

Christmas: The Season for Materialism and Manmade Religion

Attention

- 1) The Christmas season is here, a time for unbridled materialism, superficial religiosity, and lavish decorations.
 - a. 1,800 years ago Tertullian asked, “[S]hall religion be regarded as affording the occasion for all riotous extravagance?” (2.44)
 - b. In the case of the “Christmas” holiday, the answer is apparently, “Yes.”
- 2) “Of the major Christian festivals, Christmas is the most recent in origin.” (Holman Bible Dictionary. 288)
 - a. That may surprise many who suppose Christmas is as old as Christianity itself.
 - b. It may surprise you this church does not celebrate Christmas; we’ll try to give you a Biblical reason why.
- 3) I personally prefer not to use the term “Christmas,” but for clarity I will use it in presenting this lesson.
 - a. Churches want to “keep Christ in Christmas;” secularists want God out of the public square altogether.
 - b. I do not support the secular agenda, but consider with me whether Christ has ever been in “Christmas.”

I. The Origins of “Christmas”

A. When Was Jesus Born?

- i. The Bible does not give us the month, day, or year of Jesus' birth.
 - a) Most Bible scholars agree that Jesus was not born on December 25th.
 - It is probable from this that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call “Christmas.” At that time it is cold, and especially in the high and mountainous regions about Bethlehem. But the exact time of his birth is unknown; there is no way to ascertain it. By different learned men it has been fixed at each month in the year. Nor is it of consequence to “know” the time; if it were, God would have preserved the record of it. Matters of moment are clearly revealed; those which “he” regards as of no importance are concealed. (Barnes Lk. 2:8)
 - b) Early disciples didn't know the date for certain, though the earliest didn't choose December.
 - And there are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus, and in the twenty-fifth day of Pachon (May 20)...Further, others say that He was born on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth of Pharmuti (April 19 or 20). (Clement of Alexandria (~ A.D. 195). The Stromata. 2.333)
- ii. Historical data on Herod, Quirinius, and the census suggests a date between 7 and 4 B.C.

B. The “Christmas Story”

- i. The modern Christmas story is a combination of (a few) Bible facts and (much) human tradition.
- ii. Contrary to the popular Christmas story:
 - a) The Bible does not tell us when Jesus was born, nor does it appoint a celebration of His birth.
 - b) Christ came not to bring earthly peace but spiritual peace with God. **Lk. 2:14; 12:49-53** (NASB/ESV)
 - c) The wise men did not visit Jesus in the stable (probably a cave) but in a house. **Mt. 2:11**
 - Their visit was after Jesus' presentation at the Temple when he was 40 days to 2 years old. **2:16**
 - We do not know how many magi (not kings) came or their names or what they rode.
- iii. Thus the “Christmas story” is largely a product of Biblical ignorance, not Bible truths.

C. The Origins of Christmas

- i. God did not provide information or instructions for celebrating Jesus' birth.
- ii. In the early part of the fourth century, Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ. (Holman Dictionary. 288)
 - a) The Romans celebrated Saturnalia, a feast to their Sun god, from December 17-24.
 - b) When Christianity became Rome's religion, these festivals were modified instead of ended.
- iii. Many “Christmas” traditions were borrowed from pagan celebrations.
 - a) Decorative wreaths and lamps and gift-giving were part of Roman paganism. (Tertullian 2.44, 70)
 - b) The Christmas tree was likely adopted from German nature worship. (*Indoor tree in August?*)
- iv. “Christmas” as we know it is actually a Catholic religious tradition.
 - a) The name is a contraction of *Christ's Mass* and was not even used until the Middle Ages.
 - The Catholic church teaches Mass is a real (bloodless) sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood.
 - But the Bible teaches that Jesus was offered only once, and it never speaks of Mass. (cf. He. 9:28)
 - b) Santa Claus is a reference to Saint Nicolas of Myra, patron saint of Russia, sailors, and children.
- v. So why and how did an un-Biblical holiday with pagan roots become so important to Christians?
 - a) In the fourth century the controversy over the nature of Christ, whether He was truly God or a created being, led to an increased emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation, the affirmation that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14 HCSB). It is likely that the urgency to proclaim the incarnation was an important factor in the spread of the celebration of Christmas. (Holman Dictionary. 288)
 - b) Sadly, many people are now so invested in Christmas they no longer question its propriety.

II. A Christian's Participation in "Christmas"

A. *The Christian and Holy Days*

- i. There were several holy days under the OT, but these were finished at the cross. (cf. Co. 2:13-17)
 - a) The NT has no holy days as such, but we do celebrate Christ every first day of the week.
 - The first day of the week is the Lord's Day, the day of the resurrection. **Re. 1:10; Jn. 20:1**
 - The early Christians met on the first day to worship and eat the Lord's Supper. **Ac. 20:7**
 - b) The Lord's Day is the day God chose to honor Christ, not Christmas or Easter or any other.
- ii. Religious holidays appointed by men are characteristic of weak and unspiritual ways. **Ga. 4:9-11**
 - a) God identified the death of Christ as the event to be remembered, so He gave us the Lord's Supper.
 - b) Do we get as excited about celebrating the first day of the week as we do celebrating Christmas?
- iii. Some may observe certain days, but they are to do so as a matter of individual conscience. **Ro. 14:5-8**
 - a) There is no authority for the church to observe a holiday, but you must decide how to interact with it.
 - b) If you choose to exercise your liberty, beware of your example, involvement, and its implications.

B. *The Christian and the Birth of Christ*

- i. Our opposition to Christmas should not be mistaken for antagonism to rejoicing in Jesus' birth.
 - a) Angels and shepherds and foreigners honored God for sending His Son into the world. **Lk. 2:8-14**
 - b) But notice that even in heaven's joy, the emphasis was on Christ's appearance as *Savior*.
- ii. It is not wrong to celebrate the coming of Christ and the incarnation, God becoming a man.
 - a) We sing songs, say prayers, and preach sermons that rejoice in the birth of our Lord.
 - b) But we must emphasize what the Lord commands us to do; otherwise what good is His birth to us?
- iii. It is not wrong to celebrate Jesus' birth, but it is wrong to say that "Christmas" is the celebration of it.
 - a) It is wrong to identify a human institution and pagan traditions with the traditions of our Lord.
 - b) It is wrong to revel in materialism and lavish decorations and claim Jesus is the reason.

C. *The Christian and Materialism*

- i. Our modern Christmas traditions emphasize materialism and gaudiness which are contrary to Christ.
 - a) At what other time would we have a tree in our living room or light our house for all to see?
 - b) Your neighbors might be surprised to hear you don't celebrate Christmas, regardless of what you say.
- ii. What are we emphasizing in the gifts we give one another during the "holidays"?
 - a) Are we emphasizing cost or value? Are you instilling a spirit of service or of selfishness?
 - b) Is it honest to teach our children that Santa Claus, a Catholic icon, brings presents to them?
- iii. What are we showing our neighbors when we decorate our houses lavishly?
 - a) Christians aren't supposed to dress to draw attention. Why would we draw attention to our houses?
 - b) Are we being lights to the world or are we fitting in with the world?
- iv. Not all of these things are necessarily wrong, but we need to think about what we do and why.

D. *The Christian and Manmade Religion*

- i. There are a number of holidays we can gladly and wholeheartedly participate in.
 - a) There will always be some who make holidays a license for sin even when sin is not inherent in it.
 - b) But Christmas is the offspring of apostate churches and pagan traditions; what value is in it?
- ii. Christmas means one of two things to the people in the world: religious exercise or material indulgence.
 - a) Human religion and greed are not incidental to the Christmas holiday; they are intrinsic.
 - b) Think about that as you decide how and to what extent you will participate in it.
- iii. All of us observe the holiday to some extent; we're off work, we see our families, most of us give gifts.
 - a) It is not wrong to do so, but we need to stop and consider what is appropriate and what is not.
 - b) Pagans and Catholics would never worship as we do; let's be careful of celebrating as they do.

Action

- 1) The purpose of this lesson is two-fold.
 - a. First, to inform those who are ignorant of the true nature of Christmas and its relation to Biblical teaching.
 - b. Second, to challenge the rest of us to think and question what is proper in our involvement as Christians.
- 2) I don't think you are a pagan just because you may observe traditions that originated in paganism.
- 3) But it is wise to consider our relation to the world and not take for granted our involvement in its activities.