be thrown a birthday party, and it would be conceivably accurate since, by the moons, and seasons, the first day of the first month occurred at precisely the same time every year.

To use calendars as an excuse for not celebrating birthdays is really a bit childish. Let's move on.

## A Matter Of The Heart

What I feel is most important here is that God looks on the heart, and not on the outward action. This isn't true in every instance, but I believe it applies with birthdays. My reasoning is based on the fact that you cannot find even one instance in the bible which shows God condoning or condemning the celebration of birthdays.

One of the reasons for this is that, as recorded in the writing of Josephus, the Israelites did not celebrate birthdays. In light of that truth, I must add that there are a lot of things they did or didn't do which God did not appreciate. Most of their decisions concerning what they could and couldn't do was based on erroneous thinking by the Scribes and Pharisees; hence the details of Sabbath keeping which caused such turmoil when Jesus would heal people on that day of the week. So, in response to what the Jews consider right and wrong, I say, "So what?". I'm not about to base my life on how they lived theirs.

I have a deep appreciation for Paul's remarks about not thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. But that attitude doesn't require a birthday. Just watch most of the people you come across in the world today.

I know of many people who celebrate their birthdays, or actually allow others to do that for them, and who are genuinely embarrassed and often humbled by the affection lavished on them at that time.

Since I am ME, and not YOU, I can only use myself as an example. On my 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday, in 2009, I felt good about my birth, but not because I feel that I've accomplished much, but because I feel privileged to even be alive and to be known and loved by God through all of it. I determined to give a proper honor to the day by noting what it is in my life that makes my life worth living, remembering and celebrating.

So, I bought a bouquet of roses for my wife and wrote her a poem. I thanked God for His love and for the wonderful woman to whom I'm married. It's her love – given because of God – that my life is worth living and worth celebrating. I celebrated the time I have with her, and with God. I'm not important to me, but I am to her and to God, and I wanted them to know that I recognized that.

No, I'm nothing special, and whatever I can do to help others is a reward all to itself, but I also want those around me to know they're important to me, and what better time to do that than when I mark another year in this physical life?

Others may think they're so important and feel offended when nobody remembers their special day, and a few may take advantage of their 24 hours of notoriety by doing something evil and destructive, but that's not because of the day or the celebration, but because of what is in their hearts; it's who they are at the core of their being.

Using someone else's bad example of conduct is tantamount to saying drinking is a sin because a person gets drunk. It's the drunkenness that's a sin, not the liquor. Again, it's a matter of the heart, and not the elements around it. Cain slew Able because of the condition of his heart. Does that mean that it's wrong to take sacrifices to God? No! It's wrong to do so with an ungrateful heart, but one's lack of purity doesn't nullify the gift given by someone else.

Birthdays in and of themselves are not wrong – we all have a time and date on which we were born, and when that day comes around, we get a year older whether we celebrate it or not. What makes such a time wrong is the action and attitude of the person(s) involved. Because the tendency is there to get one's self all huffy with pride, it would be wise to be cautious about the date, but to ignore it all together may just be a bit of over kill.

Have a happy birthday the next time it rolls around, look at the past as an opportunity to learn, and look to the future as a chance to grow. Most of all, thank God for another year of wonderful blessings and let Him know you appreciate the opportunity you have to get to know Him even more in the coming year.

God bless you all...