

Two Sides To The Holiday Season

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Introduction: (Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:12-18)

- A. One of the most famous Christmas songs is called “It’s The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year”**
1. Many of us share that sentiment don’t we... the period of time from Thanksgiving to New Years, with Christmas taking up the bulk of the time in the middle, is our favorite time of the year.
 2. For some however, it’s not a time of year they look forward to. Perhaps it’s because of financial struggles, a bad memory, loss of loved ones, loneliness, depression, or other issues.
 3. This shows us that there is more than one side to the holiday season. We often get so caught up in the joy and celebration we forget about the other side and those needing encouragement
- B. The reality is that there are two sides to this holiday season for all of us... On the one hand, we have many wonderful spiritual opportunities to take advantage of, but on the other hand we have many difficult spiritual dangers that we must guard against. Let’s look at these two sides this morning...**

THE DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THIS SEASON:

A. Dangers Christians Need To Guard Against:

1. While the holidays are supposed to be about being together and giving, it is also a great breeding ground for greed and materialism **(1 Timothy 6:6-10)**
 - a. It’s strange, but this time of year has gotten extremely worldly. It teaches us to set our hearts on material things and to love this world. This is a problem even while we shop for others!
 - b. If we aren’t careful, this time of year can make us grow very discontent – Ads make us think, “I want... I need... I gotta have it!” We see all that’s newer, bigger, brighter, faster, etc.
 - c. Parents need to be on guard about sending an unbalanced message to their children – Do we make them think that having it all is what it’s all about? Could it be that in the name of providing them “a good Christmas” that we are really creating and feed a materialistic mindset?
 - d. I really doubt Satan cares if songs about Jesus are being played as long as people are filled with worldliness! Think about this: For many people this is about celebrating the birth of Christ. Yet so many act with anger and bitterness in their hearts on “Black Friday” to get a good deal on some toy or electronic. It seems they forget the simplicity and humbleness surrounding the birth of Jesus. People say it’s all about Jesus, but I am sure Satan can see when it’s not!
2. There is also a danger in allowing other things to interfere with our spiritual priorities. It’s easy to allow other things and people to come before the Lord and serving Him **(Matthew 22:37-38)**
 - a. It’s ironic... For many people Christmas is about celebrating Jesus and you would think it would draw people closer to Jesus, but all too often this holiday season pulls people away from Him
 - b. **Illustration:** Church in Springville cancelling services on Sunday because it was Christmas. What happened to the old “Put Christ Back In Christmas” slogan?
 - c. Think about some more specific ways our focus can get misplaced during this holiday season:
 - 1) Family comes into town and we decide not to go to church because we have company... or perhaps we just decide to skip Bible class or a Sunday night.
 - 2) With all the shopping, parties, cooking, & other events there’s no time for personal prayer, study, and worship. We can’t even give God what’s left, because nothing is left!
 - 3) Our thoughts in general can turn so much more physical during this time of year. We think about the stuff we want, the stuff we want to buy others, and other physical things

- 4) We choose to not contribute to the Lord's cause so we can spend more on Christmas... or we spend so much on Christmas we have to cut back on contribution the next year
- d. Another side of this is our morality. Over the next few weeks there will be parties and gatherings of various kinds. Especially around New Years parties with alcohol will be big!
- d. The Lord and spiritual things are to be what matters most to us. We must be on guard against our priorities and focus being shifted. Our spirituality is not a seasonal thing. People say, "Jesus is the reason for the season..." – He must be the reason for ALL of our seasons and our lives!
- 3. Holidays can also be a very dark time for some people due to a struggle with depression (**1 Peter 4:7-13**)
 - a. Depression hits especially hard at this time for several reasons:
 - 1) Some have lost loved ones around this time of year & the holidays seem to revive the pain
 - 2) Some have lost loved ones and this may be the first Christmas without them or time has passed but the holidays are a time for family and they aren't there anymore
 - 3) Some feel alone and while there may be some family around, there is still a void. They want someone to fill that void that they can share this special time of year with.
 - 4) For others it's a financial reason – They see everyone shopping and buying nice things, but they are broke and get down because they can't afford the pleasures others enjoy. For some it's the first bill or payment that comes because they have overspent.
 - b. Depression is dangerous! It's dangerous because it causes us to turn extra introverted with our struggles, separate ourselves from people who can help, destroy our eternal focus, it chips away at our faith in God, and drift further and further into a state of inactivity
 - c. Sometimes depression can be avoided by choices... such as choosing not to go over our heads in debt, not to spend more than we can afford, and to focus on what really matters
 - d. Other times it will be a greater struggle. We need to pray more than ever (**Phil 4:6**)... surround ourselves with spiritually strong people (**Phil 4:9**)... meditate on good things (**Phil. 4:8**)... focus on worship (**Phil 4:4**)... get to work in our physical and spiritual lives (**Phil 4:9, 13**)
- 4. The holiday season can pose a real danger to the Christian's character, especially in regard to some parts of the fruit of the spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**)
 - a. **Illustration:** Black Friday - Lady arguing about cell phones... Ladies getting into a fight over sheets
 - b. This time of year we know going into it that the lines will be longer, traffic will be heavier, gas more expensive, stock lower, and worldly people even more worldlier! We aren't really surprised when things do not as we had planned, but we still can get bent all out of shape!
 - c. We have to make sure we are walking by the Spirit and not the flesh! Does joy, patience, kindness, goodness, peace, gentleness, and self-control still characterize who we are. We are supposed to be Christians... to be spiritual people... regardless what time of year it might be!
 - d. What can we do? Slow down... give ourselves more time... let others go first... think on things that are good and pure during tense times... put others ahead of yourself... imitate Christ!

B. Opportunities That Arise During This Time Of Year:

- 1. First of all, there seems to be greater opportunities to be a servant & a giver (**James 1:27; Matt 25:34-46**)
 - a. Not only do we get an excuse to buy presents for people, but we see more of the needs around us. This isn't because there aren't as many needs in July, but more attention is drawn to them.
 - b. Many charities do extra work this time of year and that means that its easier for us to give. This is certainly a good thing, provided they are good charities (Not churches like Salvation Army)

- c. While this is good, the best path is to get personally involved in our serving and giving. James emphasized actually “visiting” as we provide for the needs and Jesus talked about actually doing the work to answer the needs of people. This time of year, there is much we can do!
 - d. Remember John 3:16 → God is the ultimate giver. When we are givers we are imitating our God!
- 2. We also have the opportunity to speak to others about the gospel of Christ and encourage people to get their lives right with the Lord (**Philippians 1:15-18**)
 - a. You hear and see the name of Jesus more during this time of year than any other. Manger scenes abound. Songs about Jesus are on the radio. People are talking about Jesus everywhere.
 - b. **Illustration:** Some of the most ungodly of singers put out songs praising & worshipping Jesus! It almost seems blasphemous, but at least for whatever reason they think about Jesus!
 - c. On one hand I see the problem of a lack of authority in the celebration of Christmas as a “holy day” but on the other I rejoice in the fact that at least Christ is getting preached!
 - d. Do you have friends, neighbors, family, or coworkers who aren’t religious at all? This time of year has them thinking at least to some degree more about Jesus... why not seize that chance!
- 3. This season also presents a special opportunity to speak to others about the truth, about authority, and the nature of real New Testament Christianity (**2 Peter 2:24-26**)
 - a. So many religious people and churches see this time of year as a time for celebrating the birth of Jesus and they do this without questioning the practice because it seems so good.
 - b. But where is a religious celebration like Christmas at in the Bible? We read of the birth of Jesus, but where do we read of Christians or churches celebrating it with a special “holy day.”
 - c. The word Christmas was invented in 1038AD by the Catholic church. The idea of celebrating the birth of Jesus did not enter people’s minds until at least 335AD. It’s no secret that December 25 with many of the customs have pagan origins & the “holy day” was meant to off-set that.
 - d. So what’s the big deal? What could possibly be wrong with having a “holy day” to celebrate the birth of Jesus? It’s a matter of authority. There is no scripture teaching or authoring it.
 - e. The only special celebration taught in the New Testament is the first day of the week with the Lord’s Supper. Not only do we have examples of this, but Jesus commanded it. And yet the Lord’s Supper takes a backseat in focus and practice to the celebration of Christmas!
 - f. With so many people “conforming” without questioning, we have the opportunity to teach people!
- 4. Finally, this time of year gives us a great chance to allow the glory of Lord and fellowship with God to shine through our attitudes, actions, and words (**2 Cor. 2:14-15**)
 - a. Some of the same situations that might present dangers to our character and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives also provide a unique opportunity to let those things shine through our lives.
 - b. With so many people who act selfishly, proudly, impatiently, and unkindly we have a chance to really let people see what Jesus can do with a person’s life!