

Why Not Christmas?

by: Ronald L. Dart

I have given sermons about many of our beliefs, why we practice and observe the Sabbath day? Why we keep the Holy Days?

Today I am going to talk about why we do not observe Christmas? It really seems to be a highly significant article of faith among many people in our faith. In fact, I think there are people who would just about work on the Sabbath day rather than put a green wreath with a red ribbon on the door of their house. They are very vehement about Christmas and about the nonobservance of Christmas.

Why do we believe this? Why do we feel this way and why is it a part of our practice?

The Bible Is Our Sole Authority

I think for many of us it is a natural consequence of the growing conviction that we went through in the time of our life, that the Bible was the sole authority for our faith.

A significant denomination, for example, is fond of boasting that, "They speak where the Bible speaks, and they are silent where the Bible is silent." I think that they themselves have found that that discipline is a little hard to maintain. But the truth is, whenever anyone does lip service to that idea, that "We speak where the Bible speaks and we are silent where the Bible is silent," and then they come up against the fact that Christmas is not in the Bible, then they face an immediate crisis, because you are either going to do something that the Bible has nothing to say about, does not advocate, and does not instruct, and therefore you have to do something that is not in the Bible or you are going to go back to the Bible and have to deal with that particular question.

Holy Days In The Bible

Now this is not to say that the Bible is silent on the subject of holidays or holy days. This is something that when I first came up against this subject, I had come to believe that the Bible was my authority. In fact, I was involved in an ongoing discussion with another person, another Christian about different doctrines and ideas and the one thing we agreed upon was, that the Bible was our sole authority, and whatever it was that we were going to come to, in terms of beliefs and practices, had to be based on the Bible. We were not going to be dragging anything else into our discussions along the way.

So we found and it was a surprise to me to find, that the Bible is far from silent on holidays. The fact is that there are seven significant holy days listed in the Bible and that are specifically commanded by God (Leviticus 23).

The problem is Christmas is conspicuous by its absence from that list. So when you start asking the question, "Why do we not observe Christmas?" that is a relative simple thing, it is not commanded in the Bible. There's no particular reason why one should, based upon that and if one wants to follow the Bible and not to add things to the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, Proverbs 30:6, Revelation 22:18-19) then you are not going to be observing Christmas on that basis alone.

Historical Facts About Christmas

Now there are certain historical facts about Christmas that are simply not in dispute, not in any way at all.

In ancient Rome, December 25th. was the birthday of Mithra, the Iranian mystery god, called the Sun of righteousness. The connection there is so striking, that one can hardly avoid it.

December 25th. was in the middle of the Roman Saturnalia. It was the custom in Rome to decorate houses with greenery and lights and to give presents to children and to poor people and that also has a familiar ring to it.

German and Celtic yule rites were introduced a little later. I looked up 'yule,' by the way, in the dictionary and the definition said, "Christmas and the observance thereof." In the fine print it said, "That yule is old English for a pagan festival held in midwinter." So the yule rites included food, greetings, good fellowship, greenery, fir trees, fires, lights and gifts."

So history, and the historical facts about Christmas is not anything I have to prove to anyone, because it is so readily acknowledged, so widely acknowledged in just about any source you go to and will tell you this.

We also know that King Constantine, who was probably the most powerful and influential figure in the early development of Christianity, that is in the post-apostolic development of Christianity, from about 325 A.D. onward, when he was quote "converted" and saw a sign of the cross in the sky. He basically took over and dominated the entire visible Christian church for the remainder of his life and him, being really addicted to sun worship, he introduced a lot of the practices, beliefs and customs having to do with sun worship into Christianity at that time.

Encyclopedia Article

There is an interesting article in Britannica. In fact, there's a funny thing in the main encyclopedia, the one I have, which is a 1981 edition. If you go to the main encyclopedia you will not find an entry in there under "Christmas." It is all under "Christianity."

I found this particular statement, rather interesting. It was talking about the passing of Constantine and how when he passed, his major influence began to disappear from the church.

It says, "Even after that, Roman paganism continued to exert other permanent influences great and small on the church. The emperors passed on to the popes the title of chief priests, in Latin, Pontifex Maximus. The ecclesiastical calendar contains numerous remnants of pre-Christian festivals, notably Christmas, most of all."

This, I thought was rather interesting and you might find it interesting too.

"The mainstream of Western Christianity, old ancient Rome, was a firm discipline, that gave us stability and shape."

Now note well, the firm discipline and stability that the Western church enjoyed came not from Judaism, not from the Bible, not from apostolic Christianity, it came from Roman paganism and that is what the Britannica called it, not just Roman custom, but Roman paganism.

The article goes on to say, "Western Christianity combined an insistence on established forms, with the possibility of recognizing that novelties need not be excluded since they were implicit from the start."

Whatever that means, what they're saying is, that they insisted on this stable form, but they did not exclude novelties, that might be brought into Christianity, to maybe spice things up a little bit, shall we say, make them more colorful, a little brighter in the middle of winter.

The early church fathers of the second and third centuries, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius, all contended that Christmas was a copy of a pagan celebration.

The knowledge of Christmas is historical, and not even in dispute. Christmas as such, did not enter Christianity until the fourth century, and that's when it really began to make its inroads and to be a part, a permanent part, of the Christian celebration. So it really did not originate with the apostles, it did not originate with the New Testament. It is not there at all, and neither is Easter for that matter. It came along about 300 years later.

Jesus Was Not Born On December 25th.

Then there are certain biblical facts, that are not in dispute either. First is that Jesus was not born anywhere near December 25th. This is such a simple thing, it is hardly worth the time. You can go to commentary after commentary after commentary and they will basically tell you that "No-no Jesus was not born near December 25. That's the birthday of Sol Invictus, the pagan Roman sun god, that Jesus was probably born in the autumn." That is pretty well the universal agreement on that subject.

Shepherds were not still in the field with their flocks at that time of year. Most commentaries will say that by the time you get down to December, really after the first of November, it is too cold in the fields. The flocks are no longer out there and that puts it back in October of a certainty.

You Can Prove When Jesus Was Born All By Yourself

But the fact is, that in the New Testament, just a simple, careful study, coupled with the Old Testament you can prove when Jesus was born. You don't really need anyone's help. All you need is a concordance and a little patience and a little work and you can establish the sequence of the conception of John the Baptist, that came at the end of his father's temple duty, which is a fixed date in the Hebrew calendar. He was of a particular course of priests. The courses of the priesthood started at a particular time of year, you simply count off the courses of the priests, the number of years and you know when Zacharias saw the vision about the birth of John and the assumption is that John was conceived shortly after the time Zacharias came out of his time of duty in the temple. Then you look at the conception of Jesus and the months between the conception of Jesus and John, these things are all carefully laid out in the Bible. Follow the normal gestation cycle, and guess what you will find? You find that Jesus was born in the autumn, in the season of the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles.

So you have essentially the birth of Jesus completely and totally divorced from the time of the present observance of Christmas in December.

Customs Of Christmas

You will find virtually all of the customs connected with Christmas are based on customs and traditions from around the world.

Certainly the trees, the lights, the giving of gifts, all the patterns of behavior that people go through in our society at Christmas time. These things all came from a pagan source and have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the birth of Christ.

Here and there you will find a manger scene, with a man and his wife and some sheep, maybe some shepherds, and a baby in the cradle and you will find something about the birth of Jesus that is connected with Christmas and that's just about it.

Of course, there are some radio stations that you listen to where you will hear what we used to call Christmas carols all the time, which have to do with the birth of Christ, now so many of the songs having to do with Christmas are like 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer' and 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' and they have absolutely nothing to do with Jesus, or the birth of Jesus or anything of the kind.

What Does God Say?

God gives this commandment from the law. In Deuteronomy 12 verse 28, comes a statement that is so profound, it's inconceivable that anyone could misunderstand it, misapply it or even assume for a moment that this is God's will for all time.

In Deuteronomy 12 verse 28, God says, "Observe and hear all these words that I command you, so it will go well with you, and with your children after you forever, when you do that which is good and which is right in the sight of the LORD your God."

I don't think it is possible for us to really grasp how novel, how new, how profound the religion was that God was handing down to these people. Now I say new, it was new to them. It was not really new, for it had been around for a very long time, but what I'm basically saying is how different, how startling, how strikingly different it was. From the religions of the time, all around them, what God was going to tell them was that this is totally different and I expect you to live by it.

"When the LORD your God," {29} "shall cut off the nations from before you, where you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land. {30} You take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after they have been destroyed from before you."

Now you would think, that this would be sort of automatic. You would think, that here is a land that God is going to drive out the inhabitants from before us, God disfavors them. God wants us to have their land and He's going to drive these people out ahead of us. Right? Now you think that we would know then that what we were bringing with us into this land that God had revealed to us was far superior to any practices, customs or anything else of the people that God was driving out.

In fact, in one place God mentioned "Don't do these things for because of these things I am driving these people out from ahead of you. Don't do it!"

Continuing in verse 30, "You shall not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise.""

Okay, I got that. That is clear. Do you have a problem with that? God is saying "Don't inquire after their gods, as to how they worship their gods and say, "Well that's a nice custom. I will adapt that to the worship of God." God says, "Don't do that. I don't want you doing that at all."

I remember on one occasion, and this was really one of the turning points for me. I was a Southern Baptist at the time and the 'Baptist Standard' which was the official publication of the Southern Baptist churches in Texas had a rather lengthy article in it about the 'Pagan Origins of Christmas' and I was a training leader at the time on Sunday evening and I got up

and I read that article to the class that was there. This was in that season of the year and I pointed out to them these things and then I turned to Deuteronomy 12 and read this passage, that all these things were customs of worship of Mithraism, of Sol Invictus, the Sun god, and here we read in the Bible that we should not adapt these things to the worship of Christ and here we are doing it.

Compromising The Truth

One of the fellows in the room got up and said, "Well, when I see the Christmas tree, I don't think about Baal or Mithra, I think of the new life that we have in Christ. When I see the snow around the base of the Christmas tree, I don't think of something pagan, I am thinking of the purity of Jesus Christ and the red ornaments was the blood of Jesus Christ," and he went on with a complete reinterpretation of all the pagan symbols, including the little round balls, reinterpreting all of the pagan symbols to have special meaning for him about Christ and about what Christ had done.

Now taken in a vacuum, without anything else, intruding from the outside, there was nothing singularly illogical and what he was doing and one could easily make the case that that's reasonable and sensible, but the problem is God said specifically, "Don't do that! I don't want you fooling around with those symbols. I don't want those symbols attached to Me. Those things are things that I hate." Are you going to use those symbols? And say that they mean something connected with Me?

Let's notice what God says, verse 31 of Deuteronomy 12, "You shall not do so unto the LORD your God, for every abomination which he hates have they done to their gods. In fact, they have even gone so far as to burn their own sons and daughters in the fire to their gods."

Think about that the next time you see a baby! These people, with all their quote "harmless pagan customs" end quote, went so far as to burn their own children in the fire.

God says, "I hate those symbols. I don't want to smell it. I don't want to see it. I don't want to think about it. I hate what they do. I hate everything about their religions and I don't want you doing it!"

To me, this is fundamental, to the reason why we don't observe Christmas! It is right there in Deuteronomy 12 verse 28, and the following verses.

Verse 32, "Whatever I command you, do not add to it or take away from it."

Now to tell you the truth, this doesn't leave much room for the introduction of a long list of pagan customs in the Christian practice, does it? There just is not a lot of slack in there. Not much wiggle room.

We don't observe Christmas for the simple reason that God explicitly forbids what Western Christianity has done, and that is to allow novelties to enter into worship, life and practice of the faith of Jesus Christ.

Symbolism Is Important

Symbolism is important. To argue that symbolism is not important, is to argue that words are not important, because words are symbols. Symbolism is a form of language and the purpose is to convey meaning and ideas.

Over here on the wall, we have a little poster that says, "Team Kid Motto. Learning about God, using the Bible, living for Jesus." Those are just words. No. No. They are symbols, a word is a symbol. 'TEAM', you put the words up there on the board. If we scramble the letters around over the whole poster then you would not have a clue as to what the thing even meant. They only have meaning when you put them together in a certain way and the symbol 'TEAM' brings to your mind certain concepts. So words are symbols, as are wreaths, red ribbons and fir trees decorated with lights, and what have you. These are all symbols. They are all evocative and they bring to your mind certain things.

God says, to you, the Christmas tree does not bring to My mind what it brings to your mind. For example, if you see a Christmas tree and you smell the nice evergreen smell in the living room of a home, it may invoke childhood memories of electric trains and Santa Claus and oranges and nuts in the stocking on a fireplace mantle. It may invoke all of these ideas in your mind. That is not the idea that it invokes in God's mind.

For God, it goes all the way back to the death of Nimrod, to Semiramis faking his resurrection, to all sorts of strange and pagan customs in which in His mind ultimately led to the sacrifice of burning alive of their own children. God says, "I hate it! I abhor it, and I do not want you doing that."

So the adoption of symbolism of another god is a very serious matter. It constitutes, mind you folks, a confession of another god.

Public Profession Of Your Faith

A confession of faith is so profoundly important. In fact, I think that I began to realize this long before I ever came in contact with the churches of our faith (Church of God keeping the Seventh Day Saturday Sabbath and Holy Days observance), because the church that I attended before, the public profession of faith was required. You could not go to the preacher in private somewhere, and sneak around and say, I want to be baptized, and be baptized and go your way. No, no, no! Fundamental to that was, once you walk down the aisle, you shake hands with the preacher and you publicly confess Jesus Christ. It was required.

In fact, when you get in the New Testament, the idea of the public confession of Jesus Christ, in some way, in your life, is required and expected of you and Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

The adoption of symbolism of a god has a great deal to say about what kind of a confession you are making. The adoption of the symbolism of the Bible involves a number of confessions. I consider, for example, that the observance of the Sabbath day, abstaining from work on the Sabbath day, is a confession of faith in the God who created the world in six days and rested the seventh. He is my God, not some other god.

The observance of the Feast of Tabernacles is a confession that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, that this kingdom which we belong to is not of this world. that we are not at home here, that we are looking for another kingdom, a city that has foundations and whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). We are temporary, we are on the road, we are on the march toward the kingdom of God.

The observance of the Passover is a confession that Jesus Christ is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:8) that He died for our sins, but it was my sins that crucified him and put Him on the stake, that His sacrifice is what sets us free from sin.

You know, you have to confess that, and when you come to observe the Passover in the presence of other people, when you partake of the wine and the bread, confess before all your brethren, that Jesus died for you and that you are renewing your faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The acceptance and observance for seven days of the days of unleavened bread, where we accept the fact that in those seven days leaven is a symbol, or a type of sin and we confess that we have been freed from sin and we must keep ourselves that way.

So by the adoption of all these symbols, we make certain confessions about who our God is, what He expects of us, what our life is like and what we expect of Him.

But the adoption of the symbols of Christmas invokes an entirely different message. In the modern world which is hardly religious, we do not believe that we have any business perpetuating the myth that Christmas has anything to do with Jesus Christ. So, we do not observe Christmas.

Not Everything About Christmas Is Pagan

There is a small metaphor for us, and the reason I bring it up is that someone wrote this, they said, "Everything that has anything to do with Christmas is pagan and we should have nothing whatsoever to do with it." Right, I got it.

We should then never give gifts to children, because that has long been associated with Christmas and it is pagan and we ought not to do it. Think of all the money that is going to save you. We should never give food to the poor. That's been associated with the Saturnalia and it's pagan, therefore we should not be giving food to the poor.

Now let me tell you something else that has been associated with Christmas, the birth of Jesus, has long been associated with Christmas. Are you prepared to say that the birth of Jesus is pagan? I don't think so!

There is a difference sometime between what we consciously will acknowledge with our minds and what we intuitively react to with our heart or our belly as it were. In the sense of the feeling that there's got to be something wrong with the birth of Jesus or it wouldn't have been associated with Christmas for so long. I know how absurd that sounds, but sometimes our feelings are not rational. Our feelings are not sensible, but they are there and they have to be dealt with.

Jesus Came In The Flesh

In our tradition, we believe that this is one way that we confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. John addressed it in the first century

In 1 John 4 and in verse one, John said, "Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world. {2} Hereby know you the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. {3} And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come, already is in the world."

Why is that such a big deal? There were people who had come to believe that Jesus Christ came down to the earth, fell to the earth, full-grown and that He was not really flesh and blood at all. He was a spirit and that He only appeared to be flesh and blood. There has been a lot of strange doctrines, down through time.

What is really interesting about the gospel writers is, that they are all at pains to let us know that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and none more so than Luke, who not only goes to the trouble to tell us that Jesus was flesh, but emphasizes, explains and develops all the concepts related to his physical fleshly birth.

What is there that could more clearly emphasize that Jesus Christ did come in the flesh than the realization that he was a baby, a real baby, who had to be nourished at his mother's breast, who cried when he was hungry, who cried when he needed to be changed, who cried when all the things a baby cries about cried about. I bet He was a good child, but at same time, He was a normal flesh and blood human child.

We Do Not Observe Christmas

We do not observe Christmas, but there is no reason for us to withdraw from our family and friends at this time of year. We do not observe Christmas, but there is no reason for us to be tense with our family or with our friends at this time of year.

Jesus was not born on December 25th., but He was born. He was born in humble surroundings, He was a baby who was laid in a feeding trough on a bed of straw, who was nourished at His mother's breast.

We should not be negative like Scrooge. We ought to be positive as those who love their Savior and confess Him. We are not any better than the people who observe Christmas. We may be a little bit better informed.

My wish for you at this season of the year is that the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ guide you.

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