

The Old Paths

Volume 12, Issue 43

December 25, 2005

“Christmas: Of God Or Of Man?”

Marc Gibson, Lakeland, FL

At the end of every year, nearly everything we see and hear is connected to the celebration of the holiday known as Christmas. If you ask, “What is the meaning of Christmas?” the answer you will most likely get will be, “It is the celebration of the birth of Jesus!” This immediately gives it a religious significance. Whenever we attempt to speak and act in religion, our first concern must be the authority of God and His word to guide us (Col. 3:17; II Jn. 9; I Cor. 4:6). Our challenge is to prove all things by the will of God (I Thess. 5:21). If we have been commanded by God to celebrate the birth of Jesus on a particular day, let us be busy attending to it. If no divine authority can be found for such a celebration, we are in the dangerous realm of the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:9).

Any Command To Celebrate The Birth Of Jesus?

The Bible records the birth of Jesus in the books of Matthew (1:18-25) and Luke (1:26-38, 2:1-10). The miraculous and humble circumstances of His birth demonstrate the fulfillment of prophecy and build up our faith. The simple question before us is: “Has God commanded us to choose a particular day each year on which we might celebrate the birth of Jesus?” It is not impor-

tant whether I want to do it, or someone else thinks it is a good idea, or even that it is already done by so many. Our main concern must be whether or not God desires it, for our duty is to glorify and please God by faithfully keeping His commandments (Ecc. 12:13; Matt. 7:21; Rev. 22:14). Man has no authority to teach or act outside of the inspired oracles of God (I Pet. 4:11; I Cor. 4:6).

One can read from Genesis to Revelation and not find a single command, example, or implication about a day set aside each year to celebrate the birth of Jesus. This will be very troubling to those whose only desire is to act by the authority of God. The religious celebration of Christmas must have originated from some other source. There are only two sources of authority: God and man (Matt. 21:25). If it is not of God, it must be of human authority. God is not pleased when man follows his own will instead of what is revealed in the New Testament (Lk. 6:46). God does command a day of remembrance of the death of Jesus. Jesus instituted this memorial (Matt. 26:26-28), and the disciples in the early church observed the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:23-26). This we can do in His name because He commanded it (Col. 3:17). If one were to argue that the Bible does not say not to celebrate the birth of Jesus, it should be pointed out that we must not go beyond the revealed doctrine of Christ (I Pet. 4:11; II Jn. 9). Where the Bible does not authorize,

we must not presume to act. Sincerity does not change wrong actions to right. Any religious activity not authorized by God will not have His approval.

Human Origins

The different aspects of the Christmas holiday have various origins, none of which are found in the Bible. The date of December 25th and Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas) are of Catholic history and origin. The term “Christmas” itself means, “Mass of Christ.” The mass in Catholicism is a literal repetition of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Bible teaches that Jesus was sacrificed once for all (Heb. 7:23, 27, 9:24-28), and that the Lord’s Supper is a memorial of that sacrifice. There are aspects of pagan origin in such things as yule logs, mistletoe, etc. Check any reputable encyclopedia (religious or secular) and this information will be discussed in detail. The point is that there is no religious significance given to any of these things by the word of God. If that isn’t enough, the presentation of the story of Jesus’ birth is often incorrect. We are told that there were three wise men, but the Bible does not give us an exact number (Matt. 2:1). All we know is that there were three types of gifts brought. More than one wise man could have brought the same gift. These wise men are included in many manger scenes. The Bible informs us that the wise men went to the house, not the manger, to see the Child (Matt. 2:11). We need to have more respect for the text of the story itself, as well as to speak and act only as God has authorized in His word.

What About Giving Gifts, Hanging Lights, Etc.?

Can one participate in any activity

associated with this holiday? Please understand that some activities are not wrong in and of themselves. While it would be wrong to attach a religious significance to an activity that God did not authorize, there are social, customary, and civic aspects of the holiday. Most people do not go to work on Christmas, and in this way, observe the holiday in a civil sense. Other activities, such as giving gifts, having a tree, decorating a house with lights, playing music, etc., can be done as family customs without attaching any religious significance. These things are not wrong in and of themselves. The fact that some attach a religious significance to certain activities does not make it inherently wrong to do them in a purely social and civic context. The names given to the days of the week are of pagan origin (Sunday = day of the sun; Monday = day of the moon; etc.), but we still use them. In the first century, Christians were taught that they could eat meat sacrificed to idols without attaching any significance to, or endorsing idolatry (I Cor. 10:25-29). We can enjoy the family and civil customs of the holiday season without involving ourselves in unauthorized religious functions.

If someone should have a conscientious problem with some of the social customs of the holiday, they should not violate their conscience. Nor should I knowingly put them in uncomfortable situations. Such matters of personal judgment should not be points of contention or division. If one is not sure about a matter, he should not act so as to violate his conscience. Yet, he should not bind his private judgments on another Christian who would be in agreement that no activity or symbol should be

given a religious significance that God has not given it.

An article such as this will not find a receptive hearing from those who desire to observe Christmas as a celebration of the birth of Jesus regardless of the lack of divine authority. It is not popular to call into question long-held religious traditions, but I have tried to speak kindly and forthrightly. If divine authority exists for a religious Christmas celebration, please inform me of God's commands and instructions immediately. I only desire that we trust God and follow His will. We cannot go on doing whatever we think is good in religion and expect to be pleasing to God. God has revealed His inspired word and by it alone we will be fully furnished unto every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17). The birth of Jesus was a wondrous event worthy of study, but our utmost concern must be to strictly follow the perfect way of truth given by King Jesus who rules over His kingdom until the final day. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

[Lakeland Hills Leader, 12/12/99]

“What My Absence Did”

For those who habitually are forsaking the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25), please consider what your absence did to folks ...

- It made some question the reality of religion.
- It made some think I was a pretender.
- It made some think that I regarded my spiritual welfare as a matter of small concern.
- It weakened the effect of our worship service.
- It made it harder for the preacher to deliver his message.
- It discouraged brethren, and thereby robbed them of a blessing.
- It caused others to stay away from church.
- It made it harder for me to meet the daily temptations of the devil.
- It gave the devil more power over lost souls.

Forsaking the assembling does much harm to the cause of Christ.

[Adapted from "Truth," a bulletin published by the Dallas Ave. church of Christ in Lancaster, TX.]

Sermon Recordings From 2004 Found At:
www.southside-churchofchrist.com



I want the truth, give me book, chapter, and verse!

Come and meet with the church at Southside.
Our address is: 2920 New Hartford Rd. Owensboro, KY 42303.

MEETING TIMES:

Sunday Morning Bible Study _____ **9:30 am**
Sunday Morning Worship _____ **10:20 am**
Sunday Evening Worship _____ **6:00 pm**
Wednesday Evening Bible Study _____ **7:00 pm**

Our call-in radio program is on **WBIO, FM 94.7 & 100.5**, Sunday afternoon from 12:30-1:00 pm. **Call: 683-9246 (WBIO)** with your Bible question.

Preacher/Editor: Jarrod Jacobs
Elders: Paul Dubois & Jeff Lankford
Phone: (270) 683-5386

Website address: www.southside-churchofchrist.com (Updated weekly!)