

MOTIONS WITHOUT SUBSTANCE

By

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What has continued to puzzle pollsters throughout the past several decades is that while religious concerns are on the rise morals continue their decline. Beginning with Eisenhower each president since then has been one who expressed strong Christian convictions. Churches are larger and more prominent than ever before, and 90 percent of the people claim that they are believers in God.

Then, why isn't the moral climate improving? With so many public figures claiming to be "believers," why don't we see a massive return to the commandments and example of Christ?

A clue to the answer is seen when we compare two widely observed celebrations, Halloween and Christmas. Halloween, originally known as Samhain, a pagan celebration of the Druids involving Satan worship and human sacrifice, is observed in many forms throughout the country, in schools, civic organizations, homes and even in churches. Most everyone who participates in the observance loudly denies any belief in what it is supposed to represent — ghosts, goblins, witches, activities of the dead and satanic worship. They go through all the motions but make it clear that they do not believe in any of it.

What about the observance of Christmas? Far outstripping any other annual holiday in measurable terms, here is a celebration that involves months of preparation and the cooperation of people both religious and secular in all parts of the world. While the celebration originated in paganism, there can be no question that in modern observance it is supposed to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In song and in print, Jesus is praised as virgin-born, as Savior and King. Everywhere you look you see portrayed something about His miraculous birth — the shepherds, the star, the stable, the mother and child, and the wise men. And integrated into all this is Santa Claus, Rudolf, and Frosty the Snow Man. Does everyone believe it? Of course not! The majority who celebrate Christmas are going through the motions and giving their nod to the traditions, but do not really believe that a virgin gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God, without whose death and resurrection there is absolutely no hope of eternal life.

Far be it from me to deny all the joy and beauty that may be found in traditions imbedded in the Christmas holiday. For a while I get to hear music by Handel and Bach — real music, in contrast to the noise of contemporary composers. It is a joy to hear songs describing the glory of Jesus being born of a virgin instead of the lyrics glorifying lust after harlots. It is a time for fellowship with loved ones. No matter how busy, families and friends do find time to get together, and for a short time people actually give some thought and concern to the poor and needy.

There are things going on in the Christmas celebration that a believer can turn to blessings and use to exalt Christ. But it takes discernment and effort to sort it all out, and the fact is that most people are not going to do that. The result is that many are deceived into thinking that they are serving and honoring God by going through the motions without genuine faith in His revelation.

Take, for example, the fact that during Christmas one of the strongest efforts is made to convince everyone that God's peace is showered out upon all mankind and that His prime concern is that the whole race of humanity enjoy themselves. When you consider the office party or the school celebration, you cannot help but notice that the event is designed to fill everyone, atheist and believer alike, with merriment, and care is taken to avoid any consideration of man's condition and God's purpose to have him in His own holy image. Thus man is conditioned to go through the motions of faith while at the same time denying what the faith is all about.

Of course we know that Santa, Rudolf, Christmas trees and jingle bells have nothing to do with Christ's purpose. Such trappings are part of the world's effort to create an atmosphere of magic and joy because it has rejected the real miracle and true means of joy through Jesus. If the unbelievers want to "celebrate the season" in this make-believe, that's par for the world. But if Christians are going to celebrate the birth of Jesus, they can hardly do so while denying the very facts that brought Him into the world and promoting the unbeliever's substitutes.

Jesus was born at "the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4) into a world that was almost ready for judgment. He did not come because of human goodness but because of human sin. His view of the world made Him weep. His message to the world was not "rejoice" but "repent." The angel instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus, which means "savior", because, the angel said, "it is he that shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

If the world in the first century was in need of a savior, take a look at the world today. Morals have declined lower than we thought possible in a civilized nation, with churches openly condoning practices too filthy to talk about. In some churches the Sodomites have come out of the closet and into the pulpits! Rulers of the land continually cower before the lowest antichrist perpetrators of evil. Fornication is justified and paraded before the people through television and the press without a blush, and the educational system refuses to educate its captive children concerning the truth about the use of sex. By giving them false propaganda called "safe sex", they are actually condoning their immoral sexual activity, which may result in the horrible AIDS death for millions of them. The freedom of the citizens is disappearing as the courts ignore the constitutional system of justice and bureaucrats usurp the place of elected representative government.

The problem of our society is the old problem of sin, the problem faced by Adam. The sickness is in the heart and mind, as Isaiah described the nation of Judah: "*Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity...why will you be stricken, that you revolt more and more? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint*" (Isa. 1:4, 5).

For this reason Jesus came from the Father, born of a virgin girl, lived in perfect obedience to God's will, died as our sin-offering and rose again to live as our Sovereign King. His birth, life, death and resurrection not only are unique but the essential ingredients of faith required for salvation. To go through the motions of discipleship while not being a disciple is hypocrisy; to sing of His miraculous birth, His divine mission of His glory as King, when one doesn't believe it, is false praise condemned by Jesus (Matt. 7:22).

This attempt to take the motions of faith while never being committed to it can be seen all through society. The popular fad in the churches is to do what the world does, but do it for Jesus. Be an athlete for Jesus. Be a biker for Jesus. Be a rock-singer for Jesus.

Join the thrill-seekers and entertainers of the world, but do “for Jesus.” Do anything, be anything, just say it’s for Jesus and — Bingo! — you’re a dedicated disciple. So we have taken the greed, the pride and the paganistic paraphernalia of the world, added a doxology and a verse of scripture to it and made it a part of the Christian way.

In the meantime where does God’s purpose stand? What is He trying to do with man here on the planet earth? He still seeks to have man in His own image, an ultimately the ones who please Him will be those who chose the straight and narrow way, rather than the broad way where the multitudes travel.

We owe to the world a view of a people who are different from the world, even as Jesus was. He certainly expects His disciples to be seen as those who stand out from people who are carried along the stream of humanity, going unanimously toward chaos and death.

The institutions called “churches” which “go with the flow” of the world, that appeal to sinners by condoning their sin and prefer peace with the world to peace with God, have already abandoned the King and the Kingdom. They may go through the motions every week, but there can be no substance to their faith.

Whether at Christmas or any other season, we are challenged today, just as were the Philippians in the days of Paul, to “become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom (we) are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15, 16).

We are instructed to “be not fashioned according to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). We are not to go through the mindless motions of the pagan society about us, but to be motivated by the truth as revealed in Jesus our Lord.

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