

Why Don't You Decorate the Building for Christmas?

I was recently asked this question by a sincere questioner who was a guest of the congregation. I figure if one guest has that question, others may as well. In fact, some of our members may well be wondering the same thing. This seems as good a time and place as any to answer the question. I simply ask you to keep an open mind. Please consider the Scripture behind what I'll share and make your determination based on that.

For centuries, many have been taught that December 25 should be celebrated as Jesus's birthday. It is so ingrained in our culture that to even question that is met with shock and wonder. However, we need to make sure that we do not simply follow our culture. Instead, we must follow Jesus as our Lord. The fact is that this question is all about whether or not we will let Jesus be Lord in our life.

Letting Jesus be Lord of our life is not accomplished by doing anything we like but claiming it honors Jesus. Letting Jesus be Lord of our lives means doing what He says and doing it His way. **Luke 6:46** says, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (ESV). Letting Jesus be Lord means doing what He says. **Colossians 3:17** says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (ESV). Whatever we do must be done with Jesus's authority. Authority is not granted through silence; it is granted through professed permission. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (ESV). We can look to the Bible, the Word of God, to learn about every good work. That means if we cannot find equipping for a work from the pages of Holy Scripture, then it simply isn't a good work...no matter how much we like it.

With this in mind let's put a celebration of Jesus's birthday to the test. Sure, to us, it may seem like a good idea. But I'm sure Cain's sacrifice in **Genesis 4:1-7** seemed like a good idea to him. Nadab and Abihu's foreign fire seemed like a good idea to them in **Leviticus 10:1-3**. The carrying of the ark of the covenant by a new cart seemed like a good idea to David, Ahio, and Uzzah in **I Chronicles 13:5-14**. We learn from these stories that just because something seems good to us is not enough. We have to walk by faith, that is, we have to act based on what God has revealed through His Word because faith only comes by hearing and hearing by God's Word (**Romans 10:17**).

Where then is the authority for celebrating Jesus's birthday? Oddly enough, God was so silent on this need to celebrate Jesus's birthday that the Bible never even tells us when Jesus was born. If God wanted us to celebrate Jesus's birthday, don't you think at least once He would have included the birthday in the Bible? Read **Numbers 28-29** and notice that God knows exactly how to tell us when to celebrate something He actually wants celebrated. But not once did He tell us to celebrate Jesus's birthday or even tell us when that birthday was. Where is the authority and equipping in that? That alone means that if we will celebrate Jesus's birthday, we have to rely on man's teaching and doctrine to do it. We know what **Matthew 15:9** says about worshipping God according to man-made teachings.

"Okay, Edwin, there is no authority to celebrate Jesus's birthday, but what about celebrating His birth. Surely we can do that. I mean, if He hadn't been born, then He couldn't have died for us." I certainly believe you can celebrate the birth of Jesus. The question is how? If we are going to celebrate Jesus's birth, we still have to go back to Scripture and examine what is authorized for that kind of celebration. Where in Scripture does God ask us to celebrate the birth of Jesus on a special day in which we decorate trees, pass around gifts, and hang up lights? The fact is we celebrate the birth of Jesus the same way we do any other aspect of His life. We teach others about it and we teach it accurately. We sing about it. We pray about it. But there is nothing in the Bible about setting aside a day to do all kinds of decorating and gift-giving.

The question here is not how much someone might like a religious observance of Christmas. The question is whether or not we will let Jesus be Lord of our lives. Will we worship and celebrate Him the way He has authorized? Or will we ask Him to take a backseat to what we want to do for Him?

Understand that there is nothing wrong with putting lights on a tree. There is nothing wrong with giving other people gifts. There is nothing wrong with eating a big meal and having family time. The problem is doing that to celebrate Jesus's birth just does not have equipping from Scripture. In fact, far from Scriptural roots, most of the things we do today as part of the Christmas celebration have their roots in paganism. That, to me, is a frightening place to get the means for celebrating anything about Jesus.

So, we don't decorate our building to celebrate Christmas because we don't celebrate any aspect of Jesus's life that way. What we will do is celebrate Jesus's life, death, and resurrection the way we find authorized in Scripture. As I

Corinthians 11:23-26 teaches, we celebrate Jesus by participating in the Lord's Supper when we gather as a congregation on each first day of the week. We invite you to examine that celebration, and if you are in Christ, to celebrate Jesus in that way too.

I am keenly aware that this article may be shocking to you. If you have any questions or if you think I've missed it somewhere on this topic, please feel free to talk with me. Like you, I simply want to glorify God His way. Let's work together so we can accomplish that.

--Edwin L. Crozier