

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 24. Christmas and Easter - Christian or Pagan?

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following God's Word and not human traditions, highlighting the pagan origins of Christmas and Easter.

Scripture: Colossians 2:16

Topics: "Biblical Separation", "Pagan Traditions"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the battle between God's Word and the traditions of men, emphasizing the importance of examining everything by God's Word. He highlights the need for the church to separate sin and human traditions from the pure Word of God, just as Jesus did with the Pharisees. Poonen challenges the celebration of Christmas and Easter, revealing their pagan origins and the danger of following man-made traditions that lack biblical foundation.

Transcript

Men are likened to sheep. And sheep have a tendency to follow the crowd without questioning. Jesus however came and taught us to examine everything by God's word. The Pharisees exalted human traditions. Jesus exalted God's word. Man was to live by every word that proceeded from God's mouth (Matthew 4:4).

The battle that Jesus was constantly engaged in with the Pharisees was the age-long battle of God's Word versus the traditions of men. In the church, we are engaged in the same battle today. God's word is the only light that we have on earth. And when God created light initially, He immediately separated it from the darkness. The darkness is both sin as well as human traditions. We also are called to separate both these from the pure word of God so that there is no mixture in the church.

Christmas

Consider Christmas, which is celebrated by many as the birthday of Jesus Christ. Shopkeepers of all religions look forward to Christmas, for it is a time when they can make much profit. It is a commercial festival, not a spiritual one. Millions of rupees are spent on Christmas cards and gifts. Sales of alcoholic drinks go up at this time. And the traffic police around the world are kept on their toes, for there are never so many accidents on the roads as during the Christmas season. More people go to hell through road

accidents at this time, than any other time of the year.

Is this really then the birthday of the Son of God, or of another 'Jesus'?

Let us look at God's Word first of all. The Bible tells us that there were shepherds with their sheep out in the fields of Judea, on the night that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The shepherds in Palestine did not keep their flocks out in the open fields at night after October and until February - the weather being both rainy and cold. So the real Jesus must have been born sometime between March and September. December 25 then must be the birthday of another 'Jesus' that has been foisted on an unsuspecting Christendom by Satan!

Further, even if we did know the exact date of Jesus' birth, the question would still be whether God intended His church to celebrate it. Mary, the mother of Jesus, would certainly have known the exact date of birth of Jesus. And she was with the apostles for many years after the day of Pentecost. Yet there is no mention anywhere of Jesus' date of birth. What does this show? Just this - that God deliberately hid the date of Jesus' birth, because He did not want the church to celebrate it.

In the Bible we read of earthly kings celebrating their birthdays publicly - Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20) and Herod (Mark 6:21). God never intended Jesus to be in that category.

An understanding of the difference between the old and the new covenants will also enable us to understand why God does not want His children to celebrate any special holy days now. Under the old covenant, Israel had been commanded to celebrate certain days as specially holy days. But that was only a shadow. Now that we have Christ, the will of God is that every day of our lives be equally holy. Even the weekly sabbath has been done away with under the new covenant. This is why no holy days are mentioned anywhere in the New Testament (Colossians 2:16, 17).

How then did Christmas and Easter make their entry into Christendom? The answer is: in the same way that infant baptism, priestcraft and a host of other human traditions have made their entry - by the subtle working of Satan.

When the emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion of Rome in the 4th century, multitudes became Christian 'in name', without any change of heart. But they did not want to give up their two great annual festivals - both connected with their worship of the sun. One was the birthday of the sun-god on December 25, when the sun which had gone down to the southern hemisphere began its return journey (the winter solstice). The other was the spring festival in March/April, when they celebrated the death of the winter and the birth of the warm summer that their sun-god had brought. They renamed their sun-god 'Jesus' and continued to celebrate their two great festivals, now as Christian festivals and called them Christmas and Easter.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (an authority in secular history) has the following to state about the origin of Christmas:

"December 25 was the Mithraic feast of the unconquered sun of Philocalus. Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedated the Christian period - a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices, hedged about with legend and tradition. The exact date and year of Christ's birth have never been satisfactorily settled, but when the fathers of the church in A.D. 440 decided upon a date to celebrate the event, they wisely (?) chose the day of the winter solstice which was firmly fixed in the

minds of the people and which was their most important festival. As Christianity spread among the people of pagan lands, many of the practices of the winter solstice were blended with those of Christianity" - (1953 edition, Vol. 5, Pages 642A, 643).

These pagan customs originated with the Babylonian religion begun by Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10). After he died, his wife Semiramis had an illegitimate child, which she claimed was Nimrod come back to life again. Thus began the worship of the mother and child, which the Roman Catholics took over centuries later and transferred to 'Mary and Jesus'.

The birthday of this child-god was celebrated by the ancient Babylonians on December 25. Semiramis was the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:19), worshipped centuries later in Ephesus as Diana or Artemis (Acts 19:28).

Semiramis claimed that a full grown evergreen tree grew overnight from a dead tree stump. This symbolised Nimrod's coming back to life, and bringing heaven's gifts to mankind. Thus began the practice of cutting down a fir tree and hanging gifts on it. That is the origin of today's Christmas tree!

Thus says the Lord, "Do not learn the way of the heathen. The customs of the people are futile. One cuts a tree from the forest with the axe. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails so that it will not topple!" (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

Easter

The word 'Easter' comes from one of the titles of the queen of heaven, 'Ishtar' or 'Astarte' (see 1 Kings 11:5) - one of the idols that Solomon worshipped. There were slightly different forms of that name in different countries.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states,

"The English word 'Easter' corresponding to the German 'Oster' reveals Christianity's indebtedness (!) to the Teutonic tribes of central Europe. Christianity, when it reached the Teutons, incorporated in its celebration of this great Christian feast day, many of the heathen rites and customs that accompanied their observance of the 'Spring' festival. That the 'festival' of the resurrection occurred in the spring that it celebrated the triumph of life over death, made it easy for the church to identify with this occasion, the most joyous festival of the Teutons, held in honour of the death of winter, the birth of a new year and the return of the sun. Eostre (or Ostera), the goddess of the spring, gave its name to the Christian holy day. The conception of the egg as a symbol of fertility and of renewed life goes back to the ancient Egyptians and Persians who had also the custom of colouring and eating eggs during the spring festival. This ancient idea, of the significance of egg as the symbol of life, readily became the idea of the egg as a symbol of resurrection. According to old superstition, the sun rising on Easter morning dances in the heavens; this belief has been traced to the old heathen festival of spring, when the spectators danced in honour of the sunThe Protestant churches also followed the custom of holding sunrise services on Easter morning" - (1959 edition, Vol. 7, pages 859, 860).

The Babylonians believed that a great egg fell from heaven into the River Euphrates and that Astarte came out of it. Thus began the distribution of eggs in connection with the worship of the sun in the spring festival. The 4th century Christians took this over, and even today Easter is celebrated with eggs, supposedly symbolising Christ's coming out of the grave as the chick comes out of the egg!!

Sacred bread cakes called 'bouns' were offered to the queen of heaven by the heathen, many centuries before Christ (see Jeremiah 7:18). These became the 'hot cross buns' of Good Friday, when Christians took over these pagan customs!

The death and resurrection of Christ are the central message of the gospel. The only way that Jesus intended us to commemorate this was through the 'breaking of bread' which we are to take part in together as a church. This was certainly not to be just once a year at Good Friday/Easter time, and certainly not with eggs and buns!

When we break bread, we testify not only of Christ's death, but also our death with Him. The emotionalism of Good Friday and sentimentality of Easter turns the attention of men away from the necessity of following Jesus, to empty ritualism.

God's Word or Man's Tradition?

Behind the celebration of Christmas and Easter lies the far more deadly principle of following the traditions of men even when they have no foundation in God's Word. So strong is this power of tradition that many believers who follow the Scriptures in other areas still find it difficult to give up celebrating Christmas and Easter.

It is amazing that many believers are not willing to accept what even secular writers (like the authors of Encyclopaedia Britannica) have understood clearly - that Christmas and Easter are basically pagan festivals. You can call an ass a lion, but it is still an ass. Changing the names has not made these festivals Christian! There is no difference between Christmas and Easter and Ganesh Puja and Dussera.

It becomes clear from what we have seen that what Christians are celebrating on Christmas day is the birthday of another 'Jesus' - Nimrod of Babylon. And at Easter time they are actually celebrating the resurrection of another 'Jesus' too - the sun-god that has brought summer to the northern hemisphere! Behind Nimrod and the sun-god stand Satan who actually receives that worship. The Israelites called their golden calf 'Jehovah', but it was Satan who received that worship (Exodus 32:4, 5). Let all those who celebrate Christmas and Easter remember that and beware!

As we said at the beginning, Jesus was engaged in a constant battle with the Pharisees over this very issue - man's traditions versus God's Word. He faced more opposition for opposing the empty traditions of 'the fathers' than for preaching against sin. We shall find our experience to be the same, if we are just as faithful as He was.

It is the calling of the church today to expose these empty Babylonian celebrations that Satan has promoted in Christendom and to refuse everything (however innocent looking) that has no foundation in God's Word.

Some may quote Romans 14:5, 6 about those who keep a day as unto the Lord. This is referring to the sabbath-day, which some converted Jews still did not have light on to give up. Paul exhorted those who had the light of the new covenant to bear with these weaker Jewish brethren. But this certainly cannot be applied to the celebration of Ganesh Puja or Christmas or Diwali or Easter by Christians today!

God's Word alone is our guide and not the example of even godly men in those areas where they do not follow the Word of God. "Let God be found true even though every man be found a liar" (Romans 3:4). "Check (their) words against the Word of God, says the Lord. If their messages (teachings) are different

from Mine, it is because they have no light" (Isaiah 8:20 - TLB). The Bereans searched the Scriptures to check up even on Paul's teaching, and the Holy Spirit commends them for it (Acts 17:11). That is a good example for all of us to follow.

David was a man after God's own heart. Yet, for forty years, he permitted the Israelites to worship Moses' bronze serpent without realising that this was an abomination to God. He did not have light even on such obvious idolatry. It was a much lesser king, Hezekiah, who was given light to expose and destroy this idolatrous practice (2 Kings 18:1-4). We can follow godly men in the saintliness of their lives and not in their lack of light on human traditions. Our safety lies in simply following the teaching of God's Word and not in adding to or subtracting from it.

True spirituality is to follow Jesus in all aspects of life. This involves primarily a taking up of the cross and obeying God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit in daily life. It also involves a forsaking of all human traditions that are not found in the New Testament. God desires a pure testimony in every place - a church that is not only free from all sin, but also free from Babylonian traditions.

Source:

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