

The Christmas Tree

Introduction – Many Christians shun the Christmas tree (an many shun the whole celebration of Christmas) as inappropriate and ungodly because of its association to paganism. Of course, scripture does not overtly mention a Christmas tree. But scripture is our final authority of teaching on everything, and therefore, we must allow scripture to be brought to bear on everything. As always, this requires wisdom (which, by the way, is represented to us as ‘a tree of life’ in Proverbs 3:18).

The Problem – In the dead of winter, trees and bushes look like death, except for the evergreens. Druid priests, worshipping ‘Woden’, brought these trees (or at least branches from those trees) into their homes and decorated them with fruits and nuts. They believed that the tree symbolized eternal life. Germanic tribes likewise worshipped trees, and brought trees or branches into their homes to entice the good spirits to protect them. Jeremiah warns us of following the practices of pagan rituals, and Chapter 10 specifically mentions cutting down trees and decorating them with gold and silver. We, who are not to give any place for the devil (Eph 4:27), nor imitate the unbelieving culture, what are we doing bringing Christmas trees into our homes (not to mention the ecological waste of between 30 and 40 million trees ‘uselessly’ cut down)?

Is God Guilty of Paganism? – We did not steal the idea of using a tree representationally from the Druids. Rather, they stole the idea from God. With this in mind, we take it back from the pagans.

The Two Trees (Gen 2:8-9, 15-17) – These two trees were placed in the Garden by God to represent the eternal moral issues to Adam and Eve. The Lord gave man and woman life and the Tree of Life was somehow connected as a means of sustaining that life. God spoke to Adam and Eve and they were given the choice of the gracious gift of His Word or the works of their own pursuit of knowledge through the second tree. Eve was deceived and Adam outright rebelled from the temptation given by the serpent (3:5). God then barred them (graciously) from the Tree of Life (3:22-24), instead promising to provide them access to eternal life through a Savior (3:15).

The Tree of the Curse (1 Pet 2:24, Acts 10:39, Gal 3:13) – Jesus hung on a wooden cross, a tree cut down by men and fashioned for a particular use, because God said that there He would bear the curse for the salvation of men. The first Adam was cursed at a tree, and the last Adam was cursed upon a tree. The first Adam’s actions barred men from access to the Tree of Life, the second Adam’s actions became the Tree of Life to all who would believe.

The Tree of Paradise (Rev 2:7, 22:1-2) – The tree does not simply point back to our covenantal history, but to our future as well. Overcomers are promised this food of eternal life, and in the city of the New Jerusalem, fed by the streams of living water, these trees provide fruit and healing constantly to the nations. Peace and goodwill to men is manifest.

The Logical End of ‘Ghost-Buster’ Mentality – If we claim it is unlawful to have a Christmas tree, why are we teaching our children to name the days of the week after the same gods? Wodens-day, Thors-day, and the like. Why do we encourage them to blow the candles out on their birthday cake? Why are you wearing that ring on your fourth finger on your left hand? Why do you keep blessing people when they sneeze? We are rife with superstitions. But Paul says, ‘if you want to eat the meat, go ahead’ (1 Cor 10:25-26).

Messy History – The fact of the matter is that traditions are often obscured by centuries of customs blending, changing, and changing again to reflect new ideas, reactions to old ideas, and reactions to those reactions. You can trace the cutting of trees to pagan rituals, and you can trace the decorating of a Christmas tree to a long history of Godly symbolism as well.

What Has (Can) the Tree Symbolize? – Beyond the clear teaching from the Word that trees may symbolize eternal life, a place of judgment, or the gathering of the nations to Christ, other lawful symbols have been developed in the use of a Christmas tree.

The Star or Angel – Here is the Star of Jacob, prophesied in Num 24:17 and followed by the Magi to worship the King of kings. The angel represents the heavenly host who sang to the shepherds and sent them to Bethlehem to worship Jesus.

The Lights – Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world (John 8:12), and we are to shine as lights ourselves to a world lost in darkness (Phil 2:14-16). Some say that December 24th was chosen as the night of Christmas Eve because it was considered the darkest and shortest day of the year. Regardless of the reasons, we are to shine as God’s people in great contrast to the crooked and perverse generation of darkness around us.

The Ornaments & Packages – Trees bear fruit, and these ornaments now represent the gifts of God’s Spirit upon and in us. We are to overflow with the fruit of the Spirit and it must manifest itself in how we give to others. The tree, loaded with packages like ripe fruit fallen, should picture our love, joy, peace, patience, and the like, towards one another.

Pitfalls in the Midst of Lawfulness – Christmas and Christmas trees, lawful in themselves, quickly become idols when we –
Worship Sentimentalism – So much disdain for Christmas comes from a syrupy, emasculated holiday emphasizing getting into

some kind of 'spirit' (read - mood) other than the Holy Spirit. But we are not to worship our emotions. We rejoice in the birth of our Savior.

Give Ourselves to Coveting - We live like lights when we 'do all things without grumbling and arguing'. Christmas is a time of thanksgiving, which always requires of us to ponder God's sovereignty over everything. He has, by definition, been good to you again.

Live Like Hypocrites - We are hypocrites when we think that celebrating 'the Incarnation' can be done solely in our brains. God has repeatedly taught His people about the importance of celebration, feasting, and rest. We are also hypocrites when we put up all kinds of lights while living in the darkness of malice and bitterness.

Dave Hatcher, December 22, 2002