

“Should We Celebrate Christmas? A Biblical Response” 11/25/18

Romans 14:1-23

Introductory thoughts-

- Incarnation stories are in the gospels of Matt and Luke. **We can't ignore.**
- God endorsed annual celebrations (Lev 23). Can we create new celebrations?
- Feast of Dedication/Hannukah (John 10); Purim (Esther).
- Circumcision in Egypt before God gave to Abraham (Gen 17).
- Guilt by Association Fallacy- Eating? Trees? Jer 10:1-10, Gift giving?
- Osiris Myth found in Pyramid Texts- Similarity of Resurrection.

LESSON 1- In disputable matters we should be characterized by ATTITUDE

- A. Our attitude recognizes that in these issues there is room for TOLERANCE (Vv. 1-3; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-12; Rom 13:13; Rev 22)
Movies, make-up, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, dancing, Bible translation, sports, music, material wealth.
- B. Our attitude is rooted in the fact that God alone is our MASTER (Vv. 4-9; Colossians 2:16-17; Galatians 4:10; Mark 7:19; 1 Tim 4:3)
- C. Our attitude humbly recognizes that we will stand before CHRIST (Vv. 10-12; 2 Cor 5:10; Matt 16:27; Rom 2:16; Acts 10:42; Rev 22:12)

Going Deeper God wants us to be tolerant and to receive one another in humility!

LESSON 2- In disputable matters we should be characterized by ACTION

- A. Our actions involve not condemning nor putting stumbling BLOCKS (Vv. 13-16; see also 1 Corinthians 8 and 10; 13:1-13 love is greatest)
- B. Our actions involve not getting distracted from the ESSENTIALS (Vv. 17-18; the mature/strong believer will recognize major vs minor)
- C. Our actions will be towards peace, edification, and FAITH (Vv. 19-23; no stumbling blocks in front of others, but privately happy)

In essentials, UNITY, in non-essentials LIBERTY, in all things CHARITY (love).

Going Deeper God wants us to be characterized by love and faith!

Movies, make-up, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, dancing, Bible translation, sports, music, material wealth.

Closing thoughts- 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23 (beneficial, addicted, edifying) 9:18-23 (use “disputable matters” to win people to Christ!)

Our Vision- Striving to be Disciples who make Disciples

Origins of Christmas Timeline

The Concern- If Christmas originated as a holiday that was meant to replace a pagan festival, should we celebrate it? Jesus was light of world and **Sun of Righteousness**.

“History of Religions” theory- This theory posits that early 4th century church leaders chose the December 25 date and festival in order to counteract the pagan festival of “Sol Invictus” (Unconquered Sun) instituted by emperor Aurelian in 274 A.D. Jacob Bar-Salibi (Syrian bishop) wrote in the 12th century that this indeed was the reason for the festival of Christmas. Popularized again in the 18th century and modern internet. Most academic scholars reject.

“Calculation Hypothesis”- This theory suggests that the celebration of Jesus’ incarnation was originally included in the feast of Epiphany (Jan 6), but through increased scholarly focus on date and year of Jesus’ birth, the date of December 25 was rooted in its connection to the Passover death of Jesus on March 25. Early Jewish Talmudic reasoning believed that creation and redemption are linked to same day which gave justification for the belief of Dec 25.

497 B.C.- Feast of Saturnalia in Rome dedicated to Saturn, not Sol. Dec 17-23.

52/62 A.D.- Early church began gathering together on Sunday (1 Cor 16:2; Acts 20:7).

150 A.D.- Quartodeciman Controversy- Related to “Pascha” (Passover). Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. and many fasted on exact 14th day of Nisan while others fasted for Passover on the following Sunday. Agreed to disagree agreeably (Eusebius 5.23-25).

This is important because it showed that the early church continued to celebrate the annual festival highlighting Jesus’ death as the Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7-8), but with minor changes. This also implied March 25 was believed original date of Jesus’ death and conception.

180-300 A.D.- Various church fathers teach on “Sun of Righteousness” (Mal 4:2).

193 A.D.- Pascha fast changed officially to Sunday in celebration of Resurrection.

200 A.D.- Clement of Alexandria writes that many groups seek Jesus’ true birth date and that other groups are celebrating Jesus’ birth on Epiphany (Jan 6).

202 A.D.- Hippolytus says Jesus’ birthday is December 25.

218 A.D.- Emperor Elagabalus attempted Syrian solar Baal cult in Rome, but failed.

221 A.D.- Sextus Julius Africanus teaches that Jesus was conceived on March 25.

225 A.D.- Tertullian (Carthage) writes that Jesus was killed on March 25.

255 A.D.- *Despositio episcoporum* notes December 25 as end of festival cycle.

274 A.D.- Emperor Aurelian built new temple for Sol, dedicated on Dec. 25. Chariot races on Dec 25 annually and Olympic style games every four years held in October on calendar.

312 A.D.- Donatists celebrating Dec 25 feast of Nativity. (Augustine sermon 202).

321 A.D.- Constantine instituted day of Sun (Sunday) as legal holiday and day of rest, but no feast commemoration until 380 A.D. in Constantinople.

336/354 A.D.- “Chronograph” calendar is earliest authentic documentation that Dec 25 was Jesus’ birthday and an important day on the ecclesiastical and civil calendar. It also notes Dec 25 as ‘Natalis Invicti’, a Roman civil holiday.

376 A.D.- Chrysostom writes Dec 25 Nativity Feast as ancient and “from the beginning”.

400 A.D.- Asterius of Cappadocia complains his people were willing to go into debt in order to give/receive presents.

Dec 25 accepted as feast of Jesus’ birthday separate from Epiphany (Jan 6) by **370 A.D.** in Cappadocia, **380 A.D.** in Constantinople, **386 A.D.** in Antioch, Syria, **432 A.D.** in Alexandria, Egypt, **575 A.D.** in Jerusalem. **Advent** in place by **480 A.D.** and made official in the Catholic church by **600 A.D.** (Pope Gregory the Great).

601 A.D.- Pope Gregory encourages replacing pagan festivals with feasts for martyrs.

723 A.D.- Boniface cuts down oak tree dedicated to German god Thor and prefers seeing the true God’s majesty in the Fir tree because of its triangular shape symbolizing the Trinity.

1400s A.D.- Christmas decorations known in London.

1574 A.D.- “Zwil-day” (Christmas) banned in Scotland under leadership of John Knox.

1642-60 A.D.- Puritans ban Christmas noting its pagan trappings.

1800s A.D.- Christmas trees popularized in Britain and common in America by **1870s**.

Bibliography

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The word “Christmas” is often thought of as meaning “Christ’s Mass”, but this is a later interpolation than the original meanings of the words. It is a little challenging to get the true etymology of this word, but it’s possible.

The challenge is that our words are in modern English, and they are rooted in Middle English and Old English which in turn are rooted in various stages of Latin.

It is common to understand that our modern word comes from the Middle English *Cristemaesse* which is preceded by the Old English *Cristes-messe*.

Crist or *Cristes* comes from the Greek word *Kristos* meaning Christ or “anointed one”.

Maesse or *Messe* in the ancient English means “celebration” or “mass” as in the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist (their worship service).

These old English words come from the Latin *missa* which itself is the noun use of the feminine past participle of the Latin root *mittere* meaning “to send”.

This makes sense that going to the original root words, **Christmas** means “**Christ Sent**” which is exactly what the Bible teaches about Jesus’ incarnation.

This idea of Jesus being sent into the world to take on human flesh is taught often in the NT (John 5:23, 30, 36, 37; 6:39, 44, 57; 8:16, 18, 29, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 17:21, 25; 20:21; 1 John 4:14).