

Cogitations On Christmas

by **Richard T. Ritenbaugh**
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Christmas Contradictions

An anonymous quotation that made the rounds of the Internet last year runs, "Christmas is weird. What other time of year do you sit in front of a dead tree and eat candy out of your socks?" Though it may induce a chuckle from its readers, most people either miss or ignore the larger point: Christmas is a bundle of contradictions, inanities, and outright lies.

The astounding fact is that most people are aware of this. On a Christmas Eve radio show, a local preacher substituted for the regular host. His topic of discussion centered on the greeting "Merry Christmas!" and he asked if, in our multicultural, multi-religious society, this was offensive. One caller said, no, Christianity was still the majority religion in America, but what really troubled her was the fact that professing Christians promoted the traditional lie that Jesus was born on December 25.

Without missing a beat, the preacher/talk-show host then explained to the audience that his caller was correct, Jesus could not have been born around the winter solstice, and that, in the early fourth century, the Catholic Church had combined the Roman winter solstice festival, the Saturnalia, with a celebration of Jesus' birth to help new converts adjust to Christianity. He treated these facts as common knowledge.

His "resolution" to the conundrum, however, was revealing. The gist of his answer to the troubled caller was, "If Christians would live according to the teachings of Jesus, these contradictions would not matter." I had to shake my head. Neither the host nor the caller could see the self-contradictory nature of his answer. Did not Jesus teach that we are to be honest? Certainly, He did!

He tells the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-18 that, to have eternal life, he should not bear false witness, which is the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16). In the Sermon on the Mount, He says, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37). We could say, then, that keeping a celebration to Christ on a day that is not His birthday—with customs and traditions that derive from paganism—is from the evil one. It is a lie, and the Devil is the father of it (John 8:44).

This is what makes the oft-heard phrase, "Let's put Christ back into Christmas!" so laughable. It is another self-contradictory statement. How can we put Christ back into something in which He never was in the first place? Search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and no command—not even a suggestion—to commemorate the Savior's birth will be found. It is amazing to consider that professing Christians around the world keep days and festivals never once enjoined on them in God's Word (Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Halloween, Christmas), yet the ones God tells them to keep (the Sabbath, Passover, God's holy days), they ignore!

What about the real central character of Christmas, Santa Claus? Today's jolly old elf—a roly-poly old man in a red suit trimmed in white; big, black boots; spectacles; long, white beard; and a "ho-ho-ho"—was the brainchild of Coca-Cola's marketing department early in the last century. He was based

loosely on the English Father Christmas and the German Kris Kringle. This figure, in turn, has blended with the early "Christian" Saint Nicholas, a churchman who was known for spreading the wealth to needy members of his community, sometimes throwing sacks of coins through open windows and down chimneys. Where is the biblical basis for such a character? He may be present in the modern crèche, but no one like him appears in the gospel narratives of Jesus' birth.

Then there is the season's alternate name, Yule. Where does that come from? Check the origin in the dictionary: "a pagan midwinter festival." Another contradiction! The preacher/talk-show host made mention of this point too, chuckling about how so many people do not realize that their Yule log harkens back to the heathen practice of driving away evil spirits with bonfires on the night of the winter solstice! Now, however, it is just another way to stir up Christmas cheer! No harm in that, right?

If these pagan, unbiblical elements are so commonly known, why does the Christmas tradition continue? Three reasons come to the fore:

- » Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (Romans 8:7)
- » The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)
- » The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. (Jeremiah 5:31)

Christmas continues because human nature deceives itself into practicing things that are not right because they are enjoyable. Human nature allows people to justify self-contradictory things because they appear to produce benefits for them. In such a case, truth does not matter; all that matters is that a person receives presents and has a good time. And if a religious significance—real or imagined—can be attached to it, all the better!

We should not expect people to give up Christmas anytime soon just because it has pagan origins. Human nature has a long history of explaining such pesky details away.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Spirit and Truth

Two years ago, WorldNetDaily published a controversial exposé that spotlighted one of the more frequent skirmishes in our current culture war. Written by Joe Kovacs, "[Christmas in America becomes battleground](#)" reveals the pagan origins of this esteemed tradition and demonstrates why increasing numbers of "fundamentalist Christians" are realizing that one cannot "put Christ" back into something in which He never was.

Apologist C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, asserts that one of Satan's most common ploys is to "send error into the world in pairs"—pairs of opposites—"and then he encourages us to spend a

lot of time thinking, Which is the worst?" Satan persuades us to argue over two options, or two points of view, neither one of which is true. Regardless of which side carries the argument, Satan wins the day.

In the current war over Christmas and religious symbols, Satan has pitted the secular humanists, who want to blot out Christianity and encourage almost any other form of worship, against mainstream Christians, who are fighting for the right to worship as they see fit by putting evergreen trees in schools per Jeremiah 10:2-5. Atheists and agnostics arrayed against Christmas-bent "Christians"—for whom do we root?

The truth of the matter is that Satan is the real winner regardless of the outcome.

Jesus Christ tells us,

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in *spirit and truth*; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in *spirit and truth*. (John 4:23-24)

As Mr. Kovacs' article shows, the truth about the pagan origins of Christmas is easily researched. Any good encyclopedia will show that the timing and trappings of this celebration long predate Christianity. December 25 has been a focal point of sun-worship for millennia. The pagan origins of this day are so well-documented that the real question is, "What business do Christians have in trying to "Christianize" something that has been blatantly anti-God from the very beginning?" Is this worshipping God in spirit and in truth?

God was so concerned that ancient Israel would begin adopting the pagan ways of the Canaanites—even under the auspices of worshipping the true God—that He gave the children of Israel a categorical warning:

"When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you *do not inquire after their gods*, saying, '*How did these nations serve their gods?*' I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; *you shall not add to it nor take away from it*." (Deuteronomy 12:29-32)

God is very specific in the way that He wants to be worshipped! He has **not** given us permission to worship Him in just any way that seems right to us. He warns His people specifically in these verses, as well as in Revelation 22:18-19, not to add to His instructions, nor to take away from them, and this is clearly within the context of adopting pagan practices in conjunction with worshipping Him. Christmas may not involve physical child-sacrifice—although in spirit millions of children are being sacrificed on the altar of materialism—but the stench of this celebration is odious nonetheless because it is still idolatry: replacing the true worship of God with a false one.

The Bible does not specify when Jesus Christ was born (although the best deduction is that it was in the autumn—see "When Was Jesus Born?" *Forerunner*, December 1994). More importantly, the Bible does not give any instruction in celebrating His birth, nor any example of the first-century

church doing so, nor any indication that the celebration of birthdays is pleasing to God at all! Even this idea has come from paganism, rather than from God's Instruction Book for mankind. Is this, then, worshipping God in spirit and in truth?

Is it any wonder that our Savior says, "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 15:8-9); and "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that *you may keep your tradition*" (Mark 7:9); and "[you make] the word of God of no effect through *your tradition* which you have handed down. And many such things you do" (Mark 7:13)? Human nature has the rebellious proclivity to do only what it wants to do, even when told by God Himself to do things differently (Romans 8:7)!

We see, then, that on one pole are the secularists, who believe the lie that God should not be a part of their lives. On the other pole are mainstream Christians, who believe the lie that syncretism is an acceptable form of worship. But in either case, the trail of lies indicates who the *real* "holiday spirit" is.

—David C. Grabbe

Dare to Be Different!

Most of us are by nature conformists. We tend to want to blend into the crowd and desire not to stand out as different. Most cultures teach conformity to their children early and often, and this initial training remains with them throughout their lives. Those who stray from conformity are called "black sheep," and are regarded somewhat suspiciously by "normal" people.

Schoolchildren seem to feel this need to conform—to be like everyone else—more than adults. As a preacher's kid whose family did not have a great deal of disposable income to keep up with the neighbors' kids, I felt this desire acutely. How much I envied my pals' Nikes®, Izod® shirts, and Members Only® jackets! The shoes and clothing I had were just as nice and serviceable, but they had all the wrong tags. They—and thus I—did not fit in. When I later received an Izod® shirt—burgundy, second-hand—I wore it until I nearly burst its seams.

As adults, we feel similar peer pressure, but the stakes are higher. Now it is cars, homes, memberships, investments, salaries, résumés, benefit packages, and vacation destinations—not to mention all the latest toys, gizmos, and accoutrements. Not running with the in-crowd is not as devastating to an adult as it is to a teen, but the subconscious desire to fit in is certainly present. We may call it "staying in style" or "not wanting to fall behind," but it is the same urge not to stand out as different.

We Christians have another ingredient to add to the mix: our calling. God's invitation to His Family really complicates matters in terms of fitting in to society. He has called us out of this world (John 15:19). The purpose of His invitation is to make us different! If we accept His invitation, we agree to spend the rest of our lives as the proverbial sore thumb. We are set apart from other people in the world, and commissioned—nay, commanded—to widen the gap!

Notice Paul's blunt statement in Romans 12:2: "[D]o not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . . ." John is equally as blunt: "Do not love the world or

the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). As is James: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). And God Himself: "Come out of [Babylon, a type of the world], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

Perhaps it is during this time of the year that we feel most different. We are among a tiny minority of Christians who do not celebrate Christmas. Our house may be the only one on the block without brilliant and colorful decorations. We must beg off going to the office party or participating in the gift pool. We think of new and clever ways to respond to "Merry Christmas!" or "Happy holidays!" Unlike the rest of the human herd, we avoid the malls, restaurants, and any other "festive" gathering place. Some of us leave the radio off to avoid the constant, mind-numbing holiday tunes.

Ultimately, if we want to succeed in our calling to be different, we must see our estrangement from the world as a small price to pay for eternal life and the rewards God promises. Being a bit unusual is not so bad, at least not in tolerant America as the third millennium AD begins. Other, far stranger people attract the public eye today. Although this period of tolerance is bound to end in the persecutions of the coming troubles of the end time, right now we can be different without drawing much notice.

Paul's warning in II Timothy 3:12 can be discouraging: "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." The last of Christ's beatitudes offers some balance:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. . . . (Matthew 5:10-12)

Is this enough to dare to be different?

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh