

Don't Let Christmas Cripple Your Christianity, Part 3

The day is past, but the memories will linger. Sadly, the memories are not always happy. Despite Andy Williams telling us this is the "most wonderful time of the year," for many it is the most depressing. Elvis Presley hits the nail on the head for many, singing, "I'll Have a Blue Christmas." We must not let Christmas cripple our Christianity with depression.

Some become depressed because they did not get what they wanted. On the other hand, some become depressed because they got exactly what they wanted but it did not bring them happiness as they expected. Some become depressed because the bills for all they purchased start showing up. And still others become depressed because they are not able to spend this time of year with a deceased loved one. Whatever the case, many depart December with depression.

Sadness is no sin. But lasting depression can cause serious problems in our lives. Depression turns us inward, focusing on self. When we devote our thoughts to ourselves, we lose sight of others. **Philippians 2:3-4** reminds us we must always put others above ourselves, viewing their interests as more important than our own. We cannot follow that passage when we cannot see past our own noses.

Additionally, when depression turns us inward we may forget God. If we do not forget Him, we may believe He has forgotten us. Even worse; we may believe He does not even exist. Too many have allowed self-pity to turn them from the Lord. Trust me, that is what Satan wants you to do with any depression you may be feeling.

We can destroy this depression, instead of allowing it to cripple us with the following plan.

First, we must grow our contentment. If we allow materialism a place in our lives we will always face depression over what we do not have. Contentment, however, allows for peace and joy because we are satisfied in our present circumstance (**Philippians 4:11**). As we learned in our last article, this contentment should begin with remembering God's ever abiding presence. This kind of contentment can be developed by conscious contact with Him, turning to Him through prayer and Bible study. If you are struggling with contentment, I urge you to get a pen and some paper and start writing a gratitude list. Write down everything for which you are thankful right now. Then be amazed at what God really has done for you even recently.

Second, as an outgrowth of contentment, we must not let debt be part of our Christmas. The retailers are telling us we deserve their products. If we deserve them, we have earned them. If we have earned them, we will not have to borrow to pay for them. So much depression can be avoided if we simply celebrate within our means. Perhaps reading this the day after Christmas is too late. Then I urge you, develop a plan right now to deal with your debt and keep from incurring more next year. Start a Christmas savings in January that puts some money back each month so next year you won't repeat the cycle.

Third, seek to help others. No matter the cause of our depression, the number one cure is to turn our focus upon others. When we intentionally follow **Philippians 2:3-4**, we forget our "problems" in the pursuit to help others with theirs. Perhaps this is a good time to cook a meal for one of the sick or widowed among us. Maybe now is a good time to find out about a homeless shelter or some other charitable organization you can help with. Perhaps today is just a good day to pick up the phone to call someone and check on them (not to vent to them about your depression but to genuinely check on their welfare and offer help).

Even if we recognize this time of year has no real basis in the Bible, this time of year ought to be a happy one. We must not let Christmas cripple our spirituality. Rather, as always, we must glorify God in all we do.