

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”. Bible, Jeremiah Ch. 29v13

A CHRISTIAN REVIEW OF CHRISTMAS

By Pastor John Hayward



We come to that time of the year again where lights, decorations and trees are put up in our homes and town centres. The whole nation focuses on the ‘festive season’; once again Christmas is here with us! For some sincere Christians, this is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus, sing Carols, and enjoy the festivities. For others it is a festival that they choose to avoid because of its Catholic origin and pagan influences. We want to look at the history of Christmas in the light of the Bible, and answer various questions like:

- Is Christmas a Christian festival?
- Is it commanded in the Word of God?
- Are we being legalistic if we do not celebrate it?
- Does it matter either way?!

Let’s look through this topic prayerfully and with a Berean mind. These Bereans *‘were more fair minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.’* They did not just dismiss what Paul said before they had listened to him, or blindly accept his words after hearing him, but *‘searched the Scriptures daily...’* (Acts 17:11). Please do not accept things just because I have said them, this certainly would give me no pleasure, more importantly it would not please the Lord, because there is no faith in such an attitude. We all need the Lord’s perspective and leading, and none of us has the monopoly of the whole truth. Good brothers and close

friends might have arrived to different conclusions over this issue.

Let the LORD be your light. My only plea is that you will let Him shine upon everything. Do not withhold anything through fear of what the Lord might require of you, (if indeed He does). We must remember that whatever the Lord requires of us, there is greater blessing waiting for us on the other side of the Jordan! Jesus, who for the Joy that was set before Him... (Hebrews 12:2)

If you still hold to a different view than mine after prayerful consideration and study, we can still agree to disagree in Christian love and fellowship, while respecting different views. Our fellowship is not in whether or not we celebrate Christmas, but in Christ Himself!

However as Pastor, I trust you will understand that it is only right for me to bring to you what I feel is correct and biblical as I have a mandate from the Lord to do so. A Shepherd is to watch and care for the flock. He must seek their best, even if misunderstood in the process. May the Lord help me to serve you in such a way that Christ will be glorified in our lives. Jesus is soon coming back for His Bride, all pure and holy. Let us put aside anything that would hinder the light of God’s Word from being the final authority in all our thinking, to His glory.

Who are we relating to?

Christmas is celebrated by many Christians across the world; therefore such decision should not be taken lightly. However, we must examine the practice in the light of God’s Word. Let us *‘walk in the light as He is in the light.’* (1 John 1:7). Let us also remember that our reasoning must never be based on the traditions of men or mere emotions. Everything we do must be submitted to the Word of God and the leading of His Spirit.

First, let us look at how the early Church handled the birth of Christ, and study what the Lord had commanded us. Luke, who reveals the glorious incarnation story in his gospel, also wrote a biographical account of the dynamic early years of the church. In

this divinely inspired letter called the book of Acts, we read how the Lord’s people experienced the power of the God’s Spirit coming upon them, and how the Apostles proclaimed the Gospel, which was accompanied with signs and wonders and the world was turned upside down consequently. (Acts 17:6).

What was their message proclaiming?

Surprisingly, the focus was not on the birth of Christ at all. They did not preach *‘the babe of Bethlehem,’* but the Risen Saviour, now in glory! Their entire focus was on Christ crucified, raised from the dead, seated in glory, and coming again to reign on Earth. The reason they did not focus on Jesus as a baby, was for the simple fact that He was no longer in the manger! They brought the unbelievers to the living Christ. Paul actually speaks along these lines in his second letter to the Corinthians, in which he states, concerning the Lord: *‘Therefore, from now on, we recognise no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.’* (2 Corinthians 5:16).

Therefore we do not relate to Jesus in the same way we once did. Now Paul did not know Christ according to the flesh himself, because, as he put it, *‘...last of all He was seen by me also as by one born out of due time.’* (1 Cor.15:8). So the Apostle was speaking on behalf of all men who had known Jesus while He was on the earth, through various stages of His life. The change in how people related to the Lord is seen in Scripture on a couple of occasions. John the Apostle is a prime example. When Jesus was on the earth, John reclined close to Jesus (John 13:23). However, when the Apostle saw the glorified Lord in the book of Revelation, he fell before Him as though dead (Rev 1:17). He related to Jesus as He was, glorified in heaven.

A second example is the angels. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, they declared: *‘Glory to God on the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests.’* (Luke 2:14) This was entirely appropriate, because Jesus had just been born. However the angels do not continue to do the same year by year, for the simple reason that once Jesus was glorified in heaven, they have long since

worshipped Him as the Lamb upon the Throne, which they still are doing as I write! Only once did they sing of His birth, but now they worship Him as King of kings. Jesus - the glorified Man in heaven. Hallelujah! (See Rev 5:11-12).

There was a time when it was right to bring presents to Jesus, and to worship Him as a baby, when He had just been born. Knowing that He has now ascended in heaven, worshipped by angels, and glorified as King, can we relate to Him in our worship today, as though He was still in the manger?

Surely our worship needs to be directed to Him as He is now, in glory, joining our adoration with the angels above, and remembering what He has done for us, in the light of who He is, and His current position.

Some may ask how do we relate to Jesus as a baby still? The truth is that the centre of a nativity play is around a baby doll representing Jesus in a crib. Many of the carols we sing at Christmas cause us to view Jesus as a baby again. For example in the carol 'Silent night', we are singing to the Lord, 'Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.' In another famous carol we sing, 'Yea Lord we greet Thee born this happy morning.' Another exults us. 'Worship Christ the new born King.'

Nowhere in the New Testament do you see this nostalgic looking back to the crib. I personally cannot imagine the Apostles singing like this to the Lord after He had revealed Himself to them, risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven. It is true that Charles Wesley has written some glorious Hymns on the incarnation, but for the most part our eyes are clouded over by sentiment, which prevents us seeing clearly the wonder of the Nativity. Without realising it, we can find ourselves mistaking sensual nostalgia for spiritual reality. The truth is that most of us have grown up with Christmas as a **tradition**, and traditions have the power to disengage the mind from any form of critical thought to what we are doing. We need to worship the Lord in spirit, and in the reality of who He is now. If we sing to Him, we need to relate to Him as He is. When we celebrate other people's birthdays, we never focus on simply remembering them as babies again, but rather as they currently are; even birthday presents evolve according to the current age of the recipient. We sing

of what Christ has done in the light of what He has become, the glorified Man in heaven.

Concerning the theme of Christmas worship, A.W.Tozer wrote:

'What shall we do? Cultivate humility and frugality, Put the emphasis where the Bible puts it, on the Christ at the right hand of God, not on the babe in the manger. Return to the simplicity that is in Christ. Cleanse our Churches of unscriptural pageantry borrowed from Rome. Take the Scriptures as our guide and refuse to be pressured into conformity to paganism practised in the name of Christ.'¹[...] 'Let us remember that weakness lies in the manger, death at the Cross and power at the throne. Our Christ is not in a manger. Indeed, New Testament theology nowhere presents the Christ Child as an object of saving faith. The gospel that stops at the manger is another gospel and no good news at all. The Church that still gathers around the manger can only be weak and misty-eyed, mistaking sentimentality for the power of the Holy Spirit.'²

This is a powerful and strong statement by one of the Lord's spokesmen from the last century, but a burden that must be taken to heart if we are going to see a recovery of the Church back to its first *Apostolic* Scriptural roots.

David Pawson once related how he was a guest speaker at a meeting around Christmas time, and the whole Church was decked with decorations. Whilst he was waiting to be introduced, he was asking the Lord how He felt concerning the season of Christmas. The answer he got was rather interesting. David said:

'And in the middle of that service I said, 'Lord, what do you feel about Christmas? And He reminded me that I had a photograph album at home, which was produced by my mother, who was a very keen amateur photographer. She used to win competitions, and this album is of me and my life, from a little baby right though to a boy. And when I show it people they say, 'Oh what a lovely baby' and I hate it. I want to say, 'I'm not a baby, you have to relate to me now, as I am now, not as I was then. Much easier to relate to a baby, they don't answer back. You can pick them up and cuddle them, and they don't fight you, not

¹A.W Tozer, *The Warfare of the Spirit*, Wingspread Publishers, 1993, chapter 14
²*Ibid* Chapter 26

usually anyway. So there was this album, and I had it at home. And I thought, why should the Lord remind me of that? And then I realised, He wanted to say to the people, 'I'm not a baby, not now. You have to relate to Me as I am now, or it's not a real relationship.' And I realised that cooing over a crib is not a real relationship, because it's not with a real person, it's with a doll. And if you want to be related to Jesus now, you need to be related to Him as He is, a full grown man, with His character, what it is. When the world is all excited about a little crib with a doll in it, Jesus is saying, 'I'm not like that now. I want a relationship with you that's real, between you and Me as I really am.' And I shared it with the congregation, because it came to me as I sat there on the platform.'³

Reality is the antidote to religiosity. We need to know Jesus as He is. As we have stated, the disciples never focused on the crib, but rather the Christ, crowned with glory and seated on the throne. Many people say that Christmas time is a good opportunity for witness. Whilst we applaud readily such a good motive, the question is, what Jesus do we bring them to? All too often we bring them to Jesus in a manger, a totally harmless baby. I imagine this is why so many unbelievers are happy to come to Christmas services. There is nothing offending or offensive, if we keep Jesus in the crib. It is the Cross that offends, and a risen King who is to reign over us that causes people to think. This is the message that saves people, and gives them a good start in their walk with Christ, if they respond to His gracious invitation.

The first Gospel message mentioned in the early Church was when Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost after the Spirit of God fell on the believers. What was Peter's message? **Christ and Him crucified, now exalted and reigning in glory.** This was the message that cut the people to the heart and three thousand souls were added to the Church. If we want to be effective witnesses, let us keep a right perspective, and bring folk to our mighty King, Saviour and Lord.

³David Pawson *Christ and Christmas* (online)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJBey7oun2U>

Commands and silences

Let us now consider Christmas in the light of the Bible. Jesus showed us that our love to the Lord is expressed in our obedience to His Word (*John 14:15*). Yet when we look at New Testament Scriptures, there is a surprising silence in relation to celebrating Christ's birth.

If our heavenly Father really wanted us to celebrate His Son's birth once a year, wouldn't He have told us to?

The Lord's commands are clear. For example, He has commanded us to remember His death in the communion service (*Luke 22:19*), Scriptures command us not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together (*Hebrews 10:25*), but there is no command concerning the celebrating of His birth. Some will say "lack of evidence is not absence of evidence". Similarly, I can argue that just because there is no mention of not celebrating Christmas, doesn't not mean it is okay. Furthermore, is this really the best way to approach the Word of God, and to choose our course? We can either say, the Scriptures do not mention Christmas, 'I can do it', or we can say, my God is silent concerning the celebrating of His Son's birth, it cannot be high on His heart. With no Biblical command in God's Word, should we not be asking the Lord Himself how He views the Festival of Christmas? As it is all done in His Name, shouldn't we at least inquire of Him and ask, 'Lord do you like this? Do You receive the response You are looking for in our worship through the Carols? Do you want us to worship Your Son as though in a manger again?' We need to ask the Lord this kind of questions, and find out more. ***The Lord has feelings too!***

It is significant that the Bible is silent about celebrating the birth of Christ, even Jesus did not focus on His birth, and neither did any of His Apostles after the Ascension of Christ. We must take note of the silences of the Lord as well as His spoken words. Watchman Nee, a blessed servant who suffered much for the Lord in China put it this way:

'Does the Bible have a command to remember the birth of Christ? If God's children are willing to ask this question, they will receive the shining of God's light. What a pity that so many have forgotten the necessity of asking this question. According to the Bible, during the last supper, the Lord only asked us to

*remember His death. He did not command us to celebrate Christmas, nor did He command us to celebrate Easter... Only one who believes in the Bible will know that the things which God did not command and the things God did command have the same significance.'*⁴

Paul, Peter, and John are the main three leaders in the early Church and the writers of the New Testament letters, and yet none of them observed the birth of Christ as a yearly festival. Indeed, there is almost nothing in their writings about the birth of Jesus at all. On one occasion Paul mentions in passing that Jesus was born of a woman (*Galatians 4:4*). To practice Christmas is to build on silence rather than command. As Watchman Nee suggests, we need to see the significance of the silences in Scripture, as well as the spoken Word.

What is the root and the fruit?

The question we need to ask then is this: if this festival is not commanded by the Lord, and none of the Apostles practised it i.e. no biblical authority, how did it ever become an established practice within the Church? This is a good question. To answer it we have to look back at the time of Church history known as the Patristic era, which is dated from the completion of Scripture till about the 4th Century. What we know for sure is that for the first 300 years after the Scripture Canon was complete, there was no general celebration of the birth of Christ in the early Church at all, certainly not on the 25th of December. Irenaeus and Tertullian – prominent Apostolic Fathers- who both wrote between 170-210 A.D. do not mention Christmas in their list of feast days.⁵ According to Clement of Rome, a number of different groups had suggested dates that they believed Jesus was born on, interestingly none of them being December the 25th. The first time that December the 25th became associated with the birth of Christ seems

⁴ Watchman Nee Collected Works, Vol. 18, **REMEMBERING CHRISTMAS** p. 249 Issue No. 28 (online) churchintoronto.net/.../CelebratingChristmas/WN18-RememberingChristmasEV.doc

⁵ Catholic Encyclopedia 'Christmas' (online) <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=2933>

to have been in A.D.221 by Sextus Julius Africanus,⁶ but possibly earlier.

What we do know about the pre-Christmas, post-Apostolic time is how the Church leaders felt concerning the kind of pagan observances that were around during that time, and how they encouraged Christians to separate from those practices in a cultural setting couched in idolatry. Tertullian (155-240 A.D.) was an important figure in the Patristic era of the Church. He had converted from paganism to Christianity, and states in speaking to pagans:

*'On your day of gladness, we Christians neither cover our door posts with wreaths, nor intrude upon the day with lamps...we are accused of lower sacrilege because we do not celebrate along with you the lower holidays.'*⁷

Tertullian expressed the feeling of the early Church towards the pagan holiday customs surrounding the 25th of December. In speaking to Christians, he said:

*'We must now address the subject of holidays and other extraordinary festivities. We sometimes excuse these to our wantonness, sometimes to our timidity- in opposition to our common faith and discipline. The first point indeed I will join on is this: whether a servant of God should join with the very nations themselves in matters of this kind- either in dress, food, or in any other kind of festivity...There is no communion between light and darkness, between life and death...'*⁸

Although Tertullian has no biblical authority, it is interesting to see how the important servants of the day felt about these pre-Christian pagan festivals that were a kind of prelude to Christmas. It also does us well to note the similarity in the way the pagans address their gods and the way people celebrate Christmas today. Concerning the concept of even celebrating Christ's birth, Origen (c.185-254) believed it was wrong to do so, even though others of his day had begun to speculate over the timing.⁹ Eventually ***in June 350 A.D. Pope Julius the first,***

⁶ *ibid*
⁷ Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.44. (online) <http://www.biblestudying.net/churchhistory5.html>

⁸ Tertullian (c. 200, W), 3.68, 69. (online) <http://www.biblestudying.net/churchhistory5.html>

⁹ Origen, *in Levit., Hom. VIII*, in Migne P.G., XII, 495

of the Roman Catholic Church set the date for the 25th of December¹⁰ and declared what was to be known as Christ's-Mass, a compound word which changed into what we now know today as Christmas. So the first Christmas was initiated by the Roman Catholic Church.

Christ, the Mass, and the Mixture

The mixing of Christ with the Mass is concerning in itself. "The Mass or Eucharistic Celebration is the central liturgical ritual in the Catholic Church where the Eucharist (Communion) is consecrated. The Catholic Church describes the mass as "*the source and summit of the Christian life*". The church teaches that through consecration by a priest the sacrificial bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ."¹¹ This teaching is called *transubstantiation*, the erroneous assumption that the bread and the wine actually become the body and blood of Christ as it is taken. The Scriptures clearly shows us that Jesus does not die again and again in a sacramental way. Peter the Apostle states, '*For Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He may bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.*' (1 Peter 3:18 Emphasis added).

During the Tudor time, Catholicism owned a very strong presence in England. Many Christian leaders and devout believers were burnt at the stake for standing against this doctrine associated with the Mass, including Bishop Ridley, Bishop Latimer, and Bishop Hooper to name but a few. None of these great men would have anything to do with the doctrines of Roman Catholicism, and through their bravery and deep desire to see the purity of the Gospel preserved in our land, by God's grace they poured out their lives unto the death. Christ and the Mass do not belong together. The mixture in the name is true to the nature of the festival as we shall find out a little later. The question is why did the Roman Catholic Church decide to celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December, was this the true date of the birth of Jesus? It is very doubtful that Jesus was born on the 25th of December, because Shepherds do not watch their flocks by night at such a cold time of the year. It is most likely that Jesus was born

in late September time around the time of the feast of Tabernacles.

There have been a number of reasons given for the Catholic Church deciding on the 25th of December. Some have suggested that the Catholic Church could have been influenced by a certain Jewish idea found in the Talmud, that creation and redemption should happen at the same time of the year. They believed that Jesus would have been conceived on the same day He died and that He was born 9 months later. Since they believed that Jesus was conceived on March the 25th, he would be born 9 months later on December the 25th.¹² This is a view held by some, but it is not the most likely view. The more popular view is that the Catholic Church declared the 25th as Christ's-Mass because it coincided with the Romans pagan worship of Sol Invictus, (rebirth of the unconquered son) which the Romans celebrated before the formation of Christmas on the 25th of December. This holiday not only marked the return of longer days after the winter solstice but also followed the popular Roman festival called the Saturnalia, during which people feasted and exchanged gifts. This date was also the birthday of the Indo-European deity Mithra, supposedly a god of light and loyalty whose cult at the time was growing in popularity among Roman soldiers. Even the Catholic Church acknowledges the probability of pagan roots in the Pope deciding upon the 25th of December all those years ago. The Catholic Encyclopaedia states, "The well known solar feast of Natalis Invicti, celebrated on December the 25th, has a strong claim for the responsibility of our Christmas date."¹³

Such statements show that from its inception, the Christmas festival was a mixture of paganism and Christianity. This type of fusion is called *syncretism*. On the one hand we see carols being sung and the Nativity told, on the other hand, revelry, drunkenness, and all kinds of pagan practices, all on the same day for the season of Christmas. Let us look at a few examples of syncretism - mixing of Christianity with paganism - in the Christmas festival:

¹²<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/how-december-25-became-christmas/>

¹³Catholic Encyclopedia 'Christmas' (online) <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=2933>

Kissing under the Mistletoe: This stems from Greek mythology and is rooted in paganism and it's a superstitious practice. If a girl did not allow a kiss, it basically would bring bad luck upon her.¹⁴

The Christmas Tree. Do you remember the Christmas carol, 'O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree? In this traditional carol, the lyrics praise the tree! The verses include lines like this: ' O Christmas tree, O Christmas Tree, much pleasure canst thou give me...How often has the Christmas Tree afforded me the greatest glee!' After this rather pagan tone in the carol, the last verse brings God into it. The lyrics go like this, 'O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how richly God has decked thee...Thou bids us true and faithful be, And trust in God unchangingly.' Unfortunately the mixture and syncretism of Christ with pagan traditions runs right through the history of this catholic festival.

We might ask, what has bringing a tree into a house and decking it with all kinds of ornaments got to do with the Birth of Christ? The truth is nothing at all. Early Romans marked the solstice with a feast called the saturnalia, which was in honour of Saturn, the god of agriculture. Knowing that the solstice meant the end of the long nights and the people could look forward to orchards being green and fruitful again, they marked the occasion by decorating their homes and temples with evergreen boughs, as a symbol of everlasting life. As we have stated earlier, Tertullian a Christian leader at the time spoke out against these things. Although the Christmas tree has gone through various stages of revived interest over the centuries, its use in festivities are founded in pagan practices.¹⁵

Holly and Ivy: There is a Christmas carol written after these two greeneries, simply called the holly and the Ivy.

Like the carol 'O Christmas Tree', the lyrics are a mixture of Christianity and paganism throughout. For example, 'The holly bares a blossom as white as any flower, and Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to be our sweet Saviour.' The holly and the Ivy were used during the time of the winter solstice to ward off evil spirits and celebrate new growth.

¹⁴<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mistletoe>

¹⁵<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/december/why-do-we-have-christmas-trees.html>

¹⁰https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Julius_I

¹¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_in_the_Catholic_Church

Decorations: At a time of persecution, during the Roman Empire, Christians were detected by not decorating their houses at the Saturnalia. Again these practices stems from pagan origins that have nothing to do with our Christian history.¹⁶

We could look at many other traditions associated with Christmas, but too much study makes one weary! The question we need to ask ourselves is, do we want to celebrate something that is by nature full of mixture. Do we want to celebrate the Lord in the same way the pagans follow their gods? We may say that we just want to take up the purer elements of the feast and leave the bad bits out. However, that does not change the nature of the festival in and of itself. As the years rolled on, Christmas continued to be celebrated, but the nature of its pagan origins/influences never lost their hold, and the practices of cross dressing, perverted sex and drunkenness were all included in a festival attributed to Christ. It must grieve the Lord so much that His holy Name has been attached over the years to such evil.

Things got so out of hand around the time of Oliver Cromwell, that the festival was banned all together in England for a number of years. However, the ban did not last for long, there was such an outcry that the festival was allowed to flourish again with all its doubtful activities.¹⁷ Many of the Christian Puritans did their best to remove the practice of Christmas from society all together, because of the mixture and dishonour that it brought to the Lord's Name. For all their brave efforts, they could not stop it, and many left England for a fresh start in America. Concerning the Puritans, this is what one of their leading Bishops, Reverend Increase Mathers said concerning Christmas:

'the early Christians who first observed the Nativity on December the 25th did not do so thinking that Christ was born in that month, but because the Heathens' Saturnalia was at that time kept in Rome, and they, (Catholics) were willing

¹⁶T.G Crippen, *Christmas and Christmas Lore* (online)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40C9ZfkRXd4>

¹⁷<http://www.historytoday.com/chris-durston/puritan-war-christmas>

*to have those pagan holidays metamorphosed into Christian ones.'*¹⁸

A couple of centuries later in 1871 Charles Spurgeon, who was called the prince of preachers said this about the festival in a sermon given around Christmas time:

'We have no superstitious regards for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas:

First because we do not believe in the Mass at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or English; and,

Secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birth of the Saviour; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of Divine authority.

*Superstition has most certainly fixed the day of our Saviours birth, although there is no possibility of discovering when it occurred...It was not until the middle of the third century that any part of the Church celebrated the Nativity of our Lord; and it was not till very long after the western Church had set the example, that the Eastern adopted it. Because the day is not known, therefore superstition has fixed it; while since the day of the death of our Saviour might be determined with much certainty, therefore superstition shifts the date of its observance every year. What is the method in the madness of the superstitious? Probably the fact is that the holy days were arranged to fit in with heathen festivals. We venture to assert, that if there be any day in the year, of which we may be pretty sure that it was not the day on which the Saviour was born, it is the 25th of December...'*¹⁹

Spurgeon goes on in his sermon to state, - he was speaking in December - that due to the fact that peoples mind's were fixed on the birth of Christ, he saw no harm in speaking on a text to do with the incarnation. I think this is a good position. Spurgeon dissociates from the festival, but not the glory of the Scriptural truth of the incarnation!

¹⁸<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/opinion/the-puritan-war-on-christmas.html>

¹⁹Charles Spurgeon, Sermon 24/12/1871

<http://calltoworship.org/spurgeon-on-christmas.html>

So coming back to the central theme, what can we conclude?

Firstly: without doubt, Christmas is of Roman Catholic origin. No reputable historian would argue against that.

Secondly: because it is an extra biblical feast, it is a *man made tradition*.

Thirdly: it was influenced and mixed with paganism. Let us consider these three aspects of controversy in a little more depth.

Firstly. **Roman Catholicism:** Roman Catholicism is not true Christianity. As we have stated earlier, it holds to the teaching of transubstantiation, *the belief that the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Jesus again in the Mass. Catholicism teaches about a place called 'purgatory,' which is meant to be an intermediate state after physical death in which some of those ultimately destined for heaven, must first undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to come into the joy of heaven. They believe that the entrance into heaven requires the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, for which indulgences may be given, which remove either part, or all of the temporal punishment due to sin, such as an unhealthy attachment to sin.* There is nothing in the Scripture about being able to remove punishment for sins due to indulgences. This is completely unscriptural. Only Jesus Christ can atone for our sins, and we need to rest our faith wholly upon the work of Christ on the cross to get us to heaven.

The Catholic Church also believes that Peter was the first Pope, upon which the Church is built, due to a wrong interpretation of what Matthew 16 says. Matthew 16 clearly shows from the Greek, that **Jesus is the Rock**, not Peter. Peter was married – see Matthew 8:14! Catholicism is a works-based religion, and does not preach the glorious truth of Salvation by grace, through faith alone.

The Catholic Church, as a system is all part of the Babylonian System. In the Lord's grace, He says to those believers who are caught up in it to *"Come out of her, My people"* (Revelation 18:4). Notice that they are called, *'my people.'* These are those that know the Lord, yet participate in her unfruitful works, and

are caught up in the 'system'. Surely Christ and the Mass do not belong together. We must remember that the Lord loves Catholics and desires all of them to know Him. However, Catholicism is an idolatrous and false Christianity. It is its heretical doctrine and system that are of concern.

Secondly -the traditions of men: This is again something the Bible warns us against. Jesus said to Pharisees that their traditions made void the Word of God. (Matthew 15:1-9) The word tradition means 'a handing down.' So *the traditions of men are those practices that are handed down as though authoritative, but not commanded in the Bible.* It is the fact of teaching the commandments of men as biblical doctrine. If we practise or observe something that has been handed down as doctrine, but is not commanded in the Word, we need to at least consider why we are doing it. Anything we do that is a doctrine of man will by necessity make void the Word of God, because it replaces Divine commandments with manmade traditions.

In Matthew 15:2, the Pharisees refer to 'the Elders.' Now, the Elders that they were referring to were not those of their day, but the ancient leaders of many years before. Some of these leaders had practices that became traditions over the years, and were observed by the Jewish people by the time Jesus came to the Earth. In this passage the Pharisees were judging the disciples for not following the tradition of washing their hands before eating. Notice that the Pharisees condemned the disciples for transgressing the **traditions**; in return Jesus then condemns them for transgressing the **commandments** of the Word! A few verses later, Jesus goes on to explain His words through drawing on the prophet Isaiah, saying:

'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' Notice here that there is a connection between vain worship and the tradition of men. If our worship is the result of following the commandments of men, it is vain.

What is the worship that God is after today? In John's gospel Jesus said, *'God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth.'* and He

goes on to say, *'The Father seeks such worshippers.'* (John Chapter 4). We must ask ourselves if we are worshipping in spirit and in truth, if in our focus we are singing to Jesus as the babe of Bethlehem.

In regards to Christmas as a tradition of men, Charles Spurgeon, said this in his classic, 'The Treasury of David:'

*'When it can be proved that the observance of Christmas, Whitsuntide, and other Popish festivals, was ever instituted by a Divine statute, we also will attend to them, but not till then. It is as much our duty to reject the traditions of men, as to observe the ordinances of the Lord. We ask concerning every rite and rubric, is this a law of the God of Jacob?'" and if it be not clearly so, it is of no authority with us, who walk in Christian liberty.'*²⁰

The commandments of men always cause us to lose sight of the One we are worshipping and make void the Word of God. I am not suggesting for one minute that people are not sincere, and we must remember that the Lord looks at the heart; but sincerity is not enough of itself to please the Lord. Let us lay aside every tradition of man, because when they are practised, our vision of the Lord is eclipsed, and we find ourselves unable to see Christ as He really is. Nothing that begins with man can reach the glory of God.

Thirdly - Pagan influences: We have covered this to some measure already. However, let us look a little further. There are many theories concerning why the Catholic Pope chose December the 25th as the date for Christmas. Some scholars have said that it was because of a Jewish tradition. On the other hand, the more prevalent view is that paganism is at the root of the date for the birth of Christ. This is argued by acclaimed social historian, journalist, and author, Judith Flanders in her latest book 'Christmas: A biography.'²¹ Not only has that but the Catholic Encyclopaedia states that the evidence for it being pagan in origin is strong. This is also what the Puritans believed, and therefore would not touch it. Whether we believe that the Catholic Church placed the birth of Christ on the 25th because of paganism is not the ultimate issue. The truth is that right from the early years of this festival, paganism has been almost

mystically been a central part of its identity. Certainly in England, it is clear that the 25th of December was changed from paganism into Christianity because of the doubtful practices that have always been part of the celebration. Think for a moment, if Christmas had nothing to do with paganism, why during its long history is it identified with the Yule Log, the candle lit, Christmas tree, the holly, the present giving, the plumb pudding, and other ancient practices? Even carolling is rooted in pagan practice. They were winter songs, sung at the winter solstice celebrations as people danced round stone circles. The word carol means to dance to something.

Besides the above, it is true to say that the Catholic Church has nearly always tried to convert people by allowing them to continue their paganism in a kind of Christianised way. A primary source of evidence for this strategy is the 7th century Monk called Bede, who in his writings preserved a letter that Pope Gregory sent to the Abbot Mellitus in 601 A.D, concerning the pagan practices in England. The letter is too long to quote for our purpose but can be found online. Here is a quote from the then Pope Gregory to Mellitus:

'...tell him what I have long been thinking in my own mind concerning the English people; ,to wit, that the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed. Let water be sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected and relics placed there...And because they are used to slaughter many oxen in sacrifice to devils, some solemnity must be given in exchange for this, as that on the day of the dedication, or the natives of the holy martyrs, whose relics are their deposited, they should build themselves huts of the boughs of trees about those Churches which have been turned from that use from being temples, and celebrate the solemnity with religious feasting, and no more offer animals to the devil, but kill cattle, and glorify God in their feast; and return thanks to the giver of all things for their abundance; to that end whilst some outward gratifications are retained, they may more easily consent to the inward joys.' (Emphasis added).²²

The plan was clearly not to try to stop the heathen practices of the Anglo Saxons, but to adapt them to the rites of the Church. Again this is what is called syncretism, or mixture. We cannot

²⁰Charles Spurgeon's *Treasury of David* on Psalm 81:4

²¹Judith Flanders, *Christmas a Biography* (online) Chapter one

²²Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, Chapter XXX (online)

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bede/history.v.i.xxix.htm>

worship the Lord in the way of the heathens. The Bible warns us against learning pagan ways: *"And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.* (Deuteronomy 12:3-4). Yet this is Catholic Church's strategy in relation to proselytising the world.

The observance of Religious Calendars

The observance of any religious calendar concerning days and seasons is not really encouraged in the New Testament. In Galatians 4:14, Paul says to the brethren: *"You observe days, and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you lest I have laboured in vain."* In this passage, Scriptures refer to the Jewish believers going back under the law in celebrating Old Testament feasts. The negativity towards following even Biblical feasts, seasons and dates should be taken into our consideration.

In Colossians 2:16 Paul says: *'So let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.* This verse shows us that we are not bound by festivals and special days. The Old Testament feasts (of which this passage is speaking) are shadows. We however, need to be fixed on the substance which is Christ. All the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwells in Him. We do not need Christ plus the Mass, but Christ alone!

Moreover, the Christian calendar as it is now, is largely of pagan origin anyway and not based on the Old Testament feasts, and can be simply ignored. Let us hold on to the simplicity that is in Christ, Who is our glorious Life. We are therefore at liberty not to observe religious days, months, and yearly festivals.

Conclusions

We have seen that Christmas is not a biblical feast, but rather a manmade tradition. It started with the Roman Catholic Church and is mixed in with paganism- from Babylon -, and most likely is the wrong day for the birth of Jesus. The fact that the world celebrates

something that has the name of Christ upon it reveals something more serious. All year round people mock and blaspheme the Name of our dear Lord, and then celebrate Christmas; this shows us that there is much syncretism and mixture here.

However, many Christians see things differently and hold to a sincere perspective, that as long as they do not touch the pagan elements of Christmas there is no problem in them practising the festival, seeking only to focus on Jesus' birth. Singing only hymns and carols that are scriptural, and seek to use the season to reach out to a lost and dying world, the sentiment is indeed admirable. Others do not want the name of Christ associated with the mixture and seek to take the precious out from the vile and want to rescue Christ from Christmas. The incarnation is too holy to be joined to the festival, mixed with paganism. Jesus is too pure to be identified with the Mass. What any man may think -including the writer- does not count for anything of itself. We are but men. **Only the Word of God is our final authority.**

The most important thing we need to do at this Christmas season is to ask the Lord with an open heart what He thinks about the festival. If you feel free after study and prayer to celebrate Christmas, and your conscious is clear having sought the Lord, and you do not feel that contrary elements are sufficient to prevent your participation, then that is between you and the Lord. Others may feel differently after praying, and seek to drop Christmas altogether, having explored the 'roots and fruit' so to speak.

Paul the Apostle says, *"Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind."*(Romans 14:5). The key is to be persuaded. It means 'to be fully assured.' In other words our practice needs to come out of some Study on the issue and prayer to seek the heart of the Lord on this issue, seeking to lay aside personal bias. Then once we are persuaded, we should have peace and be settled. There is certainly nothing wrong with seeing family or getting together with folks over the holiday season. Whatever views we hold, we must accept each other's perspectives in love and build each other up in the Lord, not tear each other down. I have done a lot of reading and research on this subject; it all becomes ugly when people start getting into personal attacks against differing sincere views.

I have seen this attitude manifest on both sides of the fence, and it is not according to Christ! It is often the flesh. Whatever view we have on this matter, we have no right to shout down those who feel differently to ourselves. Respect is vital. *"Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies".* (1 Cor. 8:1)

Conclusion

Should Christ be part of Christmas, or separated from it? My personal view is, because it is not commanded in Scriptures, it is merely a tradition of men; the fact that it is mixed with paganism and rooted in Catholicism is enough for me to distance myself from the observance of the Christmas festival. I feel this is also important concerning the worship of the local church. We need to relate rightly to the Lord when we come before Him as His people, and must worship Him in spirit and truth, as He truly is, not as though still a baby. This does not mean we cannot meditate upon the glory of the incarnation. It is a glorious truth and because it is so holy, let us separate it from any mixture, tradition, or mere sentimentality. May we recognise the incarnation as a miracle of Divine grace and thank the Father for giving us His Son, to pay the price for our sins, in order that we could be reconciled back to God. Let everything we do in the church be unto the pleasure of our God.

I have presented to you my thoughts and views on the matter. May we all show the Lord's love and grace to each other over our differences that we all might come more fully to the knowledge of Christ over this matter.

With much love in Jesus,

John.

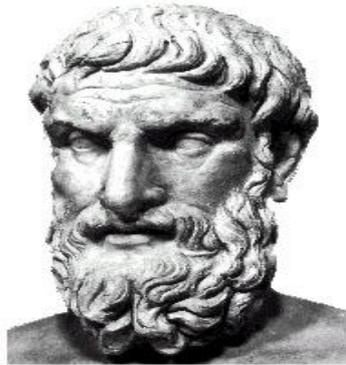
Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. **Do not touch what is unclean,** And I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:14 -17

Not Philosophy but Christ

Now this I say *lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words*. [...] Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. Colossians 2:8-10

Epicurus says:
"Life is good!

Make sure to
enjoy it."



"Death does not concern us because as long as we exist, death is not here. And when it does come, we are no longer here". Epicurus

JESUS

THE WAY

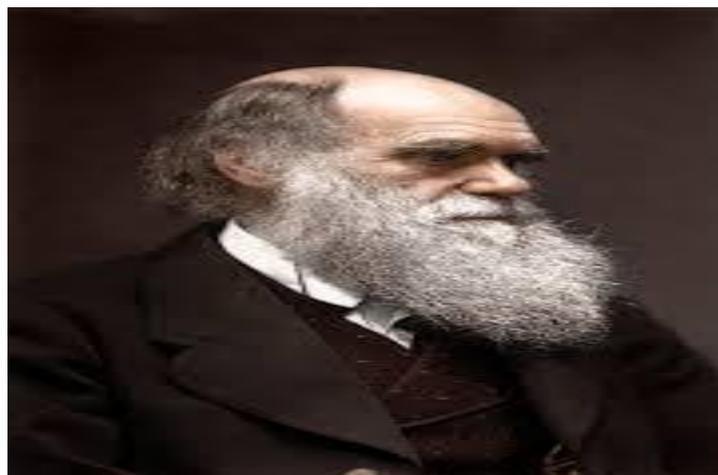
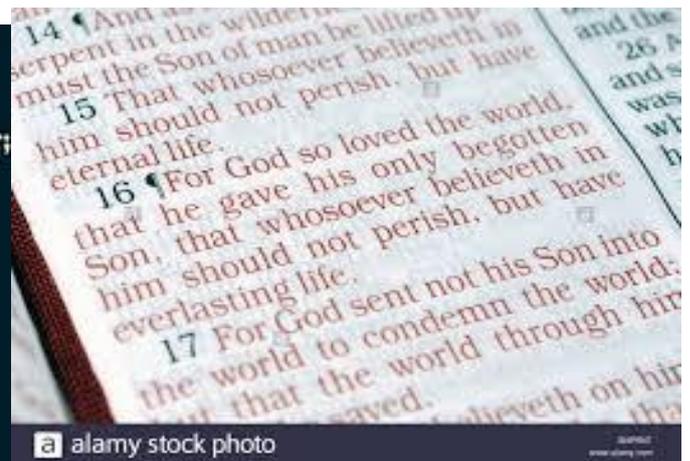
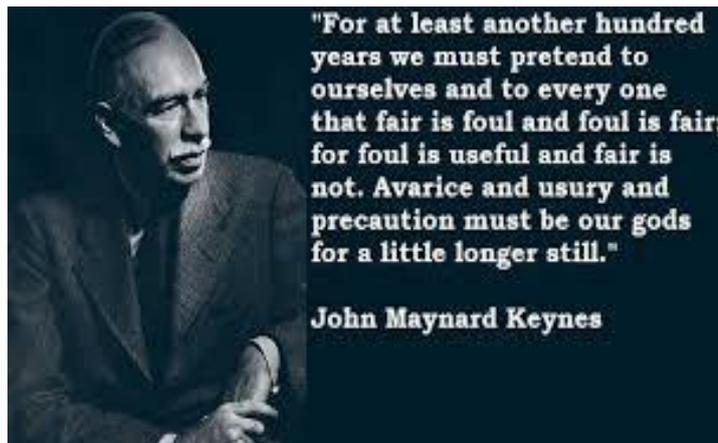
THE TRUTH

THE LIFE

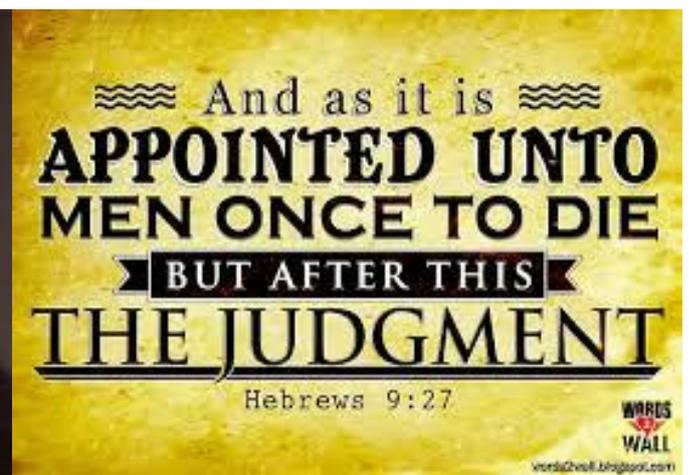
JOHN 14:6

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE COPIES OF THIS POSTER.

God says in the Bible:



"Thus man has ultimately become superior to woman [...].that if men are capable of a decided pre-eminence over women in many subjects, the average of mental power in man must be above that of woman."¹ Darwin



Website: www.bereoa.org

Email: searchscripture@bereoa.org

¹ Charles Darwin (1871) 'The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex'. V.2, 327, 329. London