

Put Christ Back in Christian

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No, that's not a typo in the title. I am not advocating putting Christ back in Christmas. I am, instead, promoting putting Jesus Christ and His teachings back into what it means to be a Christian.

Each year at Christmas time, we hear from people who want to put Christ back into Christmas. As some realize, putting Christ back into Christmas isn't really possible as He never was there in the first place (see, "Do you think Bible-believing Christians should keep Christmas?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/christmasqa.htm>). But even putting that question aside, are we being a light for Jesus Christ by making an issue over whether store clerks say, "Merry Christmas"? Are we really doing what Jesus would want when we try to force city hall to display a crèche? Are we showing the world that we are Christ's disciples by complaining when companies use "holidays" instead of "Christmas" in their advertising? Is this man, for instance, helping people to understand the Gospel by ranting about how Starbucks isn't putting "Merry Christmas" on its coffee cups this year while he wears a Jesus t-shirt and carries a gun? (<https://www.facebook.com/joshua.feuerstein.5/videos/689569711145714/>). Even presidential candidate Donald Trump has suggested that maybe we should boycott Starbucks for abandoning its Christmas-themed cups, and has made the promise, "If I become president, we're all going to be saying Merry Christmas again, that I can tell you. That I can tell you" ("Donald Trump: 'Maybe we should boycott Starbucks'") (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/09/politics/donald-trump-starbucks-boycott-christmas/>). Will this move Jesus to say to Trump, "Well done, good and faithful servant," when He returns?

I suppose that today there is less of an explicit statement of the connection that many people put between Jesus and Christmas than there used to be. Clerks often say, "Happy holidays," instead of, "Merry Christmas." But is this the result of some evil plot against Christianity, or is it merely our being more sensitive to the possibility that the customer may not be a Christian? Just as we used to call a certain shade of pink "flesh color" and today we've woken up to the fact that this left a large population of the world out, so we also realize that not everyone celebrates Christmas (in fact, even many Christians don't). Is it bad that we are being sensitive to others? Does Jesus

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christbackinchristian.pdf

consider us traitors if we're not fighting for Christ in Christmas? No. Jesus never said that we are to cram our religion down anyone's throat. He told us to go into the world and preach the Gospel. Some, led by the Holy Spirit, will believe. The rest will not, and no amount of spamming people with Merry Christmas will change that.

There's not one word in the Bible that says the world will know we are Jesus Christ's disciples by our trying to force corporations to say "Merry Christmas" or use Christmas coffee cups. I know of no place in the Bible where either Jesus or His apostles tell us to get governments to put nativity scenes on public property. I'm not judging anyone's Christianity, but this supposed battle to defend Christmas that people fight each year in the name of Christianity is a sham. They think it makes them out to be defenders of the faith struggling against the pagan hordes, but, in fact, it exposes them as trolls picking fights over non-critical issues. Apparently, they don't have a clue that there are better things to which they should be applying their time and resources.

Jesus didn't say that the world would know us as His disciples by our contentiousness, but by our love for one another (John 13:35). He also said, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:44-45). And James, the brother of Jesus, said, "If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn't bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:26-27).

But aren't these people helping Christ by keeping Him in Christmas? No, emphatically, no. The Gospel is a serious message involving the sinless Son of God taking our sins upon Him and suffering and dying for them in our place. It is our only hope of salvation and eternal life (Romans 1:16). It requires a serious presentation by credible people and sober consideration on the part of the hearers. But those who push for putting Christ back into Christmas give the impression that Christianity is about such trite considerations as sayings (Merry Christmas) and displays (nativity scenes) and that Christians are unloving, inconsiderate buffoons who have no concern for the feelings of those who don't share their beliefs.

It should be obvious that the call to put Christ back into Christmas is really just a part of the larger agenda of Christian Dominionism/Reconstructionism-influenced American conservatives. Their dream is to return America to its supposed Christian roots, install Christians in key political and judicial and military positions, and impose Judeo-Christian morals by legislating and enforcing biblical (i.e. Old Testament) law in America now and in the rest of the world as they conquer it (see "Sorting Out the Two Kingdoms") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/twokingdoms.htm>). According to these Christian jingoists, if this means being, not only inconsiderate of the beliefs of others, but even removing their rights (such as their right to sit as president), then so be it. After all, didn't Jesus want Christians to inherit the earth and implement God's law? Well, no, actually.

Jesus said that the meek or gentle will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5) and that His disciples were not to lord it over others but to humbly serve as if they were bondservants (Matthew 20:25-28). We don't represent Christ when we wrangle over signs and slogans, and we cannot spread the Gospel by imposing laws or through military conquest.

But some will still ask, "Didn't Jesus argue for the truth against the Pharisees?" Yes, but that was not the same kind of situation. The Pharisees were not in the same category as the uninformed world. They sat on Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2), meaning that they were the religious leaders representing God at that time. Jesus wasn't fighting against unbelievers and offending them away from the Gospel. He was exposing the Pharisees as religious hypocrites and legalists because they were misrepresenting God to the world and keeping the masses from coming to Christ (Matthew 23:13; Luke 11:52; 13:34). These are the very same things misguided Christian conservative zealots are doing today. They are "blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!" (Matthew 23:24). This is why it is right for those who know the truth to openly rebuke them, to stand apart from them, and to tell the world that these people are misrepresenting Jesus' teachings.

Underlying the Christian Dominionist/Reconstructionist cause is fear. They believe they must fight for Christian supremacy because they're concerned that non-Christians are moving onto their turf. And so they struggle for putting Christ in Christmas, Jesus in Easter, prayer in public schools, the Ten Commandments in court houses, and work against the pluralism that they see as contrary to their vision of a

Christian society. In doing this, they are working against the principle Jesus taught in the Parable of the Tares of the Field (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par2tares.htm>). Jesus said that the wheat and the tares must be left to grow together. Attempts to root out the non-Christians and their beliefs from our society will inevitably hurt Christians. These attempts also offend the public away from Christ and His Gospel. When people think of Christianity, they think of the petty, legalist, isolationist, faultfinding message of Reconstructionist/Conservative Christianity that is, in reality, diametrically opposed to Christ's Good News of grace and forgiveness. The Reconstructionist manifesto gets the cheers of its own people and exerts an influence on conservative politics, but it is detrimental to the cause of Christ because it turns people off to the Savior the Reconstructionists misrepresent.

Jesus said to tell the world about what He did to defeat sin. Christian conservatives simply point out people's sins. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful" (Matthew 5:7). Reconstructionists want to tell the world, Do it my way or else. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9), and, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). High-profile conservatives say, Fight the infidels and say nasty things about those who don't say, "Merry Christmas." Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Dominionists say, Keep the law. Jesus blesses those who feed the hungry, clothe the poor, visit the sick, and go to those in prison (Matthew 25:34-36). Christian conservatives say, pull yourselves up by your bootstraps, don't help the lazy bums, don't assist with their healthcare, put them in prison. Jesus said, "Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15), but when the world spares conservatives the trouble and comes to them, these people who profess themselves Christian say, Go away.

I could show more contrasts, but my point is that Christian Dominionism/Reconstructionism and its child, American Christian conservatism, are probably the greatest heresies that faithful, biblical Christians are facing today. This is because they not only preach a false Gospel, they create such a smokescreen that they obscure the true Gospel from the world. Like the Old Testament religionists whom God criticized for treading down the pasture and muddying the waters for others (Ezekiel 34:18), these people seem to go out of their way to offend people away from Christ. They seem to have no regard for the fact that they are giving unbelievers the false impression that Christianity is unloving, mean-spirited, without compassion, judgmental and accusing, controlling, and legalist. To be able to stay

within their own comfort zone and for their own political ends, they make Jesus Christ an offense to the very people who need His sacrifice, grace, and mercy. "And He said to the disciples, It is impossible that the offenses should not come, but woe to him by whom they come! It is profitable for him if a millstone turned by an ass is put around his neck, and he be thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:1-2, *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*). Read the comments that follow a news story reporting on some pronouncement of a political candidate who speaks like a dragon in the name of Christ (Revelation 13:11), and notice the reactions of the many little ones who are being offended.

We who know the truth must distance ourselves from those who get media attention by foolishly harping on a holiday greeting as if it were a fundamental doctrine of the faith or focusing on a cup of coffee as if it were the atoning blood of Christ. We must show the world that the Christ of the Bible saw those who obsessed on picky points and on the law as hypocrites. He declared that prostitutes would enter the kingdom before these hypocrites (Matthew 21:31) and told the woman they caught even in adultery that He did not condemn her (John 8:11). The fact that a false Gospel that misrepresents Christianity at its most fundamental points is being so visibly proclaimed makes it all the more important that we who know the mercy of our Lord do what we can to herald His gracious Gospel.

These are murmurers and complainers, walking after their lusts (and their mouth speaks proud things), showing respect of persons to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you that "In the last time there will be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts." These are they who cause divisions, and are sensual, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, keep building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

Jude 16-20