

THE TESTIMONY OF THE INSTITUTIONS

A value of the institutions of Christianity that is often overlooked is that they testify to the reality of the facts upon which they are based. Some of the institutions of Christianity are based upon events that happened in the 1st Century; others are inherited through the institutions that were a part of the Law of Moses. For example, the Lord's Supper observance began in the 1st Century at a Passover meal observed by Jesus and the Apostles. Christians have observed the Lord's Supper ever since. The Passover observance is an institution that has been observed by the Jews since the deliverance from Egypt. It was based upon facts alleged to have occurred in ancient Egypt. The Jews not only began observing the Passover while still in ancient Egypt but have continued to observe the Passover even down to our own time. Thus the Passover observance itself testifies to an event that surely happened early in biblical history. And the Lord's Supper observance testifies to events that took place in the 1st Century.

Mark Hopkins showed how an argument based upon the institutions of Christianity proves the credibility of the facts of the religion. It is the same argument made by Leslie in his *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*. Hopkins said on this subject,

“Thus the truth of our religion seems to be embodied in institutions that now exist, and in observances that pass before our eyes. The object of Leslie is to show, from the nature of the case—for here we make very little reference to written testimony—that the matters of fact stated could not have been received at the time unless they were true, and that the observances could never have been originated except in connection with the facts. In showing this, he lays down four rules, and asserts that any matter of fact in which these four rules meet must be true, and challenges the world to show any instance of any supposed matter of fact, thus authenticated, that has ever been shown to be false.”

First, a definition and then the Four Rules.

WHAT IS A FACT?

Fact: a thing done. A fact of history is an event that actually occurred in the history of the world. An opinion is not a fact; a belief is not a fact. It is unreasonable to say, “You have your facts, and I have mine.” A fact has objective reality apart from opinion and belief.

THE FOUR RULES

1. That the matter of fact be such that the outward senses—the eyes, and ears may be judges of it.
2. That the matter of fact be done publicly, before the world.
3. That public monuments be kept up in memory of it, and some outward actions be performed.
4. That the monuments, and actions or observances, be instituted and commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.

THE TEST OF THE RULES

1. The first two rules make it impossible for any false notion to be imposed upon men at the time of the alleged occurrence.
 - because everyone's eyes and ears would contradict it.
2. The 3rd and 4th rules make it impossible that any false notion be imposed upon men of a later age.
 - because everyone could point out that there are no observances of the event; nor have they continued for any length of time.

EXAMPLES:

How do we know that the United States of America became a self-governing country by declaring its independence from Great Britain?

Fact: The American Colonies fought a war against Great Britain in the years 1775 - 1781, and won independence. The Colonies subsequently founded the United States of America. The following is the proof of those facts:

Proof by the four rules:

1. The Continental Congress adopted The Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Thomas Jefferson wrote the document; delegates signed it; hundreds saw the document then. It exists today.
2. The Continental Congress issued The Declaration in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the view of the world. They read it publicly on July 8, 1776 for the first time.
3. To commemorate the event the colonists held a festive, and uproarious celebration on the first anniversary of the event. Many made public and patriotic speeches; bands marched in the view of crowds.
4. The Independence Holiday, July the Fourth, began then and continues to our own day.

Conclusion:

It is impossible that the colonists were deceived in the years 1775-1881 and that they did not gain independence from Great Britain. Otherwise, the people of the time would have said that there was no declaration of independence adopted by the Continental Congress, nor was it ever read in public. People of the present day are not deceived because the Fourth of July celebration began at the same time to commemorate the day of independence and has continued in regular observance since. The Fourth of July holiday is present evidence of a fact of history.

How do we know God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage?

Fact: God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian Bondage.

The Lord delivered Israel from the Egyptians where everyone including the Israelites, the Egyptians, and the world could be witnesses. He chose not the easy, but the difficult to prove to the Egyptian Pharaoh that God is supreme. The Israelites were slaves and formed an important part of the Egyptian economy. The Lord's removal of them had an immediate and important effect upon the wealth of Egypt. The Israelites numbered at least six-hundred thousand people. Moses and Aaron appeared before the Pharaoh and declared what was to follow. The Lord performed miracles through Moses that were easily seen, heard, or felt. In the Passover event, the Egyptians saw and keenly felt the death of their firstborn.

Proof by the four rules:

- The miracles were sensible; that is, men's eyes and ears were witnesses to them. The waters of the Nile became blood; the land swarmed with frogs; the dust of the earth became gnats; the cattle of the Egyptians died but Israel's cattle did not; the Egyptians suffered boils; Egypt suffered thunder, hail and fire at the same time, but Israel did not; locusts covered the land; the Lord sent darkness on Egypt but the homes of the Israelites had light; the Death Angel struck all the firstborn of Egypt and they all died, but the firstborn of Israel escaped death through the Passover.
- The Lord performed the miracles publicly, before the Israelites, before the Egyptians, and before the world. In the Book of Joshua we read that even the Canaanites knew of the events surrounding the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.
- The Jews keep a public monument, and outward observances are performed to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt. That observance is The Passover.
- The observance of the Passover began with the death of the firstborn in Egypt—the exact time of the deliverance—and has continued uninterrupted until this day.

Conclusion:

It is impossible that the Israelites, or the Egyptians, could have been deceived, and that the facts surrounding the Deliverance from Egypt are false because the Egyptians, the Israelites and the surrounding nations were witnesses of it. The deliverance of Israel was a public event. The events of the deliverance from Egypt are confirmed for our own generation by the observance of the Passover which began on the night of the deliverance and has continued, uninterrupted, down to our own time.

Mark Hopkins also wrote that in "application of these rules to the Books of Moses" i.e., the books of the Law, also called the Torah, that in whatever time it might have been attempted to impose the books of Moses on a later age, it would have been impossible, because they contain the laws and civil and ecclesiastical regulations of the Jews, which the books say were adopted at the time of Moses, and were constantly in force from that time. It would have been impossible because they contain an account of the institution of the Passover. And these books declare that the Passover was instituted in consequence of

a particular fact—the death of the firstborn and the deliverance from Egypt. If such a book had been put forth at some later time saying that the Jews had obeyed certain laws, and served God under the priesthood of Levi, and had observed the Passover from the time of Moses, while the Jews had never heard of the laws or the priesthood or of a Passover, it is impossible that the book would be received. Nothing could have saved the book from rejection.¹

Therefore, what remains is the conclusion that the miracles occurred, the Passover observance began in Egypt in commemoration of that event, and that the observance of the institution confirms the event for our own generation.

How do we know Christ came and offered Himself upon the cross?

Fact: Christ came and offered Himself upon the cross.

Proof by the four rules:

- Romans crucified Jesus where witnesses saw his agony, and heard his words as He died. Romans soldiers pierced his hands and his side. Romans saw how he died, and reported his death to the governor. Two men removed his dead body from the cross.
- The Romans crucified him publicly. Romans and Jews witnessed His crucifixion. In fact, a Roman historian records his death.
- Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to commemorate the event. The Apostle Paul gave the reason for the observance as, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." This type of observance is outward. It involves seeing, touching and tasting.
- Christians have observed the Lord's Supper from the date of the crucifixion until today.

Conclusion:

It would be impossible for such a thing to be imposed upon the people of the First Century because their eyes and ears would contradict it. It is impossible that this idea was imposed upon men of a later century because anyone can point to the observance of the Lord's Supper as testimony that the event occurred. There only remains the reality of Jesus of Nazareth and the fact of His crucifixion.

Also, it is important to remember: what the Law of Moses, and the Levitical priesthood, and the Passover were to the Jews, baptism, the Christian ministry and the Lord's Supper are to Christians. It is a part of the New Testament records that these were instituted by Christ, that they were observed at the time the New Testament was written, and that He commanded that they be observed until the end of time.

¹ Linton, Irwin H., *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, Baker Book House, 1943. pp. 160-164.

Further, it is noteworthy to recognize that the event of the Passover was a divine miracle. One miracle in the history of the world overthrows the entirety of the worldly philosophy of materialism and its popular offspring—humanism.