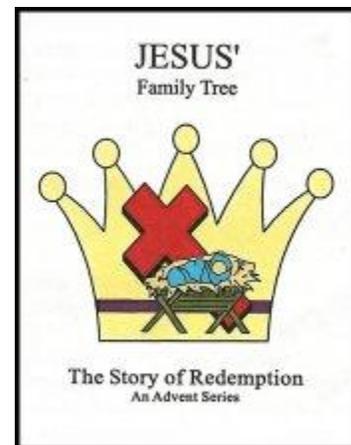




Thanksgiving and Christmas...Some Real Family Possibilities

We are entering what will be the busiest, most traditional family times of the year. The Thanksgiving and Christmas season hold, for many of us, warm remembrances of family times, smelling the turkey cooking, trimming the Christmas tree, special worship services and musical productions at church, sending and receiving Christmas cards and many other cherished traditions.

Because traditions are often celebrated without examination, as Christians, we should periodically ask ourselves if our own family tradition still represents what we believe is important. How many times do we observe these holiday periods most enthusiastically, yet realize that Jesus has been left out in the cold. Reminisce about when you were an unbeliever; did anything about the Christmas Season actually bring you closer to Christ or was it more of a stumbling block?



"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." I Corinthians 10:31 speaks directly to the Christian home on this issue of the holidays. Can you take this verse and read it to your family tradition? Jesus warned us in Mark 7:8-9 to be very careful that our traditions in no way set aside the commands of God, otherwise we "let go the command of God and are holding on to the traditions of man."

For example, Santa Claus can easily get more "air time" in our homes than Christ (he certainly does in the shopping malls!) When we attribute godly traits to a fictitious figure - we need to be very careful. For many young children Santa is:

(1) omniscient (knowing about all our deeds); (2) omnipresent by being able to be everywhere on Christmas Eve; (3) judge by knowing who has been "naughty or nice" and rewarding appropriately; (4) spiritually transcendent being able to get through walls, chimneys and into our homes; and (5) giving good gifts to those who truly believe in him. What other figure that we know of, truly possesses the same traits that we falsely attribute to Santa (hint: Jesus Christ)?

When our children find out that Santa is a "make-believe person," they might easily think they should also reject Christ, whom they have not seen, for they have been taught he possesses the same qualities. God is very jealous of His attributes, as stated clearly in the first two commandments (You shall have no other Gods before me and make for yourself no graven idol, Exodus 20:2-5). We can so easily give glory to things and people which God never intended for us to do.

There are many God honoring traditions that can bring great enjoyment to the holidays. CMI has introduced an "Advent Series" to help bring a "Jesse Tree" (remember that out of the stem of Jesse came Christ) into the Sunday School room and home during December. There are four "hold-up" color lessons. The symbols on the lesson serve as a tree of the family line of Christ. Starting around four weeks before Christmas the lessons can be taught with symbols being added. There is a daily devotional for the home. The Jesse Tree has brought new meaning to the traditional Christmas tree.

There are other ways we can place Christ in the middle of the holidays. Here are some ideas:

1. At Thanksgiving meal, everyone can write down something they are particularly thankful for during the past year. The father can read each item allowing the family and guests around the table to guess who listed that item. Thank God for each item listed. Read the Thanksgiving story to remembering how the Pilgrims were close to starving when God sent an American native who could speak English and show them how to survive.

2. Home-made Christmas cards can be and guests can be a tremendous witness, if a clear Bible message is used. They will be read, because they are different and reflect the time spent in preparing them.

3. Traditional and modern hymns or carols of the "season" with the clear message of Christ the Risen Savior are available if not already well-known. Use them when your family gather. Discuss the lyrics. The Advent message in hymns is often very understandable and Christ-centered.

4. Read and re-read the Christmas story of the incarnation of Christ. Many unbelievers really haven't heard the story of how God became man.

5. Giving gifts to Christ (others in need) on His birthday can help take the emphasis off ourselves. Samaritan's Purse's "Operation Christmas Child" and Prison Fellowship's "Angel Tree" are great ideas of giving to others. Starting in the Fall we can prepare special Christmas packages for missionaries living abroad.

6. Our neighbors and unbelieving friends often enjoy attending Christmas plays and musical productions at church, especially with our children singing or performing. Encourage your pastor to end the special performance with a clear Gospel message.

7. Christmas Day can be one of the loneliest times of the year for those who are away from home or have no family. Why not open your Christmas gifts later (we actually do on Epiphany 2 weeks later) and spend the day opening your home to those who don't have a home.

The list is endless. Don't forget that CMI has done a lot of work for you in its "Advent Series" that can be used over and over again celebrating the incarnation of God. There are so many ways of bringing Christ full force into our seasonal events, look around, ask your Christian friends, your children, read some good books on the subject ("Family Celebrations" by Ann Hibbard is an excellent example) and pray that God will give you insight and wisdom. Traditions are so very important - let's do them in a God-honoring way!

When we marry, we take traditions with us into our new families and practice them for generations. As you consider making your own family traditions more Christ centered, keep in mind that it can very easily be interpreted as a rejection of your parents ideas. You need to be gentle and loving when introducing something so basic as a new way of celebrating Christmas, especially when it significantly parts from what you did when you grew up. Without seeming to be ungrateful and unloving, explain how God has convicted you to put Christ central in the celebration (after all it is the celebration of His birthday). But most importantly, you need to give glory to God in all that you do. May you and your family have a Christ filled Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Season!

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