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IS HE THE REASON FOR THE SEASON?

by Bill Brandstatter

Many in the religious world will be celebrating the 25th day of December as the birthday of Jesus Christ. Manger scenes will abound around many church buildings. Songs about Jesus in the manger, the shepherds and the wise men will be heard during the Christmas season. Signs outside some church buildings may be seen stating such things as "Let's Keep Christ in Christmas" or "He's The Reason For The Season". Christ, however is not "the reason for the season". Man is. The Bible is void of references to any annual celebration of the birth of Christ, or the "season" in which he was born. Man, not God, invented the holiday known as "Christmas".

The term "Christmas" is not found in Holy Writ. There is not even a mention of the principle found therein. There is no indication of the date of his birth, and to attempt to provide such amounts to the same thing as attempting to set a date for his second coming. Although man is fond of celebrating birthdays, such does not justify doing so with the birth of Christ. In the long ago, Isaiah penned these words of God, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isa. 55:8). Any such date set by man is pure speculation. The term "Christmas", according to history, was coined from the 12th century practice of Christes Masse (Mass of Christ). The earliest evidence for a celebration of Christ's birth comes from the time of the Roman emperor Commodus, around A.D. 188.

The feast of Christ's birth was first found in Rome at the time of "bishop" Liberius. It was made official by his decree in A.D. 354. So, for many years the world had not heard of such a celebration. For over 200 years such was unknown to the church. Now, however, it is commonplace among the religious world.

The scriptures provide mankind with "ALL THINGS that pertain unto LIFE and GODLINESS" (II Pet. 1:3). Thus, if

the celebration of the birth of Christ pertained to either "life" or "godliness", God would have included it in his revealed word. Therefore, to add a religious significance to the birth of Christ with a religious celebration of the same is to be guilty of adding to God's word, which is sinful (Rev. 22:18). Since all things pertaining to life and godliness have been provided, man's additions are neither needful nor acceptable. Paul wrote, "WHATSOEVER ye do in word OR DEED, DO ALL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS" (Col. 3:17). Doing things "in the name of the Lord" means doing things (all things) by his authority. Since his authority (his word) is void of directives for celebrating his birth in a religious setting, to do so is to practice that which is an addition and, thus, a violation of that word. When one does such, he rests under the condemnation of God. Is the New Testament your authority in matters religious?

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WHERE IS THIS LAND?

by Eddy Gilpin

We are soon (according to man's reckoning) about to embark on a journey to a place where no man has ever gone before. Our trek to distant lands will end on shores of time untouched by previous inhabitants, unmarked by wasted opportunities, and unscathed by misaligned intentions.

Our journey will take us where: no one has yet made a mistake; no one has yet suffered at the hands of another; no one has missed attaining a goal that they have set; no one has felt unwanted, insecure, or unloved. As we set sail from the friendly confines of a place we know so well, a sense of uncertainty beclouds our thoughts as we strain to view the coastline of this unspoiled, impending destination. There it is! Faintly in the distance the sunlit shore of this land of opportunity and place of perpetual pos-

sibility captures the attention of every eager eye.

A survey of this new home discloses no boundaries for anything one might do. Goals that we might set are but ours to attain. Friends that are yet unknown await our fond embrace. Plateaus of excellence and mountains of achievement anticipate our transcending. The reins of leadership and example wait in expectancy for one to seize them.

A closer view reveals that in this land no one has ever obeyed the gospel. No one has ever taught or been taught. Such a place of opportunity cries aloud, "Behold, the fields are white unto harvest". Here, too, lies responsibility which must be accepted. This land has never known the study of God's word. But, you can change all that.

True, this land has never known war. But, it has also never known peace. It has never known sorrow. But, it has never known happiness. It has never known indecency. But, it has never known morality. It has never known death. But, it has never known life. It has never known sin. But, it has never known righteousness.

This land is only what we make it.
This land is the New Year.

"Behold, I make all things new."
(Rev. 21:5)

IS YOUR HOUSE COVERED BY THE BLOOD?

by Eddy Gilpin

Just prior to his bringing the tenth and final plague upon the land of Egypt, God gave unto Moses instructions for the observance of the Passover (Ex. 12). The true significance of this feast was not realized until Christ, "our passover", was crucified on the cross (I Cor. 5:7). The blood of that paschal lamb was to be placed upon "the lintel and the two side posts" of every house (Ex. 12:22). When accomplished, that house would be protected from "the destroyer" as he passed through the land bringing death to the firstborn of each household not covered by the blood (Ex. 12:23). In like manner, the blood of Jesus must be applied to every soul who would be protected from "the wages of sin" (Rom.

Continued on page 2

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(Continued from page 1)

6:23). In consideration, then, of these matters, the question might be asked, "Is your house covered by the blood?"

The husband and father is to be the head of the house (Eph. 5:23, 24). This does not mean that the man is better or has more favor in the eyes of God. Someone had to fill this role and task of being the head over the house, and God chose the man to fill that position. However, along with this position comes great and grave responsibility. The man is to be the spiritual leader in his home. He is to be careful that his children are brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). In light of this command, it should be asked of every father, "Is your house covered by the blood?"

Exemplenesship is a strong teacher, either for good or bad. Influence is so powerful that it even continues after one has departed the ways of this life (Heb. 11:4). Fathers, is this exemplenesship and influence for good present in your homes? Are you yourself a faithful member of the body of Christ, and thus "covered by the blood"? If not, how can you expect your children to become such or be such? The poet has said it thus:

"WALK A LITTLE PLAINER, DADDY"

Walk a little plainer, Daddy,

Said a little boy so frail;

I'm following in your footsteps,

And I don't want to fail.

Sometimes your steps are very plain

Sometimes they are hard to see;

So walk a little plainer, Daddy,

For you are leading me.

I know that once you walked this way,
Many years ago;
And what you did along the way
I'd really like to know.

For sometimes when I am tempted,
I don't know what to do;
So walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For I must follow you.

Some day when I am grown up
You are like what I want to be;
Then I will have a little boy,
Who will want to follow me.

And I would want to lead him right,
And help him to be true;
So, walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For we must follow you.

-Author Unknown

Yes, fathers your example and influence will continue on for years to come. The way you rear your children will determine to a great extent how they will rear theirs. Is the Lord a part of your own personal life? If so, how big a part is he? Can your children see that you are governed by the spiritual standards contained in God's word? Do they see you studying the Bible, praying and leading the home in matters spiritual? These are sobering questions to which each father needs to give close attention. Every father owes his children this kind of foundation. It is a basic responsibility that God has given to him, and a command by which he will be judged. Fathers, give serious consideration to these things, and make sure that your house is "covered by the blood".

ARE WE SPECTATORS?

by Allen Webster

A spectator is "one who looks on or watches" (Webster's, 1132). We are all spectators in some ways as we enjoy watching sporting events or fashion shows. But one place where we are not to be mere onlookers is our Christianity. Elijah, facing Jews who were nothing more than religious spectators, said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (I Kgs. 18:21). We must be careful that we are always "participators" and not "spectators".

ARE YOU A SPECTATOR IN WORSHIP? Worship, as a part of speech, is usually a verb and each act requires mental energy. Jesus commanded His

followers to worship "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24). When songs are led, do you listen or sing? When the lesson is preached, do you study or daydream? When the plate is passed, do you participate or spectate? For worship to be worthy of God's good pleasure, it demands our best (Mal. 1:13).

ARE YOU A SPECTATOR IN SERVICE? Each Christian is to be active in serving others (Gal. 5:13). When the sick and bereaved are announced, do you pray for them, send cards, offer encouraging words and/or make visits? These things show our love to the world (Jn. 13:34-35).

ARE YOU A SPECTATOR IN SOUL WINNING? Is teaching the lost something "they" are supposed to be doing rather than something in which "I" am interested? The command to "teach all nations" was not just given to preachers and elders, but all men (Mt. 28:19).

There is much work to be done. Find your place in the Lord's church, roll up your sleeves and help fight the Lord's battles till He calls His army home!!

CONVERSION IS NOT MYSTERIOUS

by Bennie Forister

Conversion is not some miraculous, better-felt-than-told process. Turning to God is something that people can understand, understand alike, and readily obey. God gave man his Word which gives him "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (II Pet. 1:3). The scriptures tell mankind what to do in order to be saved from sin and its wages (Rom. 6:23). The scriptures nowhere teach that the Holy Spirit comes directly into a sinner's heart to convert him independent of his own will. The inspired apostle Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is **THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION** to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Thus, the gospel and not "direct operation" is God's power unto salvation.

Conversion demands change. The necessary changes through which one goes in the process of conversion to Christ are three. They are: 1) A change of heart (mind); 2) A change of life; 3) A change in relationship. Let us notice each of these in the conversion process.

Since Christianity is a religion that involves the heart, a change of heart must occur in conversion. The heart, as the Bible often uses the word, refers to

the mind (i.e. the part of man that thinks, reasons, believes, understands, desires, trusts, purposes and obeys). For example, in Matthew 9:4 the Bible says, "And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, 'Wherefore think ye evil IN YOUR HEARTS?' " In Romans 10:1, Paul stated that his "HEARTS desire and prayer to God" was that Israel might be saved. Other passages revealing what the heart actually does are: Romans 10:10, Mark 2:6, Matthew 13:15, Proverbs 3:5, II Corinthians 9:7, Romans 6:17, and others. Thus, it is the mind of man, and not the physical heart, which must be changed in conversion. This change takes place through faith, which comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17).

After one's confidence and trust in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord have been established through hearing the gospel, his life needs to be reformed. One's faith in Christ should lead to such reformation. It should cause him to turn from sin to doing that which is lawful and right (Ezek. 18:5-32). This change in conduct is brought about through repentance. Repentance is a change of mind or will regarding sin, which is produced by godly sorrow (II Cor. 7:10) which results in a reformation of life. Hence, the sinner must resolve to turn and travel in the opposite direction concerning sin and the love thereof.

Having destroyed the love and practice of sin by faith and repentance, one must then have his state or relationship changed. This relationship is changed through baptism, which is preceded by one's confession of his faith in Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10). Paul declared, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were BAPTIZED INTO JESUS CHRIST were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk IN NEWNESS OF LIFE" (Rom. 6:3, 4). Although one's desires and directions of life are changed by faith and repentance, it takes the consummating act of baptism to change one's relationship with God. The penitent believer is baptized into Christ and thus becomes a new creature, a Christian (II Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:13, 14). Hence, conversion is a process which can be known and obeyed by man. Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ?

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Even though respectability is of great worth, it cannot save the soul.

Where GOD Put Water

by Roy J. Hearn

If one is a professed believer and follower of Christ, he is obligated to obey the Lord's every command without question, for Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18) and to reject His word is to disrespect and reject Him (John 12:48). We too often try to please ourselves instead of God. Though God has given an unalterable plan of salvation (Revelation 22:18,19) we are inclined to change or set aside His laws and expect Him to save us anyway. The Bible teaches that only the obedient have any promise of salvation. Therefore, it is imperative we obey God's laws implicitly.

There is much opposition to water in the plan of salvation. Why say so much about water? It is a most important item. Without it physical life could not exist. In the Bible God connects it with all kinds of purification. Peoples' minds have been disturbed and perverted about it, thus need to be taught the truth concerning water in God's plan. The New Testament teaches there is no salvation without it. Study the Bible to learn what God says about it. In this study the reader will note that God placed water *between* man and certain blessings, and the blessings were not received until the water was crossed. We agree that one is saved by God's power; but how does God exercise this power? God exercises His power through His will, His word, His law or covenant. Consider the following examples, note *where God put water* and when the blessing was received.

1. *Between Noah and the purified world, or salvation.* It is true Noah was saved by faith (Hebrews 11:7), an active faith that led him to obey God's commands (Genesis 6:9, 20). If Noah had not obeyed and built the ark he would have also been destroyed. He was also saved by water (1 Peter 3:20). The flood stood between him and the purified state. He was lifted by the water, which destroyed the sinful people, and by it was transported to the purified world. Thus the sinner is now saved by baptism, in which his sins are destroyed by the blood of Christ, and he is transported by baptism into Christ, or the purified state (1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27).

2. *Between Israel and deliverance from bondage.* The Israelites were in Egypt, typical of sin. They were pursued by Pharaoh, typical of the devil. They came to the Red Sea, but salvation from Egyptian bondage was beyond the sea. The Red Sea is typical of baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1, 2). The people were not delivered from bondage until they crossed the sea. Just so now, the sinner

is not purified of sin until he crosses the water of baptism, which brings him into Christ where salvation is (Romans 6:3, 4; Ephesians 1:7).

3. *Water placed between Naaman and cleansing* (2 Kings 5). Naaman had leprosy. God placed water between him and healing of this dread disease. Naaman didn't like it. He is typical of those who now reject God's remedy (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Naaman wanted to do it his way, instead of God's; but the Lord did not change His word to please Naaman; he had to obey whether or not it suited him. Leprosy is typical of sin. Just as Naaman had to dip in obedience to God's command to be healed, so the sinner must "dip," or be baptized as God commands to be saved from sin. Was the power of cleansing in the water? No, but with God, who cleanses and forgives when we obey His command to be baptized.

4. *Christ put water between the blind man and sight* (John 9). Could not Christ have given this man sight without having him wash his eyes in Siloam? Certainly, but He tested the man's faith by the command to go wash his eyes in the pool. The man obeyed and sight came after the washing. So God today tests our faith by the command to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

5. *Water was between Saul of Tarsus and sins washed away.* Christ appeared to Saul to qualify him as an apostle, not to save him. He was told to go into Damascus and there he would be told what to do. Ananias was sent to him and told Saul to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

6. *Water is placed between the sinner and righteousness.* Christ is our example (1 Peter 2:21). He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:14). In order to be acceptable to God we also must work righteousness (Acts 10:34, 35). This includes all of God's commands (Psalms 119:172). Baptism is a command of God, therefore, baptism stands between the sinner and righteousness.

7. *Water stands between the sinner and forgiveness* (Acts 2:38). "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Can one be saved without repentance? No? Well, in this passage baptism is coordinate with, equal to, repentance. Therefore, God put water baptism between the sinner and remission of sins.

8. *God put water between the sinner and Christ.* In order to be saved one

must be in Christ. To get into Christ one must be baptized. "For as many of you as have been baptized INTO Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

9. *Water stands between the sinner and the blood of Christ.* Christ shed His blood in His death, and water came with it (John 19:34). These two elements are inseparable (I John 5:8). None can be saved without the blood, but how contact it? Since Christ shed His blood in His death we must be baptized into His death to contact the blood (Romans 6:3, 4). Thus we see the importance of baptism here: it is the medium by which we are brought into contact with the blood, which cleanses our sins. This being true, one does not have salvation until he is baptized to reach the blood.

10. *Water is between the sinner and new life.* Life comes after birth. The new birth includes baptism (John 3:3-5). One is a new creature when he enters Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). One has new life after baptism (Romans 6:4) and gets into Christ by baptism (Galatians 3:27).

11. **GOD PUT WATER BETWEEN THE SINNER AND SALVATION!** "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Christ here put baptism between faith and salvation. This is the Lord's doings, not mine. It is too clear for any to misunderstand. Though baptism may seem foolish to us, remember that God chose the foolish things to put to shame the worldly-wise (1 Corinthians 1:18-27). Let us follow the Lord's ways and be blessed, for, as in the examples above, we see that the blessings received depend upon our compliance with the conditions imposed by Jehovah.

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelations 2:10).

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