Christmas Season

The time of the year commonly referred to as "Christmas Season" is upon us. From the standpoint of the time and emphasis it receives, "Christmas **Season**" is a more correct expression than "Christmas **Day**."

To some, this is a season of much spiritual significance. However, the spiritual or religious significance which many attach to it is not based upon the word of God, but rather upon Catholicism and Paganism. Though we, by faith (Rom. 10:17), know that Christ was born of a virgin, Matt. 1:21-23; Isaiah 7:14, we do not know the day nor the time of the year. According to known weather conditions in and around "*Bethlehem of Judea*" (where Jesus was born, Matt. 2:1-3), plus our knowledge of certain events which took place at the time of His birth ("*shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night,"* Luke 2:8), it seems very improbable that Jesus was born at this season of year. Jesus Christ Himself instituted the Lord's Supper, which is a memorial of His "*death till He come*" (I Cor. 11:23-26), and He authorized that it be observed by His followers on *"the first day of the week,"* Acts 20:7. However, Jesus did not ordain that we celebrate His birth. Hence, to borrow a day from Rome, plus all the ensuing Catholic and Pagan corruptions of the same, and then observe such from a **religious** perspective is to go beyond the doctrine of Christ, 2 John 9. This, of course, does not mean that we are unthankful that Christ was born. Indeed, we are most thankful that Jesus was born of a virgin, for apart from the **birth** of Christ there could have been no **death** of Christ. And apart from His death there could be no "*remission of sins,"* Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7. So, at this time of the year, and at every time of the year we should be thankful for the birth of Jesus. But every expression of thanksgiving for Jesus' birth should be in keeping with what Christ as authorized in the Scriptures, Col. 3:17.

To others, "Christmas Day" is a national holiday which allows families and friends opportunity to be together and to enjoy one another's company. In an age of travel, such as this, when various members of nearly every family are separated by much distance, the opportunity afforded by a national or legal holiday to be joyfully reunited with loved ones can serve a good purpose. Certainly blood must not flow thicker than faith, but "*the faith"* also demands proper family responsibility on the part of each individual, I Tim. 5, while at the same time directing one to seek "*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*," Matt. 6:33.

This writer does not mean to infer that no Christian can partake of any of the other seasonal practices which, by nature are **inherently** right — such as sending greeting cards and exchanging gifts. It is difficult for me to brand practices, which are inherently **right** on July 25 as being inherently **wrong** on December 25, provided that one's activities do not stem from a sense of religious duty or denote a spiritual significance. It is one thing to send a simple "season's greeting" card as a gesture of good will, and something else to send a card featuring comments about "the birth of the Christ child." It is one thing to have simple decorations, and another to erect a manger scene in front of one's house. In the judgment of this writer, the **non**-religious observance of this time period in the year is analogous to first century Christians eating meat from animals

"*offered in sacrifice unto idols*," The simple eating of the meat was not inherently sinful, provided one was able to "*eat, asking no questions for conscience sake*," I Cor. 10:27-28.

On the other hand, there are many faithful Christians who, "*for conscience sake"* (plus the fear of causing someone to stumble) make a determined effort not to "celebrate" Christmas in **any** sense, either religious or otherwise. I applaud the fact that their convictions are not for sale. In my judgment, this is a realm wherein the principles of Romans 14 should be applied. That chapter deals with matters which are neither commanded nor condemned, but regarding which concerned brethren have conscientious scruples. In that context, neither the meat eater nor the non-meat eater was to condemn the other, and both were to *"follow after things which make for peace,"* Rom. 14:19. By application, we suggest that neither the observer or the non-observer of the secular trappings of this season should condemn the other; each should follow the things "*which make for peace, and things wherein one may edify another*," Rom. 14:19.

**** -by B. Witherington

Note: The preceding article was first written for the Dec. 22, 2002 issue of this paper. Believing it to be timely, it is herein reprinted.

"In Christ Jesus" And "In One Body"

Jesus Christ came to save "*the lost*," "\Luke 19:10. The church is *"his body*" over which He (Jesus) rules as "*head*," Eph. 1:22-23. Grammatically speaking, "***in***" is a preposition denoting location. "***In** Christ Jesus*" and ***"in** one body*" are biblical phrases, which suggest a person's spiritual location. Let us notice the connection between being "***in** Christ Jesus*" and being "***in** one body*."

In Christ Jesus, *"there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one **in** Christ Jesus,"* Gal. 3:28. **In** the "*one body*," we have all been made to "*drink into one Spirit*," whether *"we be Jews or Gentiles...bond or free,"* I Cor. 12:13. "***In** Christ Jesus*," both Jews and Gentiles "*are made nigh by the blood of Christ,"* Eph. 2:13. "***In** one body*" both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled "*unto God*," Eph. 2:16. "***In** Christ Jesus*," "*the beloved*," we are made "*accepted,"* Eph. 1:6. To the "*one body*," or church, *"the saved"* (those having been "*accepted in the beloved"*) are "*added*," Acts 2:47. "***In** Christ Jesus*" we *"have redemption through His blood,"* Eph. 1:7. **In** the "*one body*" (or church) we have been "*purchased with His own blood,"* Acts 20:28.

In view of the fact that the blessings enjoyed "***in** Christ Jesus*" are also enjoyed **in** "*one body*" (or the one church), isn't it strange that people will affirm that one has to be "***in** Christ Jesus*" in order to enjoy the blessings of salvation, and then deny that one has to be a member of the "*one body*?" Especially does it appear strange (yes, even unbiblical!) when we discover that the same act of obedience (baptism) which puts one "***into** Christ*" also puts one "***into***" the "*one body*," Gal. 3:27; I Cor. 12:13. Friend, it is impossible to be "***in***" the Lord, and **out** of the Lord's body, or to stand related to the *"head*" (Christ) while standing **un**related to "*his body, the church*," Eph. 1:22-23. Furthermore, it is equally impossible to be faithful "***in** Christ Jesus*" while being **un**faithful **in** the "*one body*." Christ and the church are so closely related that when Saul persecuted the church, he also persecuted Christ, Acts 9:1-5! Sinner friend, if you are out of the church, you are also out of Christ! Unfaithful church member, in your unfaithfulness regarding the church (i.e., its support, its work, its worship, etc.,) you are also being unfaithful to Christ, its "*head,"* and the One who purchased it "*with His own blood*," Col. 1:18; Acts 20:28.

Please do not misunderstand! We are not inferring that the church saves. To the

contrary, Jesus "*is the Savior*," Matt. 1:21, but according to the Scriptures Jesus is "*the savior of* ***the body***," Eph. 5:23 which is *"the church,"* Eph. 1:22-23. Consequently, in Acts 2:47 we are not surprised to learn that "*the Lord added to the* ***church*** *daily those who were being* ***saved***." Hence, "*the church*" consisted of "*the saved*," only "*the saved*," and all "*the saved*." Indeed, **Jesus** is "*the Savior*," but the Bible teaches that "*He is the Savior of the Body,*" Eph. 5:23, which is "*the church,"* Eph. 1:22-23. Hence, to deny the importance of "*the church*" (which Jesus built and purchased) is to deny the importance of being "*saved!"* Consider ye well!