

# SHOULD CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

*By Denver Cheddie*

There are many well meaning Christians who do not celebrate Christmas or Easter, including a few who are even militantly opposed to such celebrations. Considering the manner in which Christmas is celebrated by many unsaved people as well as Christians, it is easy to empathize with them. I personally would condemn many of the customs and practices associated with Christmas e.g. Santa Claus and other myths. However to reject Christmas altogether is to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

In this article I respond to Wayne Camps' "I Don't Do Christmas" since his article encapsulates the broad spectrum of anti-Christmas sentiments. He gives his reasons for not celebrating Christmas, which I respect, but then concludes by asking, "Why would any person calling himself a Christian dare celebrate the day?" I call myself a Christian, so I wish to explain why I do not abstain from Christmas. Let us consider the validity of his reasons for rejecting Christmas.

The Great Commission Does Not Command It

It is true that neither Jesus nor the apostles commanded that we celebrate the birth of Christ (although the mystery of godliness does include Christ's birth, 1 Tim 3:16). We are given two ordinances by which we are to remember Him, baptism and the Lord's supper. However Jesus also never told us **not** to celebrate His birth. More importantly we must examine the precedent Jesus set. In John 10:22, we see that Jesus celebrated the Feast of the Dedication. This was **not** one of the Old Testament feast days designated by God. This was instituted in 165 BC by Judas Maccabeus. It was also known as *Hanukkah*, celebrated in December. We also find Paul, in the church age, celebrating Jewish feast days (Acts 18:21). These are 2 cases of prominent Bible figures celebrating events which were not commanded of them. In both cases they were simply following the existing tradition **without** Divine fiat. How different in principle is celebrating Christmas today?

There are many grey areas of scripture where discretion is allowed. Concerning circumcision for example, Paul's unequivocal teaching was that adhering to the Jewish custom was not mandatory for Christians. Yet he was adamant that Timothy be circumcised (Acts 16:3). Paul obviously never bound himself to rules and regulations in this matter. He allowed flexibility as it pertained to the furtherance of the gospel. He became all things to all men (1 Cor. 9:22). Experience has shown that Christmas is a time of the year when people are most open to the gospel. This unusual receptiveness facilitates the spreading of the true message of Christianity around this season. It is ironic indeed that people would use the great commission as a reason not to celebrate Christmas. Why not employ the same flexibility as Paul?

## Christmas Is Crucifying Jesus Anew

Camps theorizes that since the catholic *"mass is a sacrifice of Jesus Christ, meaning that every mass they observe is a new sacrifice of Jesus Christ"*, celebrating Christmas is denying the efficacious work of Christ. These *"repeated sacrifices"* put Christ to open shame (Heb. 6:6). Any sensible person could attest that this is a most flimsy argument. I am baffled as to how eating fruit cake, visiting friends and family, giving to the less privileged, and preaching the gospel could ever be putting Christ to open shame. In context, Heb. 6:6 is speaking of apostates who have deliberately abandoned Christ and it explains why they cannot be reconciled – there is no more atonement. It does not even indirectly refer to Christmas. Camps is using biblical phraseology taken out of context to superpose his ideas on the Word of God.

Camps also writes, *"If I look forward to the mass of Christ (Christmas), how could I be looking for the second coming? (Heb.9:28)"* What rubbish! The two are not mutually exclusive. His assumption, that those who celebrate Christmas are *"repeatedly looking for a sacrifice"*, is wrong because not everyone who partakes of the festival is doing so in cognizance of its catholic ramifications.

## Christmas Has A Pagan Origin

The date December 25<sup>th</sup> was originally designated by the heathens before the church celebrated Christmas, to "*honor the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven*", and was adopted by the Roman church to "*conciliate the heathen and to swell the number of adherents to Christianity*". It was a pagan celebration of the "*unconquered sun (natalis solis invicti), which at the winter solstice begins again to show an increase in light.*"

I guess all of this is supposed to mean that I am a pagan, despite the fact that I trust only in the one time work of Jesus and comprehensively renounce any human effort as a contributor to my salvation. **It is wrong to argue that since Christmas had a pagan origin in the year 274 AD, all who celebrate it today partake of a pagan festival. If this were the case, then by extension, since America was founded on "Christian principles", every American today is a Christian.** How far from the truth can we wander! Most Christians who celebrate Christmas today pay no regard whatsoever to any pagan deity associated with the original festival. They celebrate Christ.

Christmas, for me, is not even a celebration of Christ's birth. Most experts agree that Christ could not have been born in winter, and neither would shepherds be out in the fields at that time of the year, as Camps correctly points out. As Christians we celebrate Christ all year round. Traditionally in December, that celebration is further attended by house cleaning, decorating, visiting family and friends etc. Actually at Christmas the church is closer to the ideal of Acts 2:42 than at any other season, where brethren break bread together and fellowship one with another.

## The Christmas Tree Is Pagan

It is believed that the tree was a common form of decoration in pagan Rome and Egypt. *"The mother of Adonis, the Sun-God and great mediatorial divinity, was mystically said to have been changed into a tree, and when in that state to have brought forth her divine son"*. I wish to reiterate that just because the tree was employed by pagans in idolatrous celebrations, it does not mean that using the tree today as a form of decoration is necessarily pagan. An idol is whatever we value as being equal to or above God. A statue or picture in my house means nothing if I don't worship it. For some people TV is an idol, that doesn't mean that everyone possessing a TV is an idolater. Neither is a Christmas tree necessarily an object of paganism.

Paul said that an idol is nothing and even eating food offered to idols makes one neither better nor worse. It is only a problem if it becomes a stumbling block to others (1 Cor. 8). If one were to argue that celebrating Christmas destroys the faith of weak believers or otherwise hinders the gospel, then that argument may have merit. But the only people offended by Christmas are a few petty disgruntled believers who are by no means weak in faith.

## Jeremiah 10

Camps relies heavily on Jeremiah 10 to argue against Christmas. Verse 2 states that we should not learn the "way of the heathen". He even tries to make verse 3 and 4 speak disapprovingly of the Christmas tree. The context of this passage however is clear. It discusses the idolatry of the heathen nations. The cutting of trees mentioned in verses 3-5 were for the making of wooden idols, not Christmas trees. The heathen of Jeremiah's day did not worship Christmas trees. Since Israel had already followed those nations in open idol worship, God was pleading with them not to go after those gods. The "way of the heathen" is that path which leads away from God. That is what we should not learn from the heathen, but there may be other things unrelated to theology that we could learn from them. For example, it was not a Christian who discovered Pythagoras' Theorem. Yet accepting that  $opposite^2 + adjacent^2 = hypotenuse^2$  is certainly not learning the way of the heathen. If Camps could convince me that the way in which I celebrate Christmas is equivalent to following strange deities, I would repent and renounce Christmas.

## Conclusion

Although the writers of the Bible do not command the celebration of Christmas, they do not prohibit it. When the gentiles began to be saved, concern arose among the Jews concerning circumcision and the law of Moses. The non-practice of circumcision would have been considered pagan by Old Testament standards since the state of uncircumcision was spoken of in unclean terms. The verdict of the Jerusalem Council effectively stated that the church is indifferent to nuances of tradition, even so called pagan ones.

In other words, as long as our hearts are purified by faith (Acts 15:9), there is no difference between those who partake of certain festivities and those who don't, as long as those festivities are not innately antithetical to Christianity, as Christmas isn't. The principles of Christianity make equal room for those who wish to celebrate Christmas and those who wish to abstain.

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