

Is Christmas a Pagan Holiday?

We Must Take Christmas Captive

From time to time I get into discussions with people who say we should not celebrate Christmas because it is a pagan holiday. My response to that is December 25 is the day that the Lord has made, and any pagan who treads on that day is trespassing. And according to 2 Cor.10 it is our job to escort them off the premises of that day.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For although we are walking in the flesh, we do not wage war in a fleshly way, ⁴ since the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments ⁵ and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Most of the time you hear people quote verse five in the context of controlling your own thoughts and the principle does apply to that *by implication*, but that is not what Paul is talking about in the context. What Paul is talking about is the warfare going on between him and the false teachers. The false teachers present arguments and high-minded ideas that they raise up against the knowledge of God. Paul seizes those arguments and high-minded ideas, takes them prisoner, and forces them into obedience to Christ (by refuting and correcting them). That is spiritual warfare. Somebody comes along with an unbiblical argument and you demolish that argument by forcing it into obedience to Christ. They try to argue that the world created itself through evolution over billions of years, and we do spiritual warfare by taking the discussion and forcing it into compliance with the truth, which says God created the world in six days. They set up the idea that it is okay to kill unborn babies, or that religion is all a matter of opinion, or that all religions pray to the same God and lead to heaven, and we do spiritual warfare by refuting those arguments, exposing them as false, and forcing them into compliance with the truths about the sacredness of life, the absoluteness of truth, and the exclusiveness of the one, true God. That is what it means to take every thought captive.

So if the ancient Babylonians come along and they want December 25 to be all about some nature goddess celebrated with drunken revelry, or the Romans want to worship Saturn, or European pagans want to worship a sun god on the Winter solstice, our job is not to take a look at those ungodly ideas and duck and run for cover. Treating December 25 as though it were somehow contaminated or tainted because of the pagan celebrations would be superstitious. Those pagan celebrations do not have any power to corrupt a day that the Lord has made. If someone wants to attach pagan ideas to one of God's days, our job is to wrest that day out of their little pagan hands and force it into compliance with biblical truth, and I would say we have done a pretty fair job with Christmas. Yes, the battle still rages, and the enemy does all he can to inject as much secular garbage as he can with materialism and Santa Clause and all the rest, but in large measure Christmas is still mostly about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in this culture. I went into a restaurant with Josiah the other day and while all these unbelievers are sitting around eating, there is music in the background about Jesus Christ the Lord reigning as King! Bless God for that! I love that! Easter is another pagan day we have done a fair job of snatching out of their hands – although not quite as successfully as Christmas. With Halloween we really have some work to do. But all that to say there is no reason for us to shy away from December 25 or any other day. All the days are the Lord's.

But then someone might respond back and say, "I realize there is nothing wrong with the day – but is celebrating the birth of Jesus really something we should be doing?" The Bible does not command us to celebrate the incarnation. In fact, we are not commanded to celebrate anything except Jesus' death. But

nor are we forbidden. God has given us great freedom in the forms of our worship. There is no command to celebrate the resurrection either, and yet, from the very beginning the Church did so by making the first day of the week their day of corporate worship. And that change, I believe, carries the stamp of divine approval in the way it is presented in Acts.

So when it comes to Christmas the real question is, “Is the incarnation worth celebrating?” (The word “incarnation” means “to take on flesh.” Christmas is a celebration of the fact that God the Son came to earth and took on human flesh. He became a man.)

Is the Incarnation Worthy of Celebration?

What can we learn from Scripture about whether or not that is something worthy of celebration? **Luke 2:8-14 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. 12 This will be the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 14 Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!**

When the incarnation happened it was celebrated in a manner never before seen in human history. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared in the sky praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!” This is not a common occurrence in Scripture. The word “host” means “army,” and God is called the Lord of hosts almost 300 times in the Old Testament. But had there ever been a time when anyone actually saw the heavenly host worshipping God like this? No. One time there was a prophet (Micaiah) who saw the heavenly host as part of a vision, but even in that vision they were not worshipping God or celebrating anything.

So all through redemptive history we have heard about these hosts – the heavenly armies. But even with all the marvelous things that happened throughout the Old Testament there is never a time when Scripture records them appearing in the sky or anywhere else to celebrate anything. But when Jesus was born heaven exploded with joyful praise in such a way that it could be physically seen from earth. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world was a uniquely wonderful event. Is it worth celebrating? A great multitude of the heavenly host certainly thought so. These creatures had existed for thousands of years – ever since the creation – yet that night in the fields outside Bethlehem they found themselves doing something they had never done before that we know of – appearing to men and shouting praises to God in the highest because of what was taking place on earth. If we are going to take our cues from heaven I would say the incarnation is indeed something worth celebrating.

And celebrating with joy! Each holiday in our culture has taken on a particular mood. People want to be spooked on Halloween, and they want to relax on Labor Day, and they want to get serious and make resolutions on New Years Day; but more than anything Christmas is about joy. People say “merry Christmas.” That is right on. It is exactly as it should be, because it is a day when we celebrate the good news of great joy! The rejoicing of the world is a rejoicing of ignorance. They are blind to the real reason for joy, and so all their joy this time of year is hollow to say the least. They are like the rocks shouting praises to God – they have no understanding of what they are doing. But it is fitting nonetheless that the whole culture should be joyful at the celebration of the incarnation even if they do not understand what they are doing.

My prayer for myself this Christmas season is that I will be one who does know what I am doing. Joyless Christians are a reproach on the name of Christ, and I do not want to be a reproach on His name. I want to be full of joy when I think about the marvelous truth of eternal God coming to earth and taking

on human flesh. God save us from thinking of it as a mere doctrine or mere historical event in a way that fails to excite our affections with joy. May God open our eyes to all the marvelous wonders that exist because of the incarnation. Only because of the incarnation can we know God. Only because of Jesus' coming into this world can our sins be forgiven. Only through the Son of God taking on human flesh can you have any of the blessings God offers; and through the incarnation we have ALL the blessings He offers – every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms! All year long we rejoice in countless different blessings from God – experiences of His faithfulness, grace, guidance, encouragement, forgiveness, holiness, food-likeness, power, renewal, life-giving love, mercy, patience, illumination, refuge; and all of it – every bit of joy from every one of those and countless others – all of it comes only because the Son of God stripped off His heavenly robes of splendor and took on human flesh, being made in the form of a servant. And now He is the ideal High Priest who can sympathize with you in all your weaknesses because He learned obedience through suffering and was tempted in every way, just as you are, yet was without sin.