

Why I Will Celebrate Christmas Even Though Some of My Heroes Did Not

Monday, the 25th day, we went on shore, some to fell timber, some to saw, some to split, some to carry, so no man rested all that day. But towards night we came on board again. That night we had a sore storm of wind and rain.

This is from the journal of one of the Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower who recorded their activities for Dec. 25, 1620, their first Christmas Day in America. There is no mention of Christmas because the Pilgrims, you see, did not celebrate Christmas. They considered it a pagan holiday instituted by the Roman Catholic Church and carried on by the Church of England from which they had separated.

Convictions Matters I do not agree with the Pilgrims' rejection of Christmas, but I do respect and admire their conviction. You and I would not be enjoying the blessings of freedom and prosperity we have known if it had not been for people like them—people of conviction—who were willing to suffer loss in order to stand for their convictions.

It has been said that, "Those who don't stand for something, will fall for anything." In other words, unless we have a core set of convictions for which we are willing to suffer and die, we are susceptible to being led astray by whatever is popular and convenient at a given time.

I admire the Pilgrims, not because I agree with them on every point, but because they were people of principle, integrity and conviction. They were willing to be ostracized, harassed and imprisoned in England because of their conviction that Jesus (not the king or the pope) is the Head of the church and that the Bible (not church tradition) is our primary guide.

These convictions eventually led them to leave home, family and friends and begin a new life in a New World. They were people of conviction and we have been incredibly blessed because of their faith and because they were true to their convictions.

Opposing the Current Secularizing Trend

Although my convictions lead me in the opposite direction of theirs concerning Christmas, our motives and goals are similar. They were reformers seeking to purify themselves of all non-biblical religious traditions and to pattern their lives and churches after the New Testament. But whereas they were resisting a religious tyranny that sought to impose a state-run religion on everyone, today we face an anti-Christian state and culture that seeks to impose a secularized Christmas on the U.S. populace.

Just a few days ago, for example, another school, this time in Maryland, announced that there would be no mention of Christmas this year. Instead, it will be the "Winter Holiday." During this new "Winter Holiday," school children will not hear "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World," for such "Christian" carols are not welcome in a secularized setting. Indeed, as Franklin Graham has noted, "Stores, schools and communities across America continue to find new and intolerant reasons to remove any religious references to Christmas." Even the White House website is playing down "Christmas," choosing to call it "Holiday 2014," with the President and First Lady giving, not a Christmas greeting, but a "holiday" greeting with no mention of the real reason for the season.

In spite of the culture trend, Christmas offers for Christians of conviction a wonderful opportunity to proclaim the gospel in both overt and subtle ways, with nativity scenes, Christmas hymns and other expressions of our faith. It is a time when we can remind the world that, at Christmas, we celebrate the coming of God into our midst in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let's Be People of Conviction

It doesn't really matter that Dec. 25 is not the actual day of Christ's birth or that Constantine "Christianized" a pagan holiday; just like it doesn't really matter that the former owner of my Gibson Dove guitar may have used it to play ungodly music in ungodly places. The guitar is now sanctified and holy because I now use it for the glory of God. In a similar way, Christmas this year will be what you and I choose to make of it.

I am convinced that we as Christians should seize the opportunity and shout it from the housetops that Christmas is a reminder that God came to the world in the person of Jesus Christ, not only to reveal His love but to also confront the world about its wayward rebellion from Him.

Paul expressed this to the intellectual elite of Athens when he recounted to them their various misconceptions of God and then declared. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

Just as it took people of conviction to open the New World and lay the foundations for a great new nation, the current national crises requires people of a similar conviction. Such people of conviction will carry the church (and the nation) forward into our God-given future. And this is why I am celebrating Christmas this year!

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