

Keeping the “Christ” in Christmas

December 14, 2014 - Dr. Craig P. Scott, Calvary Baptist of Waterbury, CT

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. A true Christmas celebration will honor Christ, “the Messiah.” It is a wonderful time to share with others the story of God’s gift of His Son who bore our sins on a tree and redeemed us. It is a wonderful time spent with our families. We should remind ourselves that because of God’s grace those in Christ would enjoy the rest of eternity with their believing family members. It is also wonderful to sing praises to God for His great gift through the many Christmas carols of Christ’s first advent.

Yet, like anything that points people to Christ it is challenged. Carols are not permitted in many public schools. Manger scenes, Christmas trees and other symbols are being banned from public property. The greeting of “Merry Christmas” is now changed into the politically correct greeting of “Happy Holidays.” Signs in department stores reflect this policy by excluding the term “Christmas.” In the public sector, Christmas vacation is now called “Winter Holidays” or “Winter Solace.” Even the 2008 oxford dictionary deleted words such as Bishop, minister, deacon, and other religious terms.

This of course has brought great pause to many Christians. But most Christians do not know that the early church did not celebrate Christmas. It was never established in the New Testament as a religious holiday. Many of the symbols used to celebrate Christmas, such as the fir tree, may have been taken from pagan celebrations or secular traditions. Even though the December date for Christ’s birth has biblical merit, the reformation church felt winter Christmas celebration was too close to the pagan feasts of Saturnalia or the Winter Solis celebrations.

The Catholic Church was the first to create the holiday in the 3rd or 4th century. They called it Christ’s Mass because they performed a special service where they reenacted the sacrifice of Christ and declared it to be efficacious. Since this act was contrary to biblical truth it required the reinterpreting of Hebrews 10:10-14.

By AD 1545, the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent declared the Sacrifice of the Mass a “truly propitiatory sacrifice” of “Infinite value.”

“... it is quite properly offered according to apostolic tradition not only for the sins, penalties, satisfactions and other needs of the faithful who

are living, but also for those who have died in Christ but are not yet fully cleansed.”

See the Council of Trent, session 22 “Decree and Canons on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,” chapter 2.

That decree violated the clear statements of Scripture.

Heb. 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**.

Heb. 10:11-12 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: ¹² But this man, after **he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down** on the right hand of God;

Heb. 10:13-14 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering **he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified**.

Because of the prominent emphasis on the false teaching of the re-sacrificing of Christ in the Catholic Mass, the Swiss reformer, John Calvin in 1550 forbid the celebration of Christmas in Geneva, Switzerland and imposed a fine or imprisonment for anyone celebrating Christmas.

In 1560, the English reformer, John Knox forbid the celebrating of Christmas because he also considered those that did were the enemy of the cross. ***Those that invented this feast centered it around the continual re-sacrificing of Christ, which was a violation of Scripture.*** The sacrifice presented another Christ and another gospel.

In 1644 after England broke from Rome, the Westminster Assembly requested that the English Parliament pass an act forbidding the observance of Christmas, calling it a heathen holiday.

They wrote:

“There is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord’s Day which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called “Holy Days,” having no warrant in the Word of God are not to be continued.”

In 1620 the Puritans passed a similar law. So New England worked steady through December 25th in “studied neglect” of the day.”

In 1660 the General Court of Massachusetts decreed punishment for those who kept the season stating:

“Anyone who is found observing, by abstinence from labor, feasting, or any other way, any such days as Christmas say, shall pay for every such offense five shillings.”

It was not until the early 1800’s that Christmas services reappeared in the believing church. However, the southern Presbyterian Church was the last to hold out. They passed an amendment in their 1899 general assembly saying,

“There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holidays, rather the contrary as found in Colossians 2:16-21 and Galatians 4:9-11. And such observances is contrary to the principles of the Reformed Faith conducive to will-worship and not in harmony with the simplicity of the gospel of Christ.”

However, in 1900, they changed their view.

Now for some of you, this may be the first time you ever heard of such things. We must remember that Christ is our Sabbath. Everyday with Christ is special. So if you’re incensed, as I am, over the secular attack against Christmas please remember, the Scriptures do not instruct us to celebrate Christmas, Easter or any special feast day. Besides meeting on the first day of the week and partaking in the Lord’s Supper, there are no other instructions. It is true that Christ’s birth most likely occurred around the 25th of December, but we are not given any instructions to celebrate the event.

Furthermore, in our day, Christmas has become commercialized. Many Christians have lost sight of what this time of year is about.

So what should we do?

I CHOOSE TO CELEBRATE CHRIST’S BIRTH BY KEEPING FIVE-KEY ELEMENTS IN MIND.

1. HIS VIRGIN BIRTH:

Psalm 103:1 says,

“For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.”

Many have expounded this verse to show that God’s love is unfailing and steadfast toward all who follow Him. The thought is this,

“God’s great love is even greater than the distance
between heaven and earth.”

When you think about it, the sun is 93 million miles away. It takes 8.3 minutes for its light to reach the Earth. Light travels at 186,282 miles per second. The second nearest star to Earth is called, *Proxima Centauri*. It is 4.22 light years away or 24,807,799,784,068 miles away. It would take the fastest spacecraft more than 50,000 years to get there. To reach the edge of the universe, which some feel is constantly expanding, it would take about 15 billion light years. ***The point of all this is that God's love is so great that it is truly awe-inspiring.***

The birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is also another awe-inspiring manifestation of that same love.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

His love is so great that our Lord who made the heavens and earth would leave heavens glory and humbled Himself, making

“Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” - Phil 2:7-8

2. THE FIRST ADVENT OF CHRIST

There are some 2400 verses in the Bible speaking of Christ's coming. **353** of them speak about His first coming. It would do us good to mediate on the cost our Saviors First Advent. We do not have enough time to look at all 353 verses, but I would like you to briefly look at just one passage.

- a. Isaiah 53:1 - His people would not believe Him
- b. Isaiah 53:2 - Appearance of an ordinary man
- c. Isaiah 53:3 - Despised, rejected, acquainted with grief, we esteemed Him not
- d. Isaiah 53:4 - He bore our griefs and sorrows
- e. Isaiah 53:5 - Wounded, bruised
- f. Isaiah 53:6 - the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all
- g. Isaiah 53:7-12

3. THE GRACE OF GOD TOWARDS US

I choose to celebrate Christmas and remind myself that by His grace my eyes were open and I responded in faith receiving Christ.

For when Christ was in the world, “the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” But by God’s grace go I. Notice the grace

Eph. 1:6 - “To the praise of the glory of **his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.** ⁷ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to **the riches of his grace**”

Eph. 2:5 - “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (**by grace ye are saved;**)”

Eph. 2:7 - “**That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace** in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by **grace** are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”

4. I ALSO REMIND MYSELF TO BE THANKFUL OF THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN.

- a. Romans 5:15 “. . .**The gift by grace**, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.
- b. Romans 5:17 - Not only did we received the abundance of grace but also “**the gift of righteousness**” by which we shall reign in life through one man, Jesus Christ.
- c. Romans 6:23 “but the **gift of God is eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- d. 1 Cor. 12:1 “Now concerning **spiritual gifts**, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. . . But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”
- e. 2Cor. 9:15 “Thanks be unto God for **his unspeakable gift.**” - That is the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- f. Eph. 2:8-10 - “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it (**salvation through faith in Christ**) is the **gift of God:** ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

- g. Eph. 3:7: “I was made a minister, according to the **gift of the grace** of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.”
- h. Eph. 4:7 - “But unto **every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.**”
- i. Acts 2:38: “and ye shall receive **the gift of the Holy Ghost.**”
- j. Acts 10:45: “that on the Gentiles also was poured out **the gift of the Holy Ghost.**”

5. I CHOOSE TO USE CHRISTMAS TO SHARE CHRIST TO A DYING WORLD.

We should be awed when we examine Christ’s miraculous birth. We should be moved when we understand the tremendous cost He endured by coming to us. Furthermore, we should be humbled when we understand God’s abounding love and grace. We should be thankful for the gift of His Son along with the gifts of grace, righteousness, eternal life, various spiritual gifts and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are only a few gifts we can give back to God. First is the gift of our lives. We do this by presenting our selves a living sacrifice unto God. The second is the gift of our continual praise unto God. We do this by giving praise to His name. The third is the gift of doing good and sharing what we have. We can only do this when we yield to Him and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christmas without centering on Christ is nothing more than a secular or pagan celebration with religious formality and a mixture of pagan, worldly and spiritual symbols. What the world needs is Christ.