

Xmas Xtremes

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Christmas 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 “heavenly” environment is what the Lord wills on earth. Along with all the good things this season brings, some extreme positions toward “Christmas” are observable.

I once 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 purchasing and decorating a tree, gift giving, card sending, and such like. Some religious groups thus believe, and among individuals, some brethren also do so. These brethren should not observe the season if doing so would violate their consciences. However, they should not bind their personal scruples on others. If it is wrong to decorate and give gifts on December 25 as a **non-religious** tradition among family and friends, then why is it not wrong also on other such **non-religious** celebrations. (e.g., birthdays, wedding anniversaries, et al.). It is no more innately wrong to decorate a tree with ornaments as a mere seasonal custom than it is to raise a flag on July 4, put a pumpkin on the front porch in October, or eat a turkey on Thanksgiving Day.

Another extreme is represented by the often-heard cliché, “Put Christ back into Christmas.” Obviously, this admonition sounds good to many, but this is quite impossible to do since Christ **never was in** Christmas until apostate men 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 demonstrates the fact that God was not very concerned about His Son’s birth’s being celebrated. A religious practice that began four centuries after Messianic and Apostolic times and that gathered its ingredients from Pagan customs is repugnant to those who are devoted to New Testament Christianity. Thus, those who sing, “Remember Christ Our Saviour Was Born on Christmas Day,” sing a falsehood. God has made it impossible for us to attach any sacred significance to any one day as the birthday of Christ by withholding from both inspired and uninspired history the day on which He was born. For this reason, just as

with “Easter,” faithful churches of Christ have no special religious observances on “Christmas.” The silence of Scripture renders all such religious observances unauthorized and therefore forbidden.

It is ironic, in a sense, but nonetheless true: that which God ordained that we celebrate concerning His Son was/is His **death**, rather than His **birth**. That cruel bloodshed we are to remember in a special sacred Supper fifty-two times each year (fifty-three times some years)—not merely once each year—in the Lord’s Supper. It is not by the **birth** of Christ that we are saved, but by His **death**.

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 end and beginning of the year. It may be because the prosperity of some has decreased, but it may also be because some went to the extreme with their gift-buying, decorating, and other celebrations of the season. 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 “Christmas” season celebration. We should never allow a seasonal custom to interfere with our giving, worship attendance, or other Christian duties.

[**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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