



"The quest for riches darkens the sense of right and wrong."
—Antiphanes

16-Dec-05

The Rea\$on for the Season

While this time of solstice celebrations is especially wearying to those called out of this world's paganism, it is not without the occasional gleam of ironic humor. This year the American Family Association launched a boycott against Target stores because of the shortage of the word "[Christmas](#)" in its marketing and advertising. Randy Sharp, the American Family Association's director of special projects, said, "This is the first year in which it seemed like all the major retailers completely eliminated any reference to Christmas." But if those involved would have cogitated just slightly longer, they might have remembered that this is, in fact, exactly what the "traditionalists" have been clamoring for during the past decades. The battle cry *used* to be that Christmas was becoming far too commercial. Now, apparently, Christmas is not commercial *enough*, and the retail-religion tie needs to be reinforced by Crèche Crusaders. It would seem Christmas is in danger of dying out if not revived every year through seasonal advertising.

Why is there an annual cultural altercation during this time? Perhaps the reason is hypersensitivity on the part of mainstream Christians, tired of losing ground to the secularists. Perhaps the feeling—conscious or not—of events spiraling out of control, and the premonition of unraveling to the point of crisis, are causing both sides of the culture war to fight for every inch of ground—to maintain as much control as possible of what they hold dear. Perhaps there really *is* (to borrow from Bill O'Reilly) a "war against Christmas" in which "professional atheists" are carrying out "a very secret plan" to eliminate all "Christian" vestiges from Christmas. But if there is indeed a "war on

Christmas," then let Rome defend it, for it was Rome that co-opted the bacchanalia of the winter solstice and inserted the presumed birth of the Messiah. Christ-mass is wholly indefensible when one looks beyond the traditions of men and searches the Bible.

That really is the bottom line, if you will: the citizens of this nation can only disagree on how Christmas should be kept because the nearest thing to a central authority on the issue—a powerful papacy—is long gone. Should Santa Claus be included in the same scene as baby [Jesus](#)? Should gifts be exchanged? If so, how many? Where is the line between acceptable and shameful consumerism? Should mistletoe be displayed, or is that too pagan? Is a "traditional Christmas" of 2005 more correct than a "traditional Christmas" of 1905? Or vice versa? In the absence of clear instruction from [God](#), such as exists for His annual holy days, the matter is entirely up to personal interpretation and the changing traditions of an ungrounded culture. Without authentic biblical roots, there is nothing to define and describe how traditions such as Christmas should be observed. Each person has a different "reason for the season." Who is to say that one interpretation of a pagan celebration is "more right" than another?

Our Savior speaks emphatically on the subject of honoring man's tradition over the Word of God:

Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? . . . Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." ([Matthew 15:3](#), 6-9)

We humans are creatures of habit, and traditions are not inherently evil. [Sin](#) enters the picture, though, when what man wants to do, or what he has always done, is given more credence than God's instructions. Contrary to popular Christian belief, we are not free to [worship God](#) in any way we see fit. The story of Cain and Abel teaches us that He does not accept worship that is contrary to His instructions, and the result is disastrous. God has already defined the way He would have man venerate Him: in spirit and in truth ([John 4:24](#)). But truth is certainly absent in the celebration of Christmas, and the "spirit of the holidays" is certainly not the one of "love, [joy](#), [peace](#), [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

The debate over Christmas is probably not going to end anytime soon, and no matter

the outcome of the current conflagration, [Satan](#) will be the real winner. Although the specific applications may vary, the underlying "reason for the season" is *man*—not *God*. If you want to test this, try crusading for the celebrating of *God's* clearly defined and described holy days. The probable result will be cessation of cultural hostilities just long enough for the warriors to chase you up an evergreen tree and set fire to it. God has already given the answers to how He is to be honored. But this season, with or without the religious veneer, is all about man's insistence on doing things his own way without regard to truth.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Money Is Power](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh insists that how we spend our money at the Feast of Tabernacles will give to God Almighty an idea of how we will use power in the Millennium. Using the analogy of Bill Gates wealth in comparison to the average person, or the national debt, we see that responsibility with currency is both relative (in terms of the amount of wealth), but absolute (in terms of responsibility for this wealth). For a responsible diligent person, money is power, but for an irresponsible lazy person, it can prove an absolute curse. Whoever is faithful in small matters will in all likelihood be responsible in major matters. Leadership demands faithfulness, productivity, and responsible stewardship of all of our resources. If we are untrustworthy with a paltry sum of money, we will be untrustworthy with the vast resources of God's creative power. At the Feast we have the opportunity to demonstrate to God that we can show outgoing charitable uses for the financial blessings God has given us.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Cogitations on Christmas](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Three brief essays, two by Richard Ritenbaugh and one by David Grabbe, contemplate the contradictions in Christmas, the modern debate over Christmas in an increasingly secular society, and the Christmas season as a time true Christians can make a godly witness.

CGG Weekly: The Rea\$on for the Season (16-Dec-05)

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