

PUTTING CHRISTMAS INTO PERSPECTIVE

Christmas Eve Service

December 24, 2005

I. Introduction

- a. This has been a very interesting December, as it seems there have been many points of discussion concerning the celebration of Christmas.
- b. What is the quickest way to offend a professing Christian in the United States this year? ANSWER: Greet him with Happy Holidays?
- c. Why?
- d. Nativity Scene – The other day, I was listening to a Christian radio station, and the Disc Jockey asked listeners to pray for a situation in Fort Bend County. There was a possibility that a Nativity Scene may be removed from outside of a public building. Why?
- e. I recently read an article that referenced a book by Fox New anchor John Gibson, called, “The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Christian Holiday is Worse than You Thought”
- f. “Christmas Shoes”

Sir, I want to buy these shoes for my Momma please
It's Christmas Eve and these shoes are just her style
Could you hurry Sir? Daddy says there's not much time
You see, she's been sick for quite a while.

And I know these shoes will make her smile
And I want her to look beautiful
If Momma meets Jesus tonight

So popular has this song been, that a few years ago, a made-for-T.V. movie was made, starring Rob Lowe.

Yet, it was the last line of this song that really caught my attention:

I knew I caught a breath of heaven's love
As he thanked me and ran out
I knew that God had sent that little boy to remind me
What Christmas is all about.

Is this what Christmas is **all** about? Buying gifts for those less fortunate?

- g. What is Christmas all about?

II. Background

To begin with, Christmas was certainly not celebrated in the New Testament Church.

However, throughout the Roman Empire, the Persian cult, known as Mithraism, began spreading rapidly in the first and second centuries. Mithraism was the worship of the sun God, Mithras. During the fall months, the days became increasingly shorter leading up to the shortest day of the year, the Winter Solstice. On this day, December 21, the pagans believed that, because it was so short, the sun had died. However, in the days following the Winter Solstice, the days became increasingly longer. Therefore, they believed the Sun was being reborn. Therefore, a celebration was held each year, on December 25 to commemorate the birth of the Sun god.

It appears that the Roman Emperor Aurelian, in 274 AD, declared December 25 the day of “The Birth of the Unconquered Sun.” In addition to this day, the week leading up to December 25 was known as the Roman feast of Saturnalia, which was meant to commemorate the Golden Age of Saturn, the Roman god of Agriculture.

Yet, in the midst of the widespread paganism throughout the Roman Empire, the Church began contemplating was to best win over pagans to Christianity. Therefore, in 350 AD, the Bishop of Rome, Pope Julius I, choose December 25th as the observance of Christmas.

Christmas, as the holiday would be known, meant the Mass of Christ.

There seems to be little doubt among historians that Pope Leo was trying to make it as painless as possible for pagan Romans (who remained a majority at that time) to convert to Christianity. The new religion went down a bit easier, knowing that their feasts would not be taken away from them.

- **But, I will say that this bit of history does not necessarily mean we are forbidden from commemorating the Incarnation.**

III. What Christmas Is Not

a. The Mass of Christ

“The Mass is the central act of Catholic worship: Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary is perpetuated because the priest offers it anew to the Father...the only difference between the Sacrifice of the Cross and that of the Mass is that the mode of offering is different. On the Cross, the mode of offering was bloody; in the Mass, the mode of offering is unbloody.”

THIS WAS ONE OF THE GREAT PROBLEMS THE REFORMERS HAD WITH CHRISTMAS.

“We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas...because we do not believe in the mass at all, but abhor it.”

134 years ago today Charles Spurgeon – December 24, 1871

- Why do I bring this up? Because there is **NOTHING** sacred about the word **CHRISTMAS**. In fact, it’s origins are something we would certainly want to distance ourselves from.

b. It is not the Birthday of Jesus Christ

- In our Western Culture, we are obsessed with Birthdays, yet, the Bible makes no mention of when Jesus was born.
- We can pinpoint the time He was crucified, but not when He was born.
- Obviously, the date was not what was sacred – it was the truth of the Incarnation.
- Now, I am NOT trying to minimize the importance of Bethlehem...It was essential to our salvation; however, I believe, as the Puritans did, that we should celebrate the Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ every Lord’s Day!

c. Holiday

- i. Now, there were Holy Days in the Bible were “types” of Christ that looked forward to His coming.
- ii. Now that Christ has come, there is no need for these “types” of Christ.
- iii. READ Colossians 2:16-17
- iv. Holy – Day

Holy means “set apart” “sanctified”

Since the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, EVERY day is Holy.

Let us not, like is the practice in the Roman Catholic Church, take it upon ourselves to declare one day holier than another...this is most certainly the height of pride and arrogance.

v. December 25 is no more sacred, no more holy, to the Christian than December 26, or July 25.

- On December 22, 1870, the Southern Presbyterian Church in the United States issued the following statement:

“if the exact date were known, or if someday December 25 had been agreed upon by common consent in the absence of certain knowledge, we would still object to the observance of Christmas as a holy day. We object for many reasons, but at present mention only this one: that experience has shown that the institution of holy days by human authority, however pure the intention, has invariably led to the disregard of that which was instituted by God...the Lord’s Day.”

Wow! Few times has this statement been more applicable than this year. Scripture did not institute Christmas, so I believe it, to some degree, falls within the realm of Christian liberty and conscience; however, Scripture did institute the Lord’s Day – we see in Acts 20:7 and Revelation 1:9-10.

IV. So, What is Christmas ALL about? We cannot say...for if the Bible is our sole authority, we can only affirm for certain that which the Bible affirms.

- a. But, we can say that Christmas can be a time of reflection and thanksgiving.
- b. As Christians; however, and this should not be a profound statement...EVERYTHING we do should be expressly Christ-centered; God-honoring.
- c. The way we live our lives should be done completely to the glory of God.
- d. When we remember the Incarnation...in the time of year we call Christmas...what I am stating is that it should be explicitly Christian.
- e. Throughout Scripture, we are often called to Remember the Goodness of God to us, His people. Certainly this is the theme of Deuteronomy.
- f. People get upset that Prayer is no longer sanctioned in Public Schools, but we don’t pray in our homes. We get upset that Christ is removed from Christmas in the Public Square, but we celebrate Christmas in exactly the same way as the pagans do.

- g. Here is a way we can “test ourselves”: Would a non-believer be comfortable in your home during Christmas [or any other day of the year for that matter]. Or would they be very uncomfortable because your home is so centered on glorifying God in all that you do.
- h. **Colossians 3:17 states, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”**
- i. There are only a few “sacred” things today...The Word of God, the Gospel Message, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ;

When we elevate anything to the level of sacred or holy, such as the greeting “Merry Christmas” or public Nativity Scenes, all it does is dilute and detract from that which is truly Sacred.

May all that we do – even the manner in which we celebrate the Incarnation preserve and protect the Sacred Gospel Message – that we are Saved by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone, in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ Alone.