

**WHAT SHOULD
A CHRISTIAN
DO WITH
CHRISTMAS**



by A. L. Parr

Nobody knows when
Christ was born.

Frequently I have been asked the question, as perhaps you have, too, “Why Don’t You Celebrate

Christmas?” Many reasons could be given, though one is sufficient really: God never told me to do so.

That answer may at first be denied by many who have believed otherwise all their lives. For others it will not be considered a sufficient answer. To both I suggest at least an honest look at the facts of the matter before faith is settled and lines of fellowship are drawn or erased.

In the first place, nobody knows when Christ was born. Most scholars are agreed that it was *not* on December 25th. The date is not recorded, either in scripture or in any extant secular records. If God had seen it as important, he would have told us, for he “hath appointed unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Peter 1:3). Since he did not tell us, it obviously is not important. Further, God specifically prohibits us from observing special “religious holidays” for so Paul was “*moved by the Holy Ghost*” to write in Galatians 4:9-11.

Clement of Alexandria in A.D. 200 had condemned speculation on the birth of Christ as superstitious, and refuted some of the dates which had been suggested. Three dates had been variously considered: January 6th, March 25th, and December 25th. As late as A.D. 245 Origen repudiated the idea of keeping the birthday of Christ “as though he were a king Pharaoh.” The practice persisted, though and the first calendar giving the date as December 25th was published in 354 by Philocalus. Through Roman influence, December 25th became the most popular date. This was the date of the idolatrous Birthday of the Sun. The Syrians clung to January 6th and accused the Romans of sun worship and idolatry. In Britain, December 25th was a festival long before the

Romans invaded.

ORIGINS OF CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Thus we see that the celebration of Christmas was legalized in the fourth century in an effort to turn the attention of the people, who had been reared in heathenism, away from a pagan celebration that was held at that time of year. When the Roman Catholic Church was formed it strongly emphasized the observance and does to this day. Many of the leaders of the Reformation renounced its keeping as a carry-over from Romanism, but with the passing of time it revived until it is now observed by Protestantism in general.

From various lands local customs and traditions were injected. These were borrowed, given a “Christian flavor,” and passed off as part of the celebration of the birth of Christ. From earliest times the English gave the season more of a social flavor than anything else. The feudal barons extended their hospitality to their friends, tenants, and households. There was usually singing, games, dancing, plays, and rich food. There was also a sort of pantomime for the children in connection with giving of gifts to them.

Outlawed in England from 1647 to 1660 under Oliver Cromwell, Christmas found no refuge in New England. Governor William Bradford wrote of the Pilgrims’ first December in America, “*Munday, the 25th day, we went on shore, some to fell tymbber, some to saw, some to rive, and some to carry; so no man rested all that day.*”

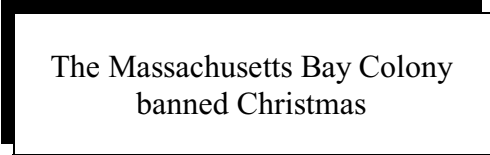
The Massachusetts Bay Colony banned Christmas in 1659 with the following General Court Statute: “...*whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by fore-bearing labour, feasting or any other way, ... euery such person so offending shall pay for euery such offence, fiue shillings...*”

This ban was repealed in 1681, but the day was not freely observed until 1750 and not made a legal U.S. holiday until a Georgia court so recognized it in 1856.

How very many people there are who staunchly affirm their belief that the celebration is from God! But a majority of believers does not make a thing so. *God*, not the consensus of man, is the source of truth, yet man, not the revelation of God, gave us “Christmas.”

“PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS”

How should a Christian deal with Christmas? We hear many people every December call for “putting Christ back into Christmas.” Here is what one Tennessee church advertized in their local newspaper a couple of years ago:



The Massachusetts Bay Colony
banned Christmas

“This is the season for decking halls, bringing out the Christmas decorations, and spending money for presents. Although the commercialization of the season has invaded the religious meaning of Christmas, some congregations have programs and special services to keep Christ in Christmas.”

While *some* religions may see a meaning in Christmas, our God has attached no “religious meaning” to it. What evidence is there that there ever was a time in America when the national attitude toward Christmas was more religious than commercial?

It is evident from the historical notes just considered that the celebration *began* in this country as primarily social and commercial. While it has always had a religious significance to the Roman Catholic

Church, and for the past 150 years or so for most Protestant denominations, still it has been with the masses a time more for parties and gaiety than for prayer and worship.

As for putting Christ “back” into Christmas, it is quite certain that he was *never* in it. As Christ is subject to the will of God and not to the will of man, and as God is not the author of Christmas but man is, and as God nowhere records himself as having “put Christ into Christmas,” it is *not possible* that Christ ever *was* or ever *will be* in Christmas

In II Timothy 3:16-17 the apostle Paul wrote that all scripture is from God and is profitable unto the perfection of man. Peter put it this way in his 2nd epistle, verse 3 of chapter 1: “*According*

as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” It is clear in these

verses that whatever God wants man to know and do for Him is recorded in the Bible. The words of Galatians 4:9-11 were penned by the apostle after some Christians had gotten themselves entangled in worldly philosophies and practices. They had been led astray by false teachers, particularly those who would attach the old law to the new faith. He wrote:

“but now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again? Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain.” (ASV)

As for putting Christ
“back” into Christmas,
it is quite certain that
he was never in it.

The days, months, seasons and years mentioned were, among others, the 7th day of the week, the annual Day of Atonement, the first and seventh months, the season (or feasts) of Tabernacles, Passover, and Weeks, and the seventh or “Sabbath Year” and the year of Jubilee. These things were all dedicated to God by the Jews as worship according to God’s own commandment. God doesn’t want these things today but has given us a *new* commandment.

In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul admonished against forsaking the truth of God for a perversion of truth, and in the 3rd chapter, verse 1, he wrote, “*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?*”

THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST is *the* important theme of the Bible. The gospel, as defined in I Corinthians 15:1-3, is the fact of the *death*, burial and resurrection. In Luke 24:44-46 Jesus said that the prophets taught that Christ must suffer and *die*. In I Corinthians 11:26 we read that it is the *death* of Christ that we remember, not the birth — not even the manner life, though this is important. His cousin, the baptizer, said of Him, “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*” It was in his sacrificing his perfect self for sinful mankind that He took away our sins — not in coming — not even in rising from the dead or ascending back to God, though He did all these and they are important. It is the *death* we show forth, nothing else!

How then should the Christian deal with the *birth* of Christ? God thought the birth of Jesus was special:

- ▶ He sent Gabriel to Mary and “*the angel of the Lord*” to Joseph to announce His coming (Luke 1:26-27; Matthew 1:20).
- ▶ He announced the actual birth through a “*multitude of the Heavenly Host*” (Luke 2:13) to shepherds, and a signifying star to a group of wise men far away (Matt. 2:1, 2).

- ▶ He revealed to Simeon in a vision that he was to come shortly (Luke 2:25-26), and the 84-year-old Anna prophesied by God’s power to “*all them that looked for redemption in Israel*” that this was the Christ (Luke 2:36-38).

But after these things God *never* commanded *anyone* to especially recognize the event, remember it, or worship him by it. God never even mentioned it again, except in the Revelation to John. That last mention and all the excitement at the time of the birth were only significant because of what Jesus would become.

He has now become:

- ▶ He has become the propitiation for our sins (I John 2:2).
- ▶ He has become the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).
- ▶ He has become the firstfruits of them that slept (I Corinthians 15:20).
- ▶ He has become joint-heir in God’s family with those who have obeyed (Romans 8:17).
- ▶ He has become the one gone before to prepare a place for us (John 14:2).

There is no longer any reason to exalt the *birth* of Christ as did Simeon, Anna, the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men. It is as the Old Covenant compared to the New. The birth is not *exalted*, but is severely *dimmed*, by the greatness of his death — the brightness of the glory of his sacrifice. It is his “lifting up *from* the earth” on Calvary, not his “coming down” *to* the earth at Bethlehem, that will “*draw all men unto*” him (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). Christians worship God by remembering that death on the first day of every week.

But how should a Christian deal with Christmas?

Based upon what we have just seen from the Word of God, it is obviously *not a religious* holiday. Though some would try to make it so, they labor apart from God’s blessings. They practice a faith different from that taught and required by the Bible.

With certain exceptions there is no apparent harm in the old customs of the English described earlier. The reference to their “singing, games, dancing, plays, and rich food” should **not** be taken as an endorsement of such irreligious revelry as is sometimes suggested by such words. God does **not** approve of dancing or “wild parties” to which Christians are sometimes invited during the so-called “holiday season.” These things only lead to further immorality and in no way are representative of God’s high design for man or productive of any praise and honor of Him. Christians invited to such parties are not at liberty

to attend and participate and still expect God’s favor. Certainly, for the Christians, there should be no effort to blend a

Our lives are not to be lived for ourselves.

season of giving and hospitality with any type of celebration of the birth of Christ (Galatians 4:9-11 and the absence of scriptural information concerning the date and religious recognition of the birth of Jesus).

Christmas has developed a unique tradition in America. It is a time for families, and families are important in God’s scheme of things (I Corinthians 7:10-16; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; etc.). We enjoy the closeness of the family — the time off from job and school so that far away members of the family can come together. We enjoy the laughter — the sharing of love that is something special in the relationships that we have with one another. We have another opportunity to encourage one another, to teach and to learn, to keep the family together in heart and mind though we may be separated most of the time by many miles. And

family ties can promote the spiritual growth that will bring us all closer to God if we each do our part in teaching and learning (II Timothy 1:3-5).

As a legal, social, and commercial holiday, December 25th may be viewed by the Christian in the same way as is January 1st, May 30th, July 4th, the first Monday in September, and the fourth Thursday in November. Take advantage of whatever time you may have off from work or school to glorify God in your family and your neighborhood. Do the teaching and serving you'd like to do at other times but can't fit into your schedule. Always remember that the Christian never has the right to do anything contrary to the will of God but rather "*whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*" (Colossians 3:17).

We must remember that our lives are not to be lived for ourselves (or for our families), but for God. And they must be lived, not for an infant in a manger, but for a crucified Savior.

APPLYING A PRINCIPLE

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it" (Romans 14:5-6).

These words of the apostle Paul to the church at Rome have been taken by Christians everywhere as a principle of personal judgment and forbearance in matters of fellowship. Rightly so; Paul is dealing in the context not with food and days but with attitudes.

Still, the principle certainly applies to days.

While it is not permitted of the Christian to make religious “holy-days” where God has not (Galatians 4:7-11), it is nevertheless permissible for each one to honor God to the best of his ability in the time he has been given. We have not been told *what* to do with legal holidays when business, industry and schools have been shut down for a day or a week or more. How we use that time is but an extension of how we use the personal time we have every day and every week (evenings, week-ends, etc) all year long, provided we “*do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*” (Colossians 3:17).

It cannot be “*in the name of Jesus*” that efforts are made to worship God in the birth of his Son, since Jesus gave us no such instruction or example. Still, there are activities common to December 25th in our society in which the Christian may properly “*regard the day*”: family togetherness, gift-giving and receiving, expressing love to the fatherless, widow, etc.

There are those, however, in the church of the Lord who choose to dispense with one or more of even these. They believe that any recognition of the term “Christmas” or things associated with it is tantamount to paying homage to the false religious ideas and doctrines which dreamed up the celebration in the first place. These Christians choose to “*regard not the day*” and to honor God in taking such a stand.

“*Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him ... every one of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Romans 14:3, 12 emphasis mine -ALP).

IT'S A MATTER OF INFLUENCE

How a Christian approaches *any* question is first a matter of his faith in God, but also is a matter of his influence on the souls living around him.

To one young preacher Paul wrote, “*be thou an example of the believers*” (I Timothy 4:12). To another he wrote, “*In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*” (Titus 2:7-8). To the church he wrote, “*that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart*” (Ephesians 4:17-18).

When God separated his people from one evil community and led them to the overthrow and displacement of another, he instructed them “*After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. And ye shall not walk in the manner of the nation, which I cast out before you*” (Leviticus 18:3; 20:23). Paul’s spiritual adoption of that ordinance in II Corinthians 6:14-18 is often quoted and well-known, but does it mean anything to us? A principle may be applied.

The Christian’s answer to Christmas, then, involves the influence and the example he sets before the world. Believers in the true God and Christ, while they may observe the day socially and personally, know that celebrating “Christmas” is not a proper means of glorifying *God*. Unbelievers generally assume that it *is*, and those who know that you are a “religious person” naturally assume that you will give “Christmas” and its manifold celebrations a high priority in your time and energies.

Then when they see your house decorated in lights, an ornamented tree in your living room, gifts, wrapping, and cards carried to and fro, or see you wearing seasonal clothing or jewelry, or hear you singing or playing music of the season, their assumptions are confirmed in their minds.

Those who “*regard not the day,*” believe that the doing of such things as these “Christmas-time activities” puts the doer in yoke, fellowship, or communion with the world; the believer and the world thus have a common bond in “Christmas.” Unless otherwise informed, anyone who observes these goings-on will not know the difference between the believer and the unbeliever (John 17:11, 14).

If some faithful Christians fail to wish you a “Merry Christmas,” it is not a reflection on their love for you. To them the uttering of the

**celebrating “Christmas” is not a proper
means of glorifying God.**

word “Christmas” is the uniting of the precious Christ, who is our pure and sinless savior, with the heresy of the Roman Catholic mass (that is, after all, how the word came into being). They are determined to speak no such “abomination” and “*to the Lord they regard not the day.*” For my part, the name itself has no more connection to Christ in my mind than the names “Sunday” and “Monday” have to the sun and moon gods for whom they were named. We have this liberty in Christ: to differ in opinion and still be brethren.

Recognizing that we teach in ways additional to speaking, we should consider: “Does the Christian have the liberty to teach what is not true; shouldn’t we always be careful for the message we are sending out, whether by word or deed” (Colossians 3:17)?

“DON’T STAY HOME FOR CHRISTMAS”

The conclusion of this tract is the result of a suggestion by a member of the church. Here is one sitting in the pew next to you who cares for your eternal soul.

On a Sunday near December 25th many families celebrate Christmas either privately at home or in larger “extended family” gatherings. It is well that we all remember that the Lord scheduled his celebration first, and that we should be careful not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together so that we may attend something of our own choosing.

In John 20:1-9 we read that Jesus rose from the dead on “the first day of the week.” In Acts 2 we read that the gospel was preached and the church was established “when the day of Pentecost was fully come.” The day of Pentecost was always the next day after the seventh Sabbath following the Passover. Since the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, Pentecost was always the first day of the week. In Acts 20:7 we read that it was the God-approved practice of the church to meet on “the first day of the week,” and at that time to engage in the worship of God according to his prescribed method (I Corinthians 16:2). In Revelation 1:10 we see the first day of the week referred to as “the Lord’s day.” In Hebrews 10:24 and 25 God teaches us to think about “one another” as we go about our daily lives, each encouraging the other to exercise “love and good works.” Then He says that we are to do this while “not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together ... but exhorting one another.”

Brethren, we can’t exhort one another if we are not assembled together. Some had set for the Hebrew Christians of the first century a bad example of not meeting together with the rest of the church. Some also have set the same bad example for us today. Let us not follow it, but follow instead the example of Christ and his apostles.

Is it reasonable to suppose that God would sanction the ignoring of his plan in favor of one of purely human origin? Christmas is man's invention, not God's! Christ is not in Christmas, but He is at "the Lord's table" (I Corinthians 10:21; Matthew 26:29) on "the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10). Don't you want to be where He is? If you do not want to be where He is now, how will you convince Him that you want to be where He is in eternity? You will be where He is on the judgement day. What kind of conversation will the two of you have regarding the use of your time while here on earth?

Get together with your family, have a big dinner and enjoy the good times, if that is your plan, but don't forget to get together with your spiritual family to eat the Lord's supper and prepare for eternity first.

ORDER FROM

Skyway Publishing

P.O. Box 662

Lincoln, IL 62656-0662

(844) 650-3223

books@skywaypub.org