

Christians And Christmas

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (1 Cor. 10:26).

It is often said that Christians should avoid Christmas and Easter because they have historical connections to pagan rituals. However, because 1 Cor. 8-10 tell us that it is OK to eat the meat that pagans have sacrificed to demons, it naturally follows that whatever the pagans have done in any other ritual should not influence us either.

Regarding the meat sacrificed to idols -

- 1 Cor. 8:8-9 say that we have freedom to choose whether or not to eat this meat because *"food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do"*.
- Also, 1 Cor. 10:25-26 say, *"eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it"*.

These verses quite clearly tell us that we are free to eat the meat that the pagans have sacrificed, however, a letter to the Gentiles seems to contradict this, telling them *"to abstain from food polluted by idols"* (Acts 15:19-21). The reason for this letter was to keep the peace with the Jewish Christians who, all their lives, had been under the law of Moses as v.21 tells us: *"For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath"*. The Jews had always followed the law of Moses, eating the meat which they had sacrificed on the Temple altar in worship to God. For this reason, they thought that if they ate the meat that the pagans had sacrificed to idols then they would be participating in the worship of pagan gods but Paul said that meat and idols are nothing (1 Cor. 10:18-19).

Eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols by *other* people is no problem. The person who eats this meat is simply having a meal but the pagan who personally offers up this sacrifice is worshipping demons (1 Cor. 10:20-21) just as the Jew who personally sacrificed on the Temple altar was worshipping God.

The apparent contradiction is further cleared up by 1 Cor. 8:4-13 and 1 Cor. 10:27-33 which tell us that we should not eat sacrificed meat if it upsets the conscience of a weak brother. 1 Cor. 8 says that stronger Christians, having the knowledge that idols are nothing, knew they had the freedom to eat this meat (vs.4-9). However, if a weak brother without this knowledge saw a stronger brother eating it then he may be led to think that he is taking part in sacrificing to idols and be encouraged towards idolatry; his conscience would become defiled (v.7) and he would be destroyed (v.11). For this reason, this meat should not be eaten in front of weaker believers as it can cause them to fall. Even though the meat is nothing but food to stronger believers, it may a stumbling block to the weak so we should avoid eating it in their presence (vs.9-13). So, the instruction not to eat meat sacrificed to idols, in Acts 15:19-21, is for the sake of weaker Christians and does not contradict the verses which tell us that we have freedom to eat it (1 Cor. 8:4-9 and 1 Cor. 10:27-30).

Rev. 2:14 & 2:20 say that Balaam and Jezebel were leading believers into eating sacrificed meat and committing sexual immorality which was part of the pagan rituals. These believers were clearly sinning by being directly involved in pagan sacrificial rituals. In contrast to being directly involved in these rituals, as stated before, Paul said that it was OK to simply eat the meat that the pagans themselves had sacrificed.

There are two situations here:

- 1) Direct involvement in pagan rituals by eating meat they had personally sacrificed to demons and committing fornication (1 Cor. 10:20; Rev. 2:14, 20).
- 2) No personal involvement in the pagan rituals but simply eating the meat that other people had sacrificed (1 Cor. 10:25-26).

The first is sinful. The second is just having a meal with no care of what the pagans may or may not have done with the meat.

So, regarding Christmas and Easter, it can be seen that what the pagans have done in the past, or are doing today, should not influence us and we should not fear these celebrations any more than we fear eating meat that others have sacrificed to idols. Celebrating Jesus' birth and death by having a Christmas tree or an Easter egg is not participating with demons despite anything the pagans may have done throughout history. Christmas trees, like idols, are dead things; they are nothing.

Regarding Isa. 44:12-20 and Jer. 10:3-5, these verses have nothing to do with worshipping under trees; they merely talk about idols made from the wood of trees and men bowing down to blocks of wood. The issue is not about trees but about worshipping idols which happen to be made from trees.

From these passages, two things are clear -

- (1) We have the freedom to choose in these matters and
- (2) We should not allow our choices to cause a believer to stumble.

Rom. 14 tells us that nothing, including a Christmas tree, is unclean in itself but if someone regards something as unclean then it is unclean to him so he should avoid it. Also, this chapter tells us not to judge one another regarding eating, drinking or sacred days and rather than judge in these matters we should seek to be loving and peaceful. So, instead of being divisive over these disputable matters, v.22 says, *“whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God”*.

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