

Should Christians Celebrate Christmas?

(There is always an attempt to de-emphasize the true spiritual significance of Christian holidays and place emphasis on Santa, toys, bunnies, baskets and candy. That is a sincere cause for concern. This article assumes that is understood. I respect those who may disagree and who may have a valid cause for concern.)

Every Christmas season, I receive emails such as: "I'm sorry, but every time I tried to watch the sermon, the decorated Christmas trees in the background were disturbing to my spirit. I turned it off. I am discouraged and disappointed because of the trees."

Her statement begs the question, "Can we redeem holidays?" Redeem means to recover the ownership of something. Can we, in good faith, redeem Halloween, Christmas and Easter with their roots saturated in paganism, superstitions and the occult?

Redeem and celebrate are not unfamiliar to Christians. God redeems man from a state of darkness, and we celebrate this transformation of heart. Simply stated, it's about why, who and how we celebrate.

For example, Halloween, a mixture of Celtic pagan superstition and early traditions, is associated with witchcraft and satanic activity. This is not something to be celebrated, nor can it be redeemed as it stands, with themes such as horror, death and fear.

We have children, and we can't always avoid the gory and grotesque decorations, so we change the theme in order to redeem. We use the opportunity to redefine Halloween to "good overcame evil day."

We don't celebrate Halloween per se; we remember Jesus' victory on the cross and how He overcame evil. Many churches offer Fall Festivals and celebrations for this very reason—to redeem the theme of Halloween.

What about Christmas? Rooted in pagan practices, it is abused and commercialized, but can it be redeemed?

Christmas, unlike Halloween's message of horror and death, celebrates eternal life through the birth of Christ. Most Christians I know don't falsely worship the tree and the decorations referred to in Jeremiah 10:1-10; we worship the Creator of heaven and earth.

Early on, Christmas was a combination of "Christ's Mass" celebrating Jesus' birth and St. Nicholas Day. St. Nicholas was bishop of Greece and was portrayed as a man who saved kids from slavery and helped the poor. After the Reformation, many discontinued St. Nicholas Day because of its unhealthy fixation on saints. The Puritans did not celebrate Christmas for this very reason, but the Germans celebrated Kris Kringle (Christ child).

Eventually, Christmas morphed into what it is today: a mixture of religious and secular activities. I'm not aware of the early church celebrating Christmas; Easter was the Superbowl holiday.

Rich in symbolism, the Christmas tree can point to the cross: once a dead and barren tree, supporting a lifeless Savior, it now stands evergreen as the symbol of eternal life that darkness cannot overcome (cf. 1 John 1:5). In my opinion, Christmas is really a heart issue: Whom and what do we worship—consumerism or Christ?

Gift-giving can also represent peace and goodwill among men (cf. Matthew 2): "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). It can, however, lead to extravagant spending and debt; this should be avoided.

Let's look at this another way. I am sure there are a number of Christians who do not acknowledge holidays because of how they originated, and I respect that. But let's follow that line of thinking in other areas: Should we not acknowledge days of the week whose names originate from false gods—Sunday from the sun god, Monday the moon god and so on?

Again, these issues are heart-issues. God does not desire superficial sacrifice and religiosity; He desires a broken and contrite heart. Pleasing God is the most important issue of the heart. We can avoid celebrating holidays, yet still be rigid, arrogant and judgmental. The heart is the main focus of this article.

Considering that liberty has its limits, if all that we do honors God, He is pleased. Again, the key is to avoid arrogance, judgmentalism and worshipping the wrong things. Strive to follow Paul's advice and not spend time "arguing over opinions," and "live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 14:1, 12:18). For example, what the previous-mentioned online viewer failed to realize was that I did not place the trees on the stage. The building was not ours. She neglected to err on the side of grace.

Whatever your position, the question to ask is, "Is my stance leading to love, joy, peace, contentment, gentleness and kindness? Or is it leading to rigidity, arrogance, legalism, divisiveness, criticism and anger over non-essentials?" The former is the filling of the Spirit; the latter is the slippery slope of judgmentalism. If not celebrating truly draws you closer to Christ, wonderful, but don't judge others who feel differently.

There are those who derail Christmas and its commercialism, yet purchase a \$3000 plasma TV on credit, book expensive vacations each summer and never serve the community or help those in need. Time is spent posting videos exposing the roots of holidays, but no time is spent in prayer, truly seeking

God. Others ridicule the secularization of Christmas and Easter, but allow their family to watch ungodly entertainment.

Again, celebrating holidays is often not the issue; the issues is what, or whom, we choose to worship—the attitude of the heart. Holidays, in many cases, are redeemed when the focus is on Christ. {eoa}