

THE KINGDOM BUILDER



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

Upside Down or Right Side Up?

T'was the month before Christmas
When all through our land,
Not a Christian was praying
Nor taking a stand.
See the PC Police had taken away,
The reason for Christmas - no one could say.
The children were told by their schools not to sing,
About Shepherds and Wise Men and Angels and things.
It might hurt people's feelings, the teachers would say
December 25th is just a "Holiday".
Yet the shoppers were ready with cash, checks and credit
Pushing folks down to the floor just to get it!
CDs from Madonna, an X BOX, an I-pod
Something was changing, something quite odd!*

Retailers promoted Ramadan and Kwanzaa
In hopes to sell books by Franken & Fonda.
As Targets were hanging their trees upside down
At Lowe's the word Christmas - was nowhere to be found.
At K-Mart and Staples and Penny's and Sears
You won't hear the word Christmas; it won't touch your ears.
Inclusive, sensitive, Di-ver-si-ty
Are words that were used to intimidate me.
Now Daschle, Now Darden, Now Sharpton, Wolf Blitzen
On Boxer, on Rather, on Kerry, on Clinton!
At the top of the Senate, there arose such a clatter
To eliminate Jesus, in all public matter.
And we spoke not a word, as they took away our faith
Forbidden to speak of salvation and grace.
The true Gift of Christmas was exchanged and discarded
The reason for the season, stopped before it started.
So as you celebrate "Winter Break" under your "Dream Tree"
Sipping your Starbucks, listen to me.
Choose your words carefully, choose what you say
Shout MERRY CHRISTMAS, not Happy Holiday!

- *author unknown*

A very clever poem, I think we would all agree. But if you really think about it, why should it surprise us that people with no faith in or acceptance of Jesus Christ as anything more than a mere historical figure have any interest in emphasizing and honoring His birth. Jesus said in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you." One common way in which the word "hate" can be understood in Scripture is the idea of "disregard." And if the world does not actually "hate" us because they hated Jesus, it is safe to say that at a minimum they certainly are disregarding us, now more than ever. Should we be surprised or upset that the world has no regard for Jesus or His birth?

To be completely honest, I think removing references to Christ at Christmas is simply the world's attempt to be more consistent in its unbelief. And in that sense, maybe we should commend it for what it is trying to do. The world years ago already did this with another of our most holy days, Easter. When I was a kid in school, we had an Easter break. It was changed many years ago to be called Spring Break. We also had a Christmas break and the world now is simply doing the same thing it did many years ago with Easter, taking the religious emphasis away from Christmas by now calling it Winter Break.

For the world Christmas is nothing more than a holiday in which they like the good feelings and traditions of decorated trees, lights, presents, parties, family and fun. I can't say that I blame them. I do too. But the world categorically rejects the real origins for the holiday, the birth of the King of Kings. Maybe we believers ought to start refusing to indulge in all the secular things of the season like having Christmas trees, lights, piles of presents, etc. and return to a singular holy focus on the spiritual meaning of the day. Romans 12:2a reminds us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." I think it would be fair to say that we believers as a whole participate in the non-religious aspects of Christmas far more than we do the religious ones. Christmas for believers is indeed an odd mix of secular and sacred.

Think about it, of all the time that families invest in Christmas activities during the season, what

percentage of these activities directly address the spiritual aspects of the season as opposed to the non-spiritual ones? I asked this question regarding my own family practices and I must admit I am embarrassed to admit just how little time we actually spend focusing on the real reason for the season. And I am an ordained minister. Above all, I should have the least excuse.

But instead of getting upset and reacting by writing letters to heathen company presidents decrying the removal of the word Christmas from their stores, websites and promotional materials (which I have done on several occasions), maybe we ought to just fall on our knees and repent for our collective failure as the body of Christ to influence our culture to an extent that they even want to honor the One whose birth we celebrate. Perhaps we ought to take the world's effort to remove Christmas from this holiday season as an indictment against us instead of an insult to us. I am mindful of what II Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Maybe we are the ones who are actually guilty of Christmas being removed from the holiday. Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Sounds a bit like what is happening to us and our beloved Christmas, doesn't it?

I think the most appropriate new symbol of what the world has done to our holy day is the new fad of an upside down Christmas tree. Have you actually seen one yet? They are in all the stores that sell trees. This new tree is indeed appropriate in that this is exactly what the world has done to Christmas ... turned it upside down.

When Paul and his missionary team were in Thessalonica, the unbelievers were angry with the message they were preaching (Jesus) and they stirred up a mob and dragged many of his team before the city authorities. I love how the New King James words the mobs complaint in Acts 17:6, "These (men) who have turned the world upside down have come here too." The hostile crowd understood that these Christians were successfully leading a radical,

cultural, counter-revolution that was transforming the world. What this hostile crowd did not understand was that their world was already upside down because of sin. What Paul and his team were actually trying to do was turn the world right side up again.

So, maybe for the world an upside down Christmas tree is indeed the perfect symbol of its view of this sacred and holy day in which God physically entered our sin-filled world to rescue us from ourselves – a day we joyfully and proudly call CHRISTmas.

Our compelling objective (See Matthew 28:18-20) is to help these poor, confused, lost, helpless, blind sinners one-by-one get their present worlds turned right side up; like someone once did for us. And we are not going to accomplish that directive by simply objecting to their removal of our word Christmas from this season, but by pointing them to the gift of Christ. That is what will light up their lives and put their Christmas tree pointing in the right direction – heavenward towards the One who came to love us back to Him.

Instead of being reactive this Christmas, let's become proactive. Instead of complaining that the world is taking something away from us, let's

concentrate on giving something to it. Let's toss the chaos of Christmas and make the time to share with our fellow creatures the "Peace on Earth" that we have found in "Christ, the newborn King".

Let's make sure our Christmas trees are right side up and the most important gift we intend to give this season is not wrapped in brightly colored paper lying under a tree, but is wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.



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