

DOES GOD HATE CHRISTMAS?

Spend five minutes surfing the Internet for information about Christmas and you'll find websites calling for an end to its celebration. Some are posted by atheists, of course. But others, surprisingly, are posted by Christians - Christians who believe that Christmas observance is sinful.

At first glance, some of the arguments put forward by anti-Christmas Christians might sound plausible, especially if you've never thought about them before. But we believe that Christians ought to be free to experience the joy and inspiration of Christmas celebration without needless guilt or apprehension that they might be doing something God does not approve of. So let's look at four common arguments against Christmas and explain why each one does not stand up.

Argument 1: "We don't know the date of Christ's birth."

It is true that no one knows for certain on what day or even month of the year Jesus was born. However, we do not need to know the precise date of Jesus' birth to celebrate the fact of his birth. It's not impossible for people to celebrate a birth-day on a date other than a person's actual birthday when it is more convenient to do so. For example, the Queen of England celebrates her birthday on June 17, but her actual birthday is April 21. It is not crucial or necessary for us to know when Jesus was born in order to celebrate his birth.

Argument 2: "Christmas is commercialized and materialistic."

Without doubt the Christmas holiday season has become a commercial rat race for many people. However, the fact that some people engage in ungodly revelry on Christmas does not mean that right and meaningful celebration of Jesus' birth is wrong. If negative behavior on the part of some meant that all Christmas celebration should be discarded, it would also follow that marriage, for example, would have to be discarded, because there are bad marriages in which physical and mental abuse takes place. We are not obligated to discard a celebration, practice or institution just because some people misuse or distort them.

Argument 3: "Most Christmas traditions originate in paganism."

There is no denying that some of the traditional practices and elements that are part of our Christmas celebration are similar to those found in ancient pagan religious ceremonies. It does not follow, however, that Christians are practicing paganism when they use similar practices or elements in worshipping Jesus.

There are basic elements of celebration common to all peoples of all religious faiths and ethnic back-grounds, whether they are parts of a wedding, an anniversary, a homecoming, a graduation or a memorial. Characteristics of most celebrations might include a special meal, giving of gifts, music and singing, deco-rations and sending greeting cards or notes. These are not inherently pagan activities; they are simply human activities and common patterns for celebration, even in the worship patterns God gave the ancient Israelites.

Worship in ancient Israel, for example, included the lighting of candles and the burning of incense (Exodus 30:1-9), sumptuous feasting (Deuteronomy 14:25), and offerings of thanksgiving for abundant harvests. In setting up Israel's worship system, God gave them several institutions, elements and practices among other things, the priesthood, the harvest festivals, sacred music in

worship, animal sacrifices, circumcision, tithing, and purification rites. God transformed these customs and elements used in pagan religions into a form of worship devoted to him. Even trees had their place in the celebrations that God gave to Israel. In the tabernacle, lamp stands were made of gold engraved with branches and foliage (Exodus 25:31-36). The Israelites used leafy branches in their religious processions and made temporary shelters of them during the festival of tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40-42). Several times in Scripture, God compares his goodness to the qualities of a tree. In Hosea 14, God compares himself to a cedar tree in verse 5, to an olive tree in verse 6, and to a pine tree in verse 8.

Christians who keep Christmas are not pagans. They do not worship trees or anything in nature as the pagans did, nor do they regard false gods. They honor God alone, who sent his Son to save the world.

Argument 4: “Jeremiah 10:2-4 condemns the use of Christmas trees.”

The King James Version of this passage reads: “Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen.... For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.” On the surface it might seem that Jeremiah is describing Christmas trees. But that is to ignore the context. Verses 2 through 4 of Jeremiah 10 are part of a larger context, which includes verses 1 through 16. Jeremiah is not talking about Christmas trees. He is condemning idolatry. The trees in Jeremiah 10 are cut down so that they can be carved into idols and decorated with gold and silver to worship heathen gods. Where the King James reads “one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe” (verse 3), the New International Version says “they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel.” The chisel is not a woodsman’s tool, but that of a wood carver. Most modern English translations agree with the NIV.

Jeremiah 10 condemns idols, not Christmas trees. And no Christian worships a Christmas tree.

Conclusion

Christians must decide for themselves about whether and how to celebrate Christmas. At the same time, it is important that we understand that we do have freedom in Christ to celebrate and worship him in joy during Christmas if we choose to do so. And one thing is certain: whether or not we choose to celebrate Jesus at Christmas time, every believer knows that there is nothing more worthy of celebration than the coming of our Savior into the world!

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Faulty Logic

Dichotomous reasoning. This is also known as polarized, all-or-nothing or two-dimensional thinking. In other words, something must be black or white, and there are no shades of gray.

Example: God hates the worship of idols. Since pagans used trees to carve idols, God must hate the use of trees in worship celebration to him. Therefore, use of Christmas trees is sinful.

Overgeneralization. Generalization, that is, the ability to generalize from a set of facts, is necessary in drawing right conclusions from the information at hand.

Overgeneralization occurs when a wrong general conclusion is drawn from a single incident or a small sampling—or even when a misguided conclusion is derived from a large body of facts.

Example: Some people get drunk at Christmas dinners and parties; therefore Christmas celebration is sinful.

Selective abstraction. This error results from focusing attention on one detail without regard to the rest of the facts and principles that should inform a conclusion.

Example: Pagans decorated trees in their worship of false gods; therefore, decorating a Christmas tree is sinful.

Discounting the positive illustration. This is also known as minimization or neglecting proof that contradicts our assumption. It occurs when people do not accept clear evidence because it does not fit their interpretation of the facts.

Example: The Gospel writer Luke records that angels praised God at the birth of Christ, which would indicate that God is pleased with praise and celebration related to Christ's birth, such as singing Christmas carols. However, a people with an anti-Christmas bias might neglect such information because it contradicts their position. Such information is sometimes called "invisible information." It is invisible because preconceived conclusions tend to prevent a person from seeing facts and evidence that is contrary to what they already believe.

Arbitrary inference or "jumping to conclusions": This occurs when someone interprets the meaning of an event based on a misinterpreting of evidence or facts at hand.

Example: Since God condemns pagans for worshipping idols, Christians should not use in their worship of Christ any element that pagans used in their worship of idols.