

The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas, Chapter 2

Christmas

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The regulative principle of worship has clear implications for those who want to promote the celebration of Christmas. It forces those who celebrate Christmas *to prove from Scripture* that God has authorized the celebrating of such a day. This, in fact, is impossible. Additionally, celebrating Christmas violates other scriptural principles.

1. Christmas Is a Monument to Past and Present Idolatry

The day on which Christmas is celebrated (December 25) and nearly all the customs associated with Christmas had their origins in pagan idol worship. “Many of the earth’s inhabitants were sun worshippers because the course of their lives depended on its yearly round in the heavens, and feasts were held to aid its return from distant wanderings. In the south of Europe, in Egypt and Persia, the sun gods were worshipped with elaborate ceremonies at the season of the winter solstice, as a fitting time to pay tribute to the benign god of plenty, while in Rome the Saturnalia reigned for a week. In northern lands mid-December was a critical time, for the days became shorter and shorter and the sun was weak and far away. Thus these ancient peoples held feast at the same period that Christmas is now observed.”¹ During the winter solstice period the Babylonians worshiped Tammuz;² the Greeks and Romans worshipped Jupiter, Mithra, Saturn, Hercules, Bacchus, and Adonis; the Egyptians worshiped Osiris and Horus; the Scandinavians worshiped Odin (or Woden). “Among the German and Celtic tribes the winter solstice was considered an important point of the year, and they held their chief festival of Yul to commemorate the return of the burning wheel. The holly, the mistletoe, the Yul log, and the wassail bowl are relics of pre-Christian times.”³ The church historian Philip Schaff writes,

The Christmas festival was probably the Christian transformation or regeneration of a series of kindred heathen festivals—Saturnalia, Sigillaria, Juvenalia, and Brumalia—which were kept in Rome in the month of December, in commemoration of the golden age of universal freedom and equality, and in honor of the unconquered sun, and which were great holidays, especially for slaves and children. This connection accounts for many customs of the Christmas season, like the giving of presents to the children and to the poor, the lighting of wax tapers, perhaps also the erection of Christmas trees, and gives them a Christian import; while it also betrays the origin of the many excesses in which the unbelieving world indulges at this season, in wanton perversion of the true Christmas mirth, but which, of course, no more forbid right use, than the abuses of the Bible or of any other gift of God. Had the Christmas festival arisen in the period

¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1961), 5:643.

² “Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen, at that precise time of the year, in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may be fairly presumed that, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the numbers of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ” (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylonians* [Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, (1916) 1943], 93).

³ *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1961), 6:623.

of the persecution, its derivation from these pagan festivals would be refuted by the then reigning abhorrence of everything heathen; but in the Nicene age this rigidity of opposition between the church and the world was in a great measure softened by the general conversion of the heathen.⁴

Christmas was not celebrated by the apostolic church. It was not celebrated during the first few centuries of the church. As late as A.D. 245, Origen (Hom. 8 on Leviticus) repudiated the idea of keeping the birthday of Christ, “as if he were a king Pharaoh.”⁵ By the middle of the 4th century, many churches in the Latin west were celebrating Christmas. Schaff adds:

Notwithstanding this deep significance and wide popularity, the festival of the birth of the Lord is of comparatively late institution.... The feast of Epiphany had spread from the East to the West. The feast of Christmas took the opposite course. We find it first in Rome, in the time of the bishop Liberius, who on the twenty-fifth of December, 360, consecrated Marcella, the sister of St. Ambrose, nun or bride of Christ, and addressed her with the words: “Thou seest what multitudes are come to the birth-festival of thy bridegroom.” [Ambrose, *De virgin ii. 1.*] This passage implies that the festival was already existing and familiar. Christmas was introduced in Antioch about the year 380; in Alexandria, where the feast of the Epiphany was celebrated as the nativity of Christ, not till about 430. Chrysostom, who delivered the Christmas homily in Antioch on the 25th of December, 386, already calls it, notwithstanding its recent introduction (some ten years before), the fundamental feast, or the root, from which all other Christian festivals grow forth.⁶

During the 5th century, Christmas became an official Roman Catholic holy day. In A.D. 534, Christmas was recognized as an official holy day by the Roman state. An expert in ancient church worship concurs. Herman Wegman writes,

The oldest mention of Christmas (December 25) as a Christian feast is found in the west at Rome in the *Chronography* of 354, based on a calendar that goes back to about 336. Thus, Christmas may have been known in Rome by 330 or earlier. There may have been some connection with the building of St. Peter’s on the Vatican hill where in one of the tombs, a mosaic of Christ as the *sol iustitiae* (sun of righteousness) has been discovered. The texts of Christmas often refer to Christ the light of the world and the sun of righteousness. In any case, it is practically certain that Christmas in Rome originated as a Christian appendage to (or perhaps replacement of) the pagan *Natalis Invicti*, the festival of the unconquered sun at the winter solstice. The syncretistic ideas of the emperor Constantine may also have been related to this development.... It appears that the festival of Christmas was adopted in the east from Rome, probably in the last quarter of the fourth century in Constantinople and in the middle of the fifth century in Egypt.⁷

The reason that Christmas became a church holy day has nothing to do with the Bible. The Bible does not give the date of Christ’s birth. “[T]he day and month of the birth of Christ are

⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 [1910]), 3:398.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:642.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:395-396.

⁷ Herman Wegman, *Christian Worship in East and West: A Study Guide to Liturgical History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 103.

nowhere stated in the gospel history, and cannot be certainly determined.”⁸ According to the writers of the Talmud “the flocks in Palestine were brought in at the beginning of November, and not driven to pasture again till toward March.”⁹ Therefore, the date of December 25 is in direct conflict with Luke 2:8. Nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to celebrate Christmas. Christmas (as well as many other pagan practices) was adopted by the Roman church as a missionary strategy.

The syncretism with paganism as a missionary strategy is clearly revealed in Pope Gregory I’s instructions to missionaries, given in A.D. 601: “Because they [the pagans] were wont to sacrifice oxen to devils, some celebration should be given in exchange for this...they should celebrate a religious feast and worship God by their feasting, so that still keeping outward pleasures, they may more readily receive spiritual joys.”¹⁰

This syncretism with paganism explains why Christmas customs are pagan to the core. The Christmas tree came into use because sacred trees were an important aspect of pagan worship during the winter solstice season. In Babylon, the evergreen tree represented Nimrod coming to life again in Tammuz, the queen of Babylon. Tammuz was supposedly born of a virgin, Semiramus. In Rome, they decorated fir trees with red berries to celebrate Saturnalia.¹¹ The Scandinavians brought a sacred fir tree into their homes in honor of their god Odin. “When the pagans of Northern Europe became Christians, they made their sacred evergreen trees part of the Christian festival, and decorated the trees with gilded nuts, candles (a carryover from sun worship), and apples to stand for the stars, moon, and sun.”¹²

The lighting of special fires and candles on December 24 and 25 are practices that originated in sun worship. The use of the Yule log probably originated with Druid sun worship. The log would not be allowed to burn up and would be used to start next year’s fire (possibly a symbol of the sun’s rebirth). “The Romans ornamented their temples and homes with green boughs and flowers for the Saturnalia, their season of merry making and the giving of presents; the Druids gathered mistletoe with great ceremony and hung it in their homes; the Saxons used holly, ivy and bay.”¹³

The fact that Christmas is full of pagan practices is universally recognized. “Yet many Christians contend that such practices no longer bear pagan connotations, and believe that the observance of Christmas provides an opportunity for worship and witness bearing.”¹⁴ Many Christians argue that they do not worship the Christmas tree, and that the pagan origins are so far in the past as to be harmless. But such a view, while common in our day, shows a total disregard of the biblical teaching regarding idols, the paraphernalia associated with idolatry, and the monuments to idolatry.

God has such a strong hatred of idolatry that Israel was not just commanded to avoid the worship of idols. Israel was also specifically ordered to *destroy everything* associated with idolatry. “You shall utterly destroy all the places, where the nations which you shall dispossess

⁸ Schaff, 3:395.

⁹ *Ibid*, 3:397, fn. 2.

¹⁰ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (quoted in *Encyclopedia Britannica* [1961], 5:643).

¹¹ “The Saturnalia, like Christmas, was a time for giving presents. Small dolls were a popular gift—though for an unpleasant reason. They commemorated a myth that Saturn ate all his male children at birth, to fulfill a pledge that he would die without heirs” (The United Church Observer, *Santa’s Family Tree*, Dec. 1976, 14).

¹² *World Book Encyclopedia* (1955), 3:1425.

¹³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5:643.

¹⁴ G. Lambert, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 1:805.

served their gods, on the high mountains, and on the hills, and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods, and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.... [A]nd that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way..." (Deut. 12:2-4, 30-31).

When Jacob set out to purify the camp (i.e., his household and attendants) the earrings were removed as well as their foreign gods (Gen. 35:1-4), because their earrings were associated with their false gods. They were signs of superstition. When Elijah went to offer his sacrifice, in his contest with the prophets of Baal, he did not use the pagan altar. He did not take something made for idols (e.g., Saturnalia) and attempt to sanctify it for holy use (e.g., Christmas), but instead he rebuilt the Lord's altar. Christians should not take the pagan festival of Yule or Saturnalia and dress it with Christian clothing, but rather sanctify the Lord's day, as did the apostles (1 Kgs. 18:32). When Jehu went up against the worshipers of Baal and their temple, did he save the temple and set it apart for holy use? No! He slaughtered the worshipers of Baal and then "broke down the sacred pillar of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal, and made it a refuse dump to this day" (2 Kgs. 10:27). "Moreover, we have the example of good Josiah (2 Kgs. 23), for he did not only destroy the houses, and the high places of Baal, but his vessels also, and his grove, and his altars; yea, the horses and chariots which had been given to the sun. The[re is the] example also of penitent Manasseh, who not only overthrew the strange gods, but their altars too (2 Chron. 23:15). And of Moses, the man of God, who was not content to execute vengeance on the idolatrous Israelites, except he should also utterly destroy the monument of their idolatry."¹⁵

God does not want His church to take pagan days, and those pagan and popish rites and paraphernalia that go with them, and adapt them to Christian use. He simply commands us to abolish them altogether from the face of the earth forever. You may not be offended by the Yule log, the Christmas tree, the mistletoe, the holly berries and the selection of a pagan day to celebrate Christ's birth, but God is offended. God commands us to get rid of the monuments and paraphernalia of paganism.

If your wife was promiscuous before you married her would you be offended if she had pictures of her old boyfriends on her dresser? Would it bother you if she celebrated the various anniversaries relating to her past relationships? Would you be offended if she kept and cherished the various rings, jewelry and mementos given to her by her old boyfriends? Of course you would be offended! The Lord God is infinitely more zealous of His honor than you are; He is a jealous God. Could Israel take festival days to Baal, Ashteroth, Dagon and Molech and alter them to make them pleasing to God? Of course not! The Bible makes very clear which kings of Judah pleased God the most. God is pleased when idols, their temples, their religious dress, earrings, sacred houses, sacred trees, poles, ornaments, rites, names and days are utterly cut off from the earth, never again to be restored. God wants His bride to eliminate forever the monuments, the days, the paraphernalia and the mementos of idolatry. "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are futile..." (Jer. 10:2-3). "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates they have done to their gods..." (Deut. 12:31).

¹⁵ George Gillespie, *English Popish Ceremonies*, (1637), 3:19.

Christians must not only put away the monuments of past idolatry but also everything associated with present idolatry. Christmas is the most important holy day in Roman Catholicism. The name Christmas comes from Romanism: Christ-mass, or the mass of Christ. The name Christmas unites the name or title of our glorious God and Savior with the idolatrous, blasphemous mass of popedom. Christ-mass is a mixture of pagan idolatry and Popish invention.

The Roman Catholic Church hates the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Roman church uses human inventions, such as Christmas, to keep millions of people in darkness. The fact that millions of Bible-believing Protestants are observing a Roman Catholic holy day which has not been commanded anywhere in God's Word reveals the sad state of modern Evangelicalism. "We cannot conform, communicate, and symbolize with the idolatrous Papists, in the use of the same, without making ourselves idolaters by participation."¹⁶ Our attitude should be that of the Protestant Reformer Bucer who said, "I would to God that every holy day whatsoever besides the Lord's day were abolished. That zeal which brought them first in, was without all warrant of the Word, and merely followed corrupt reason, forsooth to drive out the holy days of the pagans, as one nail drives out another. Those holy days have been so tainted with superstitions that I wonder we tremble not at their very names."¹⁷

The common objection against the argument that pagan monuments must be abolished is that these things occurred so long ago as to be harmless to us. But this is totally untrue. Not only do we have the present idolatry of Romanism, but there is a revival going on at this very moment in Europe and North America of the old pagan European religions. The radical feminist movement is presently reviving the fertility goddesses and gods of the ancient Near East. God's law-Word says to get rid of the monuments to idolatry. God's law is not rendered null and void with the passage of time.

2. *Christmas Dishonors Christ's Day*

The day that God has set apart for His church corporately to celebrate the person and work of Christ is that day commonly called the Lord's day or the Christian Sabbath. The first day of the week is the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is the day of Christ's victory over sin, Satan and death. Jesus' humiliation and sacrificial death are complete. Christ rose and is forever the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. "Therefore, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." (2 Cor. 5:16). "The Lord's day is given in memory of *the whole work of redemption*."¹⁸ The idea of honoring someone's life piecemeal (this event, that event) comes not from the Bible but from pagan emperor worship. In fact, the only birthday celebrations recorded in the whole Bible are those of Pharaoh (Gen. 40:20) and King Herod (Matt. 14:6; Mk. 6:21). Both birthday parties ended in murder, Herod's in the murder of John the Baptist.

God has been very generous to His people in giving them 52 holy days a year. When men add their own days (e.g., Christmas, Easter, etc.) they detract from, denigrate and even set aside the Lord's day. People love and give more attention to Christmas than they do the Lord's day. Many Christians spend nearly the whole month of December preparing for Christmas: decorating their homes, offices and churches, buying gifts, baking pies and cookies, practicing and

¹⁶ Ibid, 3:35.

¹⁷ Martin Bucer, quoted in William Ames, *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship*, (n.p., 1633), 360.

¹⁸ Gillespie, 146.

memorizing Christmas carols, performing nativity plays, holding carol recitals, etc. Many Americans rarely attend church but would never miss the Christmas service. The typical American winks at Sabbath breaking, fornication, adultery and drunkenness; but considers Christians who do not celebrate Christmas to be deluded fanatics:

What Jesus desires of us is not the observance of things He did not command, but the things He did command. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). This is what the Apostles did. They taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). It did not include Christmas, Good Friday, or Easter, because they were not part of the things commanded by Christ. So, the one who understands "the true meaning of Christmas" (or Good Friday, or Easter) is precisely the one who realizes that they are human inventions. And in order to honor Christ as the only king and head of the church, *such a person will not observe* these man-made additions to what our Lord commanded. A person such as this may be out of step with a very popular custom. The important thing is that he will be in step with Christ and the apostles.¹⁹

Christmas (and all other extra-biblical holy days) destroys society's obedience toward the Christian Sabbath by blurring the distinction or the boundary line between Jehovah's appointed day of rest and worship and the other six days of the week in which man is commanded by God to work. The Larger Catechism says, "The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, and in the New Testament called The Lord's Day" (Ans. 116). Tragically in American society the Lord's day is openly profaned with unnecessary labor and the pursuit of personal pleasures while Christmas day which usually falls upon a work day is used as a day of rest. The command to labor six days is not incidental to the fourth commandment but a crucial aspect of it ("shalt thou labor" [*tha abod*] is an imperfect with imperatival meaning). Therefore, Christmas leads directly to the violation of the positive aspect of the fourth commandment. In fact Christmas is one of the very few days of the year in which virtually every business in the land is closed. This lack of human activity is not practiced on the Lord's day. This sad fact demonstrates the apostasy of American culture. Christmas (which is not authorized) is honored, while the Lord's day (which is commanded) is not honored (except by a tiny remnant of professing Christians). Loving God and His day go hand in hand. When the love and fear of God no longer exist, His day is not honored.

Further, the religious observance of a *man-made* holy day is an implicit usurpation of the authority of Christ who is the only King and head of the church, family and state. Bannerman writes,

In keeping the last day of the week as a day of religious observance, the Jews, by the very act, expressed their religious acknowledgment of God, who had appointed it, and did an act of worship to Him as its author, in the character of the one Creator who made the heavens and the earth. In keeping the first day of the week, Christians, by the very act, recognize Christ as the author of it, and do an act of religious homage to Him as the one Redeemer, who on that day rose from the dead, and secured the salvation of His people.... And who does not see, that upon

¹⁹ G. I. Williamson, *On the Observance of Sacred Days* (Havertown: New Covenant Publication Society, n.d.), 9-10.

the very same principle the observance of holidays appointed by the Church, as ordinary and stated parts of Divine worship, is an expression of religious homage to man, who is the author of the appointment,—an unlawful acknowledgment of human or ecclesiastical authority in an act of worship. In keeping, after a religious sort, a day that has no authority but man's, we are paying a religious homage to that authority; we are bowing down, in the very act of our observance of the day as part of worship, not to Christ, who has not appointed it, but to the Church, which has. We are keeping the season holy, not to God, but to man.²⁰

The *only* day that God has authorized as a holy day is the Lord's day.²¹ If the church wants to please Jesus Christ and honor Him, then it should do so by keeping His day and by setting an example to the outside world. When Christians make Christmas more special than the Lord's day, they disobey the teachings of Christ and dishonor His day.

3. *Christmas Is a Lie*

Christianity is the religion of truth. God cannot lie. All truth and knowledge ultimately come from God. Jesus Christ is “the way, *the truth*, and the life” (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). The Gospel is called “the word of truth” (Eph. 1:13). God commands: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Ex. 20:16). Paul tells us to be “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), to put away lying and speak the truth to our neighbor in order not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:25, 30). Jesus Christ tells us that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in *truth*” (John 4:24). Christians are to be light and salt to the world (Matt. 5:13, 16). They are to be a witness before the world by speaking the truth and living the truth. Is celebrating Christmas compatible with our responsibility to speak and live the truth before the world? No, because Christmas is a lie.

The date used to celebrate the birth of Christ, December 25, is a lie. According to the Bible, Jesus was not born on December 25. “And there were in the same country shepherds *abiding in the field*, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8). It is common knowledge that shepherds in Palestine came in from the fields before winter. The rainy season in Judea began in late October or early November. The shepherds would bring their field flocks into the villages before the beginning of the rainy season. Therefore, Christ was born *before* the first week of November. “It is quite evident that Christ was not actually born in the middle of the winter season. But, on the other hand, do the Scriptures tell us what season of the year he was born? Yes, the scriptures indicated that he was born in the *fall* of the year. For example, our Lord's public ministry lasted for three and a half years (Dan. 9:27, etc.). His ministry came to an end at the time of the Passover (John 18:39), which was in the spring of the year. And so three and a half years before this would mark the beginning of His ministry in the *fall* of the year. Now when Jesus began his ministry, he was about thirty years of age (Lk. 3:23). This was the recognized age for a priest before he could become an official minister under the Old Testament (Num. 4:3). Therefore, since Christ began his ministry at the age of about 30 since this was in the fall season of the year then thirty years before this would mark his birth as being in the early FALL, not December 25.”²²

²⁰ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1960 [1869]), 1:416.

²¹ “There is no day commanded in the scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued” (The Westminster Assembly, *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, 1645).

²² Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* (Riverside: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1961), 160-61.

If Christians are willing to celebrate a lie and fill Christ's sham birthday with papist and pagan mythology (e.g., Santa Claus, the Christmas tree, mistletoe, the Yule log, evergreens, etc.), then why should the world believe the church when it really speaks the truth? If you lie about the birth of Christ and gladly indulge in pagan mythology, then when you tell your neighbor about the resurrection of Christ, why should he believe you? By celebrating Christmas you are putting a stumbling block in front of your unbelieving neighbor. Your neighbor could reason that since you speak and live a lie regarding the birth of Christ, you cannot be trusted when you speak about the resurrection of Christ. I've actually had intellectuals say to me, after I spoke to them of Christ's death and resurrection, that they are myths foisted on simple people by the church just like Santa Claus and the Easter bunny (of course, the Christmas lie has gone on for so long that most people accept it as fact). The church must stop denigrating God's inspired, infallible Word by setting up human fantasies alongside divine revelation. Christmas is a contradiction of the biblical account of Christ's birth.

4. *The World Loves Christmas*²³

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). "Do not love the world, or the things in the world (1 Jn. 2:15).

Who leads whom? Is not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ supposed to be an example to the world? Is it not to be salt and light to the nations? Is it proper for the church to follow the pagan world-system? Christmas did not originate in the Bible or the apostolic church; it is pagan to its very core. The day, the tree, the exchanging of gifts, the mistletoe, the holly berries all originated in the idolatrous pagan festivities surrounding the winter solstice. The compromised, apostatizing Roman church took what was pagan and attempted to Christianize it. Covenant-breaking, Christ-hating, idol-worshipping, pagan unbelievers love Christmas. Why? Because Christmas is not biblical! Christmas is not of God. It is a lie, and Satan, their master, is the father of lies. Atheists, homosexuals, feminists, wicked politicians, murderers, child molesters and idolaters all love Christmas. If Christmas were biblical, and if Christmas were commanded to be observed in the Bible, would the world love it so? Absolutely not! The world would hate Christmas. "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14). Does the world love the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath? Of course not! The world hates it. Does the world love and obey the resurrected King of kings and Lord of lords? No! The world hates Christ. The world does love a plastic or clay baby in a manger. A plastic baby is not very threatening. Christ is no longer a baby. He is the glorified King who sits at the right hand of the Father. "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know we Him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16).

The Bible teaches that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3:19). "Thus says the LORD: Do not learn the way of the Gentiles...for the customs of the peoples are futile" (Jer. 10: 2-3). The apostle Paul has in mind a much broader application than just marriage when he says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? *Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* And what agreement has

²³ Of course, the world loves puppy dogs, apple pie and baseball as well, but these hold no religious significance. They are not associated with Christ and are not religious ordinances.

the temple of God with idols?... Therefore come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:14-17). When the church has something relating to worship and religion in common with the unbelieving pagan world, the church, in that area, is bound together with unbelievers. The church has no business celebrating a pagan holiday with the pagan world. What hypocrisy! What wickedness!

5. Christmas Is Destructive of Christian Liberty

Jesus Christ is the only king and sole lawgiver to the church. Whenever men add human laws, ordinance, rites, ceremonies or holy days to what Christ has authorized in His word, they deny believers the liberty they have in Christ. While it is a duty for Christians to walk according to our Lord’s precepts, ordinance and admonitions, it is sinful for believers to submit to religious ordinances based on human authority. When we draw near to God by doing things deemed sacred or holy it is especially important that such things are based upon faith. Paul says, “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23) and believers must “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5) with regard to the lawfulness of holy days.

What does the apostle mean when he says that things done apart from faith are sinful? Does he mean that we must have faith in ourselves, our goodness, or our creativity? No. Paul says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith must have as its object that which is taught or authorized by Scripture. Obviously biblical faith cannot be connected to that which is an invention of man in matters of worship. Thus, God rejected Abel’s offering because it did not proceed from Jehovah’s command but from Abel’s imagination (cf. Gen. 4:3-5; Heb. 11:4). Likewise then, the appointment and celebration of religious holy days (that have no divine warrant) is sinful and will without question offend the consciences of all good Puritan and truly confessional Presbyterian believers. Thus, the imposition of Christmas religious services apart from faith, resting solely on human invention and authority, is a gross violation of Christian liberty and charity. Is a love of human traditions so important that the liberty of Christ’s sheep should be disregarded and trampled underfoot? Is it an act of Christian love to tempt believers to sin by doing that which is *not* rooted in biblical faith, but rather pagan and popish tradition? For the sake of all Christians who want to be faithful to Scripture, Christmas services must be abolished.

6. The Church Calendar Is an Imitation of the Old Covenant Ceremonial Holy Days Coupled with Heathen Customs

The “Christian” church year came into being as a human combination of three elements:

(1) There was Jewish calendar which had sacred seasons and ceremonial sabbaths which comported quite well with the natural succession of seasons. These seasons and ceremonial sabbaths were done away by the work of Christ. The imitation of the old covenant holy days may be rooted in the fact that the early church had many Jewish believers and Gentile proselytes who were accustomed to keeping such days. Thus, ceremonial days were retained and “Christianized.” An even more probable explanation is that the Christian year originated in the soil of sacerdotalism. As the church hierarchy embraced human merit and the idea that the clergy were priests, the old covenant priesthood, temple (sacred places), priestly garments, incense and special holy days became the pattern of Roman Catholic worship. The church year was founded

upon “the precedent of the Old Testament cultus, with no positive direction from Christ or the apostles. The New Testament contains no certain traces of annual festivals.”²⁴

(2) There was the combination of pagan customs that originated with the heathen traditions from ancient times that predated the arrival of Christianity in Europe. Indeed, Christmas is one day on the church calendar which is not rooted in a specific Jewish day but is based (as far as the timing of it goes) solely on a pagan feast day.²⁵ “In the Christmas festival, which from the fourth century spread from Rome over the entire church, the holy commemoration of the birth of the Redeemer is associated—to this day, even in Protestant lands—with the wanton merriments of the pagan Saturnalia.”²⁶ For example, Easter contains many heathen elements from pagan fertility cults such as the painting or dyeing of eggs, sunrise services, rabbits and hot cross buns. The name “*Easter*” is derived from Astarte or Ishtar (pronounced *easter*) a pagan fertility goddess.²⁷ The pagan Greeks in Ephesus worshiped the

²⁴ Schaff, 1:388.

²⁵ The almost universal practice of some sort of pagan sun worship throughout the ancient world (from Babylon to Egypt, Greece, Rome and even Northern Europe) with often very similar heathen customs, has led some scholars to believe that the winter solstice festival had a very early heathen origin in Babylon that eventually spread throughout much of the old world. Woodrow writes, “In pagan days, this birth of the sun-god was especially popular among that branch of the ‘Mysteries’ known as Mithraism. Concerning this we read: ‘The largest pagan religious cult which fostered the celebration of December 25 as a holiday throughout the Roman and Greek worlds was the pagan sun worship—Mithraism.... This winter festival was called ‘the Nativity’—the ‘nativity of the SUN.’” (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 471.) And not only was Mithra, the sun-god of Mithraism, said to be born at this time of the year, but Osiris, Horus, Hercules, Bacchus, Adonis, Jupiter, Tammuz, and other sun-gods were supposedly born at what is today called the “Christmas” season—the winter solstice! (T. W. Doane, *Bible Myths*, 474).

Says a noted writer, “The winter solstice (was) the time at which all the sun-gods from Osiris to Jupiter and Mithra had celebrated their (birthdays), the celebration being adorned with the pine tree of Adonis, the Holly of Saturn, and the mistletoe...tapers represented the kindling of the newborn sun-god’s fire...” (Homer W. Smith, *Man and His Gods*, 201).

Now the fact that the various sun-gods that were worshiped in different countries were all believed to have been born at the same season (in the old fables), would seem to indicate that they were but different forms (under different names) of the original son of the sun-god, Tammuz, of Babylon, the land from which sun-worship originally spread.

In Babylon, the birthday of Tammuz was celebrated at the time of the winter solstice with great feasts, revelry, and drunkenness—the same way many celebrate it today! The ancient celebration spread and became so much an established custom that “in pagan Rome and Greece, in the days of Teutonic barbarians, in the remote times of ancient Egyptian civilization, in the infancy of the race East and West and North and South, the period of the winter solstice was ever a period of rejoicing and festivity” (William S. Walsh, *Curiosities of Popular Customs*, 242).

When this mid-winter festival came to Rome, it was known as the Saturnalia—Saturn being but another name of Nimrod or Tammuz as ‘the hidden god’” (Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* [Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc., 1966], 163-164).

²⁶ Ibid, 1:376.

²⁷ The pagan elements of Easter (like Christmas) are found throughout much of the ancient world. One scholar writes, “Although Easter is a Christian festival, it embodies traditions of an ancient time antedating the rise of Christianity. The origin of its name is lost in the dim past; some scholars believe it probably is derived from *Ēastre*, Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, to whom was dedicated *Ēastre mōnath*, corresponding to April. Her festival was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox, and traditions associated with the festival survive in the familiar Easter bunny, symbol of the fertile rabbit, and in the equally familiar colored Easter eggs originally painted with gay hues to represent sunlight of spring. Such festivals, and the myths and legends which explain their origin, abounded in ancient religions. The Greek myth of the return of the earth-goddess Demeter from the underworld to the light of day, symbolizing the resurrection of life in the spring after the long hibernation of winter, had its counterpart, among others, in the Latin legend of Ceres and Persephone. The Phrygians

Hellenized version of Astarte called Diana (Ac. 19:24-27). Diana was a very large statue of a woman whose whole mid-section (front, sides and back) was surrounded by several rows of eggs.

(3) There was the division of various important events of our Lord's life (e.g., birth, circumcision, crucifixion, resurrection, sending of the Holy Spirit) into separate holy days with peculiar themes and rituals. The commemoration of particular events of a person's life was patterned after heathen emperor and hero worship.

Having already noted that the Bible strongly condemns adding human traditions to what God has commanded and expresses Jehovah's hatred of syncretism (i.e., mixing pagan customs with the true religion), a few comments regarding the Judaizing aspect of the church year are in order. First, if Christ and the apostles wanted the church to follow a church year or Christian calendar, then they would have either commanded such a thing or left us an inscripturated example to follow. Yet there is not a shred of evidence for the church calendar within the New Testament. The church calendar is based on the false, unbiblical assumption that church authorities have the right to invent their own holy days. The Roman Catholic and Episcopal concept of church authority (as autonomous or independent of divine warrant) is an implicit rejection of the crown rights of Jesus Christ. When popes or prelates place man-made holy days or rites alongside of what God has authorized, they assign to themselves an authority that belongs solely to God.

Second, Paul condemned such days when he rebuked believers who wanted to retain the old covenant shadows. "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain" (Gal. 4:9-11). James Bannerman writes,

And in the context it is not difficult to gather the twofold ground on which the apostle condemned such observances. First of all, he grounded condemnation of ecclesiastical days on the fact that, in attaching importance to them, and regarding them as ordinary parts of the service due to God, the Galatians, like "children, were in bondage under the elements (*stoicheia*) of the world;" in other words, he stigmatizes these appointments of days and seasons as rudimentary observances suited to the infancy of the Church, but only fetters to it now, when it ought to have arrived at spiritual manhood. And again he characterizes them as "the weak and beggarly elements (or rudiments) whereunto the Galatians desired again to be in bondage." They were the empty and outward appointments of a carnal and worn-out dispensation.²⁸

believed that their all-powerful deity went to sleep at the time of the winter solstice, and they performed ceremonies at the spring equinox to awaken him with music and dancing. The universality of such festivals and myths among ancient peoples has led some [unbelieving modernist] scholars to interpret the resurrection of Christ as a mystical and exalted variant of fertility myths" (*Funk and Wagnall's New Standard Encyclopedia* [New York: Unicorn, 1950], 2:4045).

Given the sinful nature of our human hearts and our sinful tendency to incorporate pagan elements into the unadorned worship of Christ, we must heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah who declared: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile [lit. vain]" (Jer. 10:2-3).

²⁸ Bannerman, 1:414. Calvin writes, "When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned as a part of divine worship, then days are improperly observed" (*Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 124).

The imitation of the holy days and seasons of the old covenant Jewish calendar is a rejection of the simple unadorned gospel worship instituted by our Lord through His inspired apostles.

Third (as noted), the church year or religious calendar detracts from the permanent, moral, weekly Sabbath (the Lord's day) that God instituted before the fall, that is included in the Decalogue—the moral law. Since it was God's sovereign plan to set aside the ceremonial sabbaths and festivals with the completion of His Son's redemptive work, while retaining the weekly moral Sabbath (yet changing the day from the seventh to the first day of the week in honor of Christ's resurrection); obviously Jehovah wants us to keep and cherish the Lord's day as a special day, sanctified from all other days. Thus, while men seek to honor Jesus by adding to Scripture, they actually dishonor Him by detracting from and de-emphasizing the Lord's day.²⁹

7. *Don't Be Fooled*

Paul warns that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). That is why pagan festivals throughout the world are fun days. They are days of fine food, parties, parades, family reunions and gift giving. Satan's goal is not merely to enslave individuals but also to control institutions, cultures and nations. The heathen calendar of "holy days," where pagan festivals are celebrated each year at certain times, is a Satan-inspired tool to habituate whole cultures in covenant rebellion. Satan wants individuals and nations to be enslaved in

²⁹ An example of the rejection of the regulative principle and the acceptance of man-made holy days can be found among the first table-antinomian Christian Reconstruction writers. Note the following comments by James Jordan. He writes, "The festival calendar of the Old Testament is no more and no less binding on the Church today than is the sabbath day. Just as the Lord's day has come in place of the sabbath day, so the Church has devised voluntary festivals in place of those of the Old Covenant. Just as the Old Covenant feasts followed the rhythmic pace of the natural year, giving typological meaning to it, so the Christian calendar also moves from the dark winter of the Nativity, through the rising of the sun, and the Resurrection of the world in the spring" (*The Law and the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23* [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984], 184-86. Why should Jordan's comments be rejected as unscriptural and Romanizing? First, he *presupposes* that the regulative principle doesn't exist and that men have the right to make up holy days without biblical warrant. This presupposition is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture (see Deut. 12:32; Gen. 4:3-5; Ex. 20:4-5; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Chron. 15:13-15; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 1 Kgs. 12:33; Mt. 15:1-3, 8-9; 18:20; Jn. 4: 19-24; Col. 2:8, 16, 20-23). Second, he *ignores* the fact that the Old Testament festivals were *not* made up by the church but were *commanded by God*. These old covenant holy days were not instituted to teach us about "the rhythmic pace of the natural year" but were designed to instruct the church in its immaturity about the person and work of Christ. Once these types, shadows and "weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9) served their purpose, and Jesus completed His redemptive work, all the festival days were completely abrogated. Third, the inspired apostles and prophets who were sent by God to interpret the person and work of Jesus as well as set in order the new covenant church's worship and government did not institute a church calendar. If God wanted us to set up new covenant imitations of the Old Testament festivals days or to follow the rhythmic pace of the seasons, He did not instruct the New Testament apostles or prophets to do so. Therefore, the church calendar is Romish, man-made nonsense. Fourth, Jordan erroneously asserts that the man-made festival days (i.e., holy days) are voluntary. The man-made church calendars are not voluntary; they are explicitly mandatory in many communions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Eastern Orthodox) and implicitly mandatory in others (e.g., Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, etc). Once a denomination adopts such popish trash a person can only avoid such corruptions by finding a different church. Even in many "conservative" Presbyterian bodies the pressure to conform to papal days such as Christmas is immense. For young men seeking a pastorate not to favor celebrating such days is a job killer. Fifth, Jordan offers not a shred of biblical evidence for the celebration of non-authorized holy days. This author did read one of Jordan's newsletters that offered justification for the celebration of holy days. The gist of the article was the fact that there are four seasons proves the necessity of the church calendar. Of course, if such an argument constitutes divine warrant for the worship of Christ's church, one could prove anything one dreamed up (e.g., the existence of rocks proves that God wants rock and roll bands in public worship). The bottom line is that Mr. Jordan likes the liturgical calendar.

pagan ritual and darkness. A culture is habituated to paganism when pagan festivals, rites and ceremonies are second nature and unquestioned in that society.

How have Christians been fooled into celebrating a pagan festival day? The day has been transformed from a day of darkness to a day of light. How is this done? It's very simple! The first thing you do is lie. You teach that this day is Christ's birthday. The fact that this is not really the day Christ was born is inconsequential. Very few people will check the facts. And the ones who do will be regarded as fanatics, Scrooges and out of touch with modernity. Second, you make it a day when family members are required to be together. What a wonderful thing it is, a day for family dinner and family values. Third, you make it a day of gift giving and charity, a day of caring and sharing. Who could be against that? Fourth, you dedicate the day to children all over the world. You make it fun and give them lots of hugs and presents. Therefore, when these children grow up, the day will be filled with fond memories. It is a day of intense sentimentality. (Does it not bring a little tear to your eye when you think of your parents and brothers and sisters gathered around the tree?) Fifth, you make sure every city and town is properly decorated. And you get the whole entertainment industry into high gear with articles, specials, movies, plays and recitals. Sixth, you put community, workplace, church and family pressure on those who do not celebrate the day to conform or else be viewed as perverting the truth or out of touch with reality.

Has this strategy been effective? Yes, very effective. There was a time when Presbyterians and Congregationalists would have been disciplined for celebrating Christmas. For Protestants from the Calvinist wing of the Reformation, celebrating such days was unthinkable for nearly three hundred years. Now, if you are a Presbyterian and do not celebrate Christmas, other Presbyterians think you are a fanatic. Protestants have been fooled, bamboozled, hoodwinked and duped because they have forgotten God's regulative principle. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6). There would be only one acceptable reason for a Christian to celebrate Christmas, and that would be an instruction from the Word of God to do so. Since there is no implicit or explicit instruction from the Bible to do so, it is forbidden.

Common Reasons Given by Christians for Celebrating Christmas

1. Doesn't Romans 14:5-6 allow Christians to celebrate Christmas?

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it (Rom. 14:5-6).

(1) Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, was addressing a situation unique to the early church. There were Jewish believers who "regarded the holy days of the ceremonial economy as having abiding sanctity."³⁰ The "days" spoken of in Romans were days *commanded by God in the old economy*. Paul is "referring to the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution."³¹

³⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 177-78.

³¹ *Ibid*, 257.

Virtually all commentators concur with this interpretation.³² Paul allows for diversity in the church *over the issue of Jewish holy days* because of the unique historical circumstances. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the ceremonial aspects of the law (e.g., animal sacrifices, Jewish holy days, circumcision, etc.) were done away with. Yet prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, the apostles allowed certain practices by Jewish Christians, as long as no works-righteousness was attributed to these practices. In Acts 21:26 we even encounter the apostle Paul going to the temple “to announce the expiration of the days of purification.” Jewish believers who were already accustomed to keeping certain holy days of the Mosaic economy were allowed to continue doing so for a time. But once the Temple was destroyed, the canon of Scripture was completed, and the church had existed for a whole generation, these unique historical circumstances ceased. Further, even if this passage were still applicable to our present situation, it could not be used to justify Christmas, because these days were not “Christianized” pagan holy days nor arbitrary holy days set up by man. Therefore, if this passage were still applicable to our situation, it could only be used to justify the private celebration of Jewish holy days by weak Jewish believers. It cannot be used as a justification for man-made days or pagan days which God has not commanded.

(2) Not only does this passage not allow Christians to celebrate Christmas, it most certainly forbids holding Christmas services of any kind and having Christmas fellowships or parties. Paul allows for diversity in the church over this issue (i.e., Jewish holy days). Both parties are to accept each other for the sake of peace and unity in the church. Both parties believe that they are obeying the Word of God. “Compelled conformity or pressure exerted to the end of securing conformity defeats the aims to which all the exhortations and reproofs are directed.”³³ Therefore, it would be wrong for the weak Jewish believers to force the church to have a worship service in honor of a ceremonial holy day, because the strong Gentile believers would feel compelled to attend the public worship of God. Therefore, those who did celebrate Jewish holy days had to do it privately unto the Lord. Those who use this passage to justify celebrating Christmas would likewise be forced by Paul’s injunction to keep the day a private affair. Thus, Christmas services and church Christmas parties would cease, for they violate the freedom of Christians not to celebrate such a day. Of course, Christmas, not being commanded by God and being a monument to idolatry, is forbidden, anyway.³⁴

Pastors and elders who do authorize a Christmas service abuse their office. The pastors and governors of a church receive their authority from God. They are responsible to rule the church according to the Word of God. When pastors and elders authorize a special Christmas service, they do so on their own authority, because there is no warrant from the Word of God to do so. Therefore, in this one point they act no differently than the pope or a bishop. They intrude a human invention into the church. Those in the church who refuse to take part in a pagan-popish festival day, who refuse to worship God according to man’s imagination, who refuse to worship God without divine authorization, are forced by the church leadership to remain at home instead of attending the public worship of God. Thus, in this point, many presbyters act like popes,

³² Out of 24 commentaries consulted, only one (a modernist) entertained the possibility that these days were non-Judaical.

³³ Murray, 178.

³⁴ In Gal. 4:10-11 and Col. 2:16-17 the observance of days is condemned by Paul because in these instances the celebration of days was connected with heresy. The situation at Rome was different. The days were kept because of a genuine misunderstanding. Heresy and ideas of works-righteousness were not involved.

prelates and tyrants over God's flock, because they take away the freedom we have in Christ to worship God as one body publicly "in Spirit and in truth" on the Lord's day.

2. *Didn't the Jews in the days of Queen Esther set up a holy day not authorized in the law of Moses? Doesn't that example allow the church to set up a holy day (e.g., Christmas) not authorized in the Bible?*

There are a number of problems with this argument.

(1) This argument assumes without evidence that Purim was a special holy day like Christmas. The biblical text makes it abundantly clear that Purim was not a special religious holy day but rather was a time of thanksgiving. The events of Purim are: "Joy and gladness, a feast and good day...and of sending portions to one another, and gifts to the poor" (Est. 8:17; 9:22 KJV). "There is no mention of any religious observance connected with the day."³⁵ There were no special worship services, no ceremonies, no Levitical or priestly activities. Also, Purim—unlike Christmas and Easter—was not an admixture of pagan and popish monuments and paraphernalia with the religion of Jehovah. Purim should not be compared to popish holy days, such as Christmas, but to special days of rejoicing such as Thanksgiving day. The Westminster divines (who were champions of the regulative principle) used Purim as a proof text (Est. 9:22) authorizing occasional days of thanksgiving (cf. Confession of Faith 21.5, proof text a).

(2) Purim did not come about because the people or church officials got together and decided to invent a holy day. It came about because of a unique historical event in Israel's salvation history. The festival was decreed by the civil magistrate (the prime minister, Mordecai, and the queen, Esther). Religious leaders (i.e., the priests) had nothing to do with it. After the civil decree, it was agreed to unanimously by the people. Thomas M'Crie writes,

Did Mordecai, in proposing it, act from the private notion of his own mind; and, in confirming it, did he proceed entirely upon the consent of the people? Or was he guided in both by divine and extraordinary counsel, imparted to him immediately, or by some prophetic person living at that time? That the vision and the prophecy were still enjoyed by the Jews dwelling in Persia, cannot be denied by those who believe the canonical authority of this book, and what is contained in that of Ezra. We have already seen reasons for thinking Mordecai acted under the influence of the faith of Moses' parents, from the time that he proposed his cousin Esther as a candidate to succeed Vashti the queen. There can be no doubt that he was raised up in an extraordinary manner as a saviour to Israel; and in the course of this lecture we have seen grounds for believing that, in addition to his other honours, he was employed as the penman of this portion of inspired scripture. From all these considerations, it is reasonable to conclude that the feast of Purim was not instituted without divine counsel and approbation. Add to this, that the decree of Esther confirming it, it is expressly said, in the close of this chapter, to have been engrossed in this book, by whomsoever it was written.³⁶

Note, the occasion and authorization of Purim are inscripturated in the word of God and approved by the Holy Spirit. Thus, Purim itself satisfied the requirement of the regulative principle as biblically defined.

³⁵ J. P. Lewis, "Feasts" in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1976), 2:525.

³⁶ Thomas M'Crie, *Lectures on the Book of Esther* (New York: Robert Carter, 1838), 287-88.

(3) The notion that Purim proves that men are permitted to invent holy days whenever they desire cannot be true, for if it were, Scripture would contain a blatant contradiction. Not only would it contradict the passages which teach that we are not permitted to add to what God has authorized (e.g. Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5; etc.); it also would contradict the book of Kings where God condemned King Jeroboam for setting up a feast day “in the month which he had devised in his own heart” (1 Kgs. 12:33). Not even kings have authority to invent their own holy days. M’Crie writes,

To seek a warrant for days of religious commemoration under the gospel from the Jewish festivals, is not only to overlook the distinction between the old and new dispensations, but to forget that the Jews were never allowed to institute such memorial for themselves, but simply to keep those which infinite Wisdom had expressly and by name set apart and sanctified. The prohibitory sanction is equally strict under both Testaments: “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.”

There are times when God calls, on the one hand, to religious fasting, or, on the other, to thanksgiving and religious joy; and it is our duty to comply with these calls, and to set apart time for the respective exercises. But this is quite a different thing from recurrent or anniversary holidays. In the former case the day is chosen for the duty, in the latter the duty is performed for the day; in the former case there is no holiness on the day but what arises from the service which is performed on it, and when the same day afterwards recurs, it is as common as any other day; in the latter case the day is set apart on all following times, and may not be employed for common or secular purposes. *Stated and recurring festivals countenance the false principle, that some days have a peculiar sanctity, either inherent or impressed by the works which occurred on them; they proceed on an undue assumption of human authority; interfere with the free use of that time which the Creator hath granted to man; detract from the honour due to the day of sacred rest which he hath appointed; lead to impositions over conscience; have been the fruitful source of superstition and idolatry; and have been productive of the worst effects upon morals, in every age, and among every people, barbarous and civilized, pagan and Christian, popish and protestant, among whom they have been observed. On these grounds they were rejected from the beginning, among other corruptions of antichrist, by the Reformed Church of Scotland, which allowed no stated religious days but the Christian Sabbath.*³⁷

3. There is no question that Christmas has no place in the public worship of God, but isn't it okay to celebrate it privately in the home?

The problem with this view is that it presupposes that the regulative principle only applies to public worship. There is no biblical evidence to support the idea that the regulative principle was meant only for public worship. In fact, the biblical evidence supports the opposite view. Cain was condemned for an innovation in private worship (Gen. 4:2-8). Noah, in family worship, offered clean animals to God (Gen. 8:20-21). God was pleased and accepted Noah's offering on behalf of himself and his family. Abraham, Jacob and Job offered sacrifices to God in private or family worship, according to God's Word. God accepted these lawful offerings. The idea that innovations in worship are permitted in family and private worship is unbiblical. It is totally arbitrary because it is not based on divine revelation. If an innovation in public worship

³⁷ Ibid, 298-300 (emphasis added).

displeases God, then how does it please Him in private worship? Would it not be permissible, under such premises, to have little shrines in our homes where we burn incense, wear surplices, miters and such, as long as we keep such things out of public meetings?

There are some differences between public and private worship (e.g., private worship should occur two to three times a day, whereas public worship should occur at *least* once every Lord's day.) People in Reformed denominations who brought in unbiblical innovations such as Christmas, women teaching the Bible and theology to men in Bible studies and Sunday school, hymns and Christmas carols, etc., did not seek to justify these new innovations by appealing to Scripture. Instead, they *arbitrarily* set these activities outside of the regulative principle by pronouncing them all as under the sphere of private worship. Pastors and their flocks are so in love with their innovations that they resort to mystification. They act as if their pastor is a pope or bishop and has the authority to turn private worship (where they assume human autonomy is permitted) into public worship (where the Word reigns supreme) by saying "thus begins the public worship of God." Where in the Bible is public worship relegated to a few hours on the Lord's day?³⁸ Jesus Christ said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). How is a woman teaching several men on the Sabbath *private*? How are fifty people singing Christmas carols engaging in *private* worship? Do not presuppose that God permits innovation and human autonomy in private worship. Try to prove it from the Word of God. You cannot. Do not arbitrarily declare what is obviously public worship as private. The rabbis of old justified all sorts of nonsense with such reasoning.

The Bible says, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). When Presbyterian pastors and elders stopped disciplining church members for celebrating Christmas in the home in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they virtually guaranteed that the pagan-popish leaven of Christmas would spread. In fact, it has. One must search far and wide to find a Presbyterian home or church where this popish invention is not celebrated.³⁹

4. We do not celebrate Christmas. For us the day is just a secular family day. What could be wrong with that?

There are 365 days in a year. How is it that every year your secular family day just happens to fall on December 25? Could it be that you are just imitating your pagan neighbors and their heathen culture? Could it be that you celebrate the day just as everyone else does and merely declare it secular as a justification or an excuse? If you are just having a good family day, then why do you fill your living room with the monuments and mementos of present and past idolatry? You say the day is a secular family day, but you have a tree, evergreens, mistletoe,

³⁸ God's people are the church whether they meet in a church building, barn, park or house. When Christians gather together to hear the Word and worship God, it is the church meeting. It is public worship whether they meet at 7:00 a.m. or 11:00 p.m. Public worship *must* occur on the Lord's day, but that does not mean that public worship is limited to that day alone. The idea that teaching and worship at 10:00 a.m. is not public, but at 11:00 a.m. it is public is totally irrational and arbitrary. It is based on human tradition. If this imaginary line really existed between 10:59 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., then could not Reformed churches have two worship and teaching services each Lord's day? One could be run by women. The women could teach and lead. They could sing uninspired hymns and charismatic campfire songs. They could burn incense and wear popish dress. They could have intricate popish liturgies, candles, bells, dance and so on. Then at 11:00 a.m. they could have "public worship" in which they have Psalm singing, preaching by men, etc. Those who arbitrarily set up a sphere of private worship in which human innovations are permitted have no recourse, on their own presuppositions, in which to avoid such bizarre dualities.

³⁹ As noted earlier, Christmas is a monument to past and present idolatry; therefore, even apart from the regulative principle it is still wrong to celebrate it in the home, office, church, country club, and so on.

gifts, candles and carols. It is obvious that you celebrate Christmas much as a papist does. The truth is that if you eliminated all the pagan paraphernalia of Christmas, then you probably would not bother to celebrate it. The pagan day would lose its glitter, charm and emotional allure. As Christians we should be family oriented. We should get together with our relatives and enjoy each other's company. But we do not need a pagan festival day to do so.

5. As Reformed believers who are dedicated to the Christianization of pagan culture, are we not taking dominion over paganism by making a pagan day a holy day dedicated to Christ?

This argument is very popular with many followers of Christian Reconstruction. They take the biblical concept of corporate sanctification (i.e., the idea that whole families, churches and societies can grow in holiness over time as people submit themselves to the word of God) and apply it to pagan-popish days such as Christmas and Easter. (One popular Reformed pastor and author even wrote that believers take dominion over evergreen trees by cutting them down, placing them in their living rooms and decorating them.) Although such an argument is clever we must emphatically reject it as contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture.

This argument confuses corporate sanctification with syncretism. When it comes to the monuments of idolatry (i.e., statues, mementos [e.g., earrings dedicated to idols], customs that are directly associated with idolatry [e.g., Saturnalia, the Yule log, the Christmas tree, etc.]) God never instructed His people to take dominion over such things by giving them different, more biblical names or by arbitrarily assigning new "Christian" meanings to such things. Instead, He always explicitly commanded their total destruction (cf. Gen. 35:4; Ex. 32:20; Deut. 12:2-4, 30-31; 2 Kgs. 10:27; 23; 2 Chron. 23:15; Jer. 10: 2-3; etc.). Christians can no more make things associated with idolatry pleasing to God, than can they somehow make fornication or adultery acceptable. One must not confuse an innocent custom such as wearing wooden shoes with heathen idolatrous practices. Jehovah has made it crystal clear that with regard to idolatry and its monuments the path to corporate sanctification involves annihilation not incorporation. When it comes to the idolatrous holy days of Halloween or Saturnalia, God's method of corporate or societal sanctification involves putting off that which is pagan and offensive to God; and, putting on that which is pleasing to Him—a cheerful weekly observance of the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath.⁴⁰

6. Since Christmas is a national holiday recognized by the civil magistrate and almost universally celebrated by the populace, is it not perfectly acceptable to celebrate the day as a national holiday like the Fourth of July?

This excuse is very similar to the assertion that the day is simply a secular day. The basic argument is that Christmas is something that the United States as a whole participates in, therefore as good citizens we should also participate in the festivities. Christmas is part of our American culture like apple pie and baseball. Why should we not allow our children to participate in this wonderful national-cultural activity?

⁴⁰ Sadly, the "father" of the modern "Christian Reconstruction" movement himself (R. J. Rushdoony) was an example of the dangers of syncretism. While he boldly proclaimed the blessedness of Christmas (and mocked those who refuse to participate in this non-authorized practice), he also denigrated the day Jehovah commanded—the Lord's day. The corporate sanctification argument is syncretistic and antinomian.

There are a number of reasons why the national holiday argument should be rejected. (1) The fact that the civil magistrate and the majority of the populace accept and practice the Christmas holiday does not somehow make the celebration of such a day acceptable before God. If the state authorized a day to celebrate a pagan deity or the life of an anti-Christian homosexual, Christians (i.e., conservative evangelicals) would not celebrate such a day. Why? Because such a day is obviously contrary to the teaching of Scripture! Therefore, when considering the national holiday argument the issue still boils down to: (a) Is Christmas authorized by Scripture; and, (b) Can pagan monuments to idolatry be made acceptable to God? (2) The state (and the whole nation as a corporate unity; cf. Mt. 28:18) is under God's law-word and Christ's authority in the same way that the church and individuals are. Therefore, the state (like the church and individuals) does not have the authority to recognize or sanction a holy day without warrant from God's word. Keep in mind Christmas is not like the fourth of July which is a secular commemoration of America's independence. It is a religious day associated directly with the birth of Christ. As such it falls directly under the jurisdiction of the regulative principle. Further, the acceptance of the national holiday argument is an implicit acceptance of the idea that religious holy days can stand solely upon a human source of authority. All such thinking is foundational to humanism, popery and prelacy.

It is tragic that many of the very people who are the direct spiritual descendants of the original Presbyterians of Scotland (the Covenanters) have become great defenders of Christmas and the liturgical calendar. Why is this fact so distressing? Because the faithful Presbyterians of both the first and second reformations in Scotland were willing to be persecuted rather than corrupt themselves with the romanizing practices of Episcopalianism! The early Presbyterians recognized that the episcopal Church of England had retained many superstitions that were part of Roman Catholic worship. From 1660 to 1688 thousands of Presbyterians died because they refused to acknowledge Episcopal church government and worship practices. If the leaders of the modern "conservative" Presbyterian denominations had been in charge in 1638 when Laud's prayer book was to be imposed upon Scotland there would have been no second reformation or National Covenant. (3) Christians are not to blindly follow the heathen culture in which we live ("You shall not follow a crowd to do evil" [Ex. 23:2]). Rather, they are to do the exact opposite. They are to be as salt and light to pagan culture, causing it to move in a distinctly Christian direction. If believers are concerned that people are not regarding Jesus as they should, then they should encourage all people and nations to submit to what Christ has commanded. A good start would be a return to biblical sabbatarianism and the observance of the sabbath day in which people celebrate the whole work of redemption. Putting a lot of time and energy into something that is not authorized, that is offensive to God, is not the way to be salt and light to culture. Christians should lead in cultural affairs, not follow.

7. Didn't the angels of God celebrate the birth of Christ? If such holy creatures of heaven celebrated the birth of our Savior should not we do likewise?

In the gospel of Luke we read that, when the angel of the Lord announced the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds, suddenly a multitude of heavenly hosts began praising God (Lk. 2:13-14). Does this glorious response to the announcement of the birth of the Savior justify the recurring annual holy day of Christmas? No, it most certainly does not. Note the following reasons.

(1) Although the angels did many things during our Lord's life, there is no indication in either the narrow or broad context of Scripture that God was using their activities as guides for perpetual worship ordinances. If the Lord was somehow instructing the church to celebrate Christmas by the angelic outburst of praise, then the apostles and the post-apostolic church missed this lesson, for it is an established fact of history that Christmas was not widely practiced in the churches until the latter half of the fourth century. Further, the obvious application of Luke 2:13 is *not* an annual Christmas holiday but the need to praise God for the incarnation of Christ.

(2) The angelic praise does not support Christmas because there is absolutely no evidence that the angels bought Christmas trees, Yule logs, mistletoe or any other paraphernalia associated with that holy day. The text says they praised God and that is it. The heavenly hosts certainly did not incorporate heathen monuments and practices into their worship of Jehovah.

(3) The text gives no indication at all that the angels established a yearly perpetual Christmas service in heaven. They praised God during the actual incarnation itself; a one time, non-repeatable historical event in salvation history.

(4) The biblical evidence noted above regarding the birth of Christ indicates that our Lord was born in the fall of the year and not on December 25. Therefore, the angelic praise in Luke 2:13 did not occur on December 25. If God was making some kind of statement regarding an annual, perpetual holy day by the heavenly praise of the angels, then He would have revealed the date that Jesus was born. Note, however, that the Bible is totally silent regarding this matter. Jehovah did not regard the actual date to be of such importance as to include it in the inspired record of the Savior's life. Thus, the importance attached to the particular date of December 25 is man-made. It did not originate in the mind of God, but in the imagination of man.

8. Do we have a Christmas celebration in Matthew 2:11 where the Magi present gifts to the baby Jesus?

This argument is an example of a commonly accepted false notion regarding the birth of the Savior that Christmas perpetuates. One often sees nativity scenes in churches, front lawns and even government buildings with the wise men kneeling or standing in the stable with the shepherds from Bethlehem. There are many reasons why such nativity scenes are unbiblical.

The biblical accounts of the visitation of the shepherds and the wise men make it abundantly clear that the appearance of the Magi occurred *long after* the birth of the Messiah. The account of the King's birth in Luke's gospel says that the shepherds were *local*, that is "from the same country" (Lk. 2:8). If the shepherds were from the vicinity of Bethlehem (which is likely), then according to various scholars they would have only been two miles outside of Bethlehem.⁴¹ When the angel of God told the shepherds that their Messiah had been born that *very day* (Lk. 2:11), they *immediately* went to Bethlehem (i.e., "they came with haste" [Lk. 2:16]). There they found the newborn "lying in a manger" (Lk. 2:16) just as the angel had promised. This all occurred *before* Jesus was circumcised at the age of eight days old (Lk. 2:21).

The wise men (unlike the shepherds) had to travel a great distance to visit the Messiah-King. They came from the East (Mt. 2:1), probably from Persia or Babylon. They made a stop in Jerusalem to inquire where the king of the Jews would be born (Mt. 2:1-2). When they finally arrived, Joseph, Mary and Jesus were not in a manger, but were now living in a *house* (*oikia*). Further, our Lord is not identified as a "babe" (Lk. 2:12; Greek: *brephos*, which refers to a newborn baby), but as a "young child" (Mt. 2:11; Greek: *paidion*). Note also that the wise men

⁴¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 213.

did not arrive within the forty day period of Mary's purification for her offering ("a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons," Lk. 2:24, was the offering of a poor person). Obviously Joseph and Mary did not yet have access to the valuable gifts of the wise men, the "gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Mt. 2:11). When the wise men were warned by God not to return to Herod and he decided to kill all the male children in Bethlehem, the account implies that Jesus may have been as old as two years when He was visited by the Magi ("from two years old and under, according to the time which he [Herod] had determined from the wise men" [Mt. 2:16]).

What this analysis teaches us is that the presentation of the gifts by the wise men had nothing to do with the particular day that Jesus was born. They did not come to celebrate Christmas day, but to honor the King. If we want to honor Christ the King, then we must do those things He has commanded. We must not follow human traditions (such as Christmas) which our Lord unequivocally condemned (read Mt. 15:1-9).

9. Isn't having a special Christmas service merely a circumstance of worship, since the birth of Jesus is recorded in the Bible and pastors have a certain liberty to preach on different texts at different times?

If a pastor is preaching through a book of the Bible and in the natural course of his exposition he comes to a passage on the birth or incarnation of Christ on or near December 25th, then choosing that text is a circumstance of worship. But, if a pastor is preaching through an unrelated section of Scripture and purposely changes the subject to the incarnation or birth of Christ on or near December 25th, then he has deliberately regarded an extra-biblical holy day, and is using the choosing of a text as a circumstance, as an excuse. It is disingenuous and dishonest to celebrate Christmas when it is obvious to everyone that a deliberate change in the preaching schedule was made to honor the papal, Episcopal, and Lutheran church calendar. Presbyterian pastors who do such a thing (which is a violation of Scripture, the Westminster Standards and the covenanted reformation) ought to resign and join an Episcopal church.

10. Aren't you making a mountain out of a mole hill? When we look at the major social ills, which plague our nation (e.g., abortion on demand, the homosexual rights movement, feminism, pornography, socialism, etc.), is not such rigor with respect to Christmas misplaced and absurd?

This objection (which is common) says a lot about the current state of evangelicalism and modern "conservative" Presbyterianism. Tragically, it treats the Christian Sabbath and the proper worship of God as a childish trifle. It makes the central principle of biblical worship (which flows directly from the second commandment) out to be a light thing. Where in Scripture do we find the principle that some commandments are unimportant (and therefore can be ignored), while we pursue what we regard as weightier matters of the law? Did not our Lord say that He came to uphold every jot and tittle of the law (Mt. 5:17 ff.). "[I]t is a pernicious fantasy to imagine that it is a tolerable and pardonable offence to transgress any commandment of God at all, because we must show to every point of his law, from the first to the last, the same fear and reverence which we have for his majesty. And indeed, once we begin to abase the word of God at any point, it is an open door for us to reject it in general afterwards. Thus, whatever is done contrary to the will of God, in whatever way, must indifferently be reproved and actively

corrected. If we do not omit a single detail of all that he had commanded us, in so doing we shall show that we fear him and desire to be subject to him.”⁴²

There is a tendency among many professing Christians today to regard the first table of the law as much less important than the second table of the law and less germane to the problems of modern culture. This tendency is likely the result of the wide-spread acceptance of pluralism in America. It also is related to the idea that believers must first seek social reforms in areas in which all conservative denominations agree. The problem with this approach is two-fold.

(1) The second table of the law rests upon the first table and cannot be divorced from it without dire consequences. In the Bible not one genuine revival ever occurred apart from a restoration of biblical worship. In fact, a reading of Old Testament history makes it very clear that true and lasting social reforms can never occur apart from a deep repentance concerning violations with regard to the first table of the law. Does anyone really think that there can be a Christian reconstruction of society while people habitually break the Sabbath and worship idols?⁴³ “God not only regards a fruitless but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to his worship, it at variance with his command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, ‘Obedience is better than sacrifice.’ ‘In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men’ (1 Sam. 15:22; Mt. 15:9).”⁴⁴

Ezekiel Hopkins writes, “Does it not argue great contempt of God, when you will not obey Him in a matter, that you yourselves count small and inconsiderable? When we sin, we flatter ourselves straight with this: ‘Is it not a little one?’ *Truly if it be but a little one to commit, it is but a little one to refrain from.* It is an aggravation of sin, rather than an excuse, to say, our sins are but little ones. It shows a heart hardened against God, and a desperate contempt of all that He can say to us or do against us, when we shall choose rather to thwart and break His commands, to venture on or rather to despise His power, wrath, and justice, than to forego our Little Sins.”⁴⁵

(2) The church must reform itself and live in accordance with *sola Scriptura* (i.e., the Bible alone is the *sole* standard for faith and life) before she can be effective as a salt and light to culture. The great revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which placed biblical worship and purity of doctrine on the “back burner” (in order to have the greatest cooperation among denominations and thus reach out to the most people), led to compromise, corruption and

⁴² John Calvin, *Come out from among Them: Anti-Nicodemite Writings of John Calvin*, translated by Seth Skolnisky (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 82-83.

⁴³ The modern Christian Reconstruction movement *generally-speaking* is schizophrenic and antinomian. On the one hand the movement advocates the continuing validity of God’s law as a rule for individuals, families and the state. The goal of this movement is the Christianization of all earthly institutions. But on the other hand, many of the leaders and their followers reject the abiding validity of the Sabbath and want churches to have autonomous legislative authority with regard to rites, holy days and ceremonies. While the original Puritan and Presbyterian concept of the civil magistrate as one who is under the direct authority of Jesus Christ and His law Word is advocated, the Episcopal concept of the church is set forth. This flagrant inconsistency and hypocrisy can be summed up by the phrase “theonomy for the state, autonomy for the church.” A number of the leading advocates of the Christian reconstruction movement mock the Puritan concept of worship and church authority while pointing people to Eastern Orthodox writers and Episcopalian liturgy and discipline. Presbyterians need to advocate a distinctly Reformed and confessional theonomy (e.g., the teachings of George Gillespie, not James Jordan, David Chilton or Ray Sutton, etc.).

⁴⁴ John Calvin, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church” in Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, eds., *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 [1844]), 1:128-29.

⁴⁵ Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, as quoted in Buddy Hanson, *God’s Ten Words: A Commentary on the Ten Commandments* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Hanson Group, 2002), 263.

apostasy among Independents and Presbyterians. The idea that worship and doctrine should be de-emphasized for cooperation and social reform led directly to the spread of Arminianism, cult groups and modernism. When churches neglect their own continuing reform or sanctification in order to reach out to society, they fertilize the fields with *poison*. They (in the name of love and compassion) sow seeds of societal decay and corruption. While autonomous pragmatism may have temporary benefits or lead to large numbers in the pews, it invariably destroys the culture that it sets out to save. When the church imitates the world in order to “redeem” it, it loses its saltiness and becomes worthless (cf. Mt. 5:13).

11. Didn't the Continental Reformed churches accept Christmas and the church calendar? Since the Reformed churches on the continent celebrated Christmas, can we not remain faithful to the Calvinistic wing of the Reformation and still celebrate Christmas?

It is true that the celebration of extra-biblical holy days became the accepted practice among Reformed churches on the continent. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) authored by Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) reads: “Moreover, if the Churches do religiously celebrate the memory of the Lord’s Nativity, Circumcision, Passion, Resurrection, and of his ascension into Heaven, and sending the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, according to Christian liberty, we do very well approve of it. But as for Festival days, ordained to men, or saints departed, we cannot allow of them” (Chapter 24, “Of Holy Days, Fasts, and Choice of Meats”).⁴⁶ The Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), famous for its excellent refutation of Arminianism, concurs. “Article 53. Days of Commemoration” reads: “Each year the churches shall, in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as His outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷ Many people appeal to the practice of German and Dutch Reformed churches as a justification for the celebration of extra-biblical holy days.

Before one examines why this continental tradition must be rejected it needs to be pointed out that: (1) The Scottish Presbyterians and English Puritans never accepted these statements as scriptural because they were not based on the Bible but upon human tradition. (2) Many of the Dutch ministers themselves recognized that extra-biblical holy days are unscriptural and attempted to have them abolished. Maurice G. Hanson writes, “The [Dutch] Reformed churches had been in the habit of keeping Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide [Pentecost] as days of religious worship. The Synod [Provincial Synod of Dordrecht, 1574] enjoined the churches to do this no longer, but to be satisfied with Sundays for divine service.”⁴⁸ (3) John Calvin’s own Presbytery, the pastors in Geneva, explicitly condemned extra biblical holy days over a decade before they were outlawed in Scotland (e.g., see the Scottish First Book of Discipline, 1560). In 1546 the Company of Pastors in Geneva ruled: “Those who observe the Romish festivals or fasts shall only be reprimanded, unless [i.e., if] they remain obstinately rebellious.” Four years later they strengthened their previous ruling. “*Abrogation of Festivals*. On Sunday, 16 November 1550, after the election of the lieutenant in the general Counsel, an edict was also announced respecting the abrogation of all the festivals, with the exception of Sundays, which God had ordained” (*Register of the Company of Pastors*, Geneva 1550). These statements prove that the

⁴⁶ Peter Hall, ed., *The Harmony of Protestant Confessions: Exhibiting the Faith of the Churches of Christ, Reformed After the Pure and Holy Doctrine of the Gospel* (Edmonton, AB Canada: Still Waters Revival, 1992 [1842]), 382.

⁴⁷ *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter*, rev. ed. (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Printing Ltd., 1984, 1995), 670.

⁴⁸ Maurice G. Hansen, *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands*.

rejection of extra-biblical holy days or religious festival days was not peculiar to the Scottish Presbyterians or English Puritans. Further, it helps to demonstrate that the later official policy in Geneva and on the Continent that accepted man-made holy days was an indication of declension based on following human tradition and not Scripture.

Regardless of what occurred in church history, the all-important question regarding the statements from the Second Helvetic Confession and the Canons of Dordt is: are they consistent with the teaching of Scripture? Is there divine warrant for these special festival or holy days? Did God instruct the New Covenant church by command or historical example to set up a church calendar with special holy days? No. He most certainly did not. (This point has already been discussed at length in this book.)

How then do the Dutch and German Reformed churches justify the celebration of these non-authorized days? Do they make a direct appeal to Scripture as the regulative principle requires? No. They argue that the commemoration (i.e., the celebration) of these festival days is a matter of *adiaphora*. That is, they are matters indifferent to worship and thus fall outside the scope of the regulative principle. Therefore, the church can lawfully set up such days for the edification of the body of Christ. This argument raises the following question. Are man-made religious holy days a matter of *adiaphora*?

There are a number of reasons why the *adiaphora* argument is unscriptural. First, the idea that these holy days, festival days or special days of commemoration fall within the category of things indifferent or are mere circumstances of worship is totally wrong. The only activities that one can consider *adiaphora* are matters that are truly circumstantial or incidental to worship such as setting up chairs, turning on the lights, the time the congregation meets on the Lord's day, the shape or size of the church building, the type of chairs people sit in, and so forth.

Those who argue that Christmas and Easter are matters of *adiaphora* use a false analogy to prove their assertion. They point out (correctly) that men are at liberty to gather for worship on other days besides the Christian Sabbath. Then they argue that since men have the freedom to gather for worship when they please, they also have the liberty to set up voluntary holy days besides the Sabbath. The problem with this argument is that getting together to worship God during the week at a voluntary time is very different than setting up a recurring annual religious holy day. People who do the latter take a day chosen by men, set that day up above other days and give that day special religious signification. Once a certain day is given a yearly, perpetual religious significance it no longer is circumstantial, voluntary or indifferent.

This point is proven by the fact that in Dutch Reformed churches the church calendar is mandatory. These so-called holy days are enforced by ecclesiastical coercion and social pressure. Remember, that genuine areas of *adiaphora* are never matters of coercion, force or discipline. For example, the consistory of a church would never be disciplined for purchasing maroon carpeting for the church building. However, they would be forced out of the denomination if they refused to follow the church calendar. Therefore, it is obvious to any unbiased observer that the Dutch and German Reformed denominations are disingenuous regarding holy days. They pretend they are *adiaphora* when as an ecclesiastical policy and practice they most certainly are not. The Romanist and Episcopalian view is much more honest and consistent because they reject the regulative principle and give ecclesiastical authorities the right to decree new rites and ceremonies.

But what if the man-made religious holy days were truly voluntary? Would they then be *adiaphora* and permissible? No. They most certainly would not because: (1) Everything within the sphere of religious worship requires divine warrant and these man-made festivals cannot be

proven by Scripture. (2) The moment that human traditions are introduced into the Christian Sabbath (Easter and Pentecost always fall on a Sunday) or the church service, people are forced either to depart from that church at that particular time to avoid the human addition to worship or they are forced to violate liberty of conscience. That is, they are forced to participate in activities that do not have biblical authorization. “Any doctrine or commandment contrary to or besides His will in matters religious the Christian not only may but must disobey. Liberty of conscience means the liberty of the individual to obey God rather than men.”⁴⁹ “Whatever is not done in faith, nor accompanied with a personal persuasion of the obligation or lawfulness of it in the sight of God is pronounced to be sin—Rom. xiv. 23.”⁵⁰ “It is a great sin, involving at the same time sacrilege, and treason to the human race, for any man or set of men to arrogate consciences of their fellow men by any obligation not certainly imposed by God and revealed in his Word.”⁵¹ Given the fact we are dealing with public worship, these human additions cannot ever be truly voluntary. Being forced to stay home during public worship because of the addition of human traditions should never take place within Reformed churches. Sadly, today it is common.

Second, the Holy Spirit condemns King Jeroboam for devising *his own time* for a holy day (1 Kgs. 2:33). If the civil magistrate of a nation in covenant with God is not permitted to autonomously determine a religious festival day, then certainly ecclesiastical authorities do not have such an authority. In *this matter*, those who follow the error of the Continental Reformed churches are guilty of the same sin as Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Third, even apart from the regulative principle, the celebration of Christmas and Easter involve the mixing of pagan and popish elements with biblical Christianity. Syncretism and the retaining of monuments to idolatry are expressly condemned in Scripture (Deut. 4:2ff.; 7:2-6; 12:2-4; 28-32; Josh. 23: 6-13; Gen. 35:1-4; 1 Kgs. 18:32; 2 Kgs. 10:27; 23; 2 Chron. 23:15; Jer. 10:2-3).

Fourth, Christmas promotes the lie that Jesus was born on December 25. As noted earlier, according to Scripture our Lord was likely born in the fall, not the winter (Lk. 2:8, see Section 3). Further, Christmas and other holy days detract from the uniqueness of the Lord’s day, are loved by Christ-hating heathens, destroy Christian liberty, promote the imitation of the ceremonial shadows and stimulate legalism in the church.

Therefore, although confessional Presbyterians respect the Reformed symbols from the Continent (as long as they agree with God’s word) and love our Dutch and German Reformed brethren, we cannot submit to, nor sanction their acceptance of extra-biblical holy days. We call upon them to repent of this human corruption, revise their standards and unite with us under the banner of our covenanted and more thorough Reformation.

Conclusion

If the church of Jesus Christ is to be salt and light to our degenerate culture, she must first clean her own house. More and more Christians are trying to have a positive impact on our pagan culture. They are trying to stem the tide of secular humanism and statism. This new involvement is needed, but it will not succeed until the church returns to the doctrinal purity and purity of worship attained by the Calvinist wing of the Reformation. The pagan Roman state with all of its power could not destroy the Christian church. The church prospered in spite of the Roman

⁴⁹ James Benjamin Green, *Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian Standards* (Collins World, 1976), 155.

⁵⁰ Robert Shaw, *Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival, n.d. [1845]), 206.

⁵¹ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958 [1869]), 267.

Empire's tyranny and oppression. What caused severe damage to the church was internal decay. The corruption of doctrine and worship within the church made the church a fountain of heresy, superstition, idolatry and tyranny.

Evangelicalism in our day is in a state of serious decline. Church growth, ecumenical fellowship, pragmatism and keeping the peace have taken precedence over doctrinal integrity and pure worship. As a result, modern Evangelicalism is flabby, compromising, impotent and lukewarm. It is not a coincidence that the church had the most positive impact upon society and culture when its doctrine and worship were most pure (e.g., the second Reformation period in Scotland, 1638). Only when we return to biblical worship and reject human autonomy will we be prepared to recapture our society for Christ.

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