

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #48

If Santa Never Comes

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It's that time of the year again. Footballs and snowflakes are in the air. Appearing on television programs and commercials is a roly-poly man with a long white beard in a red suit with a big black belt. I am sure you need no more clues to guess what holiday is on the horizon. Yes, it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas. But, can you imagine what December would be like if Santa never comes?

Most of us who keep the Feasts of the LORD holy can tell you what it is like NOT celebrating Christmas. For us, Santa Claus never comes! December 25 is just another day on the Gregorian calendar to us. We are not waiting for Santa to come down our chimney. We are not sending out greeting cards. We are not out shopping for presents. Our homes are not decorated with lights. There is no Christmas tree in our family room. There is no Christmas wreath on our front door. What I do to remember the coming of the Savior is obviously quite different than what most Christians do.

If you have celebrated Christmas in America for almost fifty years, and then decide to stop, I can assure you that it is a dramatic change in lifestyle. It not only affects you and your life personally, it affects how your family and friends perceive you.

Friends and neighbors, not seeing any house decorations, not receiving any Christmas greeting cards, not seeing you attend their holiday parties, may put you into the category of a "scrooge." Of course, most people are familiar with Charles Dickens's story *A Christmas Carol*. In it, old Ebenezer Scrooge is famous for his verbal response to the joyful celebration of Christmas by others: "Bah, humbug!"

Scrooge is presented as a miser. He is perceived as a stingy, anti-social old man. That is, until he is visited by spirits on Christmas eve. They frightfully turn him into a gentle and kindly man who then decides to rejoice in the holiday with them.

It is noteworthy that this "scrooge" complex can appear in people who are not "dyed-in-the-wool" Christians. They may not attend any Christmas religious service at a Church. They may not have read a Bible in years, or ever. But, they thoroughly enjoy this national holiday and know how to throw a fabulous party for family and friends. They still may have a fancy "Christmas" tree in their living room. They may have a spectacular display of outdoor lights strung around their house, shrubs and trees. They may have a huge lighted snowman or a Santa Claus on their front lawn. Hey, it's Christmas time, isn't it?

While being considered a "scrooge" by such holiday revelers is annoying, it is the reaction of serious Christians that is more troubling. "How can you be a Christian and not celebrate the birth of Christ?", your Church friends say. The stigma of not being one

of the Lord's disciples because you decline to participate in the celebration of this official holiday truly stings.

The worst disappointment is in family members who treat your decision to no longer join in their holiday festivities as a personal repudiation of them. This is the most hurtful aspect on not being a Christmas keeper. Some may treat you as if you have leprosy. For not joining their festivities, they may turn the tables and refuse to invite you to other family celebrations on other national holidays during the year. While such permanent animosity and isolation is rare, it certainly occurs.

This is sad. It is unfortunate. With knowledge and understanding between true Christian brethren about how one perceives the Christmas holiday, love should prevail along with patience, forgiveness and mercy toward one another; shouldn't it?

So, as a Sabbath and Holy Day of the LORD keeper, I hope you will listen and try to understand how I now perceive the celebration of Christmas each December 25. It is my prayer today that even if you decide to perceive it differently, and continue your celebration activities, we can remain loving brethren in Christ.

My decision of whether I should celebrate Christmas changed as I studied three aspects of it: 1) what the Bible revealed about Christmas, 2) what the modern celebration of Christmas entails in society and within the Church and 3) what net impact it has in bringing glory to God and saving faith to children and unconverted people.

The Bible certainly provides an important account of the birth of Christ. Many aspects of this birth were prophecies from Old Testament prophets about the coming Messiah to be sent by God to save His chosen people. To not know of these things would be counter-productive to the belief that Jesus was that Messiah and the only begotten Son of God.

Acknowledging the birth of the Savior, and even rejoicing in it, is something that I would highly favor and am happy to do with Christian brethren both in worship and in fellowship.

Where the rub comes in for me is in the celebration of His birth on December 25 as a religious holy day that is also a national holiday. I am against both practices. I believe my resistance is both logical and, more importantly, Biblical. So, I am going to share with you my perception of why I decided to STOP celebrating Christmas.

Let's start not with what I have to say about Christmas, but what the word of God says, or does not say, about it. There is no command anywhere in the Bible for the people of God to celebrate the birth of the Christ. In fact, try to find the concept of celebrating anyone's birthday in the Bible. Let me know where you find it.

Let me be clear, I trust in, and try to obey the word of God; not the traditions of men in many aspects of being a Christian. Just because the majority are willing to work on the Sabbath, I still don't work; PERIOD! Just because the law of the land permits abortions for convenience, I would not approve of that or do it in any case that I can envision.

In other words, I would give precedent to the written word of God in the Old Testament, and the examples of Jesus as the living word of God along with the writings of His apostles and disciples in the New Testament. I elevate them over the beliefs, teachings and practices of the general population or even of various Church denomination leaders.

Not one verse of the New Testament suggests that Jesus wanted, much less commanded, His disciples to celebrate His birth, much less His birthday. Not one verse in scripture shows that the apostles celebrated His birth after His death. The idea that we, as His disciples, should celebrate His birthday is found nowhere in the Bible. Have you ever wondered why this is? Have you ever investigated how or why this man-made celebration came into being?

As you study such things to obtain the truth about Christmas and God, you will find the annual celebration of the birth of Jesus is a teaching and tradition begun by the Church of Rome hundreds of years after the resurrection of the Messiah. That truth may not bother you in the least. I understand that. But, can you understand that it does bother me?

It was Jesus, in John 17: 17, who said to His disciples concerning His Father, “Your word is truth.” I believe Jesus, and I follow Him by trusting and obeying His Father’s revealed truth like He did perfectly. Should we not as Christians follow the commands and teachings of the Father and the Son, through the prophets and apostles? Or, is it fine with God to follow new or contrary commands and traditions of religious men with good sounding intentions. The Bible is clear that false teachers would come in among the disciples.

Jesus was clear that not everyone who called to Him “Lord, Lord” would enter the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of the Father would enter it. Is it the will of the Father to celebrate the birthday of His Son? Did the Father neglect to give us the day of His son’s birth and yet want us to celebrate it? Did Jesus miss His Father’s will? Did the Apostles and disciples miss it too? I think these are fair and reasonable questions.

My conscience is troubled over Christmas because I do not want to add to scripture. I do not want to create or sanctify or celebrate “holy” days which neither God nor Jesus expressly willed as being holy. Can anybody but God declare something as holy? I find it troubling to be rejoicing before the Lord and our God in ways that, although they may seem right and pleasurable to me, are not in conformance with what God asks His people to do in praise and worship before Him.

I have been scoffed at many times by Christians who say, “I can’t see anything wrong with celebrating Christmas, Kenny. It’s my favorite religious holiday of the year. It brings together peace and joy among Christians like no other time of the year. This is the time we focus on the birth and coming of our Savior as God’s ‘gift to the world.’ Like the angels and shepherds and wise men, I intend to rejoice in the good tidings of His birth.”

Perhaps you who are listening today feel this very same way? Perhaps you have similar convictions? Perhaps you would respond to me with frustration or even anger for essentially raining on your Christmas parade and celebration. But, I would urge you to give ear to a different perception. Do not draw conclusions based on tradition or misquote the scriptures to justify your will in what you do on December 25. Just study, pray and let the Holy Spirit guide your beliefs and practices. I only ask that you let me do the same in peace.

Perhaps logically, you could well argue that you can't make a teaching false from silence. In other words, even though the Bible does not embrace a celebration of Christmas, you can't say that holding such a celebration is wrong, or even sinful. This is logical and true.

But, what is NOT true is that the Bible is silent on how and when to worship God in ways that please Him. Does He give His people Holy Days or not? When men made up times, days and ways of worship not given by God, and deviated in the slightest from what God commanded, God was not pleased with their well-intended worship. God grew angry and in His just wrath, punished the offenders cutting them off from His people, or killing them.

In the next program, we will look at the scriptures that trouble my heart in deciding to observe Christmas as a holy day. We will discuss the myths of Christmas. You don't want to miss this and you can then weigh the evidence for yourself as I had to also do.

For now, I want to continue and explain my opposition to the celebration of Christmas on December 25 as a national holiday in America. When I observe the increasing fervor of getting God out of the government, or the public square, I believe the trend is clear and the end will be the complete secularization of government in separating Church and State.

America is NOT Israel. America is NOT the Roman empire. The founders may have believed in God, as do many of our politicians of today, but it seems clear that to a man, our founders did not want there to be a State Church in America with its own holy days.

America was to be a nation where you as an individual, or a non-governmental group, could chose to worship God in any way you saw fit. But, government was not to promote any specific belief in God or institute any specific religion or religious practice in America.

So, can you explain to me why our Congress would declare December 25 to be an official, government-sanctioned, American holiday? Is there any doubt that this day referenced the birth of Jesus, the head of the Christian church? The putting of "Christ in Christmas" or the Church's claim that "Jesus is the reason for the season" does not seem constitutional. The more you want December 25 to be about the birth of Jesus, the more you are asking the government to sanction that specific religion. Can you comprehend why the opposition to Christmas is growing year after year?

Every day now in the news, we have some law suit being filed concerning the public use of the word “God.” It has been added to our coins and our citizenship pledges. Even more hated is the public use of the word Jesus, or Christ, or Savior, or Christian or Christmas. It is sad. But it seems that the more Churches struggle to have their sincerely held beliefs and traditions concerning Christmas accepted by the society and nation, the more the government and non-Christian groups resist and fight them in the courts. And the tide in the local, state and federal courts, and even in the court of public opinion, seems to be going against Christmas as a national, government sanctioned holiday.

I predict that Christmas, as a national holiday, will eventually be challenged and overridden in our courts. I don’t know when or exactly how this will happen. It is not very important to me since I don’t observe the holiday anyway. But, I think that day will surely coming, unless the Lord decides to return before then. If He does return, I believe He would stop the celebration of Christmas immediately. Why? Consider what He said to the rich young ruler who addressed Him as being “good” when asking about what he must do to gain eternal life. We find the account in several books including in Mark 10: 17-18:

Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is God.”

Jesus is reprimanding this rich young ruler who runs to him during His remarkable but brief public ministry and kneels before Him and calls Him a “Good” Teacher. Jesus, as the Son of Man, and anointed by God to display miracles during His ministry by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, did not want to be honored, revered or worshipped as a man or deity; something which ONLY the sovereign God deserved.

Now, if Jesus wanted to deflect such adoration of Himself as He personally served the people of God as a baptized man and minister of the good news, even to death on the tree for them, is it any surprise that Jesus would find such adoration of Himself as a baby, or as a rather helpless child, to be inappropriate? Have you ever wondered why there is so little account of Jesus being special as a boy or young man? Yet, men have decided it is “good” to worship Jesus as a baby laying in a manger. Men’s ways indeed are not God’s ways. Scripture declares it. History demonstrates over and over the foolishness of religious men, whether in Israel or in the church of God.

When you go further in this teaching of Jesus, He gives the rich young ruler the answer from God, our Father, that allows one to inherit eternal life: “You know the commandments”...and uses five of the last six of the Ten Commandments as examples. I think we can all agree that holding a birthday party for Jesus was NEVER commanded nor practiced by His disciples. Despite this, do you have any doubt that His disciples will inherit eternal life? Were they able to grow the church of God without a Christmas party?

Could that ruler ensure his eternal life by giving gifts to Jesus as birthday presents? Of course not! Would God or Jesus applaud the rich ruler for giving gifts to His apostles, or exchanging gifts with them, in honor and appreciation of the birth of Jesus? Isn't it even more apparent that the answer is "probably not." This is not what Jesus wanted His disciples to do for Him to bring glory to God His Father. If it was, surely He would have told them and us. Are you certain that Jesus and His Father look down from heaven with joy to see how this celebration is carried out today before Them?

It seems likely that this was a young and wealthy ruler in the synagogue, and not in the government of Herod or Rome. Today we have some wealthy religious leaders of Christian Churches, who are in need of nothing, urging the disciples of Christ to exchange presents among themselves, even with those who are in need of nothing. Can you even count how many times Christmas shoppers are frustrated searching for a gift for the man or woman who has everything and needs nothing? Doesn't this strike you as absurd? Do you think that either Jesus or God is honored by such religious customs and traditions?

This is not a facetious question my friend. I am completely serious about following Christ not in a way that seems right and good to me or to the heads of department stores, but in a way that He reveals should be my practice. I hope you will think about it and consider what Jesus told the ruler who had all he needed in this life to do to enter the kingdom of God and have treasure in heaven.

He was to keep the commandments of God, which I suggest includes ALL Ten Commandments, not just the last five Jesus mentioned dealing with human relationships. Remember that according to Jesus, the first and greatest commandment is about our relationship with God. It includes keeping the seventh-day Sabbath commandment of the LORD.

There is no question about what day the Lord of the Sabbath had in mind for worship of the Father. It was NOT on Sunday. It was NOT on December 25. Should we be praising the Father for giving us His Son on a date He has not ordained or even identified?

Now think further. The second great commandment was, of course, like the first and required love for our fellow man just like our love for God was of first importance. What did Jesus tell this rich ruler he should do after he claimed to have kept the commandments from his youth? Jesus tested him by telling him what he still lacked. That was to give his material wealth to the poor (all of it, not a few gifts) and come and follow the Lord of the Sabbath. What praise would the ruler get from Jesus for giving some nice presents to his well-healed family and friends? The rich man went away sadly, for his wealth was more dear to him than following the Lord.

If, despite the admonishments of scripture, there are individuals or families, or Churches or religious organizations who want to privately celebrate Christmas, they certainly should have that right to do so without any interference from the government. If they encourage the giving away of their excess wealth to the poor, at Christmas, I would

certainly not speak against it. Of course, they could, and probably should, do that throughout the year.

If anyone wants to keep a private holiday on December 25, couldn't they use a vacation day for that purpose without annoying anyone? Should non-Christians, or those who do not choose to celebrate a national work holiday on December 25, be required to observe this thinly veiled Christian holiday? I don't think so

Just this morning, I listened on the radio to a national Christian leader whining about his experience when doing his Christmas shopping last year. Upon making some gift purchases for family and friends at a well-known, high-end department store, the clerk wished him a "Happy Holidays!" He said something like "Wouldn't it be better to wish me a Merry Christmas?" She responded that they were not permitted by the store to wish people a Merry Christmas; but instead a more generic Happy Holidays.

The incident irked this Christian leader. He does not plan to shop at that store any more. I guess it is called getting revenge. I am quite sure that Jesus would not have reacted this way. How about you?

It was Jesus who advised His disciples to render to Caesar what was Caesars and to God what was God's. If a public government office or a public company store wants to be considerate of all its customers, it has every valid reason to not cater to those who want to insist on hearing their favorite form of religious salutation. If a man wants to receive or give a Christmas greeting as a form of well-wishing, wouldn't it be better for him to do that with church friends or family who clearly share his religious beliefs? Why expect this at a department store or the post office? Why get huffy if others don't share your desire?

What's worse is that this Christian family-focused leader has noticed a rapidly growing tendency among public companies to refuse to use the term "Christmas" in their advertising literature or in communications with their employees. If the company has a special lunch for employees, or a dinner-party and dance for them and their spouses, they may call them Holiday lunches or parties. In the eyes of this famous Christian leader, they are taking Christ out of Christmas; and he doesn't like it!

He now plans to mount an assault through his giant radio program network against businesses who are happy to sell, and profit from, serving the people buying Christmas presents but who refuse to wish its patrons or employees a Merry Christmas. I guess he will recommend that true Christians need to stand up in this "Christian nation" and boycott such companies by spending their Christmas money elsewhere. After all, isn't this a Christian country? No, sir, it is not now; and never was. Let's not rewrite history. It is a country where Christians can practice their religion. Read the Constitution for yourself. You will not find the word "God" in it, and certainly not Jesus, the Christ or Savior.

But, don't the vast majority of American citizens believe in God? Yes they do, but that

does not mean they are devoted Christians who want to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Aren't Christians still the majority of the citizens? Probably, but should the public policy of the United States be to give priority to the religious beliefs of the majority?

I wonder which religious leader insisting on a national "Merry Christmas" anthem would be merry if the majority of citizens decided that Churches must pay taxes on their property and offerings; or that paid ministers be treated like any other licensed professional?

I am sorry, but I see little Christ-like behavior in this kind of coercive approach to getting the world to behave as Christians desire in the celebration of Christmas. Christians are to come out of the world and not lord it over others as the unsaved Gentile benefactors do. This is the word of God.

Something seems to be going awry with Christmas in America. Next Sabbath we will look at the many things that are clearly awry about Christmas even as celebrated in its Churches. Perhaps we have headed off the narrow path of the Lord of the Sabbath and have become lost in our traditions on the wide road of the world?