

From Decorations to Devotion

1 Peter 3:3-4



Pastor Ron Graff
Sunday,
Dec 16, 2007

Continuing the series: From Secular to Sacred

Introduction

1 Peter 3:3-4; Colossians 2:16-17

The Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31), Temple (1 Kings 6-9)

SOME PEOPLE THINK CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS ARE WORLDLY, BUT THEY CAN BE AN OBJECT LESSON ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JESUS.



Questions about the Decorations

And Those Who Dislike Decorations:

☆ Why do we use decorations that have had earlier, non-Christian meaning?

- * Evergreen Trees, Wreaths
- * Holly
- * Mistletoe
- * Light(s)
- * Yule Log
- * Other...

☆ Which decorations have distinctive Christian meaning?

- * Nativity Scene
- * Star
- * Bells
- * Candy Canes
- * Christmas Words (Love, Joy, Peace) and Scripture
- * Background Music – Carols



Questions about the Decorator

And Those Who Like Decorations:



What do the decorations mean to us?

- * Lights – Jesus is the Light – John 8:12
- * Evergreens – Eternal Life – John 3:16
- * Colors
 - ▲ Green – Eternal Life – John 3:16
 - ▲ Red - Salvation by the Blood of Christ – Romans 5:9
 - ▲ White – Forgiveness – Isaiah 1:18
 - ▲ Blue – Heaven
 - ▲ Silver – Christ’s Perfect Humanity
 - ▲ Gold – Christ’s Deity



What is the motivation for having decorations?

- * To impress other people? 😞
- * To make other people happy? 😊
- * To point other people to Christ? 😊
 - ▲ 1 Peter 3:15-16 – Be prepared to give an answer...
 - ▲ 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 – Ambassadors for Christ
 - ▲ 1 Corinthians 10:31-33- “All things to all people”, “All to the glory of God.”

From Decorations to Devotion

1 Peter 3:3-4



Pastor Ron Graff
Sunday,
Dec 16, 2007

Continuing the series: From Secular to Sacred

Introduction

S - Since I mentioned the old classic “Green Christmas” last week two people helped me get a copy of this satire. I am indebted to Don Clucas and Bob Wilson for this. I didn’t really plan to play the song, but several of you said you would like to hear it if we could find it. It is quite long, but I decided that if I just played the second half that you would get the thrust of the recording by Stan Freberg. This was a big hit in the ‘50’s, but as you can imagine, it was not appreciated by the big advertisers, so radio stations were pressured into dropping it from their list of songs. Here’s the second half of “Green Christmas.”

As we play it, we have asked the ushers to pass out a “Merry Christmas” button to each of you.

S —“Merry Christmas Button”

Christmas decorations are more extensive today than ever before. There was nothing like the lavish decoration of our homes in Biblical times. However, there are some Biblical insights about the concept of adornment.

For instance, there is clear teaching about personal adornment.

1 Peter 3:3-4 (Read the verse)

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

Does that mean that a woman should never wear jewelry or fashionable clothes? The history of our own denomination helps us understand this question. If you have taken our Church 101 class you know that the original Brethren In Christ were from Mennonite descent – like the Amish of today. They purposely wore plain, dark clothing without rings or other jewelry, or even buttons or neckties, or anything that would draw attention to themselves. This was their way of practicing modesty. But the time came in this Century when to dress this way actually did draw undue attention to themselves. So they modified their approach to dressing like the average person, without excessive

jewelry. This actually was more modest than to wear the conspicuous old-fashioned styles.

S - Colossians 2:16-17

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Another Scripture that we used last week also applies to this question. The way we celebrate holy days, including the decorations we use is not prescribed by God. It is a matter of personal choice, based on a sincere desire to honor The Lord in all we do. (Read the verse)

Another Scriptural approach to decoration is to notice the way that the Tabernacle and the Temple were decorated. For your personal study, we have listed key chapters for these structures in the Bible...

The Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31), Temple (1 Kings 6-9)

Incredible amounts of gold and silver were used in these holy places. In addition, they used expensive, beautiful woods, and in the case of the temple, beautiful carved stones. And they had Beautiful tapestries and sculptured articles of

worship. All of this enhanced the importance of the place and of the things that took place there. In addition, Biblical scholars have pointed out that they were “types” or previews of the future person and work of The Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, they noted that the Gold and Silver were symbolic of the Deity and the Sinless Humanity of Christ – the only human to have two natures – that of God and also of man.

Let’s begin our exploration of the matter of Christmas decorations. Our key thought for today is...

S - SOME PEOPLE THINK CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS ARE WORLDLY, BUT THEY CAN BE AN OBJECT LESSON ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

**S - ✦ Questions about the Decorations
And Those Who Dislike Decorations:**

☆ Why do we use decorations that have had earlier, non-Christian meaning?

Last week I used an illustration to show that it could be helpful to substitute a new meaning or a new event in place of one that was not good. I told about the great substitute parties in churches in the ‘50s and ‘60s in place of Prom Night and Graduation Night.

A Biblical example can also be added. Do you remember Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill?

S - Acts 17:22-29

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-an image made by man's design and skill.

★ Evergreen Trees, Wreaths

Patron trees (for example, the Irminsul, Thor's Oak and the figurative Yggdrasil) held special significance for the ancient Germanic tribes, appearing throughout historic accounts as sacred symbols and objects. According to Adam of Bremen, in Scandinavia the Germanic pagan kings sacrificed nine males (the number nine is a significant number in Norse mythology) of each species at the sacred groves every ninth year.^[2]

According to Church records, Saint Boniface (who, also according to Church records, had felled the Thor's Oak) attempted to Christianise the indigenous Germanic tribes by introducing the notion of trinity by using the cone-shaped evergreen trees because of their triangular appearance.^{[3][citation needed]}

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree

S - ★ Holly

For centuries, holly has been the subject of myths, legends, and traditional observances. **The ancient Chinese used *Ilex chinensis* extensively for decorating during their February New Year festivals. The Romans used the plant to decorate their houses, temples, and deities for Saturnalia, the mid-winter feast. They exchanged holly**

boughs as symbols of goodwill and friendship. This practice is considered the forerunner of holly's use in Christmas celebrations.

Ancient history says that the Druids used holly in their religious rites long before the custom came to the European continent. **The Druids of ancient Britain and Gaul held the English holly tree sacred. The "holy" connotation continued in later days in Europe, where the plant was widely believed to repel evil spirits. People planted trees and used their branches as protection against witchcraft, mad dogs, and other evils.**

Sometime in the past, the pagans of Europe took sprays of holly into their homes so that the tiny, imaginary peoples of the woodland would be safe from the cold of winter in the evergreen boughs. Later, holly was used as holiday decor that gave the good fairies and elves a place to hide as they did their good deeds.

With the coming of Christianity, the use of holly was condemned as a pagan ritual and forbidden by the Christian council. But Christian Romans continued to decorate with holly during festive seasons. **European Christian symbolism included the belief that the spiny leaves and red berries were a reminder of the crown of thorns and the blood of Christ. The Pennsylvania Dutch held that the plant's white flowers represented Jesus' purity. The Germans called this plant Christdorn, Christ's crown of thorns. They thought holly had white berries until they were stained by Christ's blood.**

http://www.ext.vt.edu/departments/envirohort/factsheet_s2/landsnurs/dec93pr1.html

Mistletoe was **used by the Druid priesthood** in a very **special ceremony held around this time...five days after the New Moon following winter solstice, to be precise.** The Druid priests would cut mistletoe from a holy oak tree with a golden sickle. The branches had to be caught before they touched the ground.

The priest then divided the branches into many sprigs and **distributed them to the people, who hung them over doorways as protection against thunder, lightning and other evils.**

<http://www.candlegrove.com/mistletoe.html>

The demise of Baldur, a vegetation deity in the Norse myths, brought winter into the world, although the gods did eventually restore Baldur to life. After which Frigga pronounced the mistletoe sacred, ordering that from now on it should bring love rather than death into the world. Happily complying with Frigga's wishes, any two people passing under the plant from now on would celebrate Baldur's resurrection by kissing under the mistletoe.

http://landscaping.about.com/cs/winterlandscaping1/a/mistletoe_2.htm

S - * Light(s)

- Sun gods in every pagan culture- Special worship during Winter Solstice.

The Romans held a festival on December 25 called *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, "the birthday of the unconquered sun."

Wikipedia

S - * Yule Log

Yule is a [winter festival](#) celebrated in Northern Europe since ancient times. In pre-Christian times, [Germanic pagans](#) celebrated Yule from late December to early January on a date determined by a lunar calendar.^[1] During the process of [Christianization](#) and the adoption of the [Julian calendar](#), Yule was placed on December 25, in order to correspond with the Christian celebrations later known in [English](#) as [Christmas](#).^[2] Thus, the terms "Yule" and "Christmas" are often used interchangeably^[3], especially in [Christmas carols](#).

Wikipedia

Yule is from an old Germanic root, *Jul*, meaning "to turn," and referred to the phenomenon of the sun "turning" in the sky three days after the winter solstice.

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Cafe/4173/realrng.htm>

- Germanic root "to turn" – Sun rises again
For us – the Son Rises Again

S - * Other...

S - ☆ Which decorations have distinctive Christian meaning?

* Nativity Scene

S - ★ Star

S - ★ Bells

S - ★ Candy Canes

Legend says that a candymaker in Indiana created them in the shape of “J” for Jesus and decorated them with red stripes to symbolize the death of Christ.

Snopes, the Urban Legend experts, say this is fiction, but do agree that in Europe’s Cologne Cathedral about 1670, the choirmaster asked craftsman to make candy sticks (already being used as decorations on Christmas Trees) look like shepherds’ crooks and give them to children to keep them quiet during the services.

[http://www.snopes.com/holidays/christmas/candyca
ne.asp](http://www.snopes.com/holidays/christmas/candyca
ne.asp)

Poinsettias

Poinsettias didn't arrive in the United States until the 19th century. The plant is named for the first U.S. Ambassador to [Mexico](#), Dr. Joel Roberts Poinsett, who introduced America to the poinsettia in 1828, after discovering it in the wilderness in southern Mexico.

A Mexican legend tells of a girl who could only offer weeds as a gift to Jesus on Christmas Eve. When she

brought the weeds into a church, they blossomed into the beautiful red plants we know as poinsettias, known as Flores de Noche Buena in Mexico (Spanish for "flowers of the holy night").

<http://christmas.howstuffworks.com/christmas-poinsettia1.htm>

S - * Christmas Words (Love, Joy, Peace) and Scripture

S - * Background Music – Carols

S - † **Questions about the Decorator
And Those Who Like Decorations:**

☆ What do the decorations mean to us?

* Lights – Jesus is the Light – John 8:12

S - John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

S - * Evergreens – Eternal Life – John 3:16

S - John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

S - * Colors

▲ Green – Eternal Life – John 3:16

S - ▲ Red - Salvation by the Blood of Christ

S - – Romans 5:9

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

S - ▲ White – Forgiveness – Isaiah 1:18

S - 18 "Come now, let us reason together,"
says the LORD.

"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.

S - ▲ Blue – Heaven

S - ▲ Gold – Christ's Deity

S - ▲ Silver – Christ's Perfect Humanity

S - ☆ What is the motivation for having decorations?
This is our application for this message...

* To impress other people? ☹

Wrong answer – wrong reason

* To make other people happy? ☹️
Not bad, but not the best reason

* To point other people to Christ? 😊
This is what it's all about. The purpose of our whole life!

S - ▲ 1 Peter 3:15– Be prepared to give an answer...

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

S - ▲ 2 Corinthians 5:20– Ambassadors for Christ

S - We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

S - ▲ 1 Corinthians 10:31-33- “All things to all people”, “All to the glory of God.”

S - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Colossians 2:16-17

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

(from New International Version)

John 8:12

12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

(from New International Version)

1 Peter 3:15-16

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Psalm 126:5-6

5 Those who sow in tears
will reap with songs of joy.
6 He who goes out weeping,

carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with him.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

1 Peter 3:3-4

3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. 4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

(from New International Version)

ADORN

ADORN (Grk. kosmeo, "to ornament"). To embellish with honor, gain; followed by a participle designating the act by which the honor is gained (Titus 2:10; 1 Peter 3:5).

(from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary.
Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago,
Illinois. Copyright (c) 1988.)

Prov 1:8-9

**8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.**

**9 They will be a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck.**

(from New International Version)

Isa 61:10

**10 I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.**

**For he has clothed me with garments of
salvation**

**and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**

(from New International Version)

⦿ Advantages

- Evergreens – Symbolic of eternal life
- Biblical preview: Isaiah 60:13
- Holly, Ivy Rosemary
- Star and/or Angel
- Advent Wreath

× Christmas Lights

⊖ Symbolic of Jesus: The Light of the
World – John 8:12

⊖ Multiple lights - Symbolic of
Disciples: Jesus called us “The light of
the world”! – Matthew 5:14-16

✕ **Christmas Colors**

⊖ Red – Sacrifice: Jesus’ blood

⊖ Green – Eternal life

⊖ Gold – Jesus’ deity

⊖ Silver – Jesus’ humanity

⊖ Blue - Heaven