

What About This Christ Mass?

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This is one of the most busiest times of the year isn't it? And what are most Americans, and most people everywhere, so busy doing? Shopping! Can you believe it? People are blindly plodding through the crowds looking for that special gift! \$201 BILLION dollars was spent during the Christmas season last year.

You know that the people of Israel were just as blind and busy when Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem... this is why there was no room at the Inn. There were very few in that crowded city, not to mention all of Israel, who were looking for that special gift of the birth of Messiah.

A majority of the vast throng that makes up this planet today are preparing themselves for the celebration of the most famous holiday of the year. And that day is called Christmas! It is the day that has been chosen to represent the birth of Jesus the Messiah, and we are going to take a close look at the origins of this celebration to see if it truly is a day we should celebrate.

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I *do* believe that it is *very important* for us to remember the incarnation of our Savior. It is important for us to look back at the time of His arrival on this earth and to reflect upon the great theme of love expressed in the giving of this most awesome gift to humanity. The Son of God was given to save humanity *from* their sins (not *in* their sins) and this is something that we should contemplate every day and not just one special day a year.

I'm asking, "*What is the true meaning of Christmas?*" When you get right down to its essence, what IS Christmas? Where did it come from? How did it originate? What does it stand for now?

To begin, there is no indication in the New Testament that the early Christians observed Christmas at all. You cannot find the exact day of Christ's birth anywhere recorded in Scripture, let alone the celebration of it. In fact, it can be demonstrated in church history that, for probably the first 300 years after the birth of Christ, Christians knew nothing of a Christmas celebration.

Frederick Neilsen, a Danish bishop, says, "*During the first three centuries we find no trace of any feast for the birth of Christ.*"-- Ecclesiastical History, page 224.

From the Encyclopedia Americana, 1944 Edition we find this: "*Christmas... It was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian church... A feast was established in memory of this event [the birth of Jesus] in the fourth century. In the fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever ON THE DAY OF THE OLD ROMAN FEAST OF THE BIRTH OF SOL [SUN], as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed.*" Emphasis added.

So, where did it come from?

The source of most of the basic forms of pagan celebrations in the ancient world can be traced back to Babylon. All of the ancient cultures: Egypt, Greece, Rome, even India and China, had beliefs, traditions, practices, gods and goddesses that were related to those found in Babylon.

"...Within the Christian Church no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and... not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance. How, then, did the Romish Church fix on December 25th as Christmas-day? Why, thus: Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen, at that precise time of the year, in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it the name of Christ." –Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p 93.

The celebration of the birth of the *unconquerable sun*, “ *the son of the queen of heaven*,” fell at the winter solstice which was just one of the four cardinal days, or periods, for celebration by the Babylonian pagans. These four pagan holidays are celebrated in the *spring; midsummer; fall; and midwinter* times of the year.

The fourth pagan cardinal day of celebration which is held in midwinter at the Winter Solstice. This is the day (or period of days) in winter when the days are shortest and the nights longest. The pagan Romans called this celebration *Saturnalia* (remember this name for further reference), in honor of their god

Saturn, and the festival lasted from the 17th to the 24th of December, with gifts exchanged, especially on the last two days.

Then, *on the 25th*, they celebrated "*The Birth of the Unconquerable Sun*," (called *Brumalia*) as the days began to lengthen and the sun began to regain its dominance (it has been generally believed among pagans that the sun dies during winter solstice, and then rises from dead). This celebration is known today as *Christmas!*

"The reasons for celebrating our major feasts when we do are many and varied. In general, however, it is true that many of them have at least an indirect connection with the pre-Christian feasts celebrated about the same time of year — feasts centering around the harvest, the rebirth of the sun at the winter solstice, the renewal of nature in spring, and so on." -The New Question Box - Catholic Life for the Nineties, copyright 1988 by John J. Dietzen, M.A., S.T.L., ISBN 0-940518-01-5 (paperback), published by Guildhall Publishers, Peoria Illinois, 61651, page 554.

"The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence...The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia ACCUSED THEIR WESTERN BRETHREN OF IDOLATRY AND SUN WORSHIP FOR ADOPTING AS CHRISTIAN THIS PAGAN FESTIVAL." Emphasis added. -The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.

In his book, "*Too Long In The Sun*," Richard Rives draws an appropriate parallel of Christmas celebration to the circumstances found in Exodus chapter 32, which records the behavior that provoked God nearly to the point of destroying the nation of Israel for their sin of blending pagan worship with His own:

"...the golden calf was built and the celebration declared a 'feast to the Lord'...The people had declared a celebration to honor God that He did not recognize as being in His honor." Richard Rives, *Too Long in the Sun*, Partakers Publishing, 1996, pp. 129-30.

We see this same behavior spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he says, "*And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own*

bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.” Isaiah 4:1.

There are many today who *call* themselves Christians yet they do not eat the Bread of life, but their own bread. They *call* themselves by Christ’s name but they do not wear the wedding garment of His righteousness... they wear their own apparel. They keep their own holy days and yet place *the name* of Christ upon them to take away their reproach.

Jesus says, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* Matthew 7:21-23.

Is it possible that the Christian world has made the day of December 25th a *Golden Calf*?

In the New Testament, *“Babylon,”* in a spiritual sense becomes *Papal Rome*. Papal Rome, or the papacy (the Roman Catholic Church), embodies the pagan beliefs and practices of ancient Babylon and is seen as the archenemy of God's people. The Papacy is also the ‘Mother of Harlots’ to which we know these ‘harlots’ to be the fallen Protestant churches of today... those churches which no longer stand on the truth as given in Scripture but on the traditions of men... the traditions of their ‘Mother!’

What is to be the attitude of God's people toward Babylon? *“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues”* (Rev. 18:4). This call is to *literal and spiritual separation* from its organizations, attitudes, practices, and traditions.

In the early Christian church, did God's people separate? No, they did the very opposite. They compromised and became contaminated with corruption. The apostle Paul said, *“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”* The church took in a little leaven and that is what caused it to fall from its once pure condition!

This is most definitely seen during the rule of Constantine who, being a former sun worshiper, also *professed* Christianity just like many do today.

"Constantine I (d. 337), himself at first a devotee of the sun cult, found it, indeed perfectly compatible with his pro-Christian sympathies to authorize his own portrayal as Helios. And in 354 the ascendant Christian church in the reign of his pious but unsavory son, Constantius II, found it prudent to change the celebration of the birth of Jesus from the traditional date (January 6) to December 25, in order to combat the pagan Sun god's popularity—his "birthday" being December 25." - Frederick H. Cramer, Astrology in Roman Law and Politics, p. 4. Copyright 1954 by the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

So we see that the celebration was changed to combat the Sun God's popularity and NOT that it was to honor the birth date of Jesus. It was this same reason that the Church of Rome changed the true Sabbath day from the seventh day of the week, to the first day, which is called SUN-DAY in honor of the "*Sun god.*"

This *holiday* (holy day) with its customs and traditions comes to us from ancient Babylon, through Rome, through the Roman Catholic Church and her daughters.

It was for this very reason that in Geneva during the time of John Calvin, that you could have been fined or imprisoned for celebrating Christmas, an institution of the great 'Whore.' It was at the request of the Westminster Assembly that the English Parliament in 1644 passed an act forbidding the observance of Christmas, calling it a heathen holiday.

In an appendix to their "Directory for the Public Worship of God" it said: *"There is no day commanded in scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath [the seventh day of the week known today as Saturday]. Festival days, vulgarly called 'Holy-days', having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued."* Emphasis mine.

When the Puritans came to America they passed similar laws. Years later the General Court of Massachusetts decreed a punishment for those who kept the Christmas season: *"...anyone who is found observing, by abstinence from labor, feasting, or any other way, any such days as Christmas Day, shall pay for every such offense five shillings."*

"A broad element of English Christianity still considered Christmas celebration a pagan blasphemy. The Puritans, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Calvinists and other denominations brought this opposition to early New England and strong opposition to the holiday lasted in America until the middle of the 18th century." Rick Meisel , *The Origins of Christmas*, Dec. 19, 1993, p. 4.

If the protestant forefathers would walk into their churches today they would be stunned! It was not until the 19th century that Christmas had any religious significance in Protestant churches. Even as late as 1900, Christmas services were not held in Southern Presbyterian churches. Their General Assembly of 1899 declared: *"There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holydays, rather the contrary (see Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-21), and such observance is contrary to the principles of the Reformed faith, conducive to will-worship, and not in harmony with the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ."*

We have seen, so far, that the celebration of Christmas came into the church centuries after the New Testament, was discarded at the Reformation, and has only in the 19th century crept back into the Protestant churches. I guess what I'm trying to say is that the "real" Christmas has always been pagan, and to make it a Christian celebration is to try to *add* Christ or biblical elements to a pagan holiday.

Take, for instance, the very date of Christmas, December 25th. As you are probably aware, no one today really knows the exact day of Christ's birth and December 25th is a *highly unlikely* time.

"Christmas: The supposed anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, occurring on Dec. 25. No sufficient data ... exists, for the determination of the month or the day of the event... There is no historical evidence that our Lord's birthday was celebrated during the apostolic or early post apostolic times. The uncertainty that existed at the beginning of the third century in the minds of Hippolytus and others proves that no Christmas festival had been established much before the middle of the century. The earliest record of the recognition of Dec. 25 as a church festival is in the Philocalian Calendar, representing Roman practice in 336 AD." -A. H. Newman, "Christmas," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. 3, p. 47. Copyright 1909 by Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York.

Why then December 25? Well, at the time of year when the days began to lengthen again (known as the winter solstice), the Babylonians celebrated the victory of their sun god. The Roman copy of this Babylonian custom was called *Saturnalia*

(remember this from earlier?), the feast of the birth of Sol [SUN]. For centuries this was an abomination to Christians. The celebration was an orgy of pagan revelry. But the Church, instead of standing firm against paganism, began to compromise.

The Church said, *"Go on with your fun and celebration. Only now we'll call it a celebration of the birth of the Son of God. Instead of losing people to paganism, we'll combine the two and gradually even win some of the pagans to our day of celebration and to profess Christianity."*

What has happened instead is that Christians *have become idolaters* through this pagan celebration.

What about the name *Christmas* itself? What does it mean? Many people do not even know that it is a combination of *Christ* and *mass*. Christ mass is the Roman Catholic celebration of a particular mass in honor of the birth of Christ. What is the significance of the mass? At its heart the Roman Catholic mass is *a denial of the sufficiency of Christ's work of atonement*. It professes to be a reenactment of the sacrifice of Christ for sin. But it is actually a denial of the gospel (Heb. 9:12, 24-26; 10:10, 12,14).

"The mass is the unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross...Christ, through the ministry of the Roman Catholic priest, offers Himself to God in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine. The mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross because the Victim is the same. The purpose of the mass is, among other things, to satisfy the justice of God for the sins committed against Him." -Rev. John A. O'Brien, *UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC FAITH*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, In, 1955, p. 212.

So we see that through the mass, Christ is crucified afresh, obviously indicating His death on Calvary was insufficient for us. This is completely unbiblical and denies Jesus as the Savior!

"When the priest pronounces the tremendous words of consecration, he reaches up into the heavens and brings Christ down from His throne, and places Him upon the (Roman Catholic) altar to be offered up again as the victim for the sins of man...Christ became incarnate a single time, the priest brings Christ down from heaven and renders Him present on the (Roman Catholic) altar as the eternal Victim for the sins of man-not once but a thousand times! The priest speaks and lo! Christ, the eternal, omnipotent God, bows His head in humble obedience to the priest's command...No wonder that the name which spiritual writers are especially fond of applying to the priest is that of 'altar Christus.' For the priest is and should

be another Christ." -Rev. John A. O'brien, *FAITH OF MILLIONS*, Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, Ind., 1938, pp. 243-244.

To those who know the Savior and Lord of the Bible, Jesus Christ, these quotations from official Roman Catholic publications are at once sickening and outrageous and should bring you to a righteous anger! Keep these words and the symbolism in your mind when you observe what you think is a harmless, "Christian," celebration. The truth is that this celebration is neither Christian or harmless. And if it isn't from Christ, it can only be from the father of lies.

Concerning whether the sacrifice of Jesus needs to be repeated on a daily basis, as the Catholic mass says it does, the Bible says:

*"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: **but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.** And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: **So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;** and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. " -HEBREWS 9:24-28*

*By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once** for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered **one sacrifice for sins for ever**, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. **For by one offering** he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. **Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.**" -Hebrews 10:5-18*

The Bible is clear that Jesus sacrificed Himself *ONCE for the sins of the world* and not every time a Romanist Priest holds mass. The Roman Catholic mass is Blasphemy my friends, and fulfills the words of Paul when he says, *“Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God”* (2 Thessalonians 2:4.). Do you want to be associated in any way with blaspheming God? I do not.

Now what could seem more harmless than the beautiful Christmas trees, and lights that light our homes, or the mistletoe during the Christmas season?

From ancient times trees have played an important role in pagan religion, and were even worshipped. The Druids held the Oak and Fir trees as sacred. Norsemen, Celts and Saxons used trees to ward off witches, evil spirits, and ghosts. In Egypt the palm tree was prominent; in Rome it was the fir. Because of this association, idols were often carefully carved from trees. The prophet Jeremiah warned the people of God about such things: *“Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with hammers, that it move not”* (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

*“The wassailing-bowl of Christmas had its precise counterpart in the 'Drunken Festival' of Babylon; The candles, in some parts of England, lighted at Christmas eve and used so long as the festive season lasts, were equally lighted by the pagans on the eve of the festival of the Babylonian god, to do honor to him, for it was one of the distinguishing peculiarities of his worship to have lighted candles on his alters. The Christmas tree, now so common among us, was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt. In Egypt that tree was the palm tree; in Rome it was the fir; the palm tree denoted the pagan Messiah, as Baal-Tamar; the fir referring to him as Baal-Berith.... On Christmas day the continental Saxons offered a boar in sacrifice to the sun, to propitiate her. In Rome a similar observance had evidently existed; for a boar formed a great article of Saturn, as appears from the words from Martial, 'That boar will make you a good Saturnalia.' Hence the boar's head is still a standing dish in England at the Christmas dinner, when the reason of it is long since forgotten. Yea, the 'Christmas goose' and 'yule cake' were essential articles in the worship of the Babylonian Messiah, as that worship was practiced both in Egypt and at Rome.”—Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pages 97, 100, 101.*

"Lighted candles are foreign to the worship of God in the church of the New Testament scriptures. Yet, they too had their place in the worship of the sun god of paganism and in Christmas today. " -Alexander Hislop, THE TWO BABYLONS, Loizeaux Bros., Neptune, N.J., 1959, p. 94 and 97.

"Among the pre-Christian Druidic superstitions, derived from ancient Babylon, was the legend of the mistletoe. It was regarded as a divine branch, which came down from heaven and grafted itself into an earthly tree. Thus the mistletoe became a token of reconciliation, the kiss being a symbol of pardon" – The History of Christmas, p. 9.

I do not believe that there is anything wrong, necessarily, with having a fresh fragrant tree or plant in our homes. In fact I love the smell of evergreen, especially in the winter months. But it is the attitude behind the placing of these things in our homes that we have to be very careful about.

"Shall we have a Christmas tree? Will it not be like the world? We answer, You can make it like the world if you have a disposition to do so, or you can make it as unlike the world as possible. There is no particular sin in selecting a fragrant evergreen and placing it in our churches, but the sin lies in the motive which prompts to action and the use which is made of the gifts placed upon the tree. The tree may be as tall and its branches as wide as shall best suit the occasion; but let its boughs be laden with the golden and silver fruit of your beneficence, and present this to Him as your Christmas gift. Let your donations be sanctified by prayer. A word to the wise is sufficient." E.G. White, Review & Herald, December 11, 1879.

Even the nativity scene, which some regard as the most "Christian" symbol of Christmas, is tainted with paganism. Nearly every recorded form of pagan worship, which has descended from Babylon, focuses the attention of the worshipper on a mother goddess and the birth of her child. Different cultures used different names, but the concept is the same. *In Babylon it was the worship of the queen of heaven and her son Tammuz, the sun god who was thought to be the incarnation of the sun. The birth of the sun god took place at the winter solstice... December 25th!* Yule was the Babylonian name for child or infant, and *Yule Day* was celebrated on December 25th, long before Christ's birth.

The author of *"The Two Babylons"* identifies this child, whose birth was so universally celebrated, with Nimrod, who built the tower of Babel, and says that he was worshiped by the name Osiris in Egypt, and Tammuz in Phoenicia and Assyria. (See page 56.) The holy prophet, Ezekiel, who in a vision saw the women of Judah weeping for him, also mentions this Tammuz. Tammuz is there spoken of in company with sun worship.

"Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east" (Ezekiel 8:14-16).

"It was an essential principle of the Babylonian system that the sun, or Baal, was the one only god. When, therefore, Tammuz was worshiped as God incarnate, that implied also that he was an incarnation of the sun."--Alexander Hislop, The Two Babylons, Loizeaux Brothers, page 96.

"This festival has been commonly believed to have had only an astronomical character, referring simply to the completion of the sun's yearly course, and the commencement of a new cycle. But there is indubitable evidence that the festival in question had a much higher influence than this--that it commemorated not merely the figurative birthday of the sun in the renewal of its course, but the birth-day of the grand Deliverer...the Sun-God and great mediatorial divinity." -Ibid pp. 94, 97.

The next time you see a manger scene on a Christmas card, and Mary and Jesus have a halo around their heads, remember that this Roman Catholic concept is borrowed from Babylon. Also remember that the believer is forbidden to make for himself *"any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth"* (Exodus 20:4). Do we take these commands of God seriously, or have we long since outgrown them and explained them away?

Remember the twelve days of Christmas? Where did that originate?

"The Yule Log tradition comes to us from Scandinavia, where the pagan sex and fertility god Jul, or Jule (pronounced 'yule'), was honored in a twelve-day

celebration in December. A large, single log (generally considered to have been a phallic idol) was kept with a fire against it for twelve days, a different sacrifice to Jul being offered in the fire on each of the twelve days." -Holidays and Holy Days, by Tom C. McKenney

"The Yule log was originally an entire tree, carefully chosen, and brought into the house with great ceremony. The butt end would be placed into the hearth while the rest of the tree stuck out into the room. The tree would be slowly fed into the fire and the entire process was carefully timed to last the entire Yule season." -The History of Christmas.

This is where the Twelve Days of Christmas originated, which are now counted as the twelve days between "Christmas" and "Epiphany" (January 12th).

What about Santa Claus? Can anyone seriously deny that he represents the *real* meaning of Christmas for the vast majority of Americans? What does he stand for today? Is he a harmless, jolly, fat elf, or has he become an Antichristian symbol of greed, materialism, and selfishness. An expression of "*something for nothing?*" and "*What's in it for me?*"

Parents who tell their children the Santa Claus myth are endangering their credibility with their children. When they ask you, "*Can Santa really see me through these walls?*" What do you tell them? Our children ought to be able to know that they can trust everything we tell them without question.

Everything the modern pagan believes about God is symbolized in Santa Claus. He is busily engaged in a nice meaningless activity most of the year. He lives somewhere up north as a harmless, friendly old man with a long white beard. He visits his people once a year, spending the other 364 days in obscurity. A child may write him at the North Pole, but the communication is strictly one way. The way for a child to be acceptable in Santa's sight is to be "*good.*" Santa warns of the consequences of being "*bad,*" but his word really can't be trusted. The child knows he has not been perfect, and even though he may feel some anxiety, he remembers last year and knows that no matter what Santa says or what the child does, in the end Santa will reward him. Santa represents a god who threatens man with judgment and death only to keep him in line in this life, but who will accept all men in one way or another in the end. If you teach your children the Santa Claus myth, you are unknowingly giving them the material to build an unbiblical concept of the true character of a merciful and just God. Not everyone will be saved...

"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever

worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Revelation 21:27.

Isn't the giving of gifts a lovely way to remember the birth of our Lord? Surely there is nothing un-Christian about giving to one another. But has any other aspect of Christmas become more perverted than this? We spend money we don't have, to buy gifts they don't need, to impress people we don't like. What a mockery and a madness shopping has become. Could anyone seriously suggest that what goes on in America around December 25th is honoring Jesus Christ, the One who lived a life of simplicity, humility and self-denial, who condemned self-indulgence, who taught us that *"a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12:15)?

People who claim to be Christians spend hundreds and even thousands of dollars on their Christmases, and at the same time give little for the work of the gospel in our land or in the needy mission field. Isn't true Christian giving something that should take place the year round, out of a true heart of love, and not from compulsion and with an expectation to receive something in return?

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward." Isaiah 58:6-8.

Just where did the idea of gift exchange come from?

"The interchange of presents between friends is alike characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and MUST HAVE BEEN ADOPTED BY CHRISTIANS FROM THE PAGANS, as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows." Emphasis added. - Bibliotheca Sacra (vol 12 pp 153-155).

One Bible writer had this attitude about such times of the year... *"I have said to my family and my friends, I desire that no one shall make me a birthday or Christmas*

gift, unless it be with permission to pass it on into the Lord's treasury, to be appropriated in the establishment of missions.” Ellen G. White.

Considering that we Christians have been given the three angel's messages of Revelation 14 to proclaim to the world and the right arm of that message is health reform, what about the parties that take place at this time of year, supposedly in connection with the birth of Jesus Christ? In this time of fasting and judgment is there much temperance being shown to the world by those who profess to know the truth of the Gospel? Is a twelve course meal on Christmas day the fast that the Lord has chosen?

But some say, “*Aren't the traditions surrounding Christmas really harmless? Aren't they innocent enough?*”

Well, are they? How does Satan most effectively tempt us? Does he set before us horrible, grotesque -looking things that repulse us? Does he jump out of a dark alley in a red suit with a tail, and wave a pitchfork and say, “*I'm the devil. I've come to deceive you?*” No, of course not. The devices of Satan are subtle: he disguises himself “*into an angel of light*” (2 Corinthians 11:14). He sets before us things that seem “harmless,” “innocent,” “fun”... things that “everyone else is doing.” Sincere Christians are too often unwittingly led into idolatry through these Satan inspired, manmade traditions.

So, how is the Christian to react to the Christ-mass and all its traditions?

We can keep on trying our best to “*Put Christ back in Christmas,*” keep on fighting the losing battle to salvage something remotely Christian from this thoroughly pagan holiday. But then we must ask ourselves, “*Am I 'putting Christ' in a pagan celebration?*” We must deal with the basic question, “*What is Christmas?*” What is it really? Where did it start and what has it historically been? If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that this option is an impossibility.

We can try to “*separate Christmas entirely from Christ.*” We can observe it as a kind of cultural folk festival, reasoning that the pagan elements are so far removed historically, that the traditions have been somehow purged from their idolatry. That would be more consistent, but there is still a problem: Your non-Christian friends and society still vaguely associate Christmas with the birth of Christ and assume that, since you're a Christian, you are joining in this celebration of Jesus' birth. But can you celebrate it as a cultural tradition and still maintain a consistent Christian witness? I don't see how.

We can “*forsake Christmas entirely.*” This is the most consistent course with what I have found to be true concerning the origin of this holiday.

Martin Luther said: *"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle field besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."*

The right thing is not always easy. Christ has never promised us that following him would be easy. Our Protestant forefathers carefully avoided Christmas because they held the scriptures to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. “*...It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4).

Jesus said to the Pharisees, *"For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men... Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition"* (Mark 7:8,13). Paul wrote to the Galatians, *"Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years! I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain"* (Gal. 4:10-11). He wasn't condemning them for observing those institutions commanded by God, but for observing those of man's making, contrary to God's law. Tradition, in and of itself, is not wrong if it doesn't conflict with the word of God. It is when it does conflict that there is a problem, and Christmas conflicts with Scripture.

Is it possible for those of us who have *just learned* the truth about Christmas to ignore the season entirely? What about our children?

Notice what one Bible writer says about this:

"As the twenty-fifth of December is observed to commemorate the birth of Christ, as the children have been instructed by precept and example that this was indeed a day of gladness and rejoicing, you will find it a difficult matter to pass over this period without giving it some attention. It can be made to serve a very good purpose. The youth should be treated very carefully. They should not be left on Christmas to find their own amusement in vanity and pleasure seeking, in amusements which will be detrimental to their spirituality. Parents can control this matter by turning the minds and the offerings of their children to God and His cause and the salvation of souls. The desire for amusement, instead of being

quenched and arbitrarily ruled down, should be controlled and directed by painstaking effort upon the part of the parents. Their desire to make gifts may be turned into pure and holy channels and made to result in good to our fellow men by supplying the treasury in the great, grand work for which Christ came into our world. Self-denial and self-sacrifice marked His course of action. Let it mark ours who profess to love Jesus because in Him is centered our hope of eternal life.” White, Review & Herald, December 9, 1884.

Friends, it is not wrong to give gifts to our friends, it is when we place these gifts and times ahead of Jesus, thus forgetting Him, that we make our mistake and fall into selfishness and idolatry.

“It is right to bestow upon one another tokens of love and remembrance if we do not in this forget God, our best Friend. We should make our gifts such as will prove a real benefit to the receiver. I would recommend such books as will be an aid in understanding the Word of God, or that will increase our love for its precepts.” White, Publishing Ministry, p.345.

You should be asking... Is what I've been saying biblical? Is it consistent with God's Word? If it's not, then you ought to disregard it. But if it is, then you ought to consider it carefully and heed it. You may, of course, disagree with scripture at this point; you may disagree with my assessment of the historical background and the present situation. I could be wrong about that. But what you *must* do with a message like this is what the Berean Christians did with Paul's preaching: *"they searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11). You must openly, honestly, and realistically evaluate the evidence for yourself and come to your own conclusions. You are not responsible to me, but to God.

Some people will say, *"I don't want to think about it. I don't want to talk about it. I'm going to have my Christmas no matter what."* Friend's, it's exactly this kind of attitude that makes Christmas an idol and that is exactly why you do not find Christ's exact date of birth in Scripture.

Peter and the other apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Who will you obey?

Amen.