

Q. Don't you think that your article, "Do you think Bible-believing Christians should keep Christmas?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/christmasqa.htm>) is double-talk? I think that attending a Christmas dinner or having anything else to do with Christmas is observing the day and is an unacceptable compromise with pagan practices.

A. I want to point out that I was not promoting the observance of Christmas in any religious way. Under the New Covenant, there are no days, whether commanded under the Old Covenant or practiced by pagans, that Christians must keep. Day keeping is one of the "weak and beggarly elements" and "rudiments of the world" (Galatians 4 and Colossians 2). Paul clearly taught against such observations. But he also said that even an idol is nothing, his point being that he knew he could even eat meat that had been offered to an idol (see 1 Corinthians 8). In other words, it's not the thing but what is in our mind. Yet he would not do it if it offended his brother.

Applying this principle to Christmas, it works out, in my opinion, more often that we offend if we don't than if we do. That is, I would offend more people if I did not keep the day. None of the people with whom I eat a meal on Christmas day are thinking of that meal as a religious observance. They are merely thinking of it as a family get-together. And I think most people today see it that way. Now, if they asked me to go to church with them to celebrate a mass or have a Christmas candlelight service, I would refuse. But to refuse a meal with them at a time when all the rest of the family is gathered together would only make me seem cold, unloving, and standoffish. This seems counterproductive to being a light for Christ. Paul said, "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain

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them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you" (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

In Acts 17, Paul speaks to the Athenians at the Areopagus. The King James Version mistranslates verse 22 as sounding like an insult ("too superstitious"), but notice verses 22-23 in the *English Majority Text Version*: "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men, Athenians, according to all things I perceive you as being very religious; for as I passed by and considered the objects of your worship, I found also an altar on which it had been inscribed: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, Him whom being ignorant of you worship, Him I announce to you." Paul called the Athenians "very religious" or, translating very literally, "ones reverent of gods." That was not an insult to the Athenians. Why did Paul begin his speech like this instead of just saying, "You stupid pagans, you're all wrong worshipping these idols"? Because he was following the principle I quoted above. He tried to get the Gospel across to them by saying what positive thing he could find (you are very religious) and using what common ground he could find (you have this altar to an unknown god). If he had simply verbally slapped them in the face, they wouldn't have listened.

Should we really be so concerned about offending people? Notice Matthew 17:24-27: "And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee."

Isn't it odd that Jesus, who seemed not to care one bit about offending the religious leaders on other occasions, performed this miracle so as to not offend them over this matter? I think the difference is that this would have been an unnecessary offense. When it came to pointing out their hypocrisy, He openly and directly offended them. But He didn't consider this matter important—He didn't want to make a point of it. So, He performed a miracle so as not to offend them. This is the way I see eating a meal with family at Christmas.

The power of a pagan practice is not in the practice itself. It is what is in our minds. The wrong in actual pagan practices is that they divert us from the light of the Gospel and keep us in darkness. But all of us commonly do things that have pagan origins without actually practicing paganism. For example, you will not find wedding ceremonies in Scripture. They have pagan origins. So do wedding rings and honeymoons. Our days of the week have pagan origins. Jesus said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" (John 11:9). But the idea of dividing the day into twelve hours comes from ancient Babylon. There are many more things that we do that have pagan origins. But we do these things with a clear conscience because everyone understands that we are not practicing paganism when we do them.

Ask any Egyptologist why corpses were embalmed, and he will tell you that it was done to prepare the dead for the afterlife. Certainly, we would call this pagan. But in Genesis 50:2-3, we read, "And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days." We can only guess what Joseph was thinking, but perhaps he didn't want to offend the Egyptians. At any rate, God did not condemn what he did.

I am in no way saying that we should accept paganism in place of the true worship of God, or put up with someone feeding us lies instead of the true Gospel. God tells His people to come out of Babylon (Revelation 18). But this does not mean that once we are out and no longer deceived that we should turn our backs on those still in it because of their "nasty pagan practices" or slap them with condemnation. We must remember that, but for the grace of God, we would still be there with them. Jesus set us an example. He ate with sinners. He didn't go to the taverns and brothels with them, but He ate with them. I think we can do the same. Furthermore, and very importantly, many true Christians fully keep Christmas sincerely believing that they should, or at least knowing that they have the freedom to do so. And the Bible clearly tells us not to judge them (see Romans 14:4-5).

I respect your right to your position, but I hope you can see what I am trying to say, and that I am not, as you accused, speaking double-talk.

Peter Ditzel

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