

Don't Let Christmas Cripple Your Christianity, Part 2

One positive aspect of a secular observance of the Christmas holiday is learning the meaning behind Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (**Acts 20:35**). Even brethren who, because of conscience, do not observe Christmas at all usually use the year's end as an opportunity to share in gift giving. If we are not careful, however, this season will have the opposite effect on us. I love this time of year, but I know we must be careful not to let Christmas cripple our Christianity with materialism.

Too many people view the holiday season as the time of year to get stuff. From childhood we are trained to enter December with full wish lists. My children have had their lists on the refrigerator since before Thanksgiving. Department stores and retailers advertise to get us to ask for gifts from others as much or perhaps more than they advertise to get us to give to others. More than anything they want us to believe we deserve the gifts they sell because we have worked hard all year. If we deserve it so much, we might even buy it for ourselves.

Then there are those who approach their day of gift giving thinking, "If I only get _____, then I will be happy." Even some Christians labor under the delusion that happiness can be bought at a store or installed in their home or car. It is not true.

Matthew 6:19-24 highlights why materialism spoils our spirituality. When we focus on our wants and pleasures, we are laying up treasures on earth. If our treasure is on earth, our heart will become tied to the earth. We will begin to value the earthly, the material, and the temporal. The heavenly, spiritual, and eternal will hold no value to us and we will let it slip through our fingers.

As our heart divides between God and material goods, we will face an all-encompassing conflict of conscience. In the end, one master will win. We cannot serve two masters. Regrettably, if we have trained ourselves to value earthly goods too highly, God loses. At that point we lose.

How can we give and receive this season without letting materialism cripple us?

First, we must be content with having God. **Hebrews 13:5-6** says God will never abandon us. When we recognize the eternal blessings of fellowship with God, worldly goods are not so valuable. We must develop the psalmist's faith and desire from **Psalms 73:25-26**: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (ESV). If God is my strength and portion, if we get nothing else, we are still content and satisfied.

Second, we must be content with our circumstances now (**Philippians 4:11-13**). In that way, we can be content with whatever our circumstances are after December 25th. As the old song says, we need to count our many blessings. Instead of complaining about the blessings we haven't received yet, let's count the numerous blessings we are enjoying already. We have eaten today. We are breathing today. We have clothes today. We have a place to live today. The list probably goes on and on for all of us. As **I Timothy 6:8** says, we can be content with food and clothing. I think most of us have way more than that. We need to learn contentment with our present circumstances.

Third, as you give to others, do so based on love and service. Do not believe your giving obligates others to give to you. Do not try to out give others to make them indebted to you. Give with no thought of receiving in turn (**Luke 14:12-14**). You might even go out of your way to give secretly or to give to those you know cannot return the favor. Further, do not give out of fear. If you are only giving because you would be embarrassed not to give something to someone, because you are afraid they won't like you if you don't, or because you feel obligated based on their giving, you will only develop resentment. Giving is not more blessed in that situation. In fact, in that situation, you aren't demonstrating love for others at all. Work on loving others and give from the abundance of that love. Then you will find more blessing from giving than receiving.

Enjoy the holidays, but do not let Christmas cripple your Christianity.