

MEDITATION ON TRADITION

1 Peter 1:18-19

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, **from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;** ¹⁹But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

The above highlighted phrase, penned by the apostle Peter, undoubtedly refers to the rigid but futile conduct of the Jews as they clung to the belief that obedience to the law would provide a way of salvation and acceptance by God. This “tradition of the elders” had been passed from generation to generation, but in one parenthetical phrase, Peter denounces their religion and soundly condemns their way of life, calling it vain, or empty.

What is the application of these words to my life? What empty, vain tradition of my fathers (family) has me in bondage? Interestingly, as I ponder this question, indeed, the most hallowed tradition my generation received is not spiritual at all, but rather, financial. The oft-repeated commandment in my home was, “Why use your own money to increase your wealth when you can use someone else’s?” In other words, think debt. But, as we are pondering a phrase from God’s holy Word, there is one tradition that we who designate ourselves as Christians have received from our fathers, and it goes back untold generations. It has been a part of our lives, has shaped our conduct, and has led us to idol-worship. It had its beginnings in paganism and each successive generation has added to its ritual, until now it is a ridiculous, hideous, vulgar tradition of man. I speak, of course, of the celebration of Christmas.

We all recognize the secularism and the materialism inherent in our celebration and in our mind we condemn it. However, keeping spiritual things spiritual, what about the hidden message of Santa Claus? Materialism aside, we see a direct conflict with the doctrine of grace. Santa bases his giving on works: If a child is obedient (works) he will receive (gifts). Any believing parent should expose this non-Christian idea without hesitation. I recently read an account of a Hindu woman who thought that the Christian’s god is Santa Claus and that he had a son who is the savior of the Christians. This is not as ridiculous as it sounds; Santa Claus is, without a doubt, the god of Christmas.

We as believers love the Lord Jesus for His willingness to come to our world and die in our place, to satisfy the judgment of God. The incarnation is an event worthy of remembrance. But, our “hallowed tradition” has many pitfalls. Ostensibly, Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Nevermind that according to Scripture He never could have been born in the month of December; nevermind that He Himself never told us to celebrate His birth; nevermind that His birth always brings to the mind of a true believer, His horrific, sacrificial death for our sin. In fact, why was Christ born into our world at all? Will not the sweet baby in the animal stall be required as the supreme sacrifice for the ugliness of our sin? Is it possible for a true believer to participate in a merry, giddy, purposeless celebration based on falseness and perpetuated by greed, all the while denying the ugly side of the incarnation? We have heard the saying, “Jesus is the reason for the season” and that is what the world thinks. You and I know better . . . are we to celebrate our sin for the sake of tradition?