

An Honest Discussion about "Christmas Trees" ¹

1 - How the Question

All Started for Me

Several years ago I was in the habit of asking, "why does the church do such-and-so?" I just simply and sincerely wanted to know the rationale and Scriptural/traditional reasons why we practice certain things in the Christian church. My heart's cry was for purity, faithfulness and holiness - so I just wanted to obey the Lord on all points, seeking His *perfect* will and not "what I could get away with".

And in that process, one of the questions that came to mind was, "what is up with Christmas Trees?" I didn't see them mentioned ANYwhere in Scripture in association with the birth of Jesus, so I prayerfully set out to discover the origins behind the practice. What I found was clear and decisive - so I had to make a tough decision.

After much prayerful consideration, I sat my wife down and (1) patiently presented the facts, (2) offered a Biblical alternative, and (3) appealed for her to pray and seek the Lord's heart on the matter. It was more difficult to her to abandon Trees (because she so loves family traditions), but she eventually chose to honor the Lord and pursue Biblical purity regarding our holidays. We have been a Tree-free household at Christmas for many years now and it has actually made our holiday MORE meaningful.

2 - The Scriptural Admonitions

For starters, let's begin with the Bible. We'll get into the historical Pagan roots/facts of Christmas Trees in a moment, but I feel it is most important to establish a clear and firm foundation of Biblical principle.

If we turn to Jeremiah, we see that the Lord speaks against idol-making practices that frighteningly resemble the process of cutting, propping up and decorating (with gold ornaments and silver tinsel) of Christmas Trees:

Jeremiah 10:2-4

"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at them. 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."

But some might argue, "Christmas Trees AREN'T idols! I'm not bowing down to worship them!" I would have to take them to task on that comment, because the common wild-eyed defensive response I have seen from "Christians" on the issue of Christmas Trees very much resembles fanatical idolization. But that is beside the point - because we're not done with looking at Scripture yet.

Leviticus 20:23

"Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them."

Deuteronomy 12:30-31

"Beware that you are not ensnared to follow [the heathen], after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?' You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods."

So the Word plainly states that we are NEVER to adopt the ways of the Pagans and use them in worshipping the Lord. All (that means ALL, folks, not some) of the Pagan religious practices are filth and abomination to our holy, almighty Lord. Do we dare be so prideful as to totally ignore Deuteronomy 12 and blindly adopt heathen religious customs without asking any questions -- and how totally arrogant to try to use these abominations in service toward the Lord Himself?!?

So the main question we then need to answer is, "ARE Christmas Trees of Pagan origin?"

3 - The Historical Facts

Babylon

Numerous resources I have researched point out that Christmas Trees (and most of the pagan practices - and particularly sun-god worship) had their start in ancient Babylon. From this origin (apparently following the dispersion of the heathens after the Tower of Babel incident), many of the world's Pagan religions adopted their own form of sun god worship, as well as the use of evergreen in their various December celebrations. I will draw upon the book "Babylonian Mystery Religions, Ancient and Modern", information resources on the Cornerstone Evangelical Association Web site, and many other sources for the following summary. Whenever possible, I have verified the facts/statements these sources have provided (I live by the motto "question everything, assume nothing").

Nimrod, who built the tower of Babel, organized this world's first kingdom and basically looked to usurp the authority of God. Nimrod was so perverse that he married his own mother, Semiramis. After Nimrod was put to an untimely death, Semiramis (who was pregnant from Nimrod) claimed that she saw a full-grown evergreen tree spring overnight from a dead tree stump, which symbolized Nimrod's springing forth unto new life. She used this to propagate the evil doctrine of the reincarnation of Nimrod in their soon-to-be-born son, Tammuz. When Tammuz was born - in late December - Semiramis

¹ C:\My Documents\SCHOOLofLocalChurch\Lessons\33PaganHolidays\Articles\ChristmasTree03.doc

proclaimed him the reincarnation of Nimrod. She married her own son and continued to promote this lovely little couple as a god and goddess. She was called the "Queen of Heaven" and Tammuz was the "divine sone of heaven" or the Sun-God. Through the following generations, Tammuz became a sort of false Messiah. With the dispersion of the peoples by God at the Tower of Babel, the idolatrous religion of Semiramis/Tammuz was spread throughout the world. And this is why you find the Mother/Son theme, the winter Sun-God holiday, and reincarnation so prevalent through most Pagan religions.

Egypt

The Pagan roots of the Christmas Tree are so obvious that even the National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA) reports that, "long before there was a Christmas, Egyptians brought green palm branches into their homes on the shortest day of the year in December." Egyptians worshipped the sun (the Pagan god "Amen Ra") and believed in continuing reincarnation. Their bringing of greenery into their homes on the day that contained the least daylight was an homage to Amen Ra, and an encouragement to him to begin "regaining strength" on that night. It symbolized reincarnation, or the return of the strength of life (coming spring/daylight) over death (winter/night).

Pantheistic Rome

The NCTA also reports that, "Romans adorned their homes with evergreens during Saturnalia, a winter festival in honor of Saturnus." Saturnalia was marked by wild hedonistic parties and an appeal for "good cheer" - all basically a forerunner of our modern "office Christmas party" and the so-called "Christmas spirit".

Druidism

Furthermore, the NCTA states, "Druid priests decorated oak trees with golden apples for their winter solstice festivities." The Druids and barbaric tribes would also honor their sacred groves of trees by hanging the severed heads of conquered peoples on the trees. The wintertime hanging of golden apples and bloody heads on trees is a blatant forerunner to our gold and red Christmas balls.

Wiccans/Witches

Researching further, I found a Pagan Website that listed the "Pagan Holidays of the Solar Calendar". On or about December 21st, the Wiccans/Pagans celebrate the lesser Sabbat of "Gwyl Canol Gaeaf", also called "Yule". It commemorates the "birth of the Sun God" (which is a direct reference to the Egyptian and Babylonian religious practices!). In this unholy holiday, the Pagans use the Yew and Silver Fir trees as sacred symbols! Why? Because the evergreen represents reincarnation, or the continuance of life, in the midst of death (winter) and the Yule logs fires and candles are "encouragement" to the sun to regain its strength and bring the fertility of spring.

Isn't all that enough proof that the Christmas Tree's roots are firmly planted in centuries of Paganism?

No matter how much we try to rationalize it for a Christian practice, it is basically a weak and sorry excuse! I've heard all the stammering explanations: "Um, well, the evergreen stands for Jesus, who is 'life', and the tree is shaped like an arrow pointing to heaven, and - gee whiz - we DO put a manger scene under it and an angel on top, and uhhh" But facts are facts - and the Bible COMMANDS us to flee from idolatry and not borrow the ways of the Pagans for worship of the Lord!!! What more do we need to take a stand? Well, if we are still not moved, here are a few more factual tidbits

4 - The Traditions of the Early Church

When we look at the practice of the very early church - the church that heard the Apostles' teaching first-hand - we find that they refused to be conformed to the ways/practices of the world. This included their personal lives, their holidays and their religious practices. What traditions did they follow? the ones passed down by the Apostles themselves:

1 Corinthians 11:2

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

2 Thessalonians 2:15

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Did the Apostles have Christmas Trees? No! So what do you think the very early church did? Would you find them running out to the equivalent of the Jerusalem "Wal-Mart" and pick up a Pagan evergreen with which they might to worship the Lord Jesus? God Forbid! You see, they not only took the teachings of the Bible VERY seriously and literally, but they also lived by the practical traditions of the Apostles.

I recommend that you pick up a copy of "The Works of the Ante-Nicean Fathers" or check out the various resources from Scroll Publishing at www.earlychurch.com. You'll discover that they would likely call us "heretics" for our numerous compromises with Paganism (like our love of Christmas Trees).

More Recent Church History

But we don't even have to go back to the very early church to see a clear testimony against Christmas Trees by the church. The faithful Puritans and other Christians here in the colonies and the new United States of America refused to participate in Christmas Trees. In fact, the Trees weren't a common practice in the U.S. until the 1800's!!! They were first introduced by German settlers and Hessian mercenaries (paid to fight in the Revolutionary War) - and it's interesting to note that Germany was a real center or hotbed of the Druid religion. Even Christmas.com, a Website dedicated to promoting everything associated with the Christmas holiday, freely admits the following:

"Most nineteenth century Americans found Christmas trees an oddity. The first record of one being on display was in the 1830s by the German settlers of

Pennsylvania. They put one on show to raise money for a local church. In 1851 a tree was set up outside of a church. The people of the parish thought it such an outrage and a return to paganism and asked the minister to take it down."

5 - Conclusion

But so many of us will go on our merry way and conveniently ignore the Word of God, the historical facts, and the testimony of the very early (and early American) church.

And yet when we blindly ignore the Pagan, anti-Biblical roots of Christmas Trees, aren't we guilty of the same kind of spiritual adultery as ancient Israel was when they mixed heathen Baal worship with the purity of Biblical Judaism? Indeed, we have basically spit in God's eye by mixing pure Biblical faith/practice with ungodly Paganism - and we dare to call it Christian! We have tossed out the pure traditions of the church and replaced them with a filthy mix of Paganism and excuses and in so doing I believe we have violated the essence of the Lord's admonition in Matthew 15:6b: "And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition."

But let's be honest - people just don't like the idea of Godly obedience. We religiously spout how much we want/like it, but in reality we tend to follow our flesh and the ways of the world. So when it comes to Christmas Trees, we shouldn't be surprised that most people really don't want to hear the Biblical admonitions and historical facts. In fact, one person took issue with my belief that Christians should not have Christmas Trees. Even though that person tacitly agreed that the Tree had its roots firmly in Paganism, their final response was, "No-one knows these things, so it doesn't matter; to people today, it doesn't represent Paganism anymore, so it won't be a stumbling block to anyone if I have a tree!"

So what did I do?

I called the leaders of various major religions in the Atlanta area - Islam, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. - and asked them their religion's view of the Christmas Tree. Plus I had the printouts from online discussions with representatives of Pagan and Wiccan covens in various places across the nation.

IN EVERY CASE they immediately stated that the Christmas Tree was of Pagan origin and that it was an obvious point of compromise and error for Christians! I might add that the Pagans were *particularly* happy about that fact, gleefully tossing it back in my face. For them, it meant that Christianity was loaded with hypocrisy (and even following in their Pagan footsteps for holiday practices!) It is sad when Pagans are more diligent and discerning in their faith/religion than are Christians.

I then totaled up the American membership of the religions I contacted - it made up 20% of the U.S. population!!! Which means that, on average, one out of every five people I meet potentially know the Pagan origins of Christmas Trees! Now, not every member of these religions is totally up on such facts, so the number is likely lower than that. But keep in mind that most of these religions are far more "indoctrinating" than modern Christianity - if you've ever talked to a Jehovah's Witness or a Muslim, you know that this is true. So they will tend to know the facts that will embarrass or discredit Christianity.

So I realized that my acquaintance's defense was nothing more than a desperate, empty excuse. I mailed them these refutations/statistics and asked them, "how much is just ONE soul worth? Are you willing to risk even one person having a reason to reject Christ?!" They chose to basically ignore/reject me. Rather than allow the status quo and comfort zone to be challenged, they discarded my argument as "radical" or "extreme."

I hate to say it, but I have found that Pagans and those in other religions are (compared to Christians) far more open to knowing and understanding what Christmas Trees are all about - and that is truly a sad testimony. When I mention my realization about Christmas Trees, I have seen so-called Christians react with so much wild-eyed rejection that you'd think I had just declared myself a Satanist. And that angry defensiveness should tell us something - when a person isn't willing to examine themselves and look critically at a personal tradition or practice, then that tradition has become an IDOL to them. And what does the Bible plainly say about idolatry?

1 Corinthians 10:14

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."

Idolatry isn't something to toy with or rationalize. It is something so spiritually dangerous that we must flee from it!

So what is YOUR decision about Christmas Trees?

Are you willing to take up your cross and follow Jesus even when it means that cherished traditions might have to go?