

Introduction:

Despite the fact that the majority of the world unscripturally ascribes religious significance to Christmas, this special day can actually have a very debilitating effect on us spiritually. There are some inherent spiritual dangers wrapped up in the way our society celebrates this holiday. If your conscience allows, enjoy the celebration, the family time, the gift giving, and the food, but take care not to let Christmas cripple your Christianity. Notice with me, three ways in which Christmas can have a disabling effect on our spirituality and how to avoid these pitfalls.

Discussion:

- I. Don't let Christmas cripple your contentment in Christ with greed and materialism.
 - A. Though one might think Christmas heightens our understanding of the Lord's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (**Acts 20:35**, ESV), Christmas often leads people to deny this principle. I know whenever I go to a store, I am constantly reminded of all the possessions I would like to have. Christmas provides a great way of getting them for free. For most people, television increases these desires as the corporate giants fill our minds with "I want," "I need," "I deserve," and "I gotta have."
 - B. Secondly, there are those who believe if they could just get that new _____, then they would be happy and life would be good. Or, "Maybe we could just get money this year, then we could get whatever we wanted." They are focused on "what I want." While they buy gifts for others, the most important part of the holiday to them is when they find out what they received.
 - C. If this describes us, we have violated **Matthew 6:19-21**. We are not to be focused on laying up treasures here on the earth, but rather laying up treasures in heaven. **Matthew 6:24** describes the danger in this. Once we begin laying up treasures on earth, coveting what others have, focusing on what we want, we are in danger of trying to serve two masters. This is an impossible task and eventually we may be led away from God. After all, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (**I Timothy 6:10**).
 - D. There are three steps to avoiding the crippling effects of greed and materialism.
 1. Be content with having God (**Hebrews 13:5**).
 2. Be content in whatever circumstances you find yourself (**Philippians 4:11-13**).
 3. Give without expecting anything in return (**Ephesians 4:28; Acts 4:34-37; Luke 14:12-14**).
- II. Don't let Christmas cripple your joy from Christ with depression.
 - A. Though Andy Williams sang, "It's the most wonderful time of the year," during the Christmas holidays many people suffer depression.
 1. Some become depressed because they didn't get what they wanted.
 2. Some become depressed because they got all they wanted and are just as miserable as before.
 3. Some become debt depressed when their first credit card or "holiday loan" payment comes due. Somehow, when the money finally has to be paid, the few hours of fun on Christmas morning do not seem worth it anymore.
 4. Some become depressed remembering a loved one who has died.
 - B. The danger of depression is two-fold.
 1. Depression causes a person to turn inward forgetting about the needs of others, causing the depressed to violate **Philippians 2:3-4**.
 2. Secondly, the depressed often turn against God. "Perhaps God doesn't even care anymore," they think. "After all, if He did, why would I feel so miserable?"
 - C. Destroying depression.
 1. Regarding the first two causes of depression, refer back to point I. If we refrain from greed and materialism, we will not suffer this depression.
 2. You can destroy debt depression by avoiding debt. Your world will not end just because you do not give your children as much as you would like to give them. Neither will your child's world end. If you have already run up your cards, it is not too late to take stuff back. In the long run, you will have more and enjoy it more if you wait until you can pay cash for gifts to your spouse and children.

3. The only one of these four causes of depression that is even remotely justifiable is the fourth. That is, depression caused by remembering a deceased loved one. However, even this depression is dangerous and needs to be overcome. There are only two things I know to help overcome this depression. First, remember that God is always with you (**Hebrews 13:5**). However, because, as one little girl once said, we often need someone “with skin on,” we can, second, turn to others for help. We do not do this by calling people and expecting them to somehow help us overcome our depression by making us happy. We get help from others by helping them. When we get outside of ourselves and see the needs of others, we are often able to overcome our own struggles with depression (**Philippians 2:3-4**).

III. Don't let Christmas cripple your commitment to Christ with other goals.

- A. While the world erroneously believes Christmas draws them closer to Christ, Christmas sometimes has the opposite effect. Sometimes, it pushes Christians away from Christ.
- B. Christmas often pushes Christians away from Christ in two areas: Time and Money.
 1. Christmas is a busy time of year. With extra cooking, shopping, concerts, and visiting family, there is not much time left for other things. Unfortunately, this often means Christ gets left out of our lives in the Christmas season. During December, we do not have time to pray or study our Bibles. During December, we do not have time to teach people the Gospel (which is truly a travesty because this is the time of the year when most people are open to at least hearing about the gospel). Sometimes, we do not even have time to meet with the saints to worship. After all, we are traveling. Or, we have family in and we do not get to spend much time with them throughout the year. Do not let Christmas control your life and cripple your commitment to Christ.
 2. Because of the expenditures which accompany American Christmas celebration, many Christians turn their wallets away from Christ. They have spent so much money on gifts and food that they have to cut back somewhere. Sadly, because creditors will call us expecting money and elders will not, contribution is one of the first things to go. Sometimes it is not just December's contribution but the whole year's. For those who take out huge Christmas loans, their next year's contribution is used to make payments on last year's Christmas.
- C. We are supposed to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (**Matthew 6:33**)—yes, even before the Christmas holidays. Make a commitment to Christ right now that you will not lose your commitment to Him through these holidays. As Paul said, “Discipline your body daily lest you be disqualified” (cf. **I Corinthians 9:27**).

Conclusion:

Don't let Christmas cripple your Christianity. Rather, let your Christianity govern how you spend your Christmas. Enjoy yourself and have a great month, but as the Preacher in Ecclesiastes says, “Remember your Creator” (**Ecclesiastes 12:1**).