

CHRISTMAS AND COMMON SENSE

-A. Ralph Johnson

Some time ago a good brother sent me a copy of an article against Christmas in which he heatedly declared:

“Is God pleased with all the church going? Is God pleased with all the manger scenes? Is God pleased with all the elementary school programs with baby Jesus in the cradle and the repetition of age old Christmas carols? Is God pleased with the bells? The Druid trees? The robed choirs? The pagan wreaths, mistletoe, evergreen and holly? ...God is sick of it! I’m sick of it! I wonder who else is? I believe it is about time for the weak sisters to investigate and throw out their gruelly sentimentalistic arguments or defend their position with a ‘THUS SAITH THE LORD!’“

Other articles followed this with quotations from people who had written in support. It seemed to me that he was letting his indignation at abuses push him to extremes with as many or more problems than it solved. The word of God warns, *ye shall not turn aside to the **right hand** or to the **left***. (Deut. 5:32). Extremes only beget extremes and the ditch on one side is just as deep as the other.

I wrote in protest and after a few exchanges the correspondence was dropped. However, he later wrote that he had changed his views. Some years later, in a visit to our congregation, he recounted the incident. I have to admire his integrity in honestly examining the evidence and having the courage to reconsider.

In recalling this I have no desire to bring any embarrassment. I only wish, by way of introduction, to show how sharp sometimes is the opposition, and to examine the fundamental problems with a view towards a more realistic solution.

OUR COMMON GOAL

To begin with, I want to emphasize that we share the essential goal of having all men honor the Lord Jesus and escape the entanglements of sin. How best may this be achieved without them slipping into sin or driving them more deeply into error? I am concerned that in our reaction against abuses we become diverted to attacking perfectly neutral or even good things, wasting our efforts, wresting the scriptures, undermining our credibility, and playing into the hands of our common enemy. We must take care to “be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

1Cor. 9:20 And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.

*Rom. 13:7 Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; **custom** to whom **custom**; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*

By using their customs to win them, Paul set us an example how to avoid unnecessary alienation. In this way he drew a clear distinction between what was sinful and that which was merely choice or culture. He became “all things to all men” that by some means he might gain some (1 Cor. 9:19-22). It is a shame when our reaction against superficial appearances alienates those we seek to win. Often the damage done extends even to our own children and children’s children. Paul would “not for an hour” permit Christians to be BOUND by laws concerning days, meats, offerings and circumcision (Col. 2:14-17; Gal. 2:3; 4:9-11; 5:1-4; Heb. 10:1-9), yet he himself disarmed their bias by using his freedom to do so (Rom. 14:5-8; Ac. 16:1-3; 21:18-26; Rom. 13:7).

Unfortunately extremism cannot make distinctions. Emotion dominates and lumps everything together. On the one hand, the negative extremist throws out the good with the bad. A typical example was manifested by the

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Pharisees in Luke 7:33, 34. John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and they said he had a demon. When Jesus did both, they accused him of being, “a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” Jesus’ comment was, “Wisdom is justified of all her children.”

On the other hand, positive extremism focuses on some good and blindly embraces a host of evils. Christians must maintain a stable balance. We need our “senses exercised to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14).

IS IT EVIL TO DO GOOD ON DECEMBER 25th?

1 Certainly would not dispute the fact that evil men have used December 25th for evil. But, **HOW CAN A GOOD MAN BE EVIL FOR USING THE DAY TO DO GOOD?**

Is it evil or good to put on a play about the birth of Christ? Is it evil or good to rejoice over the birth of Jesus? Was it only proper for angels, shepherds, his parents and later, the wise men, or is it something we may all enjoy? Does rejoicing in December make it evil? Some are so hostile to “Christmas songs” that one would wonder if they thought Jesus’ birth was good at all.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses go so far as to contend that we should not keep birthdays. They argue that the only two mentions of birthday parties were occasions of people being killed. The first was when Pharaoh hanged the baker (Gen. 40:20) and the second was when Herod beheaded John the Baptist (Mt. 14:6). The fact that two people were killed on birthday anniversaries in no way makes such a remembrance evil. Are wedding anniversaries evil? Some go so far as to claim the “wise men” were pagan astrologers following a star sent by Satan to get Jesus killed by Herod! Such is the course of extremism.

Is it evil or good to give gifts, help the poor and make little children happy? Is it wrong only in December, or right the WHOLE year? Giving gifts to children can be good (Matt 7:11). The wise men gave gifts at Jesus’ birth. God *gave* his son for us (Jn. 3:16). Jesus *gave* himself (Gal. 1:4). Jesus said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Ac. 20:35). We are promised that if we *give* freely, it will be freely given unto us (Lk. 6:38). If the purpose is good, how can we be evil for giving? Why would not this be an appropriate way to honor the coming of our Lord?

Granted, Christmas giving is sometimes abused. Every good thing is abused by some one at some time in some way, but did the covetousness and dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1-9) corrupt the virtue of Giving? How can it be evil to give, on December 25th or any other day?

Some object that the giving is to each other rather than to Jesus. That is not entirely true. Many people give Christmas offerings both to needy causes and to the church. There is a true spirit of sharing by many at Christmas. If you don’t think so, you should see all of the requests from charitable organizations in my Christmas mail! It is the biggest time of the year for people to cash in on generosity. Honestly, in spite of abuses, has not the birth of Jesus brought out a lot of good in people? Is that evil?

Is it a sin to give to someone other than Jesus? Is it not true that Jesus said, “inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME.” (Matt. 25:40)?

THE ISSUE OF ABUSES

I am not at all indifferent to the evils that are practiced at Christmas, but how can I berate my brethren for doing things in December that at other times would be considered good? How can evil be diminished by attacking good? Is that not itself bad? Does that not further evil?

Christmas is often abused, yet it does remind the world of the importance of the coming of Jesus and opens up hearts to be concerned about the needs of others. The power to touch hearts is shown in the fact that even in war

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there have often been Christmas truce and on occasion, men on both sides have left the trenches to greet each other in embrace. Would to God that men would act that way the year around!

Who opposes Christmas? If it is so evil, why do the enemies of Christ expend so much effort to get rid of it? They spend big money to try to eradicate it in public schools, in public ceremonies and on public property. Shall we join their cause?

“WHETHER IN PRETENSE OR IN TRUTH, I THANK GOD CHRIST IS PREACHED”

Yes, there are abuses, and we want people to be more genuine in their remembrance of Christ the whole year rather than a superficial tribute in December. Will this be accomplished by attacking the one time when the world does focus on him? Through the influence of Christmas, many have become aware of Jesus. Who knows how much fruit has come from this seed? It does not seem logical to oppose an influence that has so much power to soften hearts. How can we increase Christ's influence by attacking the remembrance of his coming? Rather than being condemned, the opportunity should be used for good. The flickering flame should be coaxed (Matthew 12:20), not snuffed out. Like the inspired Apostle, we should thank God that “whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached.” (Philippines 1:15-18)

It may seem impressive to compass land and sea to uncover remote abuses, dumping everything together, the bad with the good, and denouncing all participation as evil, but it defies both logic and scripture. This is looking on the outward appearances. God looks upon the heart (Jn. 7:24).

Being a critic takes no superior ability. Everything gets abused. Did you ever consider the abuses related to the automobile? The Amish sect, which still drives horses and buggies down back roads, has for themselves made a very effective “case” that it is the root of “pridefulness.” Indeed, I even read an article by a prominent sociologist who blamed, primarily, the automobile, for the general breakdown of our cultural moors. He suggested that it provided mobility, which took young people beyond local observation, thus undermining parental supervision by loosing them from community restraints. Further, it had a great influence in dissolving family units by encouraging dispersal to distant cities and jobs. And, of course, just like at Christmas, there is the terrible slaughter on the highway and consequent suffering due to the abuse of driving an automobile while under the influence of liquor. Just think how many lives could be saved if we banned automobiles!

Have you considered the abuses of the printing press, telephone, radio, and movie camera? Because I read, am I responsible for those who print pornography? Because I have a telephone, am I responsible for those who use it to gossip? Because I use pictures or films for religious instruction, am I responsible for the sexual depravity and violence encouraged by the film industry? All of these things have at some time been condemned as evil because of their misuse. There was even a time when drinking pop out of a bottle was opposed because bottles were also used for alcoholic drinks. The “logic” of such arguments is as mythical as the Santa Clause which they so contemptuously berate. There is no limit to the list of abuses. NOTHING has escaped the defiling hands of sinners. To do so, one would “needs go out of the world.” (1Cor. 5:10)

THE ISSUE OF ORIGINS

How relevant is the objection that Christmas was introduced by the Papacy? Sabbatarians have long used this same old tired argument about the Pope or Constantine changing the day of worship, when in fact they only confirmed an already existing practice. Anti-instrumentalists from the time of Calvin have tried to tag the Pope with responsibility for introducing the organ in 666 A.D., with the obvious inference, to milk every bit of negative reaction possible to bolster their position.

So what if the day was at one time used for a pagan purpose? Was it wrong for people to offset pagan influence by using the same day for the exaltation of Christ? Do we err in using Memorial Day and other holidays (note: “*holy- days*”) for Christian gatherings? Must we have a specific Biblical statement of endorsement? Using the day for the Lord makes a lot more sense than sitting home grumbling about the abuses of the heathens. As someone has so wisely said, “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

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Even if Christmas originally was established by the Pope, do people who hear that we are having a Christmas pageant think we are Catholics? Does a wreath on the door make me a Papist? No one seriously believes someone is a Catholic because they display colored lights on their house.

Is there some great virtue in merely being *different*? If my practice were evil it would be understandable but in the absence of even associating Christmas with Catholicism, the objection is meaningless.

Must I refrain from eating fish on Friday because Catholics do? Does lighting a candle make me guilty of Romish superstition? If merely holding a practice in common with Rome makes me responsible for the errors of Catholicism then why would not sharing opposition to Christmas with the Watchtower Society and atheists make me responsible for the errors of Jehovah's Witnesses and Carl Marx? Indeed, are we not sometimes so identified by outsiders when we make an issue of such things? Why is it more wicked to be like a Catholic than a cultist or a Communist?

So what if the day was used by pagans? THEY GOT IT FROM GOD! (1Cor. 10:26; Rom. 14:14; I Tim. 4:3, 4). In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He separated light from darkness, forming the days of all ages. Pagans and Papists alike may have misused them but from the beginning it was not so. When God created it he said, "It is good" (Gen. 1:4). How then, can some ancient pagan abuse on or about December 25th make that day forever after evil? The pagan objectives have nothing in common with ours and we have no intention whatsoever to pay tribute to their gods. How can we be blamed for idolatry when we have no intent, and, unless informed by some anti-Christmas zealot, would have no knowledge of any such connection?

Intent is vital in right and wrong. Our purpose of circumcising babies for sanitary and health reasons does not make us responsible for the abuses of the Pharisees any more than Paul's circumcision of Timothy (Ac. 16:1-3; 1Cor. 9:20) put him under the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:10). Circumcision is not wrong in itself (1Cor. 7:19). The heart is what matters (1Cor. 10:25-27; Col. 2:11; Rom. 14:23). True circumcision is of the heart (Rom. 2:25-29). Without this, one is not a Jew any more than the same act when practiced by Arabs or Australian Bushmen.

Both Christians and pagans pray but intent makes one acceptable and the other not (cf. Luke 18:10-14; James 1:5-8). The purpose in eating and drinking at the Lord's table makes one's participation "unto the lord" and the other "unto judgment" (1Cor. 11:20-34). Many religions baptize but without the "appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21) we are not baptized "into Christ." (Jn. 3:5; Ac. 2:38; 22:16; Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:3, 17; 1Cor. 12:13). Indeed, they may need to be baptized again (Ac. 19:1-5).

One man's purpose may be entirely different from another's. This very year, some observed December 25th in memory of the birth of Christ while the Jews kept it as Hanukkah in memory of the cleansing of the temple under the Maccabees. Others used it to get drunk. Catholics lit candles for loved ones. Jews lit candles to remind them of purification. I lit a candle because there was a power outage. Why should I be condemned for the intentions of others?

I suppose that there is not a day nor a thing that has not somewhere in the halls of antiquity been either begun or misused by evil men. Cain's wicked descendants originated the practice of dwelling in tents and cities, playing harps and organ and making brass and iron (Gen. 4:16-22). Does this make these things evil for me? This has been used to argue against the use of the organ! Indeed, almost every modern blessing either was originated in or very early turned to some evil use, but **I REFUSE TO FEEL GUILTY FOR TURNING A SWORD INTO A PLOWSHARE OR A SPEAR INTO A PRUNING HOOK!** (Isa. 2:4)

Those who espouse such positions do not even walk by their own rule. They have no aversion to using the good old "Julian Calendar" which was originated by a wicked, brutal and profligate pagan emperor who was viewed as a god and who's name was included as one of the months of the year (July). It does not bother them that it was later revised and authorized by "THE MOST HOLY FATHER," Pope Gregory, in 1582. They seem quite comfortable with names dedicated to pagan gods for months: January (Janus), March (Mars), and days of the week, Sunday

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(Sun's day), Monday (Moon's day), Wednesday (Wooden's day), Thursday (Thor's day) and Saturday --the same old Saturn whose yearly feast day, the Saturnalia, supposedly was borrowed for Christmas. Why not renounce this "paganism" and throw away the calendar too? Better yet, why not forget poisoning the consciences of people by digging up archaic origins.

What about the use of pagan names such as "Diana," "Helen," "Iris" and "Flora"? Did not many of God's people in the Bible have names of pagan Gods? How about the ancient fertility rite of rice at weddings? Who originated our games such as dice and chess? (Note the venerable "Bishop" that commands the long file on the board!) From whence came our concepts of church architecture and the pictures of Biblical scenes for films and Sunday School literature? Where did we get our systems of musical harmony, scoring, tunes and lyrics? Did these come from "The Church Of Christ?" Most came from Rome or her daughters and some of the tunes were old beer hall or war songs!

A compulsion to root out origins will bog the church in a quagmire of confusion and leave us prey to the twin-headed tyrant of arbitrariness and inconsistency. Because outsiders will focus on these "strange beliefs" we must first convince them that we are not weirdo's in order to teach them the gospel.

Please give this question a straight answer--**DOES A GOOD MAN'S GOODNESS BECOME EVIL BECAUSE IN THE PAST SOME EVIL MAN USED THE DAY FOR EVIL?**

Do I become a militarist by visiting the cemetery on the day dedicated in memory of those who died in war? By using firecrackers, introduced into the West by the Chinese, do I become guilty of pagan superstition about their ability to scare away demons? Do I Condone abuses of the early Pilgrims by eating turkey on Thanksgiving? Do I become responsible for the pagan myths about "Father Time" by gathering with Christians on New Year's Eve?--HUMBUG!

"WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE?"

What do the scriptures say about the issue of origins? "Whatever is sold in the market you may continue to eat, ASKING NO QUESTIONS as a matter of conscience; for the earth is the Lord's and ALL THAT IS IN IT. If an unbeliever invites you to dinner, and you wish to go, EAT ANYTHING that is put before you, ASKING NO QUESTIONS as a matter of conscience. (But if anyone says to you, This has been offered in sacrifice, do not eat it, for the sake of the man who told you, and as a matter of conscience, and by conscience, I mean not your own conscience but HIS" (1Cor. 10:25-29).

From this we learn three important things:

1. Origin did not in itself defile the user. If no one's conscience was endangered they could eat. (8:4, 8; Rom. 14:14, 22)
2. The concern was the effect upon the WEAK conscience. The test is, will eating cause the weak brother to be tempted to sin? (8:7; 9:11-13; Rom. 14:14, 20, 23)
3. The third factor, so greatly ignored, is that we are to "ASK NO QUESTIONS." We are not to dig up origins.

This business of digging out origins and binding unscriptural prohibitions is strictly prohibited. It serves no scriptural purpose. It focuses attention on the dead works of Satan. It is impractical to avoid all evil origins. It raises unnecessary obstacles to outsiders. It contributes to the pile of things about which people become "weak" and thus to their weakness. It produces confusion and conflict within the body of Christ in deciding which are acceptable and which must be rejected. It often becomes a competition for status as to which is the "stronger" based on how many things a person is against. As one person wryly observed, "I wonder just who is the 'stronger' brother? It seems like a lot of people are trying to bind their WEAKNESSES on me."

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The sooner these origins are forgotten, the sooner we will be free of being burdened by them. We have plenty to do in contending with the evils of the “here and now” rather than tunneling through the garbage dumps of ancient superstition and conflicting history to find something at which to get offended. Why make the job tougher?

The Scriptures admonish, “*Ask no questions*” but it seems like some people’s philosophy is, “Before you eat, you must get out your magnifying glass and scrutinize it carefully, followed by an in depth investigation of it’s history. In fact, check it’s pedigree for the last two thousand years lest some ancestor has jumped the fence into some ancient pagan herd. If one can discover some forgotten “origin,” it is imperative to move heaven and earth to make everyone aware. If anyone dissents, denounce him as “justifying idolatry!”

Such is the nonsense of the “debunkers.” It is time people stop defiling the conscience of others.

“HE THAT OBSERVES THE DAY UNTO THE LORD IS STILL THE LORD’S”

Romans the 14th chapter shows that it was not a sin to observe a day unto the Lord, whether or not God commanded it (14:5, 6). We are not to judge a brother or raise disputes in such matters (Rom. 14: 1, 3, 4, 8, 10)

Moses Lard, in his commentary on Romans 14 wrote,

“The person here alluded to has been assumed by many to be the Christian Jew, and the days to be Jewish Sabbaths and other sacred days. The Christian Jew is certainly referred to, but it will not do to say that he exclusively is referred to. Nor will it do to say that the word ‘day’ includes only Jewish sacred days. Such limitations are without warrant either from the nature of the case or anything else. The term ‘one’ includes every Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, who esteemed one day better than another; while ‘day’ includes every day so esteemed, whether it be a Jewish or a Gentile day.”

Albert Barnes, in his commentary, wrote,

“If some Christians deem them to be for edification, and suppose that their piety will be promoted by observing the days which commemorate the birth, death, and temptations of the Lord Jesus, they are not to be reproached or opposed in their celebrations.”

J. W. McGarvey Commentary Concerning “being fully persuaded in his own mind.”

“Each must follow his own judgment and conscience, and none is required to adjust his conduct to satisfy the conscience, much less the scruples of another, though we must show charity and forbearance toward his brother’s conscience.”

Where are those “strong arguments” against observing December 25th “unto the Lord?” Where are the powerful “proofs?” The very difficulty they manifest in producing a “thus saith the Lord” is a clear indication of the weakness of the position. Consider the following examples:

OBJECTION: “Amos 5:21 says God hated their feast days.”

ANSWER:

The things specified were commanded by God. Feasts (Ex. 23:14-16). Solemn assemblies (Lev. 23:36). Burnt-offerings (Num. 29:39). Meal-offerings (Num. 29:39). Peace-offerings (Lev. 3:3). Fat of beasts (Lev. 3:3). Songs (Neh 12:45-46). Melody (Ps. 98:4-5). Viols (Ps. 150:3 “psaltary” same in Hebrew; Instruments commanded by God in Num. 10:10; 2Chron. 29:25). Note that eating lambs and calves is included (6:4). Is God against lamb chops and veal?

This was not said because these things were in themselves sinful.

Amos 5:25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? 26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your

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*god, which ye made to yourselves. 27 **Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.***

This was said because they were using them in ungodly idolatrous and wicked behavior (5:26-27). They afflicted the just, took bribes and turned aside the needy (5:12). They lived in ease and disregarded the Day of Judgment (6:1, 3). They were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (6:6).

Even good things become evil when used by an evil person in an evil manner.

OBJECTION: Jer. 10:3, *“The customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest...They deck it with silver and with gold...”*

ANSWER:

Like the preceding objection, a little thoughtful reading would cover a multitude of assumptions. The “customs” of which Jeremiah here speaks were of current **idolatrous** customs, not something that had lost its original significance for centuries. He speaks of cutting down a tree, removing the branches, **carving an idol** and overlaying it with gold. (see vs. 8, 9, 14) Another such passage with more detail may be found in Is. 44:9-20. It has not the remotest reference to putting decorations on the limbs of a tree at Christmas. One would just as well use this to claim that Solomon’s temple was idolatrous. They also cut down cedars and overlaid them with gold.

Tree branches, plants and other greenery have always been used for decorations. Even in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, limbs of palm trees were used to cover the way. Were palm leaves ever used by pagans? Certainly! Keeping customs is not in itself sinful (Rom. 13:7; 1Cor. 9:19, 20).

OBJECTION: Gal. 4:9, 10 *“They observed days, months, times and years.”*

ANSWER:

He was here speaking of the Judaizers (verse 21). These were part of the Law, under the Old Testament. They had passed away (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:30). The Judaizers were insisting that they must keep the law in order to be saved Gal. 5:4). They were being drawn back into “bondage” (4:9; 5:1). Though originally given by God, these things were no longer to be used for judgment (Col. 2:16, 17). There is considerable difference between being “bound” to keep a day and having freedom to keep or not keep it (Rom. 14:5, 6).

Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) but refused to require Titus to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3). Indeed, he exercised this freedom quite broadly in keeping the old law (Ac. 21:18-26; 1Cor. 9:20, 21) which no longer was required (Col. 2:14-16).

OBJECTION: 2 Kings 15:1; 12:1. *“The kings removed the idols but God was not pleased because they did not remove the groves [or high places].”*

ANSWER:

Removing the idols was superficial. They continued using these groves to sacrifice and burn incense to false gods. The intent and practice remained the same. God did not insist that all trees be cut down because some were used for idolatry. Must I Cut down the holly and fir in my yard to avoid being called an idolater? Is singing about the birth of Jesus equivalent to offering incense to an idol? Think!

OBJECTION: “Christmas means, ‘The Mass of Christ.’ ‘Mass’ is a false teaching that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ.”

ANSWER:

Until someone calls attention to the source of the word, no one thinks about the original meaning. Many words and phrases began with objectionable uses. That is the nature of language. I am obliged to keep no “mass” on Christmas any more than I worship the sun on Sunday, or wash on Washington’s birthday. How many people know that “Good bye” means, “God be with you”? Does calling a man, “Mister” still mean that we regard him as master? (compare Matthew 23:10) Most people would be sharply jolted if we

exposed the original meaning of many of our common terms and phrases, some of them originating as lewd statements.

Observing "Christmas," no more gives tribute to the Roman mass than did the apostles advocate the errors of Greek mythology in using words such as, "hades," "tartarus" and "justice," (pagan gods). The same is true of names of people in the Bible such as, Belteshazzar (Daniel 4:8). "Jerusalem" means, "the Jebusite city of peace," even though not a single Jebusite is left. How shocking that Paul would stand on the great hill dedicated to Mars, the god of war, and cite for his text a pagan inscription, "To An Unknown God" (Ac. 17:22, 23)!

OBJECTION: "Christ is being exploited for commercialism."

ANSWER: Greed will always be with us. In Bible times, just like now, there were those who supposed that godliness was a "way of gain" (I Tim. 6:5; Matthew 23:14, 28). Jesus threw them out of the temple but he did not condemn everyone who went there.

Such people will always be quite happy to sell us Bibles, build us lavish buildings, supply the traditional fluff for weddings, provide grape juice and unleavened bread for the Lord's Supper, and all the rest of the things we cherish so much between the nursery and the time they wring the last possible dollar out of our guilt-ridden heirs for an exorbitantly priced coffin --and, if they thought they could get away with it, they would sell your carcass to the rendering works and market your ribs for dog bones! I don't think I am responsible for the greed of the Christmas Tree farmers in December any more than the turkey farmers at Thanksgiving!

While we are so concerned about "commercialism," how do you make your living? Do you work for nothing? Is your occupation commercial? My observation is that those who complain the most about "commercialism" are just as concerned as others are about getting their share of the "almighty dollar."

By the way, have you ever noticed those pagan symbols on a dollar? (Note the pagan pyramid with the pagan big eye at the top.) Maybe you should quit using them.

Remember old Scrooge? Just because people don't keep Christmas does not keep them from being greedy. One can use the accusation of "commercialism" as a "more holy" cover for being just plain stingy! Greed is not the only the weakness of the seller. If you don't want to spend the money, don't. But people should not lay a phony guilt trip on others to cover up one of your own!

The only way to avoid contact with greed would be to board a rocket ship for Mars. If you decide to go, let me know. I know of some who is selling reservations for the flight!

OBJECTION: "We must not be like the world."

ANSWER:

In what way? 1John 2:16-17 deals with "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." We are not to be like the world in those respects. It does not prohibit a thing just because others do it. Where there is no law there is no sin. (Rom. 4:15; 1John 3:4) Paul said that to the Jew he was a Jew and to the Greeks, a Greek (1Cor. 9:20-22).

OBJECTION: "Observing Christmas is living a lie because Jesus was not born on December 25th."

ANSWER:

Jesus wasn't born on January 1, A.D. 1 either but we don't hesitate to use the calendar, which is based on that erroneous date. We don't know on what day of the year he was born. It could have been December 25th or any other day. As one brother put it, "Take your choice. You have one in 365 chances of being right."

On the basis that the sheep were still in the fields, some have maintained that it could not have been as late as December. That is incorrect because the temple herds were kept out year around. (Edersheim, Vol. I, p. 186, 187 and, The Life of Our Lord by Samuel Andrews p. 17-20)

I have never taught that Jesus was born on December 25th, and neither would any informed person. Even if someone did have such a mistaken notion, would that make it a lie to remember the birth of Christ on December 25th? Is there any one of us without misconceptions? Does that mean that we are all liars? Rubbish!

Furthermore, observing a day of remembrance other than the actual day of birth, would not necessarily be a lie, even if we knew the date. The date we use for Washington's Birthday is not the actual date. Because all did not become mothers on Mothers Day, does it make us liars to honor mothers on that day? Does laying flowers on a loved one's grave on Memorial day make them liars because all did not die on that day?

CONCLUSION:

We should not lie to children about "Santa watching and bringing gifts to all good little girls and boys." Drunkenness, selfishness, greed, cheating, and running up debts while failing to meet responsibilities, are wrong, not only at Christmas but the whole year around. People should attend church every Sunday, not just on Christmas and Easter. The needs of the poor should be as important all year as at Christmas.

However, to the extent that people do good and are moved to think about Christ, I can only thank God. I cannot condemn that which is good. A good man's good is as good on December 25th as any other day of the year. An evil man's evil is as evil at any other time of year as it is on December 25th. My good does not become evil because another does evil any more than his evil becomes good because of my good.

We should not dig up origins to load people's backs with burdens which neither we nor our fathers could bear (Ac. 15:10). We are to, "ask no questions" lest we defile our brother's conscience (1Cor. 10:25-29). I have never known of any new Christian being tempted into Christmas tree worship, but I have seen them stumbled by having unfair judgments laid on their motives for having a Christmas tree and turned away in disgust. That **does** cause stumbling.

People are to be left free to choose for themselves whether or not to observe the day unto the Lord (Romans 14:5). "Weakness" is in having a conscience offended by it, not in having no conscience against it. The brother who does not observe the day has no right to judge those who do, and those who observe the day should not judge those who do not (Romans 14:9-13). We need to "*follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another*" (Romans 14:19).

Even in our differences over how to deal with these problems we need to recognize that we still hold a common goal and common concerns about abuses. A little thought and brotherly respect can show this "mountain" to be nothing but a "mole hill." Indeed, we may discover that we are sitting back to back on the same horse looking at opposite ends. If we are going to get anywhere we must be less concerned about where we have BEEN and more with where we are GOING.

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