

Celebrating Christmas and Easter

A practical application of biblical and historical realities

As believers in Jesus Christ, we affirm that *...in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:11), and that what God says is of “first importance” regarding any gospel celebration remains true today; *“that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:2-6).

As Christians, who engage in the celebration of God’s mercy during the Christmas and Easter times of year, we do not participate in, or passively support any ancient pagan ritual. Nor do we align with any mystical religious rights that may have taken place during the months of April and December in an ancient culture.

Easter, for Christians, is a modern memorial giving opportunity to proclaim the life changing truth of what God calls the “Gospel”, speaking well of Jesus Christ who is the sole reason for this celebration. He alone accomplished what we could not, in that He; *...died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God... He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...* (1 Peter 3:18, 2:24). Christmas and Easter announce that *“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

We affirm the God given freedom to worship through freshly thought out ways that have no exact historical precedent (Joshua 22). We applaud the ingenious tenacity of early Christians who hijacked pagan celebrations, using them as opportunities for introducing God honouring, Christ centered worship with gospel proclamation to their communities.

We promote the supremacies of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord during the months of December and April while employing the terminology of Christmas and Easter. These are sovereignly permitted times of world-wide celebration giving unique opportunities to proclaim Christ. Avoidance of, or rejection of these God given occasions, would only serve the purpose of *...the god of this age (who) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (Emphasis added. 2 Corinthians 4:4).

We consciously engage in Christ centred festivals, expressing that *...we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:5-6). Therefore, we shamelessly declare Jesus Christ is *...the light of the world. Whoever follows (Him) will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life* (Emphasis added. John 8:12), promoting Christ in the darkness of any and all worldly situations and celebrations.

Therefore, any assumed connection by implication between worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ during the months of December and April with the false worship by the Israelites on the “high places” thousands of years ago (Lev. 26:30; Num. 33:52; Dt. 12:2; 1Ki. 3:2; 12:31) are null and void.

Jesus Christ rules as the essence of both Christmas and Easter for God’s glory and our forgiveness through our trusting dependence in Him for peace with God. Wishing only to avoid the

travesty of gospel silence, we proclaim life in Christ alone, embracing every opportunity to declare Christ as Saviour and Lord.

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P.S.

Following are 2 informative articles from Cripplegate on the historical foundation of Christmas

The Cripplegate - Is Christmas Day Rooted in Paganism?

Posted: 02 Dec 2014

It's not uncommon to hear that the celebration of Christmas is rooted in ancient Roman paganism. That claim generally goes something like this: the ancient Romans celebrated a pagan festival on December 25th, but when the Roman Empire was Christianized in the 300s, the church simply turned the pagan festival into a Christian holiday.

It is true that there was a pagan Roman holiday named Saturnalia that marked the winter solstice. And in the old Julian calendar, the winter solstice occurred on December 25. Saturnalia became an official Roman holiday in 274 under the reign of Emperor Aurelian. And the Roman empire was Christianized about fifty years later under Constantine.

It doesn't take too much imagination to see how some could assume that the post-Constantine Romans simply adopted the pagan holiday and Christianized it.

But there's actually good evidence to suggest that the date of December 25 does not have pagan origins. That's because, long before Aurelian made December 25 an official pagan holiday, there were Christians in the early church who taught that Jesus was born on December 25th. In fact, in the early church, there were two primary dates suggested as the dates on which Jesus was born in Bethlehem. One was December 25 and the other was January 6.

Around the year 192, Clement of Alexandria suggested that Jesus was born on January 6. An early Christian tradition suggested that Christ's baptism took place on January 6. Then, because Luke says that Jesus was "about 30 years old" when He was baptized, some early Christians (like Clement) assumed that His birthday was the same day as His baptism.

A contemporary of Clement named Hippolytus of Rome, writing in the early 200s, suggested that Jesus was born on December 25. Hippolytus was convinced that the first day of creation was March 25 (corresponding to the first day of Spring in the Julian calendar). From there, he speculated that March 25 was also the day on which Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. (Incidentally, some church fathers also suggested that March 25 was the day Jesus

died, which only added to the significance of that day.) If you add 9 months to March 25, you end up at December 25.

So we have these two dates suggested very early in church history, roughly 80 years before Aurelianus made the pagan observance of December 25 official in Rome, and more than a century before the Roman Empire became Christian.

What this means, then, is that the selection of December 25th as the celebration of Jesus' birthday may not have pagan origins at all.

After the Roman Empire converted to Christianity, December 25th became the official day designated for the celebration of Christ's birth. Meanwhile, January 6th, which is known as Epiphany, remained associated not only with Jesus' baptism but also with the coming of the Wise Men. As for the "twelve days of Christmas," that refers to the twelve days between December 25th and January 6th.

The Cripplegate - The Best Gift I Can Give Christian Christmas Haters

Posted: 08 Dec 2014

It isn't wrong to have a fern on my porch or a cactus in my office (chosen for its resilience to neglect, a prerequisite for any plant life under my supervision). But apparently having a fir tree, imitation or genuine, is considered by some to be morally repugnant; though only in December. I'm not going to launch a crusade to promote the observance of Christmas with all its tiresome trappings and requisite redundancies; what I am going to do is call for some reasonableness by those believers who vociferously object to their brothers and sisters in Christ enjoying seasonal festivities.

First, let us just concede that Christians do not have to celebrate or even acknowledge Christmas...or Easter, or Pentecost, or St Ledger's Day, or MLK's birthday, or Sabbath (Col 2:16), or Thursdays (named for the Nordic god of thunder).

Rom 14:4-6 *"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honour of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honour of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honour of the Lord and gives thanks to God."*

Christians are not obligated to revere any day above another including their own birthdays, though for some reason several Christmas haters I know circle on their calendars the day of the year that they are celebrated by *getting* presents without having to give them.

But conversely, it needs to be acknowledged that Christians are free to esteem one day better than another if they are convinced in their own mind. I am convinced in my own mind that Christmas is a thoroughly enjoyable time of family traditions and themed parties and eggnog lattes at Starbucks. You need not be as convinced, and that is perfectly okay. Just please don't equate my appreciation of cheap tinsel with pagan idolatry. Jeremiah 10:3-4 is NOT referring to Christmas trees, but hand-crafted idols, hewn for the express purpose of worshipping as a god.

I love Jesus. I worship him with every breath, and I give him all the glory for each gift I get or am able to give, and I am thankful for particular seasons that remind me to contemplate various aspects of his life, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension. I do not worship my fake plastic tree, nor do I feed subliminal pagan doctrine to my kids through the metallic orbs I hang on it. And any believer who suggests what I am doing is sub-Christian is behaving in an unloving and misinformed way, and should repent.

Yes, there is much of Christmas seasonality that should be shunned—greed, materialism, shallowness, lying to kids about Santa. We are not to use our liberty as a cloak for evil (1 Peter 2:16).

But there is much of the yuletide spirit that is neither godly nor ungodly. Celebrate it or ignore it, that is your liberty in Christ. If I judge or look down on abstainers then I am missing the point that liberty to forgo celebration is a blood-bought right of my Christmas-shunning brothers and sisters. All I ask in return is that they recognize that the Bible permits me to don a cheesy red and green sweater while playing Yankee swap to the glory of God.

That mutual respect is the best gift we can give each other this year.