

A Christian's Response To Christmas

Aaron Beard
Trussville
Dec. 19, 2004

Introduction:

A. Right now our society and world is celebrating a holiday called Christmas:

1. Stores, the radio, and family and friends are all teeming with activity!
2. On either side of our building there are two denominational groups who have had and continue to have huge celebrations and services in remembrance of this day
 - a. Many churches have manger scenes set up in the yards – some even live!
 - b. Extremely extravagant songs and musical productions are being conducted
 - c. There are cantatas and dramas being conducted depicting the story of Jesus' birth
3. As the religious world abounds with activity around Christmas, we may seem a bit odd!
 - a. This congregation has no plans to conduct any of these activities
 - b. Some may ask, "Why are you who are Christians not celebrating this holiday?"

B. This morning I want us to examine Christmas and what a Christian's response should be:

1. Others may ask, some here may not understand, and we need to be willing to re-examine
2. This lesson may be somewhat of a surprise to many people here today:
 - a. There are those present who have not grown up around the teaching about Christmas, it's origin, and our response as I will present them today
 - b. So as we consider these: Listen carefully, open your Bible, & open your mind!

I. First Of All, Let's Begin By Looking At Christmas From A Historical Perspective:

A. I say "historical" and not Biblical because Christmas as the religious world is observing it right now is not found in the Bible!

1. As you look through your Bible you will not find any mention of Christmas whatsoever!
 - a. You will likewise not find any mention of Easter, Lent, or any other such "holy-day"
 - b. You will not find them because they did not originate with God but with man!
2. All historians and scholars agree that the church we read about in the Bible made no observance of Christmas, nor did any churches for several hundred years after that!
 - a. While I would not endorse everything the "church fathers" said, they do acknowledge that Christmas was not among the early festivals of the church!
 - b. In fact, they condemned those who speculated on Jesus day of birth!
3. So if we are going to understand where and why the holiday of Christmas was established we will have to turn to the pages of history!

B. The Religious Observance Of December 25th As Christ's Birthday Originated With Men:

1. The I.S.B.E. states, "Neither the term Christmas... nor the actual celebration of the anniversary of the birth of Christ is recorded in the Bible. Early Christians did meet regularly to commemorate the death, resurrection and promised return of Christ." (Vol. 1 page 804)
2. Christmas was instituted by the Roman Catholic church in the 4th Century:
 - a. Note: Webster defines Christmas as "Christ + Mass"
 - b. It was first celebrated in Constantinople in 354 AD and Antioch in 388 and later spread throughout the Catholic church and is observed by many others today!
 - c. Every scholastic source I could find on Christmas speaks of it as being "added"
3. The Roman Catholic church did not get their motivation for the creation of this special "holy-day" from God's word... it has it's roots in paganism:
 - a. The pagan "Feast Of Saturnalia" in early Rome was celebrated from December 17th–24th & was made by merriment, gift giving to children, and entertainment
 - b. Quote: McClintock and Strong (Volume 2 Page 276)
 - c. It was originally designed to turn people from pagan worship to worshipping God
4. The religious observance of Christmas has man and not God as its architect and framer!

II. What Should We Do As A Congregation In Response To Christmas?

A. Our response must be founded in a respect for the authority of Jesus & His word!

1. All we do in the Lord's service must be done by His authority (**Col 3:17; 2 John 9**)
 - a. The religious world responds, "Our cantatas, musicals, and plays are all done to glorify Christ's name! We do it in His name" → They've missed the point!!!
 - b. **Illustration:** Police at the door say, "Open up in the name of the law"
 - c. We do not have the freedom to worship and serve the Lord however we wish! We must look to Him and see how HE wants us to worship and serve Him!
2. When we worship the Lord how we want or even according to what we think He might like then our worship is in vain! It's pointless! (**Matthew 15:9**)
3. Some people look at how the religious world observes Christmas and say, "But isn't that such a good thing? They focusing on the Lord! They're celebrating Jesus Christ!"
 - a. Yes, it seems like such a good and wonderful thing and I appreciate the focus
 - b. The problem boils down to the fact that as a religious holiday, we've no authority!
 - c. There are many things that might seem GOOD to me; however, it doesn't matter what I think is good... It matters what God has told me is good!

B. When the Holy Spirit revealed God's word to man and it was recorded, no where does God instruct us to keep a special holiday remembering Christ's birth!

1. The Bible doesn't tell us WHEN Christ was born... it was most likely NOT December 25th!
 - a. The activity of the shepherds tell us this much: (**Luke 2:8**)
 - b. Keep in mind, they are watching their sheep at night, on December 25th, and in an area with the same weather climate as Kentucky!!!
 - c. **Quote:** Albert Barnes' comments on this verse
2. If Jesus wanted His birth celebrated as a day of religious observance, He would have told us to do so! (**Matt. 28:18-20**)
 - a. "All authority has been given to Me" → He is the head... It ALL belongs to Him
 - b. Gospels never record Jesus instructing anyone to keep His birthday holy & He didn't instruct His apostles to do so since they never taught or wrote about it!
 - c. We have to conclude that since the apostles never instructed us to keep Jesus' birthday as a holy day, then Jesus did not instruct them to do so!
3. If God wanted us to keep the birth of Jesus Christ as a holy day, then he would have given us the day and the way! (**2 Pet. 1:3**)
 - a. All the instructions needed for serving & worshipping the Lord are in God's word!
 - b. If Christmas was something we needed, God would have given us the instructions!
4. If something is a GOOD work it is found within the pages of God's word! (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**)
5. There is really only one part of Christ's life that we are told to remember as a congregation in a special religious observance: His death! (**1 Cor. 11:23-26**)
 - a. We know HOW we are to keep this memorial of Christ!
 - b. We know by example WHEN we are to keep this memorial of Christ!
 - c. We can clearly see this being PRACTICED throughout the New Testament!
 - d. You cannot make the same statements about the birth of Jesus!

C. The New Testament always speaks those who keep "days" religiously (holy-days) as being weak in conscience, ignorant in knowledge, or estranged from Christ!

1. When those who were Jews heard the gospel preached and obeyed it, they turned away from the shadow to the real thing!
 - a. The old law was filled with regulations, feasts, days, and years to be kept holy
 - b. Christ death and resurrection put an end to all of those things!
 - c. However, these observances were still very much engrained in the Jews
2. **Romans 14:1** → Has a weak conscience... It bothers him if he doesn't observe them... however, Paul makes it clear that God sees nothing special in keeping days!
3. Paul's warning to the Galatians is even stronger! (**Gal. 4:8-11**)
 - a. Here these Christians were returning to the bondage of the Old Law by insisting on keeping these special religious holy day observances
 - b. His fear for them was that they were turning away from Christ!

- c. Why the fear? If they were keeping these they didn't get it from the gospel of Christ... they were turning to a "different gospel!" (**Gal. 1:6-9**)

III. What Should Or Could Be The Individual's Response To Christmas?

A. Many Christians with this knowledge will celebrate the holiday season of Christmas, not as a religious observance of His birth, but just as any other national holiday:

1. We celebrate many different holidays on a secular level and have no problem with it:
 - a. Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, New Years Eve, Labor Day, etc.
 - b. We recognize these as being good celebrations and times for family gatherings
2. Many Christians see Christmas see its celebration quite the same way:
 - a. It is a happy, generous holiday season! A time to enjoy family, to give gifts, to send greetings, and to remember the poor and less fortunate
 - b. All of these activities are fine and wholesome in and of themselves
 - c. Doing these things would not be violating any teaching of the Bible – just as doing the same around the other holidays would not as well!
3. Some will misuse **I Thess. 5:22** in condemning any celebration whatsoever:
 - a. If one exchanges presents, has a tree, and gets their family together on Christmas; it is not equivalent to what the religious world is doing without authority!
 - a. It's not wrong cause it looks wrong... its wrong because it is wrong!!!
 - b. I think we do need to be cautious of what others think we are doing; however, by running to the opposite extreme we can send a wrong signal as well!

B. Individually, is it wrong to use this season as an opportunity to focus on Christ's birth?

1. Sometimes in opposing error we can find ourselves running to the opposite extreme!
 - a. **For example:** In opposition to charismatic movement we show NO emotion!
 - b. By trying to draw a GREAT distinction with others, we may find ourselves in error!
 - c. Have we done this with Christ's birth?
 - 1) Some will not preach it on it, lead songs about it, pray about it, etc.
 - 2) Some will lead songs and preach on it any time BUT December!
 - d. In combating what the religious world has wrong about their celebrations of Christmas some have completely ignored Christ's birth!!!
 - e. His birth is as much a part of God's word as anything else! (**Rom 1:1-4; I Tim 3:16**)
2. It is possible for a person to focus in on the event of Christ's birth during this time of year without necessarily going beyond Christ's authority! (**Rom. 14:6**)
 - a. **Illustration:** Individually setting aside time in July to meditate on parts of Jesus' life
 - b. During this season our religious world and secular world does so much about Christ's birth that you'd have to work hard NOT to think about it!
 - c. What's wrong with a person saying, "I will spend a little more time meditating, praying, and studying about it" since my mind is already being focused there?
 - d. Is there ever season or day when it's WRONG to think on part of Jesus' life?
 - e. Note: He is not observing a special day of religious observance but an event!
3. Some have made the comment: "The only thing we're told to remember is Christ's death!"
 - a. As a special religious observance... they are right; however, some have made this statement in regards to any remembrance of Jesus' birth!
 - b. Because of these they will not preach, sing, or mention the event in their prayers
 - c. Implications: Can't remember His resurrection, miracles, teachings, love, etc!
4. No, we don't have the authorization to keep Christmas day as celebrated by the religious world, but we must be able to distinguish between remembering the day & the event!

Conclusion: We have no authorization from the Lord to have a special religious celebration of His birthday. If such were the case we would celebrate it fully! However, let's us also be cautious of neglecting the significance of His birth because of the common religious error in our society!