

CHRISTMAS IS COMING, WHAT CAN I DO?

As most of you know I host a blog-talk radio show called Opposing the Matrix. The other host, Frank Castanette is both my pastor and my brother and he's fastly becoming a best friend. We touch on many subjects that the Church fails to talk about in addition to other subjects that seem to divide believers in Yeshua.

One of those subjects is the celebration of Christmas. When I was a kid it seemed that everyone celebrated Christmas and the Jewish people in our neighborhood celebrated Hanukkah. Though of Jewish lineage I was brought up Episcopalian through my mother's insistence that I go to church. Anyone who knows the Episcopal faith knows that it is just a stone's throw away from Roman Catholicism where tradition is concerned. We just didn't worship saints; Mary and we didn't recognize the Pope as the supreme authority or Christ's vicar here on Earth. It was alike in its boring doldrums of lethargies and to an adolescent boy it was sheer torture that I felt I was being put through. Thankfully it did give me some working knowledge of Mashiach, his work on the Cross and other key tenants of the faith. It also was very big on celebrating Christmas and Easter.

Right from the beginning I questioned Christmas. From a very young age I just couldn't equate Santa Claus, reindeer, Christmas Trees and decking the halls with all sorts of lights. What did these things have to do with the birth of our Savior? There wasn't anything that I could see in the Bible that showed all of these things. My dad saw through this part of Christmas too; mainly seeing it as a way of merchants turning people who were barely making it into poor people who spent months catching up on debt only to repeat the cycle over and over again each year. OF course, this went against the traditions that the womenfolk of the family had been engrained in the celebration for generations so dad was seen as a Grinch who had a bad attitude. I however understood him. I'm not going to say that I didn't tear into the presents under the tree and I'm not going to say that I disliked the family atmosphere that was afforded during this season, but something just seemed wrong.

Adults in general don't give credence to the feelings of kids or how they can discern certain things. I suppose that if I had asked questions or expressed my opinions to my mother or many others, they would have just thought that my dad had gotten to me and such, but my feelings were mine apart from my dad. I often wondered why the adults had told me about some big elf named Santa who worked on presents all year long and who made lists of who was

naughty and nice. I noticed from an early age that it seemed that Santa was in competition with the child who was supposedly born on December 25th so many years ago. Then, when they nearly had me hoodwinked, they sat me down and confessed that Santa wasn't real and never bothered to explain why this fraud had been perpetrated on my psyche. The same thing happened with Easter. Why tell me that there is an Easter Bunny who leaves gifts inside of eggs and such, only to tell me a couple of years later that it was all a fraud too. The bible tells us that we're supposed to bring up a child in the way that he should go, and when he gets older, he won't depart from it. So, I guess you can say that my parents brought me up to be a skeptic, and I have not departed from it; bad at first but a righteous skeptic after my conversion. And, to quote a phrase from Richard Nixon, "let me make the perfectly clear..." I do not blame my parents for these things. They were merely doing what all other parents were doing; practicing societal customs that were passed down to them. I love my parents. They did the best they could with what they had, and who can ask for more really, right?

I can only wonder if, why later in life when adults; especially my parents and grandparents told me that taking drugs and drinking and smoking cigarettes were bad for me, I didn't listen. I mean, if the Santa and Easter Bunny were things that they lied to me about maybe taking drugs, drinking and smoking were really good for me and they just didn't want me to have fun. I don't know if others operate like I do in this vein, but when lied to at such an early age it left an impression of mistrust of adults. On the flipside it did cause me to question what I was told and to examine things to see if they were right or wrong, good or bad; fruitful or unfruitful. It's just a shame that the latter part came after I made a lot of mistakes in judgment.

Like I said above, I always had nagging questions about Christmas. I didn't doubt the Christmas story because it was scripture and I knew scripture to be true, even in my days of rebellion. However, after my rebirth in Yeshua and being filled with the Ruach Ha Kodesh I began to study about Christmas. After reading several sources I was shocked. First I came to realize that the Church in early North America; the Puritans and such never celebrated Christmas; it was frowned upon as being a tradition started by the Vatican and passed down through the Reformers who failed to reform totally, or should I say "recant" from some of the practices of the Vatican. The practice of Christmas only reemerged during the late 19th century, probably the product of an influx of Catholics and marginalized Christians from Central and southern Europe whereas before then most immigrants came from the more strictly Protestant English speaking nations.

Later I read some excellent works that explained the origins of the articles that are hung or placed in the home at Christmas. I learned that the Romans celebrated a day near the Winter Solstice which they called Saturnalia; in honor of their god Saturn. I learned that the Yule Log was a tradition that the ancient Scandinavians brought into the season. They thought that the sun died the night of the Winter Solstice and they would burn a large log to their god named Yule who would bring the sun back to life the next day; or something of that order. I learned that the Romans exchanged gifts during Saturnalia. Also learned was that the Christmas tree, although it is ascribed to having started in Germany goes back much farther. In fact, bringing trees into the house was a practice of the ancient Egyptians and even the Israelites when they were in rebellion toward Yahweh before the exile to Babylon cured them of pagan worshipping practices:

Thus says the Lord: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, For the Gentiles are dismayed at them. ³ For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. ⁴ They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple. Jeremiah 10:2-4

Granted the scripture above does not specifically speak of a Christmas Tree. How could it anyway because Messiah was centuries away from his first advent when this was written. It does however speak of the ancient practice of using trees as objects of worshipping foreign gods. Cutting down a tree, placing it in one's home and adorning it with all fashions of ornaments lends more toward the ancient practices of the pagans than it does the worship of Yahweh come in the flesh in the Baby Yeshua. Other things, like the use of Mistletoe, holly, and wreaths have pagan origins but time restraints keep me from going farther into this whole thing.

The thing is, speaking personally, and I know that many agree with me on this; these things have absolutely no connection in any way with the birth of the Savior of Humanity. Even the day of celebration comes under easy suspicion. Talk to any shepherd in the Middle East and they will tell you that by the time that December comes they have their sheep in sheep pens near their homes, not out in what sometimes can be a cold and brutal winter atmosphere in December. Shepherds watch over their sheep, like they were doing in the Birth of Yeshua account in scripture usually at the end of summer and into fall. This would correlate with the time of the fall Jewish holidays, specifically the Feast of Tabernacles, or as we call it Sukkot. In prophetic terms, while Yahweh told the people of Israel to build Sukkah to remind them of the shanty homes that they built out in the wilderness while they returned to Israel after the slavery in Egypt; most will agree that Sukkot; of the Feast of Tabernacles denotes a time when God will come and dwell

with men, which is exactly what happened when Yeshua came into the world. Many of us also think that his second advent will be during this same time.

The most popular accepted account of why the date was moved to December 25 was because the Vatican, or the early Roman Catholic Church, or the Nicolaitan order (which ever term you choose, they all fit anyway) wanted to convert the heathen and they found it much easier to move the date to the day when they were honoring their god Saturn, and when others were thinking that the sun had died and been reborn; namely at the winter solstice. However, as the Vatican so often does when it tries to convert people, it tends to hold onto some of the pagan ways so that it makes their attempt at conversion easier to swallow for their converts. Therefore, the converts get some sort of convoluted gospel, sort of a cocktail of Christianity and paganism; a watered-down form of the truth.

So, with this in mind what do we do with Christmas. Well, my wife and I don't celebrate this day. We choose to celebrate Hanukkah anyway, because it is a holiday of rededication, just like the rededication of the Temple which is the story of Hanukkah. But what do we do with relatives who still choose to celebrate? This is where we are sort of backed into a corner, so to speak. We know the truth about the origins of Christmas and we choose not to participate in pagan rituals, but our loved ones do. Quite a quandary it seems.

Well, we have to look at what our friends and relatives do when they celebrate Christmas, or should we say the birthday of our Savior Yeshua. There is a difference between what people call Christmas and the what is the Birth of Yeshua. Christmas is a Vatican holiday combining paganism with the birth of Yeshua. Simply speaking, is it Messiah centered? Is their celebration of "Christmas" the celebration of the birth of the Lamb of Yahweh who came to take away the sins of the world? Do they gather together with that in mind? Do they teach their children of the true meaning of this date of birth and forsake the inane things like Santa, reindeer and those things that would like to make Christmas into some sort of New Age carnival of absurdity? Do you suppose that Miriam celebrated Yeshua's birthday when he was a young child and maybe even into adulthood? Chances are that she probably did, along with her children born after Yeshua. Jewish culture is very celebratory and a boy's 13th birthday is the biggest celebration; when He becomes a "son of the Torah." I'm sure that Miriam and Yosef probably celebrated Yeshua's birthday around Sukkot, not December, but they still honored him with special recognition for his place in the world; like all of our parents, relatives and friends did and do for us. If you think that a date like October 2nd of every year would be better then celebrate it then.

Maybe you'll cause people to change along with you and you can get it away from the Winter Solstice. Be proactive in a positive way, not judgmental.

All of these things have to be considered. There has been an increased movement in recent years where those who forsake the celebration of Christmas have become militant, even to the point of calling those who celebrate a Messiah Centered Christmas as being pagans or idol worshippers. Well, what I would ask those people is a simple question. When you were saved, did you become perfect? Maybe it took you a year or two to realize that smoking marijuana was wrong and then you ceased. Maybe you still think that taking a drink from time to time is okay, and in moderation it probably is; but we all know that during certain occasions we can drink one too many and that places us in a sinful state. What about gossip? I know Christians who still gossip and have been saved for decades. And here is the biggie; what about condemning a brother when Yeshua Himself said that we should not do it. We are allowed to discern and reprove, but only when we do so in love.

We often forget that Yahweh is the plowman and that He plows and plants the seeds. It is the Ruach Ha Kodesh that convicts. We forget that it is our first duty to pray when we see what we think is wrong. We don't just pray for the person whom we feel is offending what Yahweh has for their lives but we also pray that He gives us the wisdom to speak when we're supposed to speak and to keep quiet when we need to keep quiet. And, if you cannot say it with love then don't say it at all.

Many of you have heard me tell the story of my cousin Larry. Back in the early 1980's Larry came to visit us in California. I tried to tell Larry about Yeshua and Larry's response was, "I will NEVER EVER do that." Yahweh told me to hush and pray. I cry now as I remember how I wanted to tell Larry more; how I wanted to really nag him about Yeshua and put him in a headlock until he would submit to Yahweh. It wasn't till 25 years later that Larry met and lived with a backslidden believer named Marcia. Marcia in effect, through love and tenderness led Larry to Yeshua. Yahweh brings people to salvation in HIS timing and through HIS methods, and Scripture is clear that nobody comes to Yeshua unless Abba leads him/her. In the same way the Ruach Ha Kodesh convicts Yeshua's believers of ways that He doesn't approve of.

The important thing is that people believe in Yeshua. Sure, some adhere to the traditions of men, but when you get right down to it, everyone does in one way or another. And, if you think that you're perfect then you're in much greater danger than those people that you condemn for having a few faults. Christmas is a tradition that has worked itself into our society. We cannot

be the social agents for our relatives and friends. We can tell them about the truth, if they will listen, in regard to traditions of men, but whether they listen or not is between them and Yahweh. He is the judge, we are not. The question we need to ask and the thing that we need to observe is whether these friends and relatives and friends love Yahweh. People can live under a delusion and still love Yahweh. Let me give you an example. Do you think that you're going up in a rapture because you're part of the church of Philadelphia? Many Christians in America think that we will be pulled out of here before the tribulation starts. Look at the church in America today and if you're honest you cannot tell me that the church here is the Church of Philadelphia. The Church in America is a mess; only a remnant is faithful to Yahweh. To think that you are perfect when you are spotted and wrinkled and to think that Yeshua will come back for a filthy bride is a strong delusion; yet some are quick to condemn those who celebrate Christmas? Does that make sense. No, it doesn't. You say that Yahweh doesn't send persecution against his saints, and that is true. But there are saints around the world who are giving their lives for our Faith and they are not being pulled out of here in a rapture, not yet anyway. So how dare we think that Yeshua is going to bring the American Church, a polluted bride into his Chambers while those who are dying for the faith are dying for the faith and not being rescued. See the delusion here? My goodness, how messed up the Church really is.

So, what do we do with Christmas? Well, if we don't celebrate it for the reasons stated above then that's okay. If friends and loved ones celebrate it and it doesn't seem right to us we pray. We pray for them to see that relationship trumps tradition and religion and we pray for Yahweh to show them these things. We remain patient and we don't act like the Pharisees who sat outside and belittled Yeshua and the disciples for supping with sinners. We remember that we ALL have little things in our own lives that Yahweh might not necessarily like and we work to clean up our own messes before we "advertise" the messes of our brothers and sisters. We don't act like heartless backbiting fools who live in glass houses and throw at others who live in glass houses too. You realize that as much as you might think that someone else is messed up and is missing the point, in Yahweh's eyes you are just as messed up and maybe worse and that it is only by the grace of Yahweh Yeshua that you little fanny is making it into heaven. If asked to attend a Christmas function then go; not to be a sneering buffoon, but to pray for those there and to be that light that you're supposed to be. You realize that you cannot and have never been commissioned to fix things; that is Yahweh's job. You will fail miserably at it; he excels in fixing things. Contend for the faith, but don't slay people for it.