

Is Christmas a New Testament Holy Day? #1

Matthew 28:18-20

December 8, 2024

Greg L. Price

Is Christmas a New Testament Holy Day? By that I mean did Jesus appoint it to be a holy day to be kept each year or did the apostles of Christ set it apart as a holy day that they themselves kept? If not (which I believe is the case), why not? Are not these appropriate questions to ask, especially for those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ? Over the next few Lord's Days we will be addressing these and other questions related to the celebration of Christmas.

Since Jesus Christ is no longer living bodily upon the earth, we cannot pick up the phone or drop by His house to ask Him these questions. How then will we get clear answers to these questions? We will have to go to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. For the Bible is the very Word of Christ. The Bible reveals the mind of Christ. The Bible is not a collection of fables or children's stories written by well-intentioned men, but rather it is God's inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible does not need to be altered to conform to man's tastes, desires, or preferences in the 21st century. For truth is always truth and never changes from age to age. Man's perception of what is true may change, but God's truth never changes for God Himself is immutable—He cannot change (Hebrews 13:8).

Thus, the only way we can find out what Jesus thinks about Christmas is to search it out in His Holy Word which is what we shall do over the next few weeks. As we consider the question before us, we must put aside our own preferences and our past memories and experiences that we associate with Christmas. For it is not our thoughts, but God's thoughts that we seek to know in these matters related to Christmas.

From our text in Matthew 28:18-20 we would seek to answer the three following questions: (1) Who is the Speaker? (2) What is the Message? (3) How Does Christ's Command Relate to Christmas?

I. Who is the Speaker?

A. Clearly, Jesus Christ, is the speaker (Matthew 28:18). This appearance of Jesus to His disciples is after His crucifixion, burial, and glorious resurrection from the dead. Jesus left us an undeniable proof that the sins of those who trust Him will certainly all be forgiven—He left us an empty grave. He miraculously rose again the third day to demonstrate His absolute power over sin/death, and in so doing He gave us a preview of the certain resurrection of us all who come to Him in faith, acknowledging our sin and our desperate need of His free and undeserved mercy. He's the first fruits—we're the harvest to follow.

B. The resurrected Christ comes to His disciples not as a frail, impotent man, but comes declaring, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus has the power and authority to reveal His will to us His people as our Prophet. Jesus has the power and authority to forgive all sinners who come to Him in faith as our Priest. Jesus has the power and authority to rule from heaven over all the earth and to judge all His enemies as our King.

C. Here is a Speaker who cannot be casually ignored or tuned out without grave and serious consequences. To not heed this Speaker is to love death and judgment, rather than forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

II. What is the Message?

A. The message (in Matthew 28:19-20) is one in which Jesus promises to be with His faithful ministers in all His power and authority as they go forth making disciples of all nations, baptizing those nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and as they go forth teaching those nations only what Christ Himself has commanded them to teach (note that Christ does not say "teaching them to observe all things that please men" or "teaching them to observe all things that will fill the Church" or even "teaching them to observe all things that are believed with much sincerity", but rather "teaching them to observe ALL

THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU”).

B. Faithful ministers of Christ are not given the freedom to invent new doctrines that are not revealed by Him in Scripture, nor to add to or subtract from biblical ordinances in worship or holy days so as to please the contemporary tastes of modern man. Nor are ministers given the liberty to make the Church more acceptable to people by governing it according to popular opinion polls rather than according to the mind of Christ as revealed in His Word.

C. Simply stated, in matters related to the doctrine we are to teach and to the worship we are to offer unto God, Jesus desires no creative thinking nor innovative spirit on our parts, but rather desires an obedient heart and a submissive will to what He has authorized in His Word (“To obey is better than sacrifice” 1 Samuel 15:22).

D. The principle given here by Jesus to His faithful ministers may be summarized in this way: **ONLY WHAT IS COMMANDED AND AUTHORIZED BY CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE IS TO BE TAUGHT FOR DOCTRINE AND IS TO BE PRACTICED IN WORSHIP.** For if Jesus declares that His faithful ministers are only to teach what He has commanded, then whatever He has not commanded in His Word is strictly forbidden to be taught as doctrine or is to be practiced as worship.

E. Thus, there are two opposing principles that churches and professing Christians follow (they will follow one or the other): (1) What is not authorized or commanded by Jesus in Scripture in doctrine and in worship is forbidden; (2) What is not expressly forbidden by Jesus in Scripture in doctrine and worship is permitted. The first position is that which Jesus taught and is the position that was embraced by the Protestant Reformation (and does not allow the innovations of men); whereas the second position was embraced by the Church of Rome (and sadly most churches today).

F. For example, Rome has argued, “Where does Christ in Scripture expressly forbid crossing oneself, or using a rosary, or incense, or holy water, or many holy days (like Christmas), etc.?” And you know, Scripture cannot be specifically cited to forbid these many additions to the worship of God. But does the omission of a specific text forbidding each and every possible addition to doctrine, worship, and holy days imply that Rome (or any other church) has the right to assume that Christ is pleased with it?

1. I submit that no church or person has such a right granted to them by Christ. For doctrine, acts of worship, or celebration of holy days are Christ’s right alone to ordain. And if He has not ordained a particular day of religious celebration in His Word, it is because He did not desire it nor does He approve of it.

2. For neither worship nor any holy day is approved by Christ on the grounds of our mere sincerity; for many cults/false religions are very sincere in their worship and religious celebration, but their mere sincerity does not mean that it pleases the Lord Jesus (Proverbs 14:12).

G. In order to confirm that Christ alone (who possesses all power and authority in heaven and in earth) has the right to authorize His own doctrine/worship (including His own holy days of religious celebration), I offer the following two biblical texts for your consideration (one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament):

1. **Deuteronomy 12:32.**

a. The entire chapter of Deuteronomy 12 addresses various issues related to worship and religious celebrations that God reminded His people of before entering the Promise Land. The explicit command of the Lord is that His people are not to add to nor take away from His commands in their worship or religious celebrations. In fact, God gives an explicit prohibition against worship or religious celebrations that only have the mere will of man to authorize them (as does Christmas): Deuteronomy 12:8 (not doing what is right in one’s own eyes); Deuteronomy 12:30 (not following the ways of other religions).

b. I submit that on the basis of God’s command, God’s people (whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament) may not worship Him (in acts, symbols of worship, or in holy days) that are authorized by man’s mere will (even if it is done with the best of intentions). To the contrary, worship

(including holy days) must have God's appointment. If neither Moses nor Aaron (nor any of the apostles) could innovate a new practice in worship or invent a new religious day of celebration apart from God's authoritative will, neither can we do so. For the Lord is the same God in both the Old and the New Testaments. As He ordained holy days in the Old Testament for His people, we must wait to receive the same command from God for holy days to be kept in the New Testament. The will of Christ must govern worship and religious celebrations, not the mere will of man.

2. **Mark 7:6-9.**

a. Herein the Lord rebukes the principle of worship upon which the Pharisees proceeded. Upon what principle did they institute their religious practices (as in sprinkling their hands, pots, cups, and beds so as to religiously purify them)? They introduced these religious practices related to God's worship on the basis of their own man-made traditions ("will worship" Colossians 2:23). The Pharisees did not bring this practice specifically into the temple/synagogue (just as many Christians will not bring Christmas into the place of worship, but practice it or tolerate its practice at home), but the Lord declares all worship and religious celebrations built upon the mere tradition of man (rather than built upon the commandment of God) to be worship offered to God "in vain" (i.e. to be useless and empty). Why? Because they have no scriptural authority from Christ to do what they do.

b. Now I ask you, which of the two principles of worship mentioned earlier was the Lord using and which of the two principles of worship were the Pharisees using? The Lord was clearly following the principle that what is not authorized or commanded by God in Scripture in matters related to religious worship is thereby forbidden; while the Pharisees were as clearly following the principle that what is not expressly forbidden by God in Scripture in matters related to religious worship or celebration is permitted (for God never expressly forbade the sprinkling of hands as a religious act—but it did not have God's command). Jesus confirmed the command given to Moses in Deuteronomy 12 that when it comes to doctrine and worship, we are not to add to or subtract from what God has authorized in His Word.

III. How Does Christ's Command Relate to Christmas?

A. First, I submit that Christmas as a religious holy day was never commanded or authorized by Christ in Scripture (like the holy days of the Old Testament).

1. Never do we hear of Jesus or the apostles celebrating Christmas. They did, indeed, celebrate the weekly Sabbath (which by Christ's institution was changed from a 7th day Sabbath to a 1st day Sabbath—the Lord's Day), and they did at times have times of fasting and thanksgiving (on special occasions of blessing and/or need), but there is absolute silence concerning Christmas (not silence about the fact of Christ's incarnation/birth etc., but the religious celebration of it).

2. In fact, there was no official sanction to celebrate Christmas by the Christian Church for the first 300 years after the death of Christ. This is a well-supported fact as evidenced by even secular writers (such as Jeffrey L. Sheler, "The Search for Christmas" in the *U.S. News*, no date given):

The earliest celebrations of the Nativity were surprisingly late. There is no record of official observance of Christ's birth until the fourth century, when Constantine, a Christian convert was emperor of Rome.... The first mention of a Nativity feast, scholars say, appears in the Philocalian calendar, a Roman document from A.D. 354, which lists December 25, as the day of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea.

3. Clearly, then, Christmas was not instituted, authorized, or commanded by Christ—or practiced by the apostles. There is no date given in Scripture to celebrate it as there is with every other divinely appointed holy day in the Old Testament. It is purely a man-made holy day. Did Christ order it? No! Then who are we to offer to Him what He has not ordered, or to act as though it were pleasing to Him?

B. Application

1. Christians are by definition followers of Christ. Yet if Jesus neither celebrated nor authorized the celebration of Christmas (and if the apostles of Christ did not do so either), then how can Christmas be a New Testament Holy Day? Dear ones, it cannot be. We will continue our discussion of Christmas next week.

2. It is not easy to say “No” to the celebration of Christmas when it completely pervades our culture/family and the churches all around us. I believe there is much ignorance among professing Christians (that is not to exalt myself as better than anyone else—I kept it for the first 40 years of my life). It is simply to say, that many (if not most professing Christians) have never heard a biblical case against the celebration of Christmas or have never questioned why there is no mention of the celebration of Christmas in the New Testament as a holy day to be kept or a date given for its celebration.

3. Is this making a big deal out of nothing? We celebrate the birthday of one another (or most do). So why not celebrate the birthday of Jesus? The difference is that our birthdays are not religious holy days of worship, whereas Christmas is a holy day.

4. God has given us a weekly celebration of Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven—the Lord’s Day. Every Lord’s Day (by God’s appointment) we worship and celebrate our glorious Savior. Is it not ironic how often the day appointed by the Lord (the Lord’s Day) is minimized, while a day not appointed by the Lord (Christmas) is exalted. That is what Jesus meant when He said that the traditions of men have replaced the commandment of God.

5. So, to answer the question asked at the outset of the sermon: No, Christmas is NOT a New Testament Holy Day. Only Jesus as King of His Church has the right to appoint holy days, and He has not appointed Christmas. Out of love and obedience to the Lordship of Jesus, we do not celebrate Christmas, but we do celebrate the Lord’s Day.

Copyright 2024 Greg L. Price.