

# Christians and Christmas Trees

December 10th, 2007

*(By John MacArthur)*

*We posted this article last year on Pulpit, but given the season, we felt it was appropriate to run it again.*

## ***Should Christians have Christmas Trees?***



As the Christmas Season approaches, questions like this sometimes arise. Like everything in life, it is important to approach these issues with biblical discernment.

In this case, we see nothing wrong with the traditional Christmas tree. However, some have taught that it's wrong for anyone to have a Christmas tree in their home. But are their reasons valid? We don't think so. Let's look at the two most common objections people make against having a Christmas tree.

First, some object on the basis that Christmas trees have pagan origins. It is believed that Boniface, English missionary to Germany in the eighth century, instituted the first Christmas tree. He supposedly replaced sacrifices to the god Odin's sacred oak with a fir tree adorned in tribute to Christ. But certain other accounts claim that Martin Luther introduced the Christmas tree lighted with candles. Based on that information you could say the Christmas tree has a distinguished Christian pedigree.

However, even if a pagan background were clearly established, that wouldn't necessarily mean we could not enjoy the use of a Christmas tree. Perhaps the following analogy will help.

During World War II the American military used some remote South Pacific islands for temporary landing strips and supply depots. Prior to that time the indigenous tribal people had never seen modern technology up close. Large cargo planes swooped in filled with an array of material goods, and for the first time the islanders saw cigarette lighters (which they deemed to be miraculous), jeeps, refrigerators, radios, power tools, and many varieties of food.

When the war was over, the islanders concluded that the men who brought cargo were gods, so they began building shrines to the cargo gods. They hoped the cargo gods would return with more goods.

Most people do not even know about this religious superstition. Similarly, few know anything about the worship of trees. When a child pulls a large present out from under the Christmas tree and unwraps a large model cargo plane, no one views that object as an idol. Nor do we view the Christmas tree to be some kind of gift god. We understand the difference between a toy and an idol just as clearly as we understand the difference between an idol and a Christmas tree. We see no valid reason to make any connection between Christmas trees and wooden idols or the worship of trees. Those who insist on making such associations should take note of the warnings in Scripture against judging one another in doubtful things (see Romans 14 & 1 Corinthians 10:23-33).

Another common objection is the claim that Christmas trees are prohibited in Scripture. Jeremiah 10 is commonly used to support this viewpoint. But a closer look at the passage will show that it has nothing to do with



Christmas trees and everything to do with idol worship. Verse eight says, “A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.”

Idol worship was a clear violation of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3-6 says, “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

There is no connection between the worship of idols and the use of Christmas trees. We should not be anxious about baseless arguments against Christmas decorations. Rather, we should be focused on the Christ of Christmas and giving all diligence to remembering the real reason for the season.

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## 10 Responses to “Christians and Christmas Trees”

1. *on 10 Dec 2007 at 6:51 am \_Pat*

Amen, some take it a step further and say we should not greet on Christmas, exchange presents, or celebrate the day but far from being sober-minded this thinking is surely taken as a reproach by the unbelieving. Making sure that we keep CHRIST in our CHRISTmas need not entail such a rigid and unwelcoming attitude. In fact celebrating the day to the hilt while proclaiming Christ to all is a great testimony. but let no one be wise in their own conceits - we who celebrate should be on guard not to be gluttonous, unmindful of the destitute, argumentative with family, or materialistic and lazy BUT “He that regardeth the day, (make sure) regardeth it unto the Lord”

2. *on 10 Dec 2007 at 9:19 am \_William du Plooy*

Dear Pat,

Romans 14:14-23

” I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Hence IF I do not feel free to celebrate the season, because unto me the “season” represents an idol and to my friends a stumbling block; I shall not be condemned.

This issue is a Romans 14 issue, it is not an ordinance of the Body of Christ, and CAN be an offense to a Hebrew or Islamic friend who requires the Gospel of grace.

I am not sure we should be eager to condemn those who do not wish to celebrate Christ's humanity in outward traditions.

Equally you raise a fair point CHRISTmas is a time for testifying CHRIST's humiliation for our sake.

Personally I grew up in a home where we abandoned the festivities when I was about 7 yrs old, we could not afford gifts and my parents sought to celebrate CHRIST every day. I do not associate with the world's idea of CHRISTmas and will not tolerate santa in my home, as he is an idol to most people who are lost and an offence to the Sainthood of all believers (This being my personal view). Will I condemn anybody for having santa? No, that is their decision to follow what the Spirit makes them comfortable with, in accordance with Romans 14.

I prefer leaving the door open for my Hebrew and Islamic friends, and to witness the humility of Christ in coming to share in my humanity and in giving me His grace to overcome the world.

Let EVERY day be celebrated with the humility of Christ and may we cause NO offence to those who are not yet under the grace of Messiah.

May you be a great witness to our LORD this CHRISTmas, among your family and in your community.

3. *on 10 Dec 2007 at 10:46 am \_Pat Kruse*

Thank you for this brief commentary on Christmas. It is helpful to revisit due to the various views people hold (as is true of any topic).

Is it lawful to do good on this occasion? Or should we avoid it where possible?

Mat 12:12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Mat 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had [his] hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

And the reference alluded to in "Pat's" comment:

Rom 14:6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth [it] unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard [it]. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

Daily reading of scripture, thinking deeply about what we read, and praying as this often reading of His Word moves us to do, should help us keep our focus for daily living on Christ.

Thank God for the Holy Bible, Holy Spirit, saving faith in Christ, God's love, and fellow Christians in Christ!

Let's go out to seek and save the lost! Matt 28:19-20

4. *on 10 Dec 2007 at 12:37 pm* [\\_David R. McCrory](#)

Good post. But like others have mentioned, a more fundamental issue has arisen concerning the legitimacy of observing Christmas at all (especially among the Reformed faith). Here is a good discussion of Christmas and the Christian;

<http://reformedpuritan.wordpress.com/2007/12/03/a-reformed-christmas/>

5. *on 10 Dec 2007 at 1:24 pm* [\\_Pat](#)

Dear William, appreciate your stance and comments, to elaborate the people I have in mind in my comments are those who refuse to celebrate Christmas with CHRISTIANS or who refuse to say "Merry Christmas" to CHRISTIANS and look down on believers who do celebrate in this way with OTHER believers, that said I believe that when the unbelieving (who are ignorant of all the idolatrous issues associated with the Holiday) see this lack of unity or love within BELIEVING people it brings bewilderment and reproach on the faith. I would agree with your sensitivity to unbelievers who do not accept Christmas but NOT to the extent where we offend a brother. INSTANCE: if a holiday gathering is held at a believers house and many guests are unbelieving and offended by Christmas traditions there, I would side with those partaking of the activities - OR - simply I would much SOONER offend the unbeliever than my brother (the believer) I dont condemn those who have convictions in not observing these things IF THEY ALSO have no problem with those who do, (truly it is easy to become sanctimonious in our "purity" of not observing what others do) as a matter of fact I believe, most people who do not observe these things but also love those who do are in my estimation the ones who are great witnesses.

6. *on 11 Dec 2007 at 6:39 am* [\\_William du Plooy](#)

Pat,

That is a very good principle.

We ought always to esteem our brethren higher than ourselves. More so than the unbeliever, if needs be.

Thank you for discussing this.

In Remembrance of Christ our God-Man.

7. *on 12 Dec 2007 at 6:03 pm* [\\_Dale](#)

Great stuff. And very agreeable!

As a pastor I have a family of 4 in my church who every December till the end of January stop attending church because we have a tree up in the church and in our homes.

They sadly don't see that their stand against Christmas every year causes more sorrow than it is a witness of separation from the world. What it does is separate them from the rest of the church and the rest of their families. And I have to ask who gets the glory in their foolishness.

Later

8. *on 12 Dec 2007 at 11:11 pm - Joshua*

Can't anyone just enjoy things nowadays? Heck, I'll celebrate Kwanza if you give me a day off work, have people be nice and happy, and bring lots of good food. Christmas trees, Jesus, Santa, Rudolph, Frosty... - don't really care. I love Christ, I choose to celebrate His birth, and I like eating a ham and giving my son a toy. Thanks for the article. Let's just relax and enjoy things.

To those who freak out over it, in the words of Charlie Brown, "Good Greif!"

9. *on 13 Dec 2007 at 7:09 am - William du Plooy*

As to the necessity of celebrating Christmas: I would gladly point to the fact that as a follower of Christ, He never once instituted a feast apart from the ordinances of Believer's Baptism and the Communion at Passover.

Are we to add to that, perhaps so; perhaps not? We do certainly have no *madae* for it apart from the Romanist traditions of Catholicism (Hence Saint Nicholas).

For me it is truly a matter in which I would rather honor the LORD and where I would focus all my attention on serving the Church and the lost as every other day.

I would rather NOT offend a brother who is convinced that saints worship may be idolatry and diminishing the priesthood of all believers. Perhaps I am wrong, but as pointed out earlier, we are NOT to offend a believer, but regard a weaker brother higher than an unbeliever?

The answer (For me and my household) we celebrate the Humility of Christ at this time of year, we do not regard ANY saint in higher esteem than another (Including saint Nicholas - Santa) and we seek to speak the Gospel to the lost rather than keep the traditions of our culture.

I would rather see us speak the Gospel than offend anyone because we have accepted that which is NOT acceptable to them. The Christian life is one of humility, sacrifice and service.

I would rather have my brethren in fellowship than have a tree or Santa in the building where we fellowship.

Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps we are all wrong.

What does the Scriptures teach us on loving our bretheren, that is I feel the more important qestion.

Equally I will not condemn anyone on issues where the Scripture is not specific, such is Christmas.

10. *on 19 Dec 2007 at 10:31 am* \_ *David Johnson*

Praise God for John's biblical and therefore balanced approach to the issue of Christmas trees. Peace and goodwill to all in this dicussion. The Scriptures say, "...for whatever is not of faith is sin." (See Rom. 14:23b). Central to our relationship with Christ is our faith. Faith works by love (Gal. 5:6b). Our Head is perfect and is the object of our faith. "Body II" (as JM calls it) is imperfect (Rom. 7:14ff) and must continually be about killing sin (8:13) and excercise love towards one another in the process. One of the sins we need to kill is ignorance of God's Word, will and ways. Christmas presents a challenge for some brethren, especially if they are not grounded in several Biblical principles. For exammple, a believer can easily get caught up in the draft of supposed piety and react in a way that is not necessarily spiritual. Neither Christmas trees or non-Christmas trees avails anything. But Christmas trees are fully entrenched in our culture and our reactions are inevitable given our sinfulness. What do the Scriptures teach about loving our brethren...well for one it teaches us that our faith is both objective and subjective. Objectively, we have the Word of God which never changes and offers us not the "I would rather..." principles, but, excercise our faith towards those matters in which the Scriptures are clear (e.g., pray, forgive, study the Word, help the poor, etc.) On those matters we must obey. Regarding doubtful matters, we need to excercise faith again, and be reminded that faith works by love (Gal. 5:6b). Divine love, wrought in the believer, never compromises truth or conscience, but always seeks conditions by which a brother's holiness is improved, truth is imparted and love is demonstrated. We can do this whenever the issue of Christmas trees come up. Christmas trees are not fundamental to the believer's holiness, truth or love. But, to be sure, some brethren see it as a sin and then you have other brethren who do not. Since this is inevitable given our culture, and since all true believers have faith, it never needs to be an issue to divide over, but rather an occasion in which faith works by love. Like all matters in life, the Christmas tree issue just needs to be handled by faith, which alone works by love, and in such a frame, results in guidance and energy from the Spirit which is always pure, peaceable, gentle, and (watch this), [is] easily entreated setting up the conditions in which brethren can experience mercy and good fruits towards each other, and that without partialty and without hypocrisy (See James 3:17-18). That ain't bad. In such a state, brethren will learn, focus on Christ's Incarnation, even while sitting next to a Christmas tree. It won't jump out at you and it won't undermine your conscience, so long as you do what you do from faith. Its sin, whenever brethren make such doubtful matters "law" and impose such matters of conscience on other brethren causing division in the body. Ignorance prevails and pain increases. The test is not what "I would rather have...", but what Christ wants of me (you) as I (you) consider your brother's need. He may not need a Christmas tree, and you may not want him to have one, that isn't even the issue - for Christmas trees or non-Christmas trees avails anything, but faith in Christ and our love of the brethren, notwithstanding his or her position on a decorated evergreen. Buy the way, its interesting to me that God is a Person who decorates His house both naturally and artificially (e.g., in His creation, the OT

Tabernacle, etc.). This tells me part of our image bearing as believers is properly one of beauty and order. So if not a Christmas tree here, to be sure a beautiful tree in eternity bearing 12 “bulbs” of fruit (see Rev. 22:2) - it seems our desire to decorate things comes from the image GOD stamped upon us for His glory. I confess that I have a tree...its pretty, its got lots of memories and reminders...and since I became a believer, its never distracted me from Christ. However I am sensitive to a brother’s objection of Christmas trees and so am willing to bear that burden to the extent of not having a tree if that is necessary. But is is equally that brother’s responsibility to receive me, but not to determine such reception on such doubtful matters as a Christmas tree. I think this is the balance that honors Christ.

V/r Dave Johnson

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