

Why My Family Does Not Celebrate Christmas

*A response to Dr. Richard P. Bucher
by Matthew Janzen -- 12.2011 (Revised 12.2015)*

I recently ran across a series of articles written by a Lutheran Minister (Richard P. Bucher). The articles deal with the topic of the annual holiday known by the name of *Christmas*. These articles can be found by doing a Google search for "Our Redeemed Lutheran Church" or "Christmas is not Pagan by Richard P. Bucher." I recommend that you read not only this study of mine, but also Dr. Bucher's articles, so as to get perspective from both sides of the debate. Dr. Bucher's position is that Christmas today is *not* a pagan holiday, whereas my position is that it *is* a pagan holiday and should not be celebrated by those who follow Yeshua (Jesus).

The last time I celebrated Christmas was December of 1996, which means I've not celebrated for a while. I have five children that have never celebrated, and my wife grew up in a home where she never celebrated. In 1996-97 I saw what was enough evidence for me at the time to discontinue the celebration, but years later (around 2003-2005) I began a more detailed study into the origins of the holiday. I remember going into the study prayerfully asking the Father to grant me the wisdom that only comes from Him, and to lead me onto the right path in this area.

If Christmas is permissible for Christians to celebrate, then I certainly did not want to teach anyone that it was wrong or sinful to do so. On the other hand if Christmas is condemned in Scripture, then I did not want to involve myself, nor the family that Yahweh has blessed me with, to partake in something dishonorable to Him no matter how harmless it seemed to me or any member in my family.

As you know from the title to this study, I decided against celebrating the holiday. After studying, I could not see how I could Scripturally justify the modern day Christmas that Christians celebrate. I realize that this brief history of my journey does not prove anything one way or the other, I only write this to give the reader a small background of the road I've traveled when it comes to the subject of Christmas.

Currently, at the end of 2015, I still hold to the position of not celebrating the holiday, and I want to make it clear from the beginning of this paper that *I do believe it is a sin* to celebrate the holiday known in American today as Christmas. I make that statement realizing that there are loads of Christians who do not realize that what they are doing is violating Scripture. Whether people believe me or not, I do not have a "bone-to-pick" here. I've expressed to many people over the years that I would have no problem celebrating the holiday if I believed there was an allowance to do so within Yahweh's word. This though is the key. I believe that if we claim to love Yahweh, and His precious Son Yeshua, we then must show forth that love by listening to the words that are breathed out by Yahweh in Holy Scripture. I speak specifically of the portion of Scripture known in Hebrew as Torah, meaning guidance and instruction (commonly translated as "law" in English Bibles).

I quote here from Dr. Bucher:

In fact, if the "Christmas is pagan" crowd merely presented their argument as "opinion," there would be no urgent need to respond. But it is the fact that they condemn Christmas observers as guilty of idolatry and, and in some cases, suggest that Christians who do Christmas are risking their salvation that is just too much. For in so doing they are binding Christian consciences and robbing Christians of their God-given freedom, making unnecessary matters necessary.

I am not saying that the issue is a moot one where you have Yahweh given liberty to *celebrate* if you choose and *forego celebrating* if you choose. I do believe celebrating Christmas is a form of idolatry and is thus a sin. It is not a Yahweh-given freedom.

I do not write these words to be mean, difficult, or harsh. I do try very hard *not* to be obnoxious towards those who choose to celebrate, because I understand that they do not realize they are violating a commandment. I also realize that many American customs are very near and dear to the heart of those who have grown up celebrating them. I admit that sometimes I think about the warm feelings of being with my family at this time of the year, and if I followed my emotions, I could very easily fall back into celebrating Christmas. We must not, however, allow our feelings and emotions towards customs or family to be of greater importance to us than our service toward our Creator. I love those members in my family who celebrate Christmas, they are my family. *I love my Creator more though.* He is first in my life. He gave me my life, my new heart and new mind. I want to love Him with all of my being, and the Scriptural way to do so is to walk according to His commands (1 John 5:3).

I will now follow Dr. Bucher's article in the area of three points he brings up championed by those who do not celebrate Christmas.

POINT #1: Christmas is obviously pagan because there is neither Biblical command nor precedent for celebrating Christ's birth.

I would not say that Christmas is pagan because there is no Biblical command for celebrating Christ's birth. The word pagan has to do with worship to gods other than Yahweh. Pagan is defined principally by Noah Webster's 1828 English Dictionary in this manner:

PA'GAN, n. [L. *paganus*, a peasant or countryman, from *pagus*, a village.] A heathen; a Gentile; an idolater; one who worships false gods. This word was originally applied to the inhabitants of the country, who on the first propagation of the christian religion adhered to the worship of false gods, or refused to receive christianity, after it had been received by the inhabitants of the cities.

I do believe that Christmas is pagan, but the reason it is pagan is because of the *origin* of many of the customs that are practiced in celebration of the time, and not because of its absence from Scripture. For example, the American holiday known as Independence Day (4th of July) is nowhere in the pages of Scripture. Does this make it a pagan holiday? No.

The origin of the holiday (or customs within the holiday) do not have anything to do with stemming from the worship of false mighty ones. Independence Day rather finds its origin in the year 1776 when the Declaration of Independence was signed in this country (USA).

Dr. Bucher comments:

Now it is certainly true that the Bible does not command the celebration of Christ's birth in specific words, and I won't pretend that there is. Is it not true, however, that Matthew and Luke included their accounts of Christ's birth, at least in part to be read in worship? As the people responded to such readings of God's Word in worship with their praise, were they not celebrating Christ's birth? Moreover, it is well known that the portions of New Testament were from a very early period incorporated into the worship of the Church (e.g., the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:46-55; and the Benedictus in Luke 1:68-79); it is also well known that portions of the New Testament contain hymns or confessions used already in the Apostolic age (e.g., Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Dr. Bucher here admits that the Bible does not command the celebration of Christ's birth. Not only does the Bible not command such, the Bible doesn't give us any example of anyone celebrating the birth of Christ.

Think about this for a second: if the celebration of Christmas, which Christians believe to be the celebration of Christ's birth, is such an honorable thing for Christians to do, a major Christian holiday, why then did not the earliest followers of Yeshua celebrate this holiday? The apostles, disciples, and various women who were followers of Yeshua, walked with him, talked with him, dined with him, yet never made a decision to celebrate His birth as a holiday festival in any manner. We do not find any record of such a celebration in the pages of the New Testament. I have to see this as being very odd if the celebration was and still is of such great importance.

Let me further point out that *this is not comparable* to the other holiday I mentioned, Independence Day. *Some people attempt to make a parallel here that does not exist.* After hearing my argumentation given above, some believers would say something to the effect of: "Well, the earliest followers of Yeshua didn't celebrate Independence Day or Thanksgiving either."

While this is a true statement, it is not one which should be used to defend celebrating Christmas. The origins of both of these American holidays date back only to the 16 and 1700's A.D. These holidays were completely unknown to the Apostles because the origin of these holidays would not take place until over 1,000 years later. *With the birth of Christ it is entirely different.* Here's why. The birth of Christ took place around 2,000 years ago (scholars date it between 7 B.C. and 4 A.D.). I agree that this was a prestigious event, but if it called for a celebration to be held in honor of the birth of Christ (during the winter season), why did the apostles and disciples of Yeshua never do such a thing?

Normally, the way birthdays are celebrated is that the person is born and then every year thereafter, on the same date, the day is celebrated. Why then do we not read of Yeshua's parents celebrating his birth for the approximately 33 years that he lived on this earth? Why do we not read of any of his followers celebrating his birth in the pages of the New Testament?

Dr. Bucher has mentioned reading the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke during worship gatherings and calls this a celebrating of the birth of Christ. With this I do not have a problem. I celebrate the fact that Yeshua was born in Bethlehem. I do not even have a problem singing songs about His birth such as Silent Night or Hark the Herald Angels Sing. These songs contain Scriptural truths concerning the historical event of birth of the Savior. My question is, what does this have to do with the way Christians celebrate the holiday known today as Christmas? There is certainly nothing wrong in thinking about, teaching on, or singing honorably about *any* great event in the birth, life, or death of Christ in the worship assembly. This though is a far cry from what Christians do today during the winter month of December.

Dr. Bucher continues:

Yes, the doctrine of the Christian Church must be based only on Scripture alone and we dare not add to or subtract from it. But in matters that do not involve doctrine, in matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden, Christians have freedom in the Church to do or say, add or create, or subtract and delete anything -- unless, as I said, it clearly contradicts an essential teaching of the Christian faith, or is found by the majority not to be edifying.

This, by the way, is the meaning of our Lord's words in Mark, which these anti-Christmas writers love to quote: "You lay aside the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men . . . making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:8,13). Jesus was not scolding the Pharisees because they had traditions. He was scolding them because (1) their man-made traditions contradicted the commandment of God and (2) they told those who didn't follow their traditions that they were sinning, thus making them necessary matters of conscience.

Does annually celebrating Christ's birth contradict a commandment of God or violate an essential teaching of the Bible? Not at all. Do Pastors tell their parishioners that if they do not observe Christmas they are sinning? If they do, they are wrong. Since we are not commanded to celebrate Christ's birth annually, we are not sinning if we choose not to. But neither are we sinning if we choose to observe it. It should not be made a matter of conscience, a matter of sin, in either case.

The doctrine of the Christian Church must be based on Scripture alone. I agree with Dr. Bucher on this point. I also agree with him when he writes of traditions which are not sinful. For instance, many people I talk to are unaware of the fact that the Israelites did celebrate non-commanded holidays in the 9th and 12th months of their calendar. The celebration in the 9th month is known by the name *Hanukkah* and the 12th month celebration is called *Purim*. Both holidays are not commanded by Yahweh to be kept, but they do find their origin in great happenings amongst the Israelite peoples in history.

Here we have traditions (holiday traditions) which are not bad traditions, but honorable traditions. On a much smaller scale it is okay to have family traditions as well. A family may have a tradition to go to a particular park or restaurant on a certain date each year for family fellowship or fun. Such a tradition is not wrong or sinful because it doesn't violate the instructions and guidance of Yahweh found in His word. However, as Dr. Bucher has pointed out, *some traditions are sinful because of the two reasons he has pointed out*. Any time a tradition is elevated to the status of a commandment from Yahweh *and* any time a tradition contradicts the written instructions of Yahweh it is sinful. Yeshua scathed the Pharisees for such in Matthew 15 and Mark 7. They had laid aside the commandment to keep a tradition which they then deemed to be a binding "law" from Yahweh.

It is true that the Elders of Christian churches who celebrate Christmas do not command their members to do so (at least to my knowledge and experience). In other words, Pastors wouldn't say that if you're a Christian you *have* to celebrate the holiday. However, Dr. Bucher has not in my estimation searched the Scriptures out thoroughly enough in the area of Christmas being a bad tradition. I say this because I believe what is done in the month of December, by Christians around the world, violates clear Scriptural commandments from Yahweh.

I do not speak here of celebrating the birth of Christ in the way I mentioned earlier. Talking about, preaching on, singing about, and being thankful for the birth of Christ are all permissible, and should be done by the Christian all year long. I rather speak about what goes on in Christian churches and Christian homes during the winter "holiday" season. What is done is a *blending* of pagan practice with a holy event. The birth of Christ is a sacred occurrence. To blend the birth of Yahweh's Messiah with pagan customs, and then celebrate the holiday as His birth, is a direct violation of the instructions of Yahweh. Let's look at a few of the commands given to Yahweh's people in Scripture.

Leviticus 18:1-5

Yahweh spoke to Moses: "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: I am Yahweh your Mighty One. **Do not follow the practices of the land of Egypt, where you used to live, or follow the practices of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. You must not follow their customs** You are to practice My ordinances and you are to keep My statutes by following them; I am Yahweh your Mighty One. Keep My statutes and ordinances; a person will live if he does them. I am Yahweh.

Deuteronomy 12:29-32

"When Yahweh your Mighty One annihilates the nations before you, which you are entering to take possession of, and you drive them out and live in their land, **be careful not to be ensnared by their ways** after they have been destroyed before you. Do not inquire about their Mighty Ones, asking, '**How did these nations worship their Mighty Ones? I'll also do the same.**' **You must not do the same to Yahweh your Mighty One**, because they practice for their Mighty Ones every detestable thing Yahweh hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their Mighty Ones. **You must be careful to do everything I command you; do not add anything to it or take anything away from it.**

Deuteronomy 18:9

When you enter the land Yahweh your Mighty One is giving you, **do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations.**

Yahweh warns us that it is sin to mix pagan custom with true worship. It is a sin to make an attempt to worship Yahweh in the way that the other nations worship their mighty ones. The Deuteronomy 12 passage specifically warns against being intrigued by the way the other nations worship their mighty ones. He says that we should be careful not to be ensnared by their ways and inquire after their ways of their worship.

This is exactly what has been done with the celebration of Christmas. The Christian Church has taken a true, holy event (the birth of Christ) and have tainted this event by mixing it with all sorts of practices that stem from pagan worship dedicated to other deities throughout history.

This is quite similar to what the Israelites did in Exodus 32. Moses was not yet back from his journey on the mountain of the Almighty, so many of the people of Israel began to request that Aaron make them a mighty one to go before them (Exodus 32:1). According to Exodus 32:2-4 the Israelites removed their gold jewelry and made a molten calf out of the gold, fashioning it with an engraving tool. The people then pronounced, "Israel, this is your mighty one, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Notice that the people had built themselves a representation of Yahweh. They were worshiping the calf, but directing their "calf worship" to Almighty Yahweh. We see this by reading the following:

Exodus 32:5

When Aaron saw [this], he built an altar before it; then he made an announcement: "There will be a festival to Yahweh tomorrow." Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, then got up to revel.

Notice how Aaron proclaimed a festival to Yahweh, but intertwined within this festival was pagan practice (the golden, molten calf). They were mixing the profane with the holy, the unclean with the clean. The prophet Haggai informs us of how Yahweh feels about such mixing.

Haggai 2:11-14

This is what Yahweh of Hosts says: Ask the priests for a ruling. If a man is carrying consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and with his fold touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any other food, does it become holy?" The priests answered, "No." Then Haggai asked, **"If someone defiled by [contact with] a corpse touches any of these, does it become defiled?" The priests answered, "It becomes defiled."** Then Haggai replied, "So is this people, and so is this nation before Me"—Yahweh's declaration. "And so is every work of their hands; even what they offer there is defiled.

The question here is this: when a clean thing touches an unclean thing, what happens? Does the clean item consecrate the unclean item or does the unclean item defile that which is clean? If you are familiar with this text in Haggai and the Torah itself then you will know that the clean item becomes defiled by contact with that which is unclean. This

is precisely what has happened with Christmas. Many unclean practices have been absorbed into the supposed celebration of the birth of Christ. Things like the Christmas tree, mistletoe, the yule log, and even the very date of December 25, all stem from ancient pagan worship to other mighty ones just like the golden calf that the Israelites made. Christians then proclaim, "A festival to the Lord" on December 25, mixing a pure event, the birth of Christ, with all sorts of unclean, profane rituals.

Let me give you an illustration of how this dishonors Christ. I've been married now (December, 2015) for almost 18 years. If I approached my wife this evening and said something like: "Honey, we've got an anniversary coming up, but I think we should celebrate early on the anniversary of an old girlfriend of mine in high school. I'm also going to buy you a nice, new outfit, but it will be my old girlfriend's favorite color. I want to get some new jewelry for you to, but I'm going to have my old girlfriends initials engraved on it. It will all be done for you honey, but I just think incorporating this other stuff I used to do, and re-interpreting it in love to you, will be best." What do you think my wife's reaction would be? Do you honestly think she wouldn't mind? I mean, after all, I'm doing it all towards my wife, right?

So in response to Dr. Bucher: Yes, celebrating the birth of Christ the way that is done in this nation among Christians and Churches is a direct violation of the commandment of Yahweh. It is a tradition of men which violates the instructions of the Creator. More on this later.

Dr. Bucher comments further:

Now some within the anti-Christmas camp would respond by saying, "Ah, but there is a passage that commands us not observe special holy days. It is wrong to celebrate Christmas because the Bible commands us not to observe "days, months, seasons, and years" in Gal. 4:9-11..."

Actually, the "days, months, and times, and years" to which Paul referred were Jewish holy days, about which the vast majority of Biblical commentators agree. When this passage is placed in the context of the entire letter to the Galatians, this becomes obvious. The Galatians were being taught by Jewish-Christian false teachers that faith in Jesus Christ was not enough to be justified before Mighty One, that they also had to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses...

The problem was not that the Galatians were observing holy days and seasons. It is that they were being taught that such observances were necessary for their salvation, a complete contradiction of the Gospel that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Similarly, to observe Christmas because you believe to not do so would be sinful is wrong and you would fall under Paul's exhortation in Gal. 4 & 5. But to observe Christmas in your Christian freedom, because you choose to, not because you have to, is completely permitted before Mighty One.

Galatians 4:9-11 is actually an accurate Scripture to use in *condemning* the celebration of any holiday which stems from pagan worship. Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Valentines

Day etc. would all fall under the category of Galatians 4:9-11. Dr. Bucher has stated that the observance of times Paul was writing about were in reference to Israelite holydays, but this is not the case. It is also stated that the vast majority of scholars agree with this interpretation, but this proves nothing. When we look intently at the text itself we will see that Paul is not writing about Biblical holydays commanded in the Torah, but rather pagan days which some of the Galatians were returning to after their professed belief in Christ. Notice the text:

Galatians 4:8-11

But in the past, **when you didn't know (the) Mighty One**, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not mighty ones. **But now, since you know (the) Mighty One**, or rather have become known by (the) Mighty One, **how can you turn back again to the weak and bankrupt elemental forces?** Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again? You observe [special] days, months, seasons, and years. I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.

Paul writes that in the past, the Galatians did not know Yahweh, and it was at *that time* that they were a slave to things that by nature are not mighty ones at all. From the start we see that Paul references a time when these Galatians *did not have knowledge of the one true Mighty One Yahweh*. They were at this time serving other mighty ones who were merely idols. People who do not know Yahweh do not celebrate the festivals of Yahweh, therefore Paul is not talking about Yahweh's festivals in Galatians 4.

Paul goes on to speak of the people in Galatia coming to the knowledge of the true Mighty One, that is, being known by the one true and living Mighty One, but then seeking to *turn back* to weak forces. What weak and elemental forces were they turning back to? It would have to be forces which they served when they did not know Yahweh the Mighty One.

When the Galatians did not know Yahweh do you really think they observed holydays like Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Of course not. The Galatians were a Celtic, Gaelic people who would have been entrenched in the worship of false mighty ones (other than Yahweh), and thus were pulled out of all sorts of pagan worship, including pagan festivities.

Dr. Bucher misinterprets Galatians 4:8-11, therefore his conclusion of the text is built on a faulty foundation. Galatians 4 is actually a text that *would condemn* those who come out of pagan ritual practice, and then into the truth, only to venture back into celebrating certain days, months, times, and years, in honor of those things which by nature are not mighty ones at all.

Let me briefly note that I agree with Dr. Bucher concerning what he states about justification being by grace through faith and not by works. Our being made innocent in the eyes of Yahweh has *nothing* to do with our own works but everything to do with the work of Yeshua the Messiah. I do not have a problem at all with this Biblical teaching. However, this is not the issue at hand, nor is it what Paul was writing about in Galatians 4:8-11.

Dr. Bucher continues:

In some of the literature in question, we are also informed that the Sixteenth Century reformers rejected Christmas because it was pagan, as did the Puritans in the Seventeenth. Moreover, it is stated that it wasn't until the Nineteenth Century that Christmas was observed in Protestant denominations. The idea is, if these Bible-believing scholars rejected Christmas, shouldn't we?

It is true that many of the Reformation churches rejected or outlawed the celebration of Christmas, as did the Puritans, and some Protestant denominations after them. It is disingenuous, however, to claim that they did so because they believed Christmas to be pagan. Rather, as their statements show, they refused to observe Christmas because (1) they believed that Scripture forbade special holy days; (2) they perceived Christmas to be "Roman Catholic" based on non-Scriptural tradition; and (3) they rejected Christ-mass because they considered the Church of Rome's mass to be contrary to the Gospel.

That reformation movements strove to distance themselves from the Pope and the Church of Rome is not at all surprising. The whole point of the Sixteenth Century Reformation was to "reform" the abuses and errors in the Christian Church of their day, which in Europe was the Church of Rome. With the resurgence of Biblical scholarship and Biblical authority, these reformers began to see that there were a multitude of teachings and practices in the Church of Rome that were "doctrines of men," that were not found in or supported by the Word of Mighty One. In their zeal for Biblical truth, however, many of these groups tried to remove all doctrines of men and everything that smacked of the Church of Rome, including Christmas and other major holy days, ceremonies, and fasts.

While it is certainly factual that the Puritans along with other churches during the early days of the Protestant reformation rejected the Christmas holiday (along with other non-Biblical holidays), this alone doesn't prove that we shouldn't celebrate Christmas. I do believe that the Puritans were correct for not celebrating Christmas, but they may have had reasons for rejecting it that were not Biblical. Regardless though, their acceptance or non-acceptance of any practice, though interesting to study, should not be a deciding hermeneutic for what is righteous or unrighteous. This is not to say that we cannot learn from the reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries, for I believe that we can learn much from them. There were many great men in those days that loved and feared the Almighty, serving Him to the best of their ability and knowledge. I am only pointing out that what they practiced is not on par with the instructions from Yahweh found in the pages of Scripture. Scripture is our sole authority on matters of faith and practice; only Scripture and all of Scripture. It is Scripture that causes me to believe the way I do about the Christmas celebration, not the Puritans or other Reformers.

What we have seen in this section is that the birth of Christ was in fact not celebrated by the first century church in any way close to the way modern day Christianity celebrates it.

This is a very striking piece of information, seeing that these earlier followers of Yeshua believed the birth of Christ to be a prestigious event, arguably more so than many people

who claim to follow Christ today. As wonderful of an event and gift that it is, the early Christians saw no need to have an annual celebration of the birth of Christ, much less include within that celebration all the trappings from other pagan worshipers surrounding them, and of their past.

Point 2: The first Christians never observed the celebration of Christ's birth until emperor Constantine in 313 AD officially tolerated Christians.

I have belabored the point that the early Christians did not celebrate the birth of Christ annually, as a holiday, in any fashion. I will however continue to follow Dr. Bucher's article as he makes other points that I have not yet dealt with satisfactorily.

Let me briefly note here that Dr. Bucher deals largely in this section with the emperor Constantine. Seeing that I would not use any arguments from Constantine to prove my position against celebrating Christmas, I will refrain from responding to his statements here. I believe the celebration of Christmas can be proven to be pagan and sinful without ever mentioning Constantine by name.

I will though deal with some ending remarks he has made in this section. Dr. Bucher writes:

...while it is true that Christmas (the birth of Christ) was not listed as one of the chief Christian festivals in the first two centuries of the Church's existence, it is not exactly true that the first Christians never observed the birth of Christ until the time of Constantine. Actually there is evidence of the feast being celebrated in Egypt prior to 200 A.D. The Church father Clement of Alexandria tells us that certain theologians had claimed to have determined not only the year of the Lord's birth but also the day; that it took place in the 28th year of Augustus and on the 25th day of Pachon (May 20) (*Stromata*, I, 21). He also added that others said that he was born on the 24th or 25th of Pharmuthi (April 19 or 20). Another piece of evidence is *De Paschae Computus* of 243, which states that Christ was born on March 28, because, it says, this was the day that the sun was created. Clement also tells us that other Christians were in the custom of celebrating the Baptism of Christ (his Epiphany) on the 15th day of Tubi and others on the 11th of the same month (Jan. 10 or 6). This is significant because it became customary in many places for Christians to celebrate both Christ's epiphany and his birth at the same – a practice of the Armenian Church to this day.

I would like you to note that Dr. Bucher states forthrightly that it is true that Christmas was not listed as one of the chief Christian festivals in the first two centuries of the Church's existence. He then goes on to state how that from the writings of Clement of Alexandria one can show that some theologians of the 2nd century claimed to have determined the birth date of Christ. The actual statement made by Clement is as follows:

Clement - Stromata I.XXI (earlychristianwritings.com)

And there are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus, and in the twenty-fifth day of Pachon. And the followers of Basilides

hold the day of his baptism as a festival, spending the night before in readings. And they say that it was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, the fifteenth day of the month Tubi; and some that it was the eleventh of the same month, And treating of His passion, with very great accuracy, some say that it took place in the sixteenth year of Tiberius, on the twenty-fifth of Phamenoth; and others the twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi and others say that on the nineteenth of Pharmuthi the Saviour suffered. Further, others say that He was born on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi.

First, how do these people Clement references know what day the Messiah was born when the Scriptures simply do not give us that information?

Second, these people referenced by Clement disagree as to when the Savior was born, and third, how does any of this prove these people were celebrating the birth of Christ in the manner that so many people in America do today?

True enough, we do find in this writing of Clement evidence for some early believers celebrating the day of Christ's baptism as a festival, but even this finds no evidence in the pages of the New Testament. The fact is that the writings of Clement do nothing in the way of proving that the earliest followers of Yeshua celebrated the birth of Christ in any manner, much less in the manner done today with pagan practice intertwined. Concerning this other ancient text mentioned by Dr. Bucher (*De Paschae Computus*), I will quote from a book entitled *Toward the Origins of Christmas* by Susan K. Roll, page 82.

This text is a primary source for the association of the birth of Christ with the first Genesis creation account. If the anniversary of the first day of creation is believed to coincide with the spring equinox, then 25 March in the Julian calendar, the author considers it amazingly appropriate that Christ should be born on the fourth day thereafter, the anniversary of the creation of the sun, by way of analogy:

Oh the splendid and divine providence of the Lord, that on that day, even the very day, on which the sun was made, the 28 March, a Wednesday, Christ should be born. For this reason Malachi the prophet, speaking about him to the people, fittingly said, "Unto you shall the sun of righteousness arise, and healing in his wings."

While this particular text (the *De Paschae Computus*) dates back to 243 A.D. it does absolutely nothing in the way of proving that the early Christians (of the Apostolic Era) celebrated the birth of Christ in any manner annually. The only thing this text shows is that there were at least some people who believed Christ was born on March 28 and that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Malachi about the sun of righteousness. I have to say that I do not follow the reasoning of such people in the least bit. It is pure assumption to state that Christ must have been born on the very day that the sun in the sky was made. It is also nothing but an additional assumption, to then state that because of the first assumption, this must mean that Malachi was talking about all this when he said what he said concerning the sun of righteousness. With all due respect to Dr. Bucher, to use such texts as these in attempt to support a 2nd or 3rd century A.D. celebration of the birth of Christ is quite a stretch.

Point 3: The date of Christmas (December 25), and its many customs all come from pagan sources. Therefore Christmas is pagan.

Here we come to what I believe to be the meat of this issue. I do believe that many of the customs of the holiday known today as Christmas stem from pagan worship dedicated to false mighty ones. It is upon this basis that Christmas is a pagan holiday. If you remove the birth of Christ from what is celebrated today on December 25, you have nothing left but a winter solstice festival in honor to false gods. However, if you remove each and every pagan custom surrounding the celebration of Christmas today, all you have left is the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. I believe Christians should be satisfied with these birth narratives by them selves. The way to celebrate the birth of Christ is to preach about it, sing about it, and be thankful for it. We can do that any day of the year.

Dr. Bucher writes:

It is when the "Christmas is pagan" literature examines the origin of the dating of Christmas on Dec. 25, that the anti-Christmas advocates become convinced that Christmas is wholly pagan. This is their strongest argument. The argument goes like this: Since no one knows when Jesus was born, where did the Church get the idea of celebrating it on Dec. 25? From the pagans who had several festivals the time of the winter solstice which honored pagan gods. Where did the pagans at the time of the Roman empire get the idea? It came from the paganism of ancient Babylon, a paganism begun by Nimrod and his wife...

The Romans, like many other cultures at the time of the winter solstice, had various festivals. Saturnalia, was a festival that honored Saturn, the god of agriculture, from Dec. 17-24. It was the most popular festival of the year and did involve merrymaking, gift-giving, relaxed morality, and temporary freedom for slaves, who were allowed to do and speak whatever they wanted. But not unlike many of our Christmas feasts today, by the early Fourth Century, the religious aspect of Saturnalia had faded, and the secular merrymaking had come to the fore. It is not likely, however, that Christians chose Dec. 25 to celebrate Christ's birth on the basis of Saturnalia.

It is a fact that the Romans, during the time of Christ, as well as the time of the apostles, celebrated a festival in (1) honor the sun and (2) fear of the winter solstice. This festival had nothing to do with the canon of Scripture at that time (Old Testament), but had everything to do with heathen worship.

In this section I am going to quote from various Encyclopedias and Dictionaries, giving you the references where you can verify each quotation for yourself. I do this so that you will see that I am not just some wild eyed, crazy haired preacher that wants to come up with something different than everyone else in the Christian, religious world. I want to show you that it is widely recognized that the holiday celebrated today (known as Christmas) is nothing more than a mixture of pagan practice with the birth of the Lord. I begin by quoting from the 1976 *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 1, page 804:

During the period dating from the earliest general celebrations of Christmas, numerous customs have been introduced into the event. Originally, it appears that a special religious ceremony marked the occasion. **Gradually a number of the prevailing practices of the nations into which Christianity came were assimilated and were combined with the religious ceremonies surrounding Christmas. The assimilation of the such practices generally represented efforts by Christians to transform or absorb otherwise pagan practices.**

The Feast of Saturnalia in early Rome, for example, was celebrated for seven days from the 17th to the 24th of December and was marked by a spirit of merriment, gift giving to children and other forms of entertainment. **Gradually, early Christians replaced the pagan feast with the celebration of Christmas; but many of the traditions of this observance were assimilated and remain to this day a part of the observance of Christmas.** Other nations, the Scandinavians, Germans, French, English, and others have left their mark on the observance as well. Some groups refrain from celebrating Christmas on the grounds that the introduction of pagan practices has destroyed the original significance of the occasion. They cite the use of Christmas trees and the Yule log, among other things, as examples of the paganization of Christmas. 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.

Notice how it is readily admitted that many of the customs of Christmas stem from the practices of the heathen nations that did not worship Yahweh or give honor to His Son Yeshua. These practices were absorbed into the celebration of the birth of Christ. Remember what Yahweh commands in Deuteronomy 12:29-30 (KJV):

When Yahweh thy Mighty One shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and **that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.** Thou shalt not do so unto Yahweh thy Mighty One...

Let me continue on by quoting from the 1983 *New Book of Knowledge*, Volume 3, page 290:

December 25 is a Christian festival and is observed as the anniversary of the birth of Christ. In early times this day was not one of the feasts of the Christian Church. **In fact, church leaders thought the celebration of birthdays to be a heathen custom.** It is believed that Christmas was not celebrated until some 300 years after the birth of Christ.

No one is certain why December 25 was chosen. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this is the date of the Nativity. **It is believed that the efforts of the early Christians in Rome to change pagan customs into Christian rites led, in the 4th century A.D., to the adoption of December 25 as the date of Christ Mass, or feast, in honor of the birth of Christ. This day was probably chosen because, according to the calendar then in use, December 25 was the winter solstice, the time when days begin to grow longer in the Northern Hemisphere. The sun-worshipping pagans had celebrated this day as the promise of spring.**

Actually very few of the customs associated with Christmas have their origin in church festivals...

The Christmas tree is the symbol of the spirit of the Yuletide in many homes. The custom came from Germany and dates to long ago when primitive people revered trees - particularly evergreens. **These trees did not die or fade in winter and seemed to be a sign of immortality. The Christians changed the custom into one honoring Christ...**

This reference work tells us that Christians changed the custom of revering the evergreen tree into a custom a custom honoring Christ. I ask you though, are we allowed to take a heathen custom and re-interpret the custom in an attempt to honor Christ? What does Yahweh say in His word?

These *are* the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which Yahweh (the) Mighty One of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye **shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods**, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and **under every green tree**: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and **burn their groves with fire**; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. **Ye shall not do so unto Yahweh thy Mighty One.** (Deuteronomy 12:1-4 KJV; Deuteronomy 12:4 HCSB - "**Don't worship Yahweh your Mighty One this way.**")

Yahweh teaches in the plainest of terms not to worship Him by doing the same things the heathen nations do to their gods. He instead wants us to worship Him in the manner He has prescribed. It doesn't matter what our motive is here, it doesn't matter if we are even thinking that what we are doing is a good thing. What matters is what Yahweh has said.

Here's another piece from the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* under the heading "Christmas," taken from studylight.org.

Of the major Christian festivals, Christmas is the most recent in origin. **The name**, a contraction of the term "Christ's mass," **did not come into use until the Middle Ages. In the early centuries, Christians were much more likely to celebrate the day of a person's death than the person's birthday.** Very early in its history the church had an annual observance of the death of Christ and also honored many of the early martyrs on the day of their death. Before the fourth century, churches in the East—Egypt, Asia Minor, and Antioch—observed Epiphany, the manifestation of God to the world, celebrating Christ's baptism, His birth, and the visit of the Magi.

In the early part of the fourth century, Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ. The practice spread widely and rapidly, so that most parts of the Christian world observed the new festival by the end of the century. In the fourth century, the controversy over the nature of Christ, whether He was truly God or a created being, led to an increased emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation, the affirmation that "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). It is likely that the urgency to proclaim the incarnation was an important factor in the spread of the celebration of Christmas.

No evidence remains about the exact date of the birth of Christ. The December 25 date was chosen as much for practical reasons as for theological ones.

Throughout the Roman Empire, various festivals were held in conjunction with the winter solstice. In Rome, the Feast of the Unconquerable Sun celebrated the beginning of the return of the sun. When Christianity became the religion of the Empire, the church either had to suppress the festivals or transform them. The winter solstice seemed an appropriate time to celebrate Christ's birth. Thus, the festival of the sun became a festival of the Son, the Light of the world.

Here again we see that within Christmas there is a blending of heathen customs with the honorable event of the birth of the Messiah. In the words of one author,

"Some well-meaning Christians try to celebrate Jesus' birth without mixing in any of the pagan customs and traditions. To be honest, though, if you truly eliminate every single custom and tradition that has its origin in pagan idolatry, you won't be left with much of anything. Even the December 25th date will have to be abandoned, so why bother?" (*Gates of Eden*, periodical, Nov-Dec. 2002, p.17).

This next entry will be from the *Encyclopedia of Christmas*, by Tanya Gulevich. On page 155 under the heading of "December 25" we read the following:

The earliest Christians did not celebrate Christmas. In fact, the first Christian calendar listing December 25 as the Feast of the Nativity was compiled in 336 A.D. Since neither of the two biblical accounts of the Nativity - found in the Gospel according to Luke and the Gospel according to Matthew - gives the date of Jesus' birth, how did December 25 come to be the date on which Christians celebrate Christmas?

In the ancient world various pagan peoples celebrated the birthdays of gods and important individuals. In fact, many pagan myths explained the miraculous births of the gods. This association with paganism caused some early Christian thinkers to oppose the celebration of birthdays on principle. For example, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, the Christian teacher and writer Origen (c. 185 - c. 254) argued that Christians should not observe birthdays since scripture depicts only wrongdoers like the pharaohs and Herod celebrating their birthdays.

By the fourth century, however, Christian leaders had overcome their reluctance to honor the birthday of Jesus Christ. Now they had to decide upon a date for the new feast. The first mention of Christmas observances taking place on December 25 occurs in the Philocalian calendar, a Church document written in 336 A.D. **Some scholars believe that Christian authorities scheduled the Feast of the Nativity for December 25 in order to draw people away from the pagan festivals celebrated on or around that date.** The madcap revels associated with the Roman holiday Saturnalia ended on December 23, just two days earlier. On January first the Romans observed Kalends, their new year festival. Finally, **on December 25 devotees of Mithras and Sol celebrated the Birth of the Invincible Sun.**

According to the calendar used by the ancient Romans, the winter solstice fell on December 25, making it a perfect day on which to commemorate

the rebirth of the sun. The cult of the sun god was especially popular with the Romans between the second and the fourth centuries, a time when Christianity was struggling to establish itself as a legitimate faith. By selecting December 25 as the date for the new Feast of the Nativity, Christian leaders probably hoped to convince sun god worshipers to celebrate the birth of Jesus rather than the birth of the sun.

I could go on and on quoting from so many more Encyclopedias and Dictionaries, but they would just basically be repeating the already mentioned information. I would encourage you to spend an entire day at a collegiate level library, and take the time to look up "Christmas" in various religious and secular resources.

Dr. Bucher writes this toward the close of his article series:

December 25 was chosen not because it had somehow been proven from extra-biblical sources that Christ was definitely born on December 25. Rather the date was chosen to counteract a very popular pagan holiday that already had been occurring on this date...

Now does the fact that the Church of Rome chose the same date to celebrate Christ's birth as a popular pagan festival mean that "Christmas is based on a pagan festival" or that "Christmas is pagan"? I don't think so! What kind of reasoning is that? It simply means that they chose the same day - why, we don't exactly know. Perhaps they chose it to keep Christians from taking part in the pagan festivities, or perhaps to entice pagans to join the Christian faith. If a group of Christians chose to celebrate Christ's birth on Halloween or on some well known Satanic day, would it be fair or right to accuse them of basing Christ's birth on paganism, so that from then on Christmas would be forever pagan? Of course not! In this case the Christians might be doing this to give themselves something Christian to celebrate on the day. Is that wrong? Placing a Christian feast on a well known non-Christian day does not make the Christian feast non-Christian. They are merely sharing the day. We worship our God on Sunday, which in Roman times, was the day dedicated to the Sun-god. Does that make our worship on Sunday pagan? Perhaps we should worship on Saturday. But that day in Roman times was named in honor of the god Saturn. Would that make our festivals on Saturday pagan? Of course not. But this is the kind of faulty logic used by the "Christmas is pagan" crowd.

I have underlined a few sentences in the above commentary by Dr. Bucher to drive home a point that I hope you are able to receive at this point in the study. Dr. Bucher leans towards the belief that December 25 was chosen as the day to celebrate the birth of Christ *in attempts to witness to the heathens about the Savior.*

In other words, some professing Christians were attempting to counteract the pagan customs that were going on during that time period. Their attempt included a reinterpretation of already existing pagan customs. As Dr. Bucher said, "They are merely SHARING the day."

There is a glaring truth in that statement. These professing Christians of the fourth century were attempting to evangelize people using an unscriptural method. Yahweh

commanded His people not to worship Him in the way that the heathens worshiped their mighty ones (Deuteronomy 12:28-32). These Christians ignored that commandment and did just the opposite of what Yahweh commanded. They took the way the heathens were worshipping their mighty ones, and then began to reinterpret all of the customs, and then use them in worship to Father Yahweh and His Son Yeshua, only with reinterpretation. This is sin. What they should have done is evangelize the heathens by proclaiming the unadulterated Gospel, and teaching the Messianic significance of the appointed times that Yahweh Almighty had commanded (Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16; Acts 2:1; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). These appointed times were and are a foreshadowing or *type* of the work that Yahweh accomplished through His Son Yeshua.

Here are the last comments from Dr. Bucher that I will quote:

Of course some Christmas customs are certainly taken from paganism. The use of the word yule and the various customs associated with it, for example, come from pagan culture. The word probably came the Anglo-Saxon *geol*, which meant "feast." It is thought that among the Anglo-Saxons, the time of the winter solstice was a time of a great feast.

But so what? Is everything that was once used by paganism centuries ago, now off limits when Christians apply them to Christmas or other Christian festivals? Are we prepared to strictly apply that to everything we do? Why can't we use some of the same words, symbols or customs, which long ago ceased to be used in the worship of false gods? We need to remember that before pagans coopted them centuries ago, God had given many of the things used in custom, as good gifts to be enjoyed by his people. Why then can Christians not redeem these good gifts for their use as they celebrate Christmas? In my opinion, it is sufficient to point out to people the origin of these customs, and distinguish these "winter customs" from the true Christmas celebration, which has to do with the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ. In my perfect world, people would call all of those customs "winter customs" or "holiday customs" rather than "Christmas customs." "Christmas" would only be used to refer to the Christian holy day that remembers Christ's birth. But I don't see that happening any time soon.

Here, Dr. Bucher readily admits some Christmas customs stem from pagan practice. I would rather have him say that *most* Christmas customs stem from paganism, because that is what I've seen in my research, but any admission by Dr. Bucher is appreciated. He goes on to mention redeeming certain symbols that were initially used by our heavenly Father. The problem with this is that the customs surrounding the celebration of the winter solstice, or "Christmas," were not initially used by Yahweh and then given to His people. Let me explain.

I have labored to teach others in my preaching that for heathens to take originally pure creations and symbols used by Yahweh and pollute them does not negate the original purity of the creation/symbol. One symbol that I use to explain this is the rainbow. We see the sign of the Noahic covenant in Genesis 8 to be the "bow in the sky." This sign has been taken by the homosexual community today. When you're riding down the road in Georgia, and you see a vehicle with a rainbow sticker on the back, you immediately think

that the person driving is a practicing homosexual or that they are at least not against a homosexuality "life-style." In spite of this use of the rainbow by heathens, I believe we can use the rainbow as a sign in Christianity because Yahweh initially created the rainbow to be the sign that He would never again destroy all living creatures with a flood upon the earth as He did in the days of Noah.

What Dr. Bucher and many others fail to see is that Yahweh never instituted an evergreen tree to be a sign of the birth of His Son. Yahweh never instituted December 25 to be the day we celebrate the Lord's birth. Sure, Yahweh created trees, and He is the Maker of every day on the calendar, but these symbols/customs were not initially used by Yahweh and then polluted by pagans. *These symbols were initially used by pagans in worship to their false gods.* Later down the line, some adherents to Christianity made an attempt to reinterpret and reassign these customs into the worship of the Father and His beloved Son.

This did make it easier to attract people to Scripture because they could continue to perform the same worship with new meaning. For example, the worship they once gave to the goddess Asherah (evergreen tree) was now given to Yeshua. That may sound good to our human minds, but I believe that I have shown that this violates specific commandments in Yahweh's law.

We need to be thankful for the birth of the Messiah. We need to speak about it, sing about it, and teach about it. What we *do not need to do* is mix heathen customs with this magnificent truth, and then tell people it is holy and honorable to our Lord to do so. Let's worship the Father and His Son in the way that Scripture commands, instead of the way that we think is best.