

Should Christians Keep Christmas?

Q. Do you think Bible-believing Christians should keep Christmas?

A. Thank you for asking for my thoughts on Christmas.

As you may know, I was once a member of the Worldwide Church of God. When I was a member of that church, it strongly condemned the celebrating of Christmas. The Worldwide Church of God's reasons for not keeping Christmas were these:

1. December 25 is not the day on which Jesus was born.
2. The Bible nowhere says that we should celebrate Jesus' birth, whatever day it is.
3. The celebrations we associate with Christmas—giving gifts, decorating trees, using mistletoe and holly, etc., have their origins in the pagan religions of the ancient world and pre-Christian Europe. The Roman Catholic Church adopted these in an effort to spread its influence and control these celebrations.

When I left the Worldwide Church of God in 1991, I questioned all of its teachings, including its teaching against Christmas. But, while I found that the Worldwide Church of God was wrong in many areas of doctrine, I found that it was right concerning the above three points about Christmas. On the other hand, this does not mean that its vehement stand against Christmas was necessarily the right approach.

It is true that Jesus was not born on December 25. It is not known for sure when Jesus was born, but scholars agree that it was not December 25, which was a day celebrated by non-Christians. Many who have studied into this subject believe that the most likely time of year for Jesus' birth was the autumn.

It is true that the Bible does not say to celebrate Jesus' birth. In fact, the New Testament does not order the celebrating of any day. Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 4:9-11 call the keeping of days "shadows" and "weak and beggarly elements" that we are not to return to as a part of our worship or approach to God or as a religious work. Because of these Scriptures, I do not believe Christmas should

ever be kept for religious reasons. There is no "putting Christ back into Christmas." He never was there.

Some might cite Romans 14 to justify keeping Christmas to the Lord. In verses 5-6a of this chapter, Paul writes, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. 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." But one must ask the question of whether a day that is celebrated with traditions that have their origins in paganism and Roman Catholicism can validly be kept to the Lord. I believe that it cannot.

The traditions and celebrations we associate with Christmas do have their origins in non-Christian religions. Christmas celebrations are not Christian or biblical in origin. They found their way into the church by order of the bishops of Rome. The word Christmas refers to the mass of Christ. The celebration of the mass directly violates the Bible, which says that Jesus offered Himself once for the sins of His people (see, for example, Hebrews 9:28 and 10:12). As an added point, I find disturbing the fact that some Reformed churches not only allow the celebrating of Christmas, but also order it. In Article 67, their Church Order (drawn up in the National Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619) states that "the churches shall observe...Christmas." Such church-ordered observing of days is far too close to Roman Catholicism for comfort.

Of course, the Worldwide Church of God was not the only church to have taught against the keeping of Christmas. Many other churches also taught this, and some still do. The Puritans believed that celebrating Christmas was sinful, and keeping Christmas was at one time against the law in New England. The Presbyterian Church also at one time believed that Christians should not keep Christmas. Today, some Presbyterian and Baptist churches, as well as some other churches, still do not keep Christmas.

Yet, we must consider our effect upon others. Some practices can separate us from relatives and even other brethren. Because Christmas is so commonly celebrated today, and often without any religious significance, to refuse to have anything to do with it can separate us from loved ones. Yes, there may be times when we must stand out from others over important matters, but is Christmas—when it is stripped of religious significance and reduced to merely eating a

meal with friends and relatives and perhaps giving a few gifts and cards—an important matter?

When we were in the Worldwide Church of God, my wife and I would have nothing to do with celebrating Christmas. Perhaps more than anything else, this caused bad feelings with our relatives, who took this as a rejection of them and their family gatherings on Christmas. When we left the Worldwide Church of God, we began again to keep Christmas with our extended families. This was done only for their sakes. Personally, because we know that December 25 is not Jesus' birthday, that God does not tell us to celebrate Jesus' birthday, and because Christmas traditions are not Christian anyway, we see no point in celebrating the day. Christmas does not mean anything special to us. We rejoice in the coming of our Savior every day.

Since leaving the Worldwide Church of God, we find that we are continually evaluating and adjusting our approach to Christmas. Our goals are 1) to do nothing that blasphemes God or dishonors Him, 2) to do nothing that offends anyone away from Christ, 3) to not set a poor example by unnecessarily straining relations with relatives and friends over noncritical issues. To this end, we give a few gifts, especially to children. The adults in our extended family put their names into a hat. Each one draws out a name and then gives a gift to that one person. We also attend a family Christmas dinner. We do not put up a tree or any other decorations.

So, these are my thoughts on Christmas. Obviously, everyone must come to his or her own conclusion on this surprisingly complex topic that can easily separate people.

—Peter Ditzel