

Xmas Extremes

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This is the time of year when most people are the happiest, friendliest, most hospitable, and most benevolent. I suppose the reason is what might be termed the "Christmas spirit." What a wonderful world this would be if this spirit "ran loose" each day of the year, and indeed, this is what the Lord wills. Along with all of the good things this season brings, I have observed some who have extreme positions toward "Xmas."

Not long ago I received a question concerning defense of decorating a tree and giving gifts at this season of the year. This points up one of the extremes, namely, that it is wrong to practice such innocent customs as having a tree and buying gifts, exchanging cards, and such like. There are some religious groups that take this position and among individuals, I have known of brethren at various places who do, also. I think this is the answer to that extreme: if it is wrong to give gifts on December 25, it is wrong also on any other occasion. If it is not wrong on any other occasion (birthday, anniversary, etc.) then it is not wrong on December 25. There is nothing more wrong with decorating a tree with ornaments as merely seasonal custom than with raising a flag on Veterans' Day or eating a turkey on "Thanksgiving" day.

Another extreme is represented by the often-heard cliché, "Put Christ back into Christmas." Perhaps this sounds good to many, but the truth is that Christ never was **in** Christmas until man put him there! "In the 5th century the Western church [Roman Catholic, DM] ordered the feast to be celebrated on the day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun and at the close of Saturnalia, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed" (*Encyclopedia Americana*, 6:622). This statement clearly points out the fact that God was not very concerned about His Son's birth's being celebrated.

The thing that God considered important for us to celebrate was His death, and we are thus to keep it in sacred commemoration each Lord's day. It is not by the **birth** of Christ that we are saved, but by His death and resurrection. Thus when we sing, "Remember Christ Our Saviour Was Born on Christmas Day," we know not what we sing. God has made it impossible for us to attach any sacred significance to one day as the birthday of Christ by withholding from both sacred and secular history the day on which He was born. For this reason, churches of Christ have no special religious observances at this season of the year. The silence of the Scriptures forbids any such religious observance. A practice that began four centuries after

Messianic and Apostolic times and gathered all of its ingredients from Pagan customs should indeed be looked upon with repugnance as a religious practice to those interested in New Testament Christianity.

One other extreme is especially noticed: Although I personally believe we are at liberty to exchange gifts at this or any other appropriate time, this can also be carried to extremes. We should not become enslaved by our freedom. Sometimes the contribution figure of the church sees a sharp decline at the close of the year. It may be because our prosperity has decreased, but it may also be because we went to the extreme with our gift-buying, decorating, and so forth. Some members of the church probably spend as much on gifts during this one season as they give to the Lord all year. We should never allow the Lord to suffer because we spent too much money on a wife, husband, child, or others. When such is done, we are in fact making Christ pay for our "Santa Claus." We should never allow such a seasonal custom to interfere with our giving, church attendance, or other Christian duties. May we be delivered from these "Xmas extremes."

[**Note:** I wrote this article in December 1960 or 1961, while preaching for the Lord's church at Iowa Park, Texas. It was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, December 15, 2013, of which I was editor.]

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