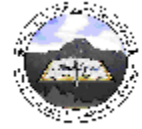




On The Frontier



“For The Glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

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‘Tis The Season To Be Critical

If you grew up in a family with any semblance of Christian belief you no doubt were taught some measure of respect for the “holiday season.” To whatever degree you practiced your observance, it surely began with Thanksgiving Day and concluded with New Year’s Eve. But to be sure, the centrality of it all would be Christmas Day. There are, of course, variations in the holidays and the commemoration thereof. For instance, Epiphany otherwise known as “Three Kings.” Those who enjoy carols and Christmas parties know that this season extends over a period of 12 days. That time is packed with golden rings, calling birds and various kinds of gentry, musicians and domestic workers. Christmas Day is December 25th, subtract 12 days and you have the 13th. This is why shopping malls, newspapers, television networks and other cultural bastions annually deliver the “Twelve Days of Christmas” blitz. All this begins, as you would expect, on December 13th. Of course, if you consult a “Church” calender (in the East or West) you may find these 12 days to begin on Christmas Day and end on January 6th. Some denominations call this day “The Feast of Epiphany” or “Adoration of the Magi” or “The Manifestation of God” or “The day of the Three Kings (wise men/magi).” They say these three were named Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. Legend has them following a bright star to Bethlehem on the night of Christ’s

birth. There they presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The history of Christmas (the festival of the nativity of Jesus Christ) is intertwined with that of the Epiphany. The commemoration of the Baptism (also called the Day of Lights, i.e., the Illumination of Jesus) was also known as the birthday of Jesus, because he was believed to have been born then of the “Virgin” or reborn in baptism. In some legends Christmas and Epiphany were referred to as the first and second nativity; the second being Christ’s manifestation to the world.

But it wasn’t until the fourth century that Christmas was adopted by the Western Christian Church as the feast of the nativity of Christ’s birth. While the Western Church celebrates on December 25th, it’s interesting to note that the Eastern Christian Church continues to recognize January 6th as the celebration of the physical birthday in Bethlehem.

Aren’t you glad your birthday isn’t juggled about like that? I for one am glad to say that my birthday has never been in dispute. But maybe that’s because it isn’t important enough. At any rate, I’m glad for that, I like to keep things simple.

The above practices and beliefs are seriously lacking in sound scriptural backing. This is abundantly clear to those of us who have taken the time to study the Bible. We also refuse to consider myth and legend as a viable alternative to Truth. Nevertheless, a

great number of people celebrate the “holidays” as previously mentioned.

As to dates, our research has revealed the birth of Jesus Christ to be September 11, 3BC. This can be substantiated by astronomical, historical and biblical records. There’s little doubt as to the accuracy of that date as any honest research will reveal. Nevertheless, the birth of our Lord is recognized and celebrated worldwide. Some may rejoice in December, some in January, some in September and some all day every day. But rejoice they will and well they should. One way or the other, the “holiday season” commands the attention of the entire year and that worldwide.

Whatever the day, here’s a truth that has resounded for over two millennia:

Luke 2:11

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Dates aside, that was one magnificent day!

Lest we forget our British brethren, there’s Boxing Day, the origin and significance of which is in dispute. Boxing Day is also known as St. Stephen’s Day. Who was he? Supposedly the first Christian martyr. Reduced to the simplest essence, its origins are said to be found in a long-ago practice of giving cash or durable goods to those of the lower ranks. Gifts among social and cultural equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but benevolence to

those less favored were provided the day after. The "holiday season" is a full time for us all. Filled to the brim with discrepancy but filled none the less.

With so much attention given it, how can anyone deny the birth of Christ? Accurate or not the nativity of our Lord has galvanized the very history of man.

Isaiah 9:6,7

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

You must admit, that's awesome!

John 3:16,17

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Herein is the most important thing, God sent His Son! Aren't you glad He did? I know the accuracy of dates is important, but that he was born exceeds the magnitude of when. Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour was born! Glory to God, hallelujah! Let

everything that has breath praise God.

I John 4:7-14

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world.

I'm confident that loving someone doesn't include criticizing them. Many years ago a very wise man advised me never to criticize, condemn or complain. Maintenance of these tenets is always in the best interest of us all. Yet somehow the "holiday season" can bring out the worst of this. How can this be? Why do so many of us become critical in consideration of an event as marvelous as the birth of Christ?

James 3:10-ff

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?

Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so *can* no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish.

For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

I want to be known as wise and knowledgeable, don't you? Why get caught up in the wasted effort of criticizing others? We would be better served to take that time and utilize it more profitably. Every minute spent in an earthly, sensual, devilish manner is a wasted one. Imagine how much more you could give God if you didn't criticize. Don't criticize others, praise Him instead!

How much time do you suppose you've wasted in fault finding? Multiply that figure by the vast potential of the masses. The result is staggering! Why? Because there's an incredible number of critical, negative people in our world. That's not a crowd I wish to be associated with. How about you? Refuse to criticize, be positive and stand out from the crowd. Trade the criticism of others for the praise of God. The contrast will be amazing as will the change in your life.

When considering the birth of Jesus Christ one cannot help but acknowledge his ministry. Which ministry was opened publicly with the following:

Luke 4:16-21

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

And there was delivered unto him the book [scroll] of the prophet Esaias [Isaiah]. And when he had opened the book [scroll], he found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book [scroll], and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

The Lord selected a passage from Isaiah pertinent to those present that day. Consider now the timelessness of the message, some of its truth yet future.

Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Our God is so loving and kind to give us such beautiful promises. This passage is so magnificent it should be printed in gold and punctuated with diamonds and rubies. The contrast of what we had and what He gave is so stark as to defy description. That is, apart from His Word. Beauty for ashes! Joy for mourning! The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness! What a wonderful God!

Our Heavenly Father is exceedingly magnificent! Should we not praise Him? Do it now and while you're at it trade in all your criticism for more praise. Criticism is heavy. Isn't it? But the garment of praise is light!

Matthew 11:28-30

Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

Take Jesus Christ at his word. Make the trade. It's always easier to do things God's Way!

Meanwhile, the world continues to do things the "earthly" way. Thus, we have a multitude of variety in worldliness magnified to compliment the "holiday season."

While on the topic of variety one cannot overlook Little Christmas (and you thought there was only one Christmas). What exactly is Little Christmas? Well, for starters, it's Finnish in origin. Technically, *Pikkujoulu* or "Little Christmas" is the first Sunday in Advent (the period beginning four Sundays before Christmas, also the coming of Christ, i.e., birth and or Return). In most cases "Little Christmas" is "little" more than a pre-Christmas party or binge. On the first Sunday in Advent it's traditional to light a candle, possibly putting it in a four-branch candelabra, where it will be joined on the succeeding Sundays by a second, third, and fourth as Christmas Day approaches. With all these "holiday" variations, you can be sure that there are yet more variations practiced in each individual variation. Consequently, there's much dispute as to what's proper and with dispute there oft times is criticism.

Let's not forget the "season" kickoff, Thanksgiving Day. A wonderful

observance to be sure, but not without variation. While some regard God, for others it's football. Old Tom Turkey gets his share of adoration as do Macy's Parade and Superman. And how can we forget the Rockettes (my personal favorites) or the many marching bands, floats and balloons that punctuate this marvelous day. Surely we all know that the original purpose was to render thanks unto our Benevolent Maker and the sumptuous bounty that He so freely provides us with. It's a great holiday! A time for family and giving of thanks. Not a time for criticism, a time for praise. That was the original intent anyway.

The conclusion of the "holiday season" is perhaps a tad pointless. At least in my estimation. The main reason being, it's little more than an excuse for ribald behavior. If you want to spend money, go out on New Year's Eve. If you want to risk your well-being, go out on New Year's Eve. If you want to be around drunken fools, go out on New Year's Eve. If you want a headache, an upset stomach and a big dry cleaning bill, go out on New Year's Eve. But, I digress into criticism. Well, not I but God's Word.

Ephesians 5:18

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Proverbs 23:29,30

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

Romans 13:11-ff

And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.

You mean to tell me I can't even get drunk on New Year's Eve? You bet! Hey don't blame me, I didn't write the Book. Don't criticize me. God's Word, not mine, is the critic.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner [critic] of the thoughts and intents [motives] of the heart.

We should be very thankful that we have His Word. How else would we know right from wrong?

II Timothy 3:16,17

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

How wonderfully familiar and refreshing those two verses are! Thank you Lord! We desperately need God's Word. That's the point you know. The Word does the judgement, not us. It's God ordained.

The "holiday season" can be rife with evil and sadness. Those who have not are made to feel worse by virtue of those who have. As wonderful a family experience as the holidays can be, for some they are little more than a painful reminder of the family they do not have. We should remain at the ready to help those who are in such a state. They need to know they can be a part of God's family.

Psalms 68:5,6

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, *is* God in his holy habitation.

God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry *land*.

Ephesians 2:19

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

These truths will never be made known by those who busy themselves with criticism. Every year it seems the number of those on the attack increases. This year there has even been a movement to ban Christmas displays from public places. Great swelling arguments have ensued over the status of Christmas. Is it a "secular" holiday or is it a "religious" holiday? If the latter then it must be banned in keeping with the bogus and non-existent "separation of Church and State." They're saying that it's unconstitutional to display anything depicting a religious theme in the public place. (A side bar to this is:

there's nothing even remotely resembling "separation of Church and State" in the Constitution. This was arrested from the context of something said by one of the Founders, not something Constitutionally agreed upon.) Consequently, they are endeavoring to determine what's secular about Christmas and what's religious. This may seem amusing to those of us with a belief system based upon Bible Truths. We know that there's no difference between that which is religious and that which is secular. They are, in effect, the same. Both miss the mark, both are based upon the doctrines, commandments and traditions of men. Therefore, neither has any real in-depth spiritual value. We know that the Lord wasn't born in December, let alone January. The wise men were more than three in number and their names are anybody's guess as the Bible doesn't say. They were Magi, men who studied the constellations and the Messianic prophecies contained in them. They traveled in caravans and didn't arrive in time for the Lord's birth. In fact, Jesus was a toddler by the time they got there. As for the "star," that was a massing of planets and would only be noticed by the most astute and observant astronomers of the day. If it were as phenomenal as some suggest, the entire populace would have been alerted and they weren't. The only ones to receive the birth announcement in time to see baby Jesus were the shepherds. As for talking donkeys named Dominick and little drummer boys playing rum-pa-pum-pum . . . I submit that since there's very few, if any, accurate depictions of the "nativity," all be considered acceptable for public places. Bogus may beget bogus, I guess. And why not simply leave those souls who enjoy these things alone? Why be critical of what they do,

especially if what they do has no bearing on what you do? But criticize they must, so on and on it goes.

I'm certain that no self-respecting believer would want to be considered a part of the liberal fiendishness and secular humanism that surrounds us. And bear in mind, if you would, I haven't brought the non-Christian beliefs to bear. You are aware, I'm sure, of the resentment towards Christian holidays held by those of other "faiths." You may factor them in as you consider these things, but you'll find the outcome to be the same. Simply put, 'Tis the Season to be critical. That does not mean, however, that you and I need to take part in the flak. With all the criticism that's currently being bandied about there's certainly no need for any of us to get on board.

Think of the irony in it. A wonderfully instructed believer is snookered into "throwing in" with the godless ones. Bless your heart, there's simply no place in "earthly, sensual and devilish" for any of us. Yet, how many times have we been tricked into using our knowledge of God's Word as a bludgeon? Something as healing and wonderful as God's matchless Word should never be used to steal the joy from a family or an individual.

I learned a long time ago that the time to talk about healing is when every one is enjoying good health. Simply put, there's a time and place for everything, even sharing an accurate understanding of the exact birthday of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, there's a proper way of doing things and an improper way. You can be right and very unloving at the same time. Better to be loving and wrong at the same time than unloving at any time! We are obligated to make the Truth as palatable for

people as possible. To deliberately make the Word difficult for a person to receive is sin. God's Word is easy to be entreated and we should deliver it in kind.

As we stand on the threshold of yet another year, I exhort you with the following:

Romans 14:13

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.

Luke 6:37

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

It may be in vogue to be critical but:

Isaiah 50:4 BBE

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are experienced, so that I may be able to give the word a special sense for the feeble: every morning my ear is open to his teaching, like those who are experienced:

We here at Frontier Christian Ministries wish you and yours a blessed holiday and a happy and healthy new year. God bless you abundantly!

Psalms 113:3

From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name *is* to be praised.

Psalms 150:6

Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.
