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# THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP AND CHRISTMAS

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## **Introduction**

The Puritan/Presbyterian wing of the Reformation accomplished a purity in worship not seen since the apostolic church. This purity was attained by making the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments the only infallible standard and authority in determining worship ordinances. Any ordinances solely based on church tradition or man's authority were discarded. However, this purity attained by our spiritual forefathers has, with the passage of time, been cast aside. Pragmatism, tradition and human opinion are exalted in determining how God's people are to worship Him. The attitude among many in church leadership positions is to give the people what they want, rather than to submit to God's divine revelation.

The purpose of this booklet is to show that God does not leave it up to man to make up his own rules regarding worship. Christians are to learn and submit to what God says in this area. The first part of this booklet discusses the "regulative principle" of Scripture and worship. God has set down in Scripture how He is to be worshipped. Man is not to add to or detract from what God says. The second part of the booklet examines the keeping of Christmas. Christmas is a good example of how many people violate this regulative principle of worship. It is celebrated almost universally, even by those who claim to adhere to the regulative principle.

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## **I**

### **The Regulative Principle**

#### **The Regulative Principle of Scripture - Sola Scriptura**

Because of man's sinful nature, God's covenant people often stray from the truth. Men often pervert true religion by eliminating elements in it they find unpleasant. They also pervert it by adding their own ideas to it. This very tendency to corrupt true religion, by addition or subtraction, is why God warned Israel not to add to or subtract from His Word. "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:1-2).

This passage of Scripture, and others like it, forms the basis for the Protestant reformers' doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. That is to say, the Bible alone is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men . . . and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, everything that man does is to be based on either the explicit commands of Scripture, deduced by good and necessary consequence (e.g., historical example,<sup>2</sup> implication, etc.) or, if circumstantial, to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word (e.g., time or place to meet, etc.). Moses' command in Deuteronomy 4:2 is God's regulative principle, in a broad sense. Man's ultimate authority and blueprint for life is revealed in the Bible.

### **The Regulative Principle of Worship**

The Bible is our only infallible rule for faith and practice. There is no area of life where this truth is more applicable than in the area of worship. Before entering the promised land, God told the Israelites how to avoid idolatry and syncretism (i.e., blending or mixing) with pagan worship. "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 I will do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God. . . . What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:30-32).

Whatever is not commanded by Scripture in the worship of God is forbidden. Anything that the church does in worship must have warrant from an explicit command of God, be deduced by good and necessary consequence, or be derived from approved historical example (e.g., the change of day from seventh to first for Lord's day corporate worship). "As under the Old Dispensation nothing connected with the worship or discipline of the Church of God was left to the wisdom or discretion of man, but everything was accurately prescribed by the authority of God, so, under the New, no voice is to be heard in the household of faith but the voice of the Son of God. The power of the church is purely ministerial and declarative. She is only to hold forth the doctrine,

enforce the laws, and execute the government which Christ has given her. She is to add nothing of her own to, and to subtract nothing from, what her Lord has established. Discretionary power she does not possess."<sup>3</sup>

The view commonly held among Protestant churches today is that anything is permitted in worship, provided it is not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. This was, and is, the accepted view among Episcopalian and Lutheran churches. The early Reformed and Presbyterian churches rejected this view as unscriptural. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men. . . or *any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture*."<sup>4</sup> What is today called the regulative principle of worship is not something John Calvin or John Knox invented but is simply a divine imperative. It is a crucial aspect of God's law. "We say that the command to add nothing is an organic part of the whole law, as law, and, therefore, that every human addition to the worship of God, even if it be not contrary to any particular command, is yet contrary to the general command that nothing be added."<sup>5</sup>

### **The Circumstances of Worship**

In order to understand the regulative principle of worship properly, one must understand the difference between worship ordinances and the circumstances, or incidentals, of worship. Worship ordinances are those things and activities received from divine revelation. Every worship ordinance is appointed by God. Anything connected to worship that has a religious and moral significance has to be based on divine command (explicit or implicit) or approved historical example. The church receives all worship ordinances from God as revealed in the Bible. The church must obey all of God's ordinances. The church does not have the authority to add to or detract from those things God has appointed.

The circumstances of worship refer not to worship content and ceremony but to those things "common to human actions and societies." The *only* way someone can learn a worship ordinance is to study the Bible and see what God commands. But the circumstances of worship are *not* dependent on the explicit instructions of the Bible; they depend only upon general revelation and common sense ("Christian prudence"). Believers and unbelievers alike

know that shelter and heat are useful to conduct a meeting in January, in Minnesota. They understand the desirability of chairs, lighting, clothing, and so on. It is understood that a time must be chosen in advance in order to conduct a meeting. There are many things common to both religious and civil (or secular) meetings that are not dependent on specific biblical instructions. These things are the circumstances, or incidentals, of worship.

**Worship Ordinances <sup>6</sup> vs. Worship Circumstances**

Ordinances		Circumstances
Preaching from the Bible	Matt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Acts 9:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:8, 17:10; 1 Cor. 14:28	Structure in which the church meets
Reading the Word of God	Mk. 4:16-20; Acts 13:15; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:13; Acts 1:13, 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20	Location at which the church meets
Meeting on the Lord's day	Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18	Time at which the church meets
Administration of sacraments	Matt. 28:19; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:24-25	Clothing worn to worship
Hearing the Word of God	Lu. 2:46; Acts 8:31; Rom. 10:41; Jas. 1:22; Lu. 4:20; Acts 20:9	Type of seating provided
Prayer to God	Matt. 6:9; 1 Thess. 5:17; Heb. 13:18; Phil. 4:6; Jas. 1:5; 1 Cor. 11:13-15; Deut. 22:5	
The singing of Psalms	1 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2; Ps. 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16	

Note that everything in the left column must be learned from the Word of God. Everything in the right column is a circumstance common to everyone who lives in God's universe. Worship ordinances are limited in number by divine revelation. Worship circumstances are virtually infinite in number, being based on the common agreement of men guided by "Christian prudence." Because man is created in the image of God and must live and function in God's created reality (the universe), he must live and function in accordance with that reality. People

do not need explicit instructions from the Bible to know to put on a jacket when it is five degrees outside. But men do need clear instructions from the Bible on how to approach the infinitely holy God.

The regulative principle of worship is taught throughout the Bible. What follows is an examination of the many passages in Scripture which *prove* that whatever is not commanded in Scripture in the worship of God is forbidden. Worship ordinances must be based specifically on what God says, not on human opinion or tradition.

### **The Unacceptable Offering**

"And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Gen. 4:3-5).

What was it regarding Cain's offering that made it unacceptable before God? The preference for Abel's offering and the rejection of Cain's was not arbitrary, but based upon past revelation given to Adam and his family. Evidently, God revealed this information to Adam when He killed animals to make coverings for Adam and his wife (Gen. 3:21). Generations later, Noah knew that God would only accept clean animals and birds as burnt offerings to the Lord (Gen. 8:20). Cain, unlike his brother Abel, decided, apart from God's Word, that an offering of the fruit of the ground would be acceptable before the Lord. But God rejected Cain's offering, because it was a creation of his mind. God did not command it; therefore, even if Cain was sincere in his desire to please God, God still would have rejected his offering.

God expects faith and obedience to His Word. If God's people can worship the Lord according to their own will, as long as the man-made ordinances are not expressly forbidden, then could not Cain, Noah or the Levites offer God a fruit salad or a bucket of turnips, for it is nowhere forbidden? And if God wanted a strict regulation of His worship *apart* from the regulative principle, would it not require hundreds (or perhaps thousands) of volumes telling us what is forbidden? But God, in His infinite wisdom, says, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32).

## Strange Fire

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which *he commanded them not*. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1,2).

"*What was their sin?* Their sin was offering of strange fire, so the text saith that they offered *strange fire*, which God commanded them not. . . . But had God ever forbidden it? Where do we find that ever God had forbidden them to offer strange fire, or appointed that they should offer only one kind of fire? There is no text of Scripture that you can find from the beginning of *Genesis* to this place, where God hath said in *terminus*, in so many words expressly, *You shall offer no fire but one kind of fire*. And yet here they are consumed by fire from God, for offering 'strange fire.' "<sup>7</sup>

Those who reject God's regulative principle of worship have a real problem explaining this text. Some argue that Nadab and Abihu were condemned because they offered strange incense, for offering strange incense is expressly condemned in Exodus 30:9. But the text does not say "strange incense", it says "strange fire". Others argue that they must have been insincere or drunk. But what does the Holy Spirit give us as the reason for their judgment? They offered *strange fire* "which he commanded them not." When it comes to worshipping God, there must be a warrant out of God's Word. "All things in God's worship must have a warrant out of God's word, [and] must be commanded. It's not enough that it is not forbidden. . . . Now when man shall put a Religious respect upon a thing, by vertue [*sic*] of his own Institution when he hath not a warrant from God; Here's superstition! we must all be *willing* worshipers, but not *Wil*-worshippers [*sic*]." <sup>8</sup>

## David and His Men's Error

"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. . . . And when they came to Nachon's

threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Sam. 6:3-7).

David and the men involved in moving the ark were, without question, sincere in their desire to please God by moving the ark to Jerusalem. Yet, the result of this sincere effort was the judgment of God. Uzzah put out his hand to protect the ark from falling, because he loved God and cared about God's ark. Yet, despite all the sincerity and good intentions, God's anger was aroused, and He killed Uzzah. Why? Because the whole affair was highly offensive to God. Uzzah's touching of the ark was the capstone of the day's offenses.

Those who object to the regulative principle make much of the fact that Uzzah was killed for something clearly forbidden in God's law (i.e., touching the ark). Yes, it is true that Uzzah died violating an explicit prohibition of the law (Num. 4:15). But, king David's analysis of what went wrong that day includes everyone involved, not just Uzzah. "For because ye [the Levites] did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon *us*, *for that we sought him not after the due order*. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves [i.e., poles] thereon, *as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord*" (1 Chron. 15:13-15).

When God gives a command that the Levites are to carry the ark with poles (Num. 4:6,15), it is not necessary for God to forbid men of Judah from using an ox cart. King David and his men should have consulted the law of Moses and obeyed it. Instead, they acted pragmatically. They imitated the Philistines, who used a new cart when they sent the ark back to Bethshemesh. When it comes to the worship of God, we are not permitted to improvise, even if our intentions are good. Sincerity is important, but sincerity must be in accord with divine revelation. Even in religious matters that may seem small or trivial to us, God commands that we act in accordance with His revealed will and not innovate according to our will. "The great lesson for all time is to beware of following our own devices in the worship of God when we have clear instructions in His word how we are to worship Him."<sup>9</sup>

## **Autonomous Worship Condemned**

"And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; *which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart*" (Jer. 7:31; see also, Jer. 19:5).

The Lord condemns the children of Judah's idolatry and pagan worship with the statement, "which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart." Idolatry, murder and child sacrifice are explicitly condemned in the law and the prophets. Yet, Jeremiah cuts to the essence of idolatrous worship. Judah was worshipping in a manner that did not originate from God's heart. Judah's worship was not founded upon God's command. Rather than worshipping God according to His command, they "walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward" (Jer. 7:24). If the people of Judah had consulted the Word of God and obeyed it, they would have been spared God's fury. "We have to do with a God who is very jealous; who will be worshipped as He wills, or not at all. Nor can we complain. If God be such a Being as we are taught in the Holy Scripture, it must be His inalienable right to determine and prescribe how He will be served."<sup>10</sup>

## **Vain Worship**

"Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matt. 15:1-3).

The Pharisees were the respected religious leaders of the Jewish people. They believed that they had the liberty to add to the commandments of God. The law of God did contain various ceremonial washings to signify the unclean becoming clean. The Pharisees simply added other washings to emphasize and "perfect" the law of Moses. There is no express commandment forbidding these ceremonial additions, except the regulative principle (e.g., Deut. 4:2; 12:31). These additions have no warrant from the Word of God.

Jesus Christ is the champion of the regulative principle. He strongly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for adding to God's law. What happens

when sinful men add rules and regulations to God's law? Eventually man-made tradition replaces or sets aside God's law. "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matt. 15:6). The ancient Christian church added its own rules and ceremonies to the worship of God and degenerated into the pagan and idolatrous Roman Catholic Church. If we do not draw the line regarding worship where God draws the line, then, as history proves, the church will eventually degenerate into little better than a bizarre pagan cult. Christ's rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees applies today to practically every (so called) branch of the Christian church. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. *But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matt. 15:8-9).

### **Other Examples**

The idea that only what God commands in His word is permitted in worship is taught throughout the Bible. There is king Saul who offered sacrifice before the Lord without divine authorization. God commanded the priests, not kings, to offer burnt offerings. The kingship was taken from Saul and his family forever (1 Sam. 13:8-14). Consider king Jeroboam who ordained his own feast day, his own holy places and his own offerings "in the month which *he had devised of his own heart*" (1 Ki. 12:32-33). King Jeroboam was a pragmatist. He did not see any need to follow the express commands of God in worship. And his unauthorized, autonomous worship, and the idolatry associated with it, is presented in the book of Kings as the very paradigm of false worship. If it is wicked for Jeroboam, a king, to make up his own feast day (holy day), then certainly it is wicked for popes, bishops and the people to set up Christmas, Good Friday, and so on.

Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, concurs with the Old Testament's teaching on worship. Paul condemns those who seek to impose Judaical food laws and holy days upon the church (Col. 2:16). Because the ceremonials laws were "shadows" that pointed to the "substance"--Jesus Christ--they are done away with. They are no longer authorized and therefore are forbidden. Paul's warning regarding human philosophy is the backdrop of his condemnation of false worship and man-made laws (legalism): "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, *after the tradition of men*, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8).

Paul condemns manmade doctrines and commandments: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) *after the commandments and doctrines of men?* Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in *will worship, and humility*, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col. 2:20-23). Paul says that adding to God's Word is a mere vain display of "will worship and humility." It is "will-worship" religion instead of worship-according-to-God's-will religion. Manmade laws take away the liberty we have in Christ. God's moral law is perfect; it does not need additions. Manmade rules and regulations are "not in any honour" to the believer.

God has given His church a Psalm book and a holy day (the Lord's day). Can man improve upon the worship and service that God has instituted? Of course not. It is the height of arrogance and stupidity to think that sinful men can improve upon God's ordinances. "It is provoking God, because it reflects much upon His honor, as if He were not wise enough to appoint the manner of His own worship. He hates all strange fire to be offered in His temple (Lev. 10:11). A ceremony may in time lead to a crucifix. Those who contend for the cross in baptism, why not have the oil, salt and cream as well."<sup>11</sup>

### **Why the Regulative Principle is Necessary**

Church history has shown that God's covenant people have often been drawn away from the simplicity of pure gospel worship into all manner of manmade innovations. Because of man's fallen nature and proneness to sin, it was inevitable that human autonomy in worship would pervert and then force out true worship. "And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and *that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring*: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God" (Num. 15:39-40).

Many argue that God's regulative principle is too strict. They argue that it confines the human spirit and stifles human creativity. They teach that it is an overreaction to the abuses of Roman Catholicism. But let us look at the logical implications of allowing anything into God's worship, as long as it is not forbidden in the Word of God.

The first thing is that the simplicity and transcultural nature of pure Gospel worship are replaced by a virtually infinite variety of manmade innovations. Since God no longer draws the line for worship content and ceremony, man will draw and redraw the line as he pleases. A church that does not obey God's regulative principle finds it impossible to stop new-fangled ideas and innovations in worship. The Presbyterian and Reformed denominations which abandoned the Regulative Principle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century prove this point. The pattern of perversion goes something like this: First, man-made hymns (not commanded) are sung along with God's inspired Psalms (commanded); then, within a generation or two, the Psalms are completely replaced by hymns and grossly paraphrased Psalms. The old fashioned hymns, after a while, are replaced by "charismatic" campfire songs. Initially, the Reformed churches would sing the Psalms without musical accompaniment, because musical instruments were used only in association with God's temple and therefore ceased as one of the aspects of the ceremonial law. Many Reformed churches abandoned *a capella* Psalm singing and brought in organs. Then, within a generation or two, churches were using folk guitars, orchestras and even rock groups. The innovations just described are only the tip of the iceberg. You can find the following in so-called Presbyterian and Reformed churches: celebration of holy days (Christmas, Easter, etc.), choirs, intricate liturgies, liturgical dance, rock groups, drama, rock videos, the church calendar, pictures of Christ, crosses, etc.

If you give sinful man the autonomy of choosing how he will worship, the historical pattern is clear. Man will choose man-centered worship. Sinful man is drawn to entertainment (thus the popularity of the clap-your-hands, stamp-your-feet "charismatic" style worship, rock groups, drama, choirs, music soloists, pop and country singers, etc.), and sinful man is drawn to ritual and pomp (cathedrals, incense, candles, bells, holy days, popish vestments, liturgy, etc.). When will man-made innovations stop? They won't until the church obeys God's regulative principle of worship. God has given a command which man is not to ignore. "[T]he acceptable way of worshipping the true God is *instituted* by Himself, and so *limited* by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men. . . or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture."<sup>12</sup> False worship originates in the mind of man, according to his imagination. True worship originates in the mind of God and is revealed in the Bible. "But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the

counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward" (Jer. 7:23-24). Calvin, in his commentary on Jeremiah, uses this verse to condemn all the perverse innovations of papal worship: "Moreover, if the origin of the whole Papal worship be considered, it will appear, that those who first devised so many strange superstitions, were only impelled by audacity and presumption, in order that they might trample underfoot the word of God. Hence it is, that all things are become corrupt; *for they brought in all the strange figments of their own brains.* And we see that the Papists at this day are so perversely fixed in their own errors, that they prefer themselves and their own trumperies to God. And the same is the case also with all heretics. What then is to be done? Obedience, as I have said, is to be held as the basis of all true religion. *If, then, on the other hand, we wish to render our worship approved by God, let us learn to cast aside whatever is our own, so that his authority may prevail over all our reasons*" (Emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

### True Worship vs. False Worship

True Worship	False Worship
Only what God commands in His Word is allowed.	Whatever is not expressly condemned in the Bible is allowable.
God-centered worship.	Leads to man-centered worship.
Worship content is the objective word of God.	Worship becomes more and more subjective or mystical.
Worship remains pure, simple and unadulterated.	Worship changes and evolves and becomes adulterated with manmade traditions.
Worship based on God's Word has limited parameters.	Public worship forms and content theoretically are infinite.
Thoroughly biblical.	Basically pragmatic: whatever seems to work, and whatever pleases man, will be used.
Pure Gospel worship is transcultural. Besides language barriers, people from churches that are faithful to the regulative	False worship caters to man's sinful autonomy. Therefore false worship is a mixture of paganism and Christianity. Because false

<p>principle could visit a like-minded church anywhere in the world and immediately fit right in and feel at home. In the seventeenth century, an English or American Puritan, a Scottish or Irish Presbyterian and a Reformed Dutchman both had very similar worship services. This was not the result of some act of conformity but because they both believed and obeyed the regulative principle. In the future, as pure doctrine and pure worship are revived and as whole nations are converted and covenant with God, the transcultural nature of pure Gospel worship will be very useful and important to travelers and business people.</p>	<p>worship has a theoretically infinite number of worship options, a person would have to adapt, learn and adjust to each cultural and denominational worship option. The high church liturgical Episcopalian would probably feel uncomfortable at a black gospel jamfest. There are thousands of different hymnals, hundreds of different liturgies. There are rock groups, drama groups, orchestras, poetry readings, videos, Bo-Bo the clown, comedians, entertainers, Johnny Carson style interviews, liturgical dance, organ recitals; there are several different holy days and church calendars, etc. False worship fragments the church.</p>
<p>Historically kept the Reformed and Presbyterian churches' worship pure, until abandoned or redefined so as to be rendered meaningless.</p>	<p>Historically has led the church into declension, heresy and idolatry. The apostolic church eventually degenerated into papalism.</p>
<p>Biblical worship focuses on God and His Word.</p>	<p>Man-centered worship focuses on man and his senses. Therefore it either degenerates into entertainment or pompous ritual and ceremony (smells, bells, gator hats, cathedrals, intricate liturgies, etc.)</p>
<p>Men have liberty under God's Word.</p>	<p>Men lose their liberty under man's changing and arbitrary standard.</p>
<p>Pure Gospel worship fosters biblical ecumenicity and community.</p>	<p>False worship divides the church into a thousand splinters. As worship content and style "evolve" and change, the old are even divided from the young.</p>

The word "liturgy" comes from the Greek *leiturgia*,

meaning "the work or service of the people." Therefore, in a sense, all Christian worship is liturgical. When I speak of liturgy in a negative sense, I am referring to liturgy as used, for example, in the Roman Catholic, Protestant Episcopal, Lutheran and Russian Orthodox churches, etc. Liturgy in the negative sense means liturgy based on human and church tradition, for example: *mandatory* use of prayer books, the church calendar, priestly robes and vestments, candles, incense, manmade holy days, kneeling at communion, cathedrals, pictures of Christ and the saints, church music, choirs, and so on. *The Book of Common Order* referred to by historians as Knox's Liturgy was used by the Scottish until 1645. It was based upon the order of service from the Reformed churches in Strasbourg, Frankfurt and Geneva. The attitude of John Knox and the early Presbyterians toward the "common prayers" out of the *Order* was to limit their use to training those ignorant in the art of extemporaneous prayer. "The continuous and imperative use of a liturgy was inharmonious with the spirit of the reformers, who relied upon the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in prayer."<sup>14</sup> The half-educated substitutes for ministers did require such mental crutches, as the *Book of Discipline* admitted, 'till they grow the greater perfection. . . .' In similar terms, the well informed Calderwood, the historian, states: 'none are tied to the prayers of that book; but the prayers are set down as samplers. . . . They are set forth as models.' "<sup>15</sup>

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## **II Christmas**

The regulative principle of worship has clear implications for those who want to promote the celebration of Christmas. The Regulative Principle forces those who celebrate Christmas *to prove from Scripture* that God has authorized the celebrating of such a day. This, in fact, is impossible. Additionally, celebrating Christmas violates other scriptural principles.

### **Christmas is a Monument to Past and Present Idolatry**

The day on which Christmas is celebrated (December 25) and nearly all the customs associated with Christmas had their origins in pagan idol worship. "Many of the earth's inhabitants were sun worshipers because the course of their lives depended on its yearly round in the heavens, and feasts were held to aid its return from distant wanderings. In the south of Europe, in Egypt and Persia, the sun gods were worshipped with elaborate ceremonies at the season of the winter solstice, as a fitting time to pay tribute to the benign god of plenty, while in

Rome the Saturnalia reigned for a week. In northern lands mid-December was a critical time, for the days became shorter and shorter and the sun was weak and far away. Thus these ancient peoples held feast at the same period that Christmas is now observed."<sup>16</sup> During the winter solstice period the Babylonians worshipped Tammuz;<sup>17</sup> the Greeks and Romans worshipped Jupiter, Mithra, Saturn, Hercules, Bacchus, and Adonis; the Egyptians worshipped Osiris and Horus; the Scandinavians worshipped Odin (or Woden). "Among the German and Celtic tribes the winter solstice was considered an important point of the year, and they held their chief festival of Yul to commemorate the return of the burning wheel. The holly, the mistletoe, the Yul log, and the wassail bowl are relics of pre-Christian times."<sup>18</sup>

Christmas was not celebrated by the apostolic church. It was not celebrated during the first few centuries of the church. As late as A.D. 245, Origen (Hom. 8 on Leviticus) repudiated the idea of keeping the birthday of Christ, "as if he were a king Pharaoh."<sup>19</sup> By the middle of the 4th century, many churches in the Latin west were celebrating Christmas. During the 5th century, Christmas became an official Roman Catholic holy day. In A.D. 534, Christmas was recognized as an official holy day by the Roman state.

The reason that Christmas became a church holy day has nothing to do with the Bible. The Bible does not give the date of Christ's birth. Nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to celebrate Christmas. Christmas (as well as many other pagan practices) was adopted by the Roman church as a missionary strategy.

The syncretism with paganism as a missionary strategy is clearly revealed in Pope Gregory I's instructions to missionaries, given in A.D. 601: "Because they [the pagans] were wont to sacrifice oxen to devils, some celebration should be given in exchange for this. . . they should celebrate a religious feast and worship God by their feasting, so that still keeping outward pleasures, they may more readily receive spiritual joys."<sup>20</sup>

This syncretism with paganism explains why Christmas customs are pagan to the core. The Christmas tree came into use because sacred trees were an important aspect of pagan worship during the winter solstice season. In Babylon, the evergreen tree represented Nimrod coming to life again in Tammuz who was supposedly born of a virgin, Semiramus. In Rome, they decorated fir trees with red berries to celebrate Saturnalia.<sup>21</sup>

The Scandinavians brought a sacred fir tree into their homes in honor of their god Odin. "When the pagans of Northern Europe became Christians, they made their sacred evergreen trees part of the Christian festival, and decorated the trees with gilded nuts, candles (a carry-over from sun worship), and apples to stand for the stars, moon, and sun."<sup>22</sup>

The lighting of special fires and candles on December 24 and 25 originated in sun worship. The use of the Yule log probably originated with Druid sun worship. The log would not be allowed to burn up and would be used to start next year's fire (possibly a symbol of the sun's rebirth). "The Romans ornamented their temples and homes with green boughs and flowers for the Saturnalia, their season of merry making and the giving of presents; the Druids gathered mistletoe with great ceremony and hung it in their homes; the Saxons used holly, ivy and bay."<sup>23</sup>

The fact that Christmas is full of pagan practices is universally recognized. "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."<sup>24</sup> Many Christians argue that they do not worship the Christmas tree, and that the pagan origins are so far in the past as to be harmless. But such a view, while common in our day, shows a total disregard of the biblical teaching regarding idols, the paraphernalia associated with idolatry, and the monuments to idolatry.

God has such a strong hatred of idolatry that Israel was not just commanded to avoid the worship of idols. Israel was also specifically ordered to destroy *everything* associated with idolatry. "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 the LORD your God. . . . [A]nd that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God" (Deut. 12:2-4, 30-31).

When Jacob set out to purify the camp (i.e., his household and attendants) the earrings were removed as well as their foreign gods (Gen. 35:4),

because their earrings were associated with their false gods. They were signs of superstition. When Elijah went to offer his sacrifice, in his contest with the prophets of Baal, he did not use the pagan altar. He did not take something made for idols (e.g., Saturnalia) and attempt to sanctify it for holy use (e.g., Christmas), but instead he rebuilt the Lord's altar. Christians should not take the pagan festival of Yule or Saturnalia and dress it with Christian clothing, but rather sanctify the Lord's day, as did the apostles. When Jehu went up against the worshipers of Baal and their temple, did he save the temple and set it apart for holy use? No! He slaughtered the worshipers of Baal: "they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day" (2 Ki. 10:27).

"Moreover, we have the example of good Josiah (2 Ki. 23), for he did not only destroy the houses, and the high places of Baal, but his vessels also, and his grove, and his altars; yea, the horses and chariots which had been given to the sun. The example also of penitent Manasseh, who not only overthrew the strange gods, but their altars too (2 Chron. 23:15). And of Moses, the man of God, who was not content to execute vengeance on the idolatrous Israelites, except he should also utterly destroy the monument of their idolatry."<sup>25</sup>

God does not want His church to take pagan days, and those pagan and popish rites and paraphernalia that go with them and adapt them to Christian use. He simply commands us to abolish them altogether from the face of the earth forever. You may not be offended by the Yule log, the Christmas tree, the mistletoe, the holly berries and the selection of a pagan day to celebrate Christ's birth, but God is offended. God commands us to get rid of the monuments and paraphernalia of paganism.

If your wife was promiscuous before you married her would you be offended if she had pictures of her old boyfriends on her dresser? Would it bother you if she celebrated the various anniversaries relating to her past relationships? Would you be offended if she kept and cherished the various rings, jewelry and mementos given to her by her old boyfriends? Of course you would be offended! The Lord God is infinitely more zealous of His honor than you are; He is a jealous God. Could Israel take festival days to Baal, Ashteroth, Dagon and Molech and alter them to make them pleasing to God? Of course not! The Bible makes very clear which kings of Judah pleased God the most. God is pleased when idols, their temples, their religious dress, earrings, sacred houses, sacred trees, poles, ornaments, rites, names and days are utterly

cut off from the earth, never again to be restored. God wants His bride to eliminate forever the monuments, the days, the paraphernalia and the mementos of idolatry. "Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain" (Jer. 10:2-3). "Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods" (Deut. 12:31).

Christians must not only put away the monuments of past idolatry but also everything associated with present idolatry. Christmas is the most important holy day in Roman Catholicism. The name Christmas comes from Romanism: Christ-mass, or the Mass of Christ. The name Christmas unites the name or title of our glorious God and Savior with the idolatrous, blasphemous Mass of Popedom. Christ-mass is a mixture of Pagan idolatry and Popish invention.

The Roman Catholic Church hates the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Roman church uses human inventions, such as Christmas, to keep millions of people in darkness. The fact that millions of Bible-believing Protestants are observing a Roman Catholic holy day which has not been commanded anywhere in God's Word reveals the sad state of modern Evangelicalism. "We cannot conform, communicate, and symbolize with the idolatrous Papists, in the use of the same, without making ourselves idolaters by participation."<sup>26</sup> Our attitude should be that of the Protestant Reformer Bucer who said, "I would to God that every holy day whatsoever besides the Lord's day were abolished. That zeal which brought them first in, was without all warrant of the Word, and merely followed corrupt reason, forsooth to drive out the holy days of the pagans, as one nail drives out another. Those holy days have been so tainted with superstitions that I wonder we tremble not at their very names."<sup>27</sup>

The common objection against the argument that pagan monuments must be abolished is that these things occurred so long ago as to be harmless to us. But this is totally untrue. Not only do we have the present idolatry of Romanism, but there is a revival going on at this very moment in Europe and North America of the old pagan European religions. The radical feminist movement is presently reviving the fertility goddesses and gods of the ancient Near East. God's law-Word says to get rid of the monuments to idolatry. God's law is not rendered null and void with the passage of time.

## Christmas Dishonors Christ's Day

The day that God has set apart for His church corporately to celebrate the person and work of Christ is that day commonly called the Lord's day, the first day of the week, the Christian Sabbath. The first day of the week is the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is the day of Christ's victory over sin, Satan and death. Jesus' humiliation and sacrificial death are complete. Christ rose and is forever the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." (2 Cor. 5:16). "The Lord's day is given in memory of *the whole work of redemption*."<sup>28</sup> The idea of honoring someone's life piecemeal (this event, that event) comes not from the Bible but from pagan emperor worship. In fact, the only birthday celebrations recorded in the whole Bible are those of Pharaoh (Gen. 40:20) and King Herod (Matt. 14:6; Mk. 6:21). Both birthday parties ended in murder, Herod's in the murder of John the Baptist.

God has been very generous to His people, giving them 52 holy days a year. When men add their own days (e.g., Christmas, Easter, etc.) they detract from, denigrate and even set aside the Lord's day. People love and give more attention to Christmas than they do the Lord's day. Many Christians spend nearly the whole month of December preparing for Christmas: decorating their homes, offices and churches, buying gifts, baking pies and cookies, practicing and memorizing Christmas carols, Christmas plays, Christmas carol recitals, etc. Many Americans rarely attend church but would never miss the Christmas service. The typical American winks at Sabbath breaking, fornication, adultery and drunkenness; but considers Christians who do not celebrate Christmas to be deluded fanatics. "What Jesus desires of us is not the observance of things He did not command, but the things He did command. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:19,20). This is what the Apostles did. They taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). It did not include Christmas, Good Friday, or Easter, because they were not part of the things commanded by Christ. So, the one who understands 'the true meaning of Christmas' (or Good Friday, or Easter) is precisely the one who realizes that they are human inventions. And in order to honor Christ as the only King and head of the church, *such a person will not observe* these man-made additions to what our Lord commanded. A person such as this may be out of step with a very popular custom. The important thing is that he will be in step with Christ and the Apostles."<sup>29</sup>

The *only* day that God has authorized as a holy day is the Lord's day.<sup>30</sup> If the church wants to please Jesus Christ and honor Him, then it should do so by keeping His day and by setting an example to the outside world. When Christians make Christmas more special than the Lord's day, they disobey the teachings of Christ and dishonor His day.

### **Christmas is a *Lie***

Christianity is the religion of truth. God cannot lie. All truth and knowledge ultimately come from God. Jesus Christ is "the way, *the truth*, and the life" (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13). The Gospel is called "the word of truth" (Eph. 1:13). God commands: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 20:16). Paul tells us to be "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), to put away lying and speak the truth to our neighbor in order not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:25, 30). Jesus Christ tells us that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in *truth*" (John 4:24). Christians are to be light and salt to the world (Matt. 5:13, 16). Christians are to be a witness before the world by speaking the truth and living the truth. Is celebrating Christmas compatible with our responsibility to speak and live the truth before the world? No, because Christmas is a lie.

The date used to celebrate the birth of Christ, December 25, is a lie. According to the Bible, Jesus was not born on December 25. "And there were in the same country shepherds *abiding in the field*, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). It is common knowledge that shepherds in Palestine came in from the fields before winter. The rainy season in Judea began in late October or early November. The shepherds would bring their field flocks into the villages before the beginning of the rainy season. Therefore, Christ was born *before* the first week of November. "It is quite evident that Christ was not actually born in the middle of the winter season. But, on the other hand, do the scriptures tell us what season of the year he was born? Yes, the scriptures indicated that he was born in the *fall* of the year. For example, our Lord's public ministry lasted for three and a half years (Dan. 9:27, etc.). His ministry came to an end at the time of the Passover (John 18:39), which was in the spring of the year. And so three and a half years before this would mark the beginning of His ministry in the *fall* of the year. Now

when Jesus began his ministry, he was about thirty years of age (Lk. 3:23). This was the recognized age for a priest before he could become an official minister under the Old Testament (Num. 4:3). Therefore, since Christ began his ministry at the age of about 30 since this was in the fall season of the year then thirty years before this would mark his birth as being in the early FALL, not December 25."<sup>31</sup>

If Christians are willing to celebrate a lie and fill Christ's sham birthday with Papist and pagan mythology (e.g., Santa Claus, the Christmas tree, mistletoe, the Yule log, evergreens, etc.), then why should the world believe the church when it really speaks the truth? If you lie about the birth of Christ and gladly indulge in pagan mythology, then when you tell your neighbor about the resurrection of Christ, why should he believe you? By celebrating Christmas you are putting a stumbling block in front of your unbelieving neighbor. Your neighbor could reason that since you speak and live a lie regarding the birth of Christ, you cannot be trusted when you speak about the resurrection of Christ. I've actually had intellectuals say to me, after I spoke to them of Christ's death and resurrection, that they are myths foisted on simple people by the church just like Santa Claus and the Easter bunny (of course, the Christmas lie has gone on for so long that most people accept it as fact). The church must stop denigrating God's inspired, infallible Word by setting up human fantasies alongside divine revelation. Christmas is a contradiction of the biblical account of Christ's birth.

### **The World Loves Christmas<sup>32</sup>**

"[K]now ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15).

Who leads whom? Is not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ supposed to be an example to the world? Is not Christ's church to be salt and light to the nations? Is it proper for the church to follow the pagan world-system? Christmas did not originate in the Bible or the apostolic church; it is pagan to its very core. The day, the tree, the exchanging of gifts, the mistletoe, the holly berries all originated in the idolatrous pagan festivities surrounding the winter solstice. The compromised, apostatizing Roman church took what was pagan and attempted to Christianize it. Covenant-breaking, Christ-hating, idol-worshipping, pagan unbelievers

love Christmas. Why? Because Christmas is not biblical. Christmas is not of God. It is a lie, and Satan, their master, is the father of lies. Atheists, homosexuals, feminists, wicked politicians, murderers, child molesters, and idolaters all love Christmas. If Christmas were biblical, and if Christmas were commanded to be observed in the Bible, would the world love it so? Absolutely not! The world would hate Christmas. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14). Does the world love the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath? Of course not. The world hates it. Does the world love and obey the resurrected King of kings and Lord of lords? No! The world hates Christ. The world does love a plastic or clay baby in a manger. A plastic baby is not very threatening. Christ is no longer a baby. He is the glorified king who sits at the right hand of the Father. "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" (2 Cor. 5:16).

The Bible teaches that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3:19). "Thus saith the LORD: Learn not the way of the heathen. . . for the customs of the peoples are vain" (Jer. 10: 2-3). The apostle Paul has in mind a much broader application than just marriage when he says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? *or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?. . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:14-17). When the church has something relating to worship and religion in common with the unbelieving pagan world, the church, in that area, is bound together with unbelievers. The church has no business celebrating a pagan holiday with the pagan world. What hypocrisy! What wickedness!

### **Don't Be Fooled**

Paul warns that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). That is why pagan festivals throughout the world are fun days. They are days of fine food, parties, parades, family reunions and gift giving. Satan's goal is not merely to enslave individuals but also to control institutions, cultures and nations. The heathen calendar of "holy days," where pagan festivals are celebrated each year at certain times, is a Satan-inspired tool to habituate whole cultures in covenant rebellion. Satan wants individuals and nations to be enslaved in pagan ritual and darkness. A culture

is habituated to paganism when pagan festivals, rites and ceremonies are second nature and unquestioned in that society.

How have Christians been fooled into celebrating a pagan festival day? The day has been transformed from a day of darkness to a day of light. How is this done? It's very simple. The first thing you do is lie. You teach that this day is Christ's birthday. The fact that this is not really the day Christ was born is inconsequential. Very few people will check the facts. And the ones who do will be regarded as fanatics, Scrooges and out of touch with modernity. Second, you make it a day when family members are required to be together. What a wonderful thing it is, a day for family dinner and family values. Third, you make it a day of gift giving and charity, a day of caring and sharing. Who could be against that? Fourth, you dedicate the day to children all over the world. You make it fun and give them lots of hugs and presents. Therefore, when these children grow up, the day will be filled with fond memories. It is a day of intense sentimentality. Doesn't it bring a little tear to your eye when you think of your parents and brothers and sisters gathered around the tree? Fifth, you make sure every city and town is properly decorated. And you get the whole entertainment industry into high gear with articles, specials, movies, plays and recitals. Sixth, you put community, workplace, church and family pressure on those who do not celebrate the day to conform or else be viewed as perverting the truth or out of touch with reality.

Has this strategy been effective? Yes, very effective. There was a time when Presbyterians and Congregationalists would have been disciplined for celebrating Christmas. For Protestants from the Calvinist wing of the Reformation, celebrating such days was unthinkable for nearly three hundred years. Now, if you are a Presbyterian and do not celebrate Christmas, other Presbyterians think you are a fanatic. Protestants have been fooled, bamboozled, hoodwinked and duped because they have forgotten God's Regulative Principle. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6). There would be only one acceptable reason for a Christian to celebrate Christmas, and that would be an instruction from the Word of God to do so. Since there is no implicit or explicit instruction from the Bible to do so, it is forbidden.

## **Common Reasons Given by Christians for Celebrating Christmas**

### **I. Doesn't Romans 14:5-6 allow Christians to celebrate Christmas?**

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it" (Rom. 14:5-6).

1. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, was addressing a situation unique to the early church. There were Jewish believers who "regarded the holy days of the ceremonial economy as having abiding sanctity."<sup>33</sup> The "days" spoken of in Romans were days *commanded by God in the old economy*. Paul is "referring to the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution."<sup>34</sup> Virtually all commentators concur with this interpretation.<sup>35</sup> Paul allows for diversity in the church over the issue of *Jewish holy days* because of the unique historical circumstances. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the ceremonial aspects of the law (e.g., animal sacrifices, Jewish holy days, circumcision, etc.) were done away with. Yet prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, the apostles allowed certain practices by Jewish Christians as long as no works-righteousness was attributed to these practices. In Acts 21:26, we even encounter the apostle Paul going to the Temple "to announce the expiration of the days of purification." Jewish believers who were already accustomed to keeping certain holy days of the Mosaic economy were allowed to continue doing so for a time. But once the Temple was destroyed, the canon of Scripture was completed, and the church had existed for a whole generation, these unique historical circumstances ceased. And even if this passage were still applicable to our present situation, it could not be used to justify Christmas, because these days were not "Christianized" pagan holy days nor arbitrary holy days set up by man. Therefore, if this passage were still applicable to our situation, it could only be used to justify the private celebration of Jewish holy days by weak Jewish believers. It cannot be used as a justification for man-made days or pagan days which God has not commanded.

2. Not only does this passage not allow Christians to celebrate Christmas, it most certainly forbids holding Christmas services of any kind and having Christmas fellowships or parties. Paul allows for diversity in the church over this issue (i.e., Jewish holy days). Both parties are to accept each other for the sake of peace and unity in the church. Both parties believe that they are obeying the Word of God. "Compelled conformity or pressure exerted to the end of securing conformity defeats the aims to which all the exhortations and reproofs are directed."<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, it would be wrong for the weak Jewish believers to force the church to have a worship service in honor of a ceremonial holy day, because the strong Gentile believers would feel compelled to attend the public worship of God. Therefore, those who did celebrate Jewish holy days had to do it privately unto the Lord. Those who use this passage to justify celebrating Christmas would likewise be forced by Paul's injunction to keep the day a private affair. Thus, Christmas services and church Christmas parties would cease, for they violate the freedom of Christians not to celebrate such a day. Of course, Christmas, not being commanded by God and being a monument to idolatry, is forbidden, anyway.<sup>37</sup>

Pastors and elders who do authorize a Christmas service abuse their office. The pastor and governors of a church receive their authority from God. They are responsible to rule the church according to the Word of God. When pastors and elders authorize a special Christmas service, they do so on their own authority, because there is no warrant from the Word of God to do so. Therefore, in this one point they act no differently than the pope or a bishop. They intrude a human invention into the church. Those in the church who refuse to take part in a pagan-popish festival day, who refuse to worship God according to man's imagination, who refuse to worship God without divine authorization, are forced by the church leadership to remain at home instead of attending the public worship of God. Thus, in this point, many presbyters act like popes, prelates and tyrants over God's flock, because they take away the freedom we have in Christ to worship God as one body publicly "in Spirit and in truth" on the Lord's day.

## **II. Didn't the Jews in the days of queen Esther set up a holy day not authorized in the law of Moses? Doesn't that example allow the church to set up a holy day (e.g., Christmas) not authorized in the Bible?**

1. There is almost no resemblance between Christmas and Purim. Purim consists of two days of thanksgiving. The events of Purim are: "joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. . . and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor" (Est. 8:17; 9:22). There was no worship service. There were no levitical priestly activities. There were no ceremonies. The two days of Purim have much more in common with Thanksgiving and it's dinners than Christmas. Purim is certainly no justification for Christmas services. Purim resembles the special days of thanksgiving which are still allowed, and not the religious and ceremonial holy days of the Levitical system. In

fact, the Westminster divines used Purim as a proof text (Est. 9:22) authorizing days of thanksgiving.<sup>38</sup>

2. Purim was a unique historical event in Israel's salvation history. The festival was decreed by the civil magistrate: the prime minister, Mordecai, and the queen, Esther. It was agreed to unanimously by the people. *The occasion and authorization of Purim are inscripturated in the Word of God and approved by the Holy Spirit.* The biblical imperative of no addition and no subtraction applies to man-made law and worship. It most certainly does not forbid the Holy Spirit from completing the canon of Scripture and instituting new regulations.

3. Christmas is intrinsically immoral because it is built upon the monuments of pagan idolatry. There is nothing wrong with a country having a day of thanksgiving for a special act of deliverance by God. But there is something very wrong when a corrupt church attempts to sew Christian cloth onto pagan garments. There is something very wrong when Protestants conspire with the corrupt church of Rome and use godly Mordecai as an excuse.

### **III. There is no question that Christmas has no place in the public worship of God, but isn't it okay to celebrate it privately in the home?**

The problem with this view is that it presupposes that the Regulative Principle only applies to public worship. There is no biblical evidence to support the idea that the Regulative Principle was only meant for public worship. In fact, the biblical evidence supports the opposite view. Cain was condemned for an innovation in private worship (Gen. 4:2-8). Noah, in family worship, offered clean animals to God (Gen. 8:20-21). God was pleased and accepted Noah's offering on behalf of himself and his family. Abraham, Jacob and Job offered sacrifices to God in private or family worship, according to God's Word. God accepted these lawful offerings. The idea that innovations in worship are permitted in family and private worship is unbiblical; it is totally arbitrary because it is not based on divine revelation. If an innovation in public worship displeases God, then how does it please Him in private worship? Would it not be permissible, under such premises, to have little shrines in our homes where we burn incense, wear surplices, miters and such, as long as we keep such things out of public meetings?

There are some differences between public and private worship (e.g., private worship should occur two to three times a day, whereas public worship should occur at *least* once every Lord's day.) People in Reformed denominations who brought in unbiblical innovations such as Christmas, women teaching the Bible and theology to men in Bible studies and Sunday school, hymns and Christmas carols, etc., did not seek to justify these new innovations by appealing to Scripture. Instead, they *arbitrarily* set these activities outside of the Regulative Principle by pronouncing them all as under the sphere of private worship. Pastors and their flocks are so in love with their innovations that they resort to mystification. They act as if their pastor is a pope or bishop and has the authority to turn private worship (where they assume human autonomy is permitted) into public worship (where the Word reigns supreme) by saying "thus begins the public worship of God." Where in the Bible is public worship relegated to a few hours on the Lord's day?<sup>39</sup> Jesus Christ said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). How is a woman teaching several men on the Sabbath *private*? How are fifty people singing Christmas carols engaging in *private* worship? Do not presuppose that God permits innovation and human autonomy in private worship. Try to prove it from the Word of God. You cannot. Do not arbitrarily declare what is obviously public worship as private. The rabbis of old justified all sorts of nonsense with such reasoning.

The Bible says, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). When Presbyterian pastors and elders stopped disciplining church members for celebrating Christmas in the home in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they virtually guaranteed that the pagan-popish leaven of Christmas would spread. In fact, it has. One must search far and wide to find a Presbyterian home or church where this popish invention is not celebrated.<sup>40</sup>

#### **IV. We do not celebrate Christmas. For us the day is just a secular family day. What could be wrong with that?**

There are 365 days in a year. How is it that every year your secular family day just happens to fall on December 25? Could it be that you are just imitating your pagan neighbors and their heathen culture? Could it be that you celebrate the day just as everyone else does and just declare it secular as a justification or an excuse? If you are just having a good family day, then why do you fill your living room with the monuments and mementos of present and past idolatry?

You say the day is a secular family day, but you have a tree, evergreens, mistletoe, gifts, candles and carols. It is obvious that you celebrate Christmas much as a papist does. The truth is that if you eliminated all the pagan paraphernalia of Christmas, then you probably would not bother to celebrate it. The pagan day would lose its glitter, charm and emotional allure. As Christians we should be family oriented. We should get together with our relatives and enjoy each other's company. But we do not need a pagan festival day to do so.

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## **Conclusion**

If the church of Jesus Christ is to be salt and light to our degenerate culture, she must first clean her own house. More and more Christians are trying to have a positive impact on our pagan culture. They are trying to stem the tide of secular humanism and statism. This new involvement is needed, but it will not succeed until the church returns to the doctrinal purity and purity of worship attained by the Calvinist wing of the Reformation. The pagan Roman state with all of its power could not destroy the Christian church. The church prospered in spite of the Roman empire's tyranny and oppression. What caused severe damage to the church was internal decay. The corruption of doctrine and worship within the church made the church a fountain of heresy, superstition, idolatry and tyranny.

Evangelicalism in our day is in a state of serious decline. Church growth, ecumenical fellowship, pragmatism and keeping the peace have taken precedence over doctrinal integrity and pure worship. As a result, modern Evangelicalism is flabby, compromising, impotent and lukewarm. It is not a coincidence that the church had the most positive impact upon society and culture when its doctrine and worship were most pure (e.g., the second Reformation period in Scotland, 1638). Only when we return to Biblical worship, and reject human autonomy in worship are we prepared to recapture our society for Christ.

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## **Historical Appendix**

The Holy Spirit upbraids the Jew with their holy-days. "Your Sabbaths, and new moons, and ceremonies," says He, "My soul hateth."  
By us, to whom Sabbaths [i.e., the Jewish sabbaths] are strange, and the new moons and festivals formerly beloved by God, the Saturnalia [i.e., Yule] and New-year's and Midwinter's festivals and Matronalia are frequented--presents come and go--New-year's gifts--games join their noise--banquets join their din! Oh better fidelity of the nations to their own sect, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself! Not the Lord's day, not Pentecost, even if they had known

them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians. We are not apprehensive lest we seem to be heathens! If any indulgence is to be granted to the flesh, you have it. I will not say your own days, but more too; for to the heathens each festive day occurs but once annually: you have a festive day every eighth day [i.e., the Lord's day]. --Tertullian, *De Idololatria* (2nd century).

We have always accounted as an unspeakable abomination before God, all those inventions of men, viz. the feasts and the vigils of saints, the water they call holy, the abstaining from flesh upon certain days, and similar things; but especially the mass. --Waldenses, *First Confession* (1120).

One should abolish all festivals, retaining only the Lord's day. . . . My reason is this: with our present abuses of drinking, gambling, idling, and all manner of sin, we vex God more on holy days than on others. And the matter is just reversed; we have made holy days unholy, and working days holy, and do no service, but great dishonour, to God and His saints with all our holy days. --Martin Luther (German Reformer), *Address to the German Nobility* (1520).

We ought to cease from all work on the Lord's day, as persons zealous for God's glory, and kind to our servants; and on that day we ought to devote ourselves to the worship of God. . . . There is no certain determination of time for any Christian fast, and it cannot be found in Scripture that God has either commanded or appointed any particular days. --Waldenses, *Second Confession* (1532).

Those who observe the Romish festivals or fasts shall only be reprimanded, unless [i.e., if] they remain obstinately rebellious. --*Register of the Company of Pastors* (Geneva, 1546).

*Abrogation of Festivals.* On Sunday 16 November 1550, after the election of the lieutenant in the general Council, an edict was also announced respecting the abrogation of all the festivals, with the exception of Sundays, which God had ordained.--*Register of the Company of Pastors* (Geneva, 1550).

By the contrary doctrine, we understand whatsoever men, by laws, councils,

or constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God's Word; such as the vows of chastity, forswearing of marriage, binding of men and women to several disguised apparels, to the superstitious observation of fasting days, difference of meat [food] for conscience' sake, prayer for the dead; and keeping of holy days of certain saints commanded by man, such as be all those that the Papists have invented, as the feasts (as they term them) of Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, of Christmass, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady. Which things, because in God's Scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from the realm; affirming farther, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the Civil magistrate. --Church of Scotland, (*First Book of Discipline* (1560).

This one thing, however, we can scarcely refrain from mentioning, with regard to what is written in the 24th chapter of the aforesaid Confession [Second Helvetic] concerning the "festival of our Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension, and sending the Holy Ghost upon his disciples," that these festivals at the present time obtain no place among us; for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day than what the divine oracles have prescribed. --The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland [subscribed by John Knox, John Craig, James Melville, and a host of others], *Letter to the Very Eminent Servant of Christ, Master Theodore Beza, the Most Learned and Vigilant Pastor of the Genevan Church* (1566).

That all days that heretofore have been kept holy, besides the Sabbath days, such as Yule [Christ-mass] day, Saint's days, and such others, may be abolished, and a civil penalty against the keepers thereof by ceremonies, banqueting, fasting, and such other vanities. --General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Articles to be Presented to my Lord Regent's Grace* (1575).

[W]e abhor and detest all contrary religion and doctrine; but chiefly all kind of Papistry in general and particular heads, even as they are now damned and confuted by the Word of God and Kirk of Scotland. But, in special, we detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist upon the Scriptures of God, upon the Kirk, the civil magistrate, and consciences of men;. . . [his] dedicating of kirks, altars, days;. . . --John Craig [subscribed by the king and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1580; renewed in 1581, 1590 and 1638], *The National Covenant: or, the Confession*

*of Faith* (1580).

The Kirk of Geneva, keeps Pasche and Yule, what have they for them? They have no institution [from Scripture]. --King James VI (James I, of King James Bible fame), *Address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (1590).

If Paul condemns the Galatians for observing the feasts which God himself instituted, and that for his own honour only, and not for the honour of any creature: the Papists are much more laid open to condemnation, which press observations of feasts of men's devising, and to the honour of men. --Thomas Cartwright (Nonconformist minister, England), *The Confutation of the Rhemists' Translation, Glosses and Annotations* (1618).

On the day called Christmas Day, the Governor called them out to work as was used. But the most of this new company excused themselves and said it went against their consciences to work on that day. So the Governor told them that if they made it a matter of conscience, he would spare them till they were better informed; so he led away the rest and left them. But when they came home at noon from their work, he found them in the street at play, openly; some pitching the bar, and some at stool-ball and such like sports. So he went to them and took away their implements and told them that was against his conscience, that they should play and others work. If they made the keeping of it a matter of devotion, let them keep their houses; but there should be no gaming or reveling in the streets. Since which time nothing hath been attempted that way, at least openly. --William Bradford (governor, Plymouth colony), *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1621).

Opposed to the ordinance of the Lord's Day are all feast days ordained by men when they are considered holy days like the Lord's Day. --William Ames (Nonconformist minister, exiled to the Netherlands; professor of theology at Franeker), *The Marrow of Theology* (1623).

The PASTOR thinketh it no Judaism nor superstition, but a moral duty to observe the Sabbath. . . . Beside the Sabbath he can admit no ordinary holidays appointed by man, whether in respect of any mystery, or of difference of one day from another, as being warranted by mere tradition, against the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, but accounteth the solemn fasts and humiliations unto which the Lord calleth, to

be extraordinary sabbaths, warranted by God himself.

The PRELATE, by his doctrine, practice, example, and neglect of discipline, declareth that he hath no such reverend estimation of the Sabbath. He doteth so upon the observation of Pasche, Yule, and festival days appointed by men, that he preferreth them to the Sabbath, and hath turned to nothing our solemn fasts and blessed humiliations. --David Calderwood (minister and theologian, Church of Scotland), *The Pastor and the Prelate* (1628).

Concerning ceremonial festivals, of man's making, our practice cannot be objected: because we observe none. We take occasion of hearing, and praying, upon any day, when occasion is offered. We say (with Hospinian, *de Orig. Fest. Christ*, cap. 2.),

*Not the day, but the Word of God, &c. puts us in mind of the nativity, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. . . .*  
For we do not fear. . . lest *all the Churches of God will condemn us herein*. Those that consent with Geneva, nor those of Scotland;. . . no nor any that follow Bucer's judgment (in Matt. 12), *I would to God that every Holy-day whatsoever beside the Lord's Day, were abolished. That zeal which brought them first in, was without all warrant of the Word, and merely followed corrupt reason, forsooth to drive out the Holy days of the Pagans, as one nail drives out another. Those Holy-days, have been so tainted with superstition that I wonder we tremble not at their very names.*

See the place, Oecolampadius (in Isa. 1:4), thinketh that no wise Christian will condemn us. *I never heard wise man yet, who did not judge that a great part at least of other feasts besides the Lord's Day should be abolished.* --William Ames (Nonconformist minister, exiled to the Netherlands; professor of theology at Franeker), *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship* (1633).

By communicating with idolaters in their rites and ceremonies, we

ourselves become guilty of idolatry. Even as Ahaz (2 Ki. 16:10) was an idolater. . . that he took the pattern of an altar from idolaters. Forasmuch then, as kneeling before the consecrated bread, the sign of the cross, surplice, festival days, bishopping, bowing to the altar, administration of the sacraments in private places, &c. are the wares of Rome, the baggage of Babylon, the trinkets of the Whore, the badges of Popery, the ensigns of Christ's enemies, and the very trophies of Antichrist: we cannot conform, communicate,

and symbolize with the idolatrous Papists, in the use of the same, without making ourselves idolaters by participation. Shall the chaste Spouse of Christ take upon her the ornaments of the Whore? --George Gillespie (Westminster divine), *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (1637).

[H]ow can it be denied, that many corruptions, contrary to the purity and liberty of the Gospel, were they never so innocent in themselves, have accompanied these *Novations*, such as the superstitious observing of *Days*, feriation and cessation from work, on those days, *Feasting-guising*, &c. --Alexander Henderson (Westminster divine) and David Dickson (professor of theology, Church of Scotland), *The Answers of Some Brethren of the Ministrie, to the Replies of the Ministers and Professours of Divinitie in Aberdeene: Concerning the Late Covenant* (1638).

[Festival days are] an entrenching upon God's prerogative: for *none can appoint an holy day, but he who hath made the days*, and hath all power in his own hand, which is clear; first, from the denomination of them in both Testaments; in the old they are called the solemn feasts of Jehovah [Lev. 23:1; Ex. 32:5], not only because they were to be kept to Jehovah, but also because they were of his appointing; and so in the New Testament, as we read but of one [holy-day] for the self-same reasons, it is called *The Lord's Day* [Rev. 1:10]. --John Bernard? (Nonconformist minister, England), *The Anatomy of the Service Book* (1641).

This day is the day which is commonly called *The Feast of Christ's Nativity*, or *Christmas day*: A day that hath been heretofore much abused to *superstition* and *prophaneness*. It is not easy to reckon whether the superstition hath been greater, or the prophaneness. I have known some that have preferred *Christmas day* before the *Lord's Day*, and have cried down the *Lord's Day*, and cried up *Christmas day*.

I have known those that would be sure to receive the sacrament upon Christmas day, though they did not receive it all the year after. This and much more was the superstition of the day. And the prophaneness was as great. Old Father *Latimer* saith in one of his sermons, That the Devil had more service in the twelve Christmas holy days (as they were called) than God had all the year after. . . . There are some that though they did not play at cards all the year long, yet they must play at Christmas; thereby, it seems, to keep

in memory the birth of Christ. This and much more hath been the profanation of this feast. And truly I think that the superstition and profanation of this day is so rooted into it, as that there is no way to reform it but by dealing with it as *Hezekiah* did with the brazen serpent. This year God by a *Providence* hath buried this feast in a fast, and I hope it will never rise again. You have set out (Right Honourable [House of Lords]) a strict order for the keeping of it, and you are here this day to observe your own order, and I hope you will do it strictly. The necessity of the times are great. Never more need of prayer and fasting. The Lord give us grace to be humbled in this day of humiliation for all our own, and *England's* sins; and especially for the old superstition, and profanation of this feast: always remembering upon such days as these, Isa. 22:12-14.--Edmund Calamy (Westminster divine), *An Indictment Against England Because of her Selfe-Murdering Divisions* (1645).

Festival days, vulgarly called holy-days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued. --Westminster Assembly, *Directory for Publick Worship* (1645).

The General Assembly taking to their consideration the manifold abuses, profanity, and superstitions, committed on Yule-day [Christ-mass] and some other superstitious days following, have unanimously concluded and hereby ordains, that whatsoever person or persons hereafter shall be found guilty in keeping of the foresaid superstitious days, shall be proceeded against by Kirk censures, and shall make their public repentance therefore in the face of the congregation where the offence is committed. And that the presbyteries and provincial synods take particular notice how ministers try and censure delinquents of this kind, within the several parishes. --General Assembly, Church of Scotland, *Act for Censuring Observers of Yule-day, and other Superstitious days* (1645).

Lascivious carousings, drunkenness, harlotry, come from observing of holy days. . . . [Y]our [i.e., the prelates'] ceremonies that break the sixth commandment, shall find no room in the fifth commandment. Cause the fifth commandment [to] speak thus, if you can: "Notwithstanding that crossing, kneeling, surplice, human holy days occasion the soul murder of him for whom Christ died, yet we the Prelates command the practice of the foresaid ceremonies as good and expedient for edification, for our commandment maketh the murdering of our brethren, to be obedience to the fifth commandment." But if Prelates may command that which would otherwise, without, or before

the commandment, spiritual murdering and scandalizing our brother, they may command also, that which would be otherwise without, or before their command, adultery against the seventh, and theft against the eighth, and perjury and lying against the ninth commandment, and concupiscence against the tenth; for the fifth commandment hath the precedency before the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth commandments, no less than before the sixth, which forbiddeth the killing of our brother's soul. . . .

What do our Doctors [the prelates] clatter and fable to us of a right of justice, that mortal rulers have to command in things indifferent, from which the destruction of souls doth arise? for these commandments of rulers: *kneel religiously before bread, the vicegerent image of Christ crucified; keep human holy days; cross the air with your thumb above a baptized infant's face*, at best, are but positive commandments, not warranted by God's word. But shall they be more obligatory by a supposed band of justice that Prelates have over us to command, such toys then this divine law of God and Nature, *Rom. 14. For indifferent days, meats, surplice, destroy not him for whom Christ died?*. . . We see not how the ceremonies are left free to conscience, because they are alterable by the Church, for [because] the reason of kneeling to bread, of human [holy] days, of surplice, is moral, not national [i.e., they are ecclesiastical, and therefore moral, not civil, and therefore national]. --Samuel Rutherford, (Westminster divine), *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (1646).

[U]surping Prelacy under it's shadow, did in the secret and holy judgment of God, change the Glory of God and of our Lord Jesus into the Similitude and Image of the Roman Beast, turning the Power of Godliness unto Formality, his faithful Ministers into corrupt Hirelings, the Power and Life of Preaching into Flattery and Vanity, the Substance of Religion into empty and ridiculous Ceremonies, the Beauty and Purity of the Ordinances into Superstitious Inventions of Kneeling, Crossing, Holy Days and the like. . . . --James Stirling (minister, Church of Scotland), *Naphtali, or the Wrestlings of the Church of Scotland for the Kingdom of Christ* (1667).

1. That there can be no solemn setting apart of any day to any creature; thus Saints' days are unlawful. For the Sabbath, or Day of *Rest*, is to the Lord, and to none other, it being a peculiar piece of worship to him who hath divided time betwixt his worship and our work. . . .

2. No man can institute any day, even to the true God, as a part of worship, so as to bind the consciences to it, or to equal it with

this day [the Lord's day]. That is a part of God's royal prerogative, and a thing peculiar to him to sanctify and bless a day.

3. Even those days which are pretended to be set apart to and for God, and yet not as part of worship, cannot be imposed in a constant and ordinary way (as Anniversary days and feasts are) because by an ordinary rule God hath given to man six days for work, except in extraordinary cases he shall please to call for some part of them again. --James Durham (minister, Church of Scotland), *The Law Unsealed* (1675).

Dec. 25. Friday. Carts come to Town and Shops open as is usual. Some somehow observe the day [Christ-mass]; but are vexed I believe that the Body of the People profane it, and blessed be God no Authority yet to compell them to keep it. --Samuel Sewall (judge, chief magistrate of Boston), journal entry in *The Heart of the Puritan* (1685).

It is not a work but a word makes one day more holy than another. There is no day of the week, but some eminent work of God has been done therein; but it does not therefore follow that every day must be kept as a Sabbath. The Lord Christ has appointed the first day of the week to be perpetually observed in remembrance of his resurrection and redemption. If more days than that had been needful, he would have appointed more. It is a deep reflection on the wisdom of Christ, to say, *He has not appointed days enough for his own honour, but he must be beholding to men for their additions.* The Old Waldenses witnessed against the observing of any holidays, besides that which God in his Word hath instituted. Calvin, Luther, Danaeus, Bucer, Farel, Viret, and other great Reformers, have wished that the observation of all holidays, except the Lord's Day, were abolished. A Popish writer complains that the Puritans in England were of the same mind. So was John Huss and Jerome of Prague long ago. And the Belgic Churches in their Synod, *Anno* 1578. The Apostle condemns the observation of Jewish festivals in these days of the New Testament, Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16. Much less may Christians state other days in their room. The Gospel has put an end to the difference of days as well as of meats. And neither the Pope nor the Church can make some days holy above others, no more than they can make the use of some meats to be lawful or unlawful, both of which are expressly contrary to the Scripture, Rom. 14:5,6. All stated holidays of man's inventing, are breaches of the Second and of the Fourth Commandment. A stated religious festival is a part of instituted worship. Therefore it is not in the power of men, but God only, to make a day holy. --Increase Mather (Nonconformist minister, New England), *Testimony Against Prophane Customs* (1687).

Q. Is there any other day holy besides this day [i.e., the Lord's day]?

A. No day but this is holy by institution of the Lord; yet days of humiliation and thanksgiving may be lawfully set apart by men on a call of providence; but popish holidays are not warrantable, nor to be observed; Gal. 4:10. Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. --John Flavel (Nonconformist minister, Dartmouth, England), *An Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1692).

Q. 3. May not the Popish holy-days be observed?

A. The Popish holy-days ought not to be observed, because they are not appointed in the Word; and, by the same reason, no other holy-days may be kept, whatsoever pretence there be of devotion towards God, when there is no precept or example for such practice in the holy scripture. --Thomas Vincent (Nonconformist minister, London), *An Explicatory Catechism: or, An Explanation of the Assembly's Catechism* (1708).

Instead of Endeavours to *extirpate Superstition and Heresie*, as we are bound by the same Articles of the *Solemn League*, and by the "National Covenant to Detaste [*sic*] all Superstition and Heresie without or against the Word of God, and Doctrine of this Reformed Kirk; according to the Scripture. . . Gal. 4:10. Ye observe Days, and Months, and Times, and Years. . . . Col. 2:23, Which things have indeed a shew of Wisdom in Will-worship, and Humility, and neglecting of the Body, not in any Honour to the satisfying of the Flesh. Tit. 3:10. A Man that is an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition, reject. Yet in the darkness of the times of Persecution, many Dregs of Popish Superstition were observed, many *Omens* and *Freets* too much looked to; Popish Festival days, as Pasche, Yule, Fastings even, &c. have been kept by many. . . ." --John M'Millan, of Balmaghie, et al., *The National Covenant, and Solemn League and Covenant, With the Acknowledgement of Sins and Engagement to Duties: As they were Renewed at Douglass, July 24th, 1712, With Accommodation to the Present Times* (1712).

I do reckon the civil imposition of the Yule vacance not only unreasonable, but an occasional inlet into the religious observation of the holydays, since this is certainly the *prima ratio legis*, but very

burdensome and expensive to lieges. I hear endeavours will be used to alter the law. --Robert Wodrow (minister and Scottish church historian), *Letter to Mr. John Williamson* (1713).

The restoring of the Yule vacance, abolished at the Revolution, as it carries in it a studied reflection upon the Reformation then attained unto, so it is most senseless and superstitious in itself, an occasion of much debauchery, and a great prejudice to the lieges, by stopping the courts of justice; and it is most evident, that this and sundry other things were hatched and promoted by ill-affected persons or Jacobites, sent from among ourselves, for no other reason but merely out of wantonness, to kick at our constitution, at the Revolution, and at the glorious reign of King William our deliverer. --Robert Wylie (minister, Church of Scotland) et al., *Memorial of Grievances to be Presented to the King* (1714).

1. We think God has appointed one certain day in the week, for the thankful remembrance of those mercies, which he has in common bestowed upon us. Upon that therefore, as often as it returns, all Christians are bound to employ themselves in meditating upon God's works of creation and redemption, in praising God, and in other religious exercises. Hence we judge it needless for men, by their authority, to appoint other days of the same nature; and desire them, who usurp such a power, to produce the commission they have for it.

2. It seems probable to us, that God would not have us observe these yearly Holidays; because we meet with nothing in his word, whereby we can fix the times of the year, when those things happened, which our Adversaries pretend are the occasion of them. --James Peirce (Nonconformist minister, Exon, England), *A Vindication of the Dissenters* (1718).

Albeit there be an Act of Assembly 1645. Sess. ult. *Ordering all the Observers of superstitious Days, particularly Yule, &c.--to be proceeded against by Kirk-Censure--the Guilty to make publick Repentance for the same--before the Congregation where the Offence is committed--Presbyteries--and Synods, to take particular Notice how Ministers--censure Delinquents of this Kind, within the several Parishes, &c.* Yet this seems to be gone into Desuetude, seeing, not only *Masters of Schools and Colleges*

are accessory to this *superstitious Prophanity--by granting Liberty or Vacancy to their Scholars at such Times; for which,*

by Virtue of this *Act*, they ought to be summoned before the Assembly, and censured according to their Trespass. But even the *Elders of this Church* [the author means the Revolution Church--the Church of Scotland], in many Places, are guilty of *observing Yule*, and such as are ordinarily *Communicants*, with Numbers of others in closs Communion with this Church, and yet never one of these censured, but connived at. And what if I should say, too *many Ministers* homologate this sinful Custom? whereby, through Ministers Unfaithfulness, a young up-rising Generation are left in Ignorance about the Sinfulness of that, and other superstitious Days, &c. too, too much in Fashion in our declining Days. --Andrew Clarkson (acting as clerk and compiler for the United Societies, i.e., the Covenanters), *Plain Reasons for Presbyterians Dissenting from the Revolution-Church in Scotland* (1731).

Dissenters . . . reject the consecrating churches, chapels, cathedrals, priests, garments, altars, liturgies, singing service, litanies, bowings, crossings, cringings, holy days, fasts, feasts, vigils, because not one word of any of them is contained in our only rule of faith. --Thomas DeLaune (English Nonconformist Baptist), *A Plea for the Non-Conformists* (1733).

[I]nstead of making progress in a work of reformation, we came in a short time to fall under the weight of some *new* and very heavy *grievances*: As for instance. . . . Countenance is also given to a superstitious observation of *holy-days*, by the *vacation* of our most considerable civil courts, in the *latter end* of *December*. --Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher (founding ministers of the Secession [Associate Presbyterian Church]), *A Testimony to the Doctrine, Worship, Government and Discipline of the Church of Scotland* (1734).

*Q. Hath God appointed any other set times to be kept holy to the Lord, besides the sabbath?*

A. None but the Jewish festivals or ceremonial sabbaths, which being only shadows of things to come, they expired with Christ's coming; but the command for the weekly sabbath being moral, it continues still in force, Col. 2:16,17; Gal. 4:9-11; 1 Cor. 16:1,2.

*Q. Are we bound to keep the holy-days observed by others, such as days for Christ's birth, passion and ascension; days dedicated*

*to angels, as Michaelmas; to the virgin Mary, as Candlemas; besides many others dedicated to the apostles and other saints?*

A. Though it be pretended that these days serve to promote piety and devotion, yet we have no warrant from God to observe any of them; nay, it appears to be unlawful to do it: for 1st, God doth quarrel men for using any device of their own for promoting his service or worship, without having his command or warrant for it, as in Deut. 12:32; Isa. 1:12; Jer. 7:30. 2ndly, the apostle Paul doth expressly condemn the Galatians for observing such holy days, Gal. 4:10,11. 3dly, It is a disparaging of the Lord's day which God hath appointed, and a usurping of his legislative power, for men to set days of their appointing on a level with his day, as the institutors do, by hindering people to labor thereupon. 4thly, It is an idolatrous practice to consecrate days to the honor of saints and angels, for commemorating their acts, and publishing their praise; such honor and worship being due to God alone.

*Q. Were not these days appointed by the ancient church, and authorized by great and holy men?*

A. It was will-worship in them, seeing they had no power to institute holy-days: for, 1st, Under the law, when ceremonies and festivals were in use, the church appointed none of them, but God himself. 2dly, We read nothing of the apostles appointing or observing such holy-days; not a word of their consecrating a day for Christ's birth, his passion, or ascension; nor a day to Stephen the proto-martyr, nor to James, whom Herod killed with the sword. We read of the apostles observing the Lord's day, and keeping it holy, but not of any other. 3dly, These other days are left unrecorded, and uncertain, and so are concealed like the body of Moses, that men might not be tempted to abuse them to superstition. 4thly, These days have not the divine blessing upon them; for they are the occasions of much looseness and immorality. 5thly, Though the observing of these days had been indifferent or lawful at first, yet the defiling of them with superstition and intemperance should make all forbear them. --John Willison (minister, Church of Scotland), *An Example of Plain Catechising, Upon the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1737).

*Q. May the church appoint holy days, to remember Christ's birth, death, temptation, ascension, &c.?*--A. No; as God hath abolished the Jewish holy days of his own appointment, so he hath given no warrant to the church to appoint any: but hath commanded us to labour six days, except when Providence calls us to humiliation or thanksgiving; and expressly forbids us to observe holy days of men's appointment,

Col. 2:16; Gal. 4:10,11.

Q. What is the difference between a fast day and a holy day?--A. The day of a fast is changeable, and esteemed no better in itself than another day; but a holy day is fixed to a certain time of the week, year, or moon, and reckoned better in itself. --John Brown, of Haddington (minister and professor, Associate [Presbyterian] Burgher Synod), *An Essay Towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1758).

Not to insist further in enumerating particulars, the presbytery finally testify [*sic*] against church and state, for their negligence to suppress impiety, vice, and superstitious observance of holy days, &c. The civil powers herein acting directly contrary to the nature and perverting the very ends of the magistrate's office, which is to be *custos et vindex utriusque tabulae*; the minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath on him that doeth evil. Transgressors of the first table of the law may now sin openly with impunity; and, while the religious observation of the sabbath is not regarded, the superstitious observation of holy days, even in *Scotland*, is so much authorized, that on some of them the most considerable courts of justice are discharged to sit. --The Reformed Presbytery (Covenanters), *Act, Declaration, and Testimony, for the Whole of our Covenanted Reformation, as Attained to, and Established in Britain and Ireland, Particularly Betwixt the Years 1638 and 1649, Inclusive. As, Also, Against all the Steps of Defection from Said Reformation, Whether in Former or Latter Times, Since the Overthrow of that Glorious Work, Down to this Present Day* (1761).

Q. Is there any warrant for anniversary, or stated holidays, now, under the New Testament?

A. No: these under the Old, being abrogated by the death and resurrection of Christ, there is neither precept nor example in scripture, for any of the yearly holidays observed by Papists, and others: on the contrary, all such days are condemned in bulk, Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16,17.

Q. What crimes doth the observation of them import?

A. The observation of them imports no less than an impeachment of the institutions of God, concerning his worship, as if they were imperfect; and an encroachment upon the liberty wherewith Christ hath made his church and people free, Col. 3:20. --James Fisher (minister,

Associate [Presbyterian] Burgher Synod), *Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained* (1765).

The *public worship* of God is grievously corrupted, in *England and Ireland*, --by a multitude of superstitious inventions. . . . A great many devised holidays, saints days, fasts and festivals, are likewise observed; with peculiar offices for the same. --Adam Gib (minister, Associate [Presbyterian] Anti-Burgher), *The Present Truth: A Display of the Secession Testimony*, Vol. 2 (1774).

Men cannot, without sin, appoint any *holy days*. (1.) God has marked the weekly sabbath with peculiar honour, in his command and word. But, if men appoint holy days, they detract from its honour; and wherever holy days of men's appointment are much observed, God's weekly sabbath is much profaned, Ex. 20:8; Ezek. 43:8. (2.) God never could have abolished his own ceremonial holy days, in order that men might appoint others of their own invention, in their room, Col. 2:16-23; Gal. 4:10,11. (3.) God alone can bless holy days, and render them effectual to promote holy purposes; and we have no hint in his word, that he will bless any appointed by men, Ex. 20:11. (4.) By permitting, if not requiring us, to labour *six days* of the week in our worldly employments, this commandment excludes all holy days of men's appointment; Ex. 20:8,9. If it *permit* six days for our worldly labour, we ought to stand fast in that liberty with which Christ hath made us free, Gal. 5:1; 1 Cor. 7:23; Matt. 15:9. If it *require* them, we ought to obey God rather than men, Acts 4:19; 5:29.--Days of occasional fasting and thanksgiving are generally marked out by the providence of God: and the observation of them does not suppose any holiness in the day itself, Joel 1:14; 2:15; Acts 13:2; 14:23; Matt. 9:15. --John Brown, of Haddington (minister and professor, Associate [Presbyterian] Burgher Synod), *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1796).

We therefore condemn the following *errors*, and testify against all who maintain them:

1. "That any part of time is appointed in divine revelation, or may be appointed by the church, to be kept holy, in its weekly, monthly, or annual returns, except the first day of the week, which is the Christian Sabbath." --Reformed Presbyterian Church in America (Covenanters), *Reformation Principles Exhibited* (1806).

That the Lord's day is the only day appointed by God to be kept holy, though he allows us to set days apart, on proper occasions, for fasting and thanksgiving. Those days which, by men now under the New Testament are called festival or holy days, have no warrant from the word, and are superstitious. Ex. 20:8; Matt. 9:14,15; 28:20; Col. 2:20-23; Matt. 15:7-9. --Reformed Dissenting Presbytery, *An Act, Declaration and Testimony, of the Reformed Dissenting Presbyterian Church, in North America* (1808).

It is our duty to attend faithfully and industriously to that secular business which is incumbent on us, during the six last days of the week, and not to institute or observe sabbaths of human invention; that we may be prepared for the sanctification of the Lord's sabbath. "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work." Gal. 4:10,11. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed labour upon you in vain." --Ezra Stiles Ely (pastor, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), *A Synopsis of Didactic Theology* (1822).

[The Waldenses] contemn all approved ecclesiastical customs which they do not read of in the gospel, such as the observance of Candlemas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and the feast of Easter. . . . --William Sime, *History of the Waldenses* (1827).

Under the old dispensation, there were a number of days appointed for ceremonial observances. The Jews kept thirty-five in the year, but of these some fell on the Sabbath. While the Mosaic economy lasted, and while they remained in Palestine, these were to be observed; but at the death of Christ they passed away. Hence the apostle says to the primitive Christians, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath day" (Col. 2:16), or the Jewish Sabbath, on the seventh day of the week, which was now merged in the first. This shews how little they understand the liberty of the gospel, who prescribe for the observance of Christians, a variety of holy days, which are unauthorized in Scripture, and are found in experience to be lost in idleness, or abused in folly. Such days, originating in secular policy, or superstitious excitement, may be marked by names and rites solemn and imposing; yet, wanting the sanction of Jehovah, and the animating breath of heaven, they are soon disregarded as empty forms, hated as encumbrances on public industry, and welcomed only by those whose situation makes them wish for a season and a pretext for amusement and dissipation. --Henry Belfrage (minister, Associate [Presbyterian] Burgher Synod),

*A Practical Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1834).

[M]en have no right to institute holidays, which return as regularly at certain intervals as the Sabbath does in the beginning of the week. This is an assumption of authority which God has not delegated to them. Holidays are an encroachment upon the time of which he has made a free gift to men for their worldly affairs. . . . --John Dick (minister, United Associate Congregation; professor, United Secession Theological Seminary), *Lectures on Theology* (1835).

We believe that the Scriptures not only do not warrant the observance of such days [i.e., "holy" days], but that they positively discountenance it. Let any one impartially weigh Colossians 2:16, and also, Galatians 4:9-11; and then say whether these passages do not evidently indicate, that the inspired Apostle disapproved of the observance of such days. --Samuel Miller (professor, Princeton Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), *Presbyterianism: The Truly Primitive and Apostolic Constitution of the Church of Christ* (1836).

[W]e testify against the celebration of Christmas, or other festivals of the Papal or Episcopal church. --Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: Historical and Doctrinal* (1837).

From what has been said, we may infer that this passage of Scripture gives no countenance to religious festivals, or holidays of human appointment, especially under the New Testament. Feasts appear to have been connected with sacrifices from the most ancient times; but the observance of them was not brought under any fixed rules until the establishment of the Mosaic law. Religious festivals formed a noted and splendid part of the ritual of that law; but they were only designed to be temporary; and having served their end in commemorating certain great events connected with the Jewish commonwealth, and in typifying certain mysteries now clearly revealed by the gospel, they ceased, and, along with other figures, vanished away. To retain these, or to return them after the promulgation of the Christian law, or to imitate them by instituting festivals of a similar kind, is to doat on shadows--to choose weak and beggarly elements--to bring ourselves under a yoke of bondage which the Jews were unable to bear, and interpretatively to fall from grace and the truth of the gospel.

"Ye observe days and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come." Shall we suppose that Christ and his apostles, in abrogating those days which God himself had appointed to be observed, without instituting others in their room, intended that either churches or individuals should be allowed to substitute whatever they pleased in their room? Yet the Christian church soon degenerated so far as to bring herself under a severer bondage than that from which Christ had redeemed her, and instituted a greater number of festivals than were observed under the Mosaic law, or even among pagans.

To seek a warrant for days of religious commemoration under the gospel from the Jewish festivals, is not only to overlook the distinction between the old and new dispensations, but to forget that the Jews were never allowed to institute such memorials for themselves, but simply to keep those which infinite Wisdom had expressly and by name set apart and sanctified. The prohibitory sanction is equally strict under both Testaments: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."

There are times when God calls, on the one hand, to religious fasting, or, on the other, to thanksgiving and religious joy; and it is our duty to comply with these calls, and to set apart time for the respective exercises. But this is quite a different thing from recurrent or anniversary holidays. In the former case the day is chosen for the duty, in the latter the duty is performed for the day; in the former case there is no holiness on the day but what arises from the service which is performed on it, and when the same day afterwards recurs, it is as common as any other day; in the latter case the day is set apart on all following times, and may not be employed for common or secular purposes. Stated and recurring festivals countenance the false principle, that some days have a peculiar sanctity, either inherent or impressed by the works which occurred on them; they proceed on an undue assumption of human authority; interfere with the free use of that time which the Creator hath granted to man; detract from the honour due to the day of sacred rest which he hath appointed; lead to impositions over conscience; have been the fruitful source of superstition and idolatry; and have been productive of the worst effects upon morals, in every age, and among every people, barbarous and civilized, pagan and Christian, popish and protestant, among whom they have been observed. On these grounds they were rejected from the beginning, among other corruptions of antichrist, by the reformed church of Scotland, which allowed no stated religious days but the Christian Sabbath. --Thomas M'Crie

(minister, Associate Anti-Burgher/Constitutional Associate Presbytery; author and church historian), *Lectures on the Book of Esther* (1838).

It is notorious, that wherever other days than the Sabbath are religiously observed, there that holy day is less strictly observed than its nature demands--less strictly than it is generally observed by those who regard it as the only *set* time which God has commanded to be kept holy. It is also notorious, that holy days, as they are called, are times at which every species of vice and disorder is more flagrantly and more generally indulged in, than at any other time; so that these days are really and highly injurious to civil society, as well as an encroachment on the prerogative of God. --Ashbel Green (minister, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism* (1841).

Stated festival-days, commonly called *holy-days*, have no warrant in the Word of God; but a day may be set apart, by competent authority, for fasting or thanksgiving when extraordinary dispensations of Providence administer cause for them. When judgments are threatened or inflicted, or when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained, fasting is eminently seasonable. --Robert Shaw (minister, Free Church of Scotland), *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (1845).

Is it innocent and allowable to observe the Passover, (or Easter), the Pentecost, or the Nativity of our Saviour, (Christmas) . . . ?

Ans. No; Not even when the observance is left optional with the people; because, (1.) The Passover and the Pentecost are, by the introduction of the new dispensation, laid aside, as typical observances. (2.)

The observance of them was partly in accommodation to the early Jewish believers, partly to please pagans with outward parade of worship, in compensation for the loss of their heathen observances, and partly by a declining church, that wished to substitute outward worship for that which is spiritual. (3.) There is no need of them in order to promote religion. The observance of them is will-worship, and will tend to the decline of religion. (4.) Christmas, or the Nativity, is unauthorized. The time is utterly unknown, being left in impenetrable darkness by the Holy Spirit in the divine records; and no doubt this was done because the knowledge of it was unnecessary, and in order to repress will-worship. In a word, while fast-days are appointed on account of the duty to be performed, in set days, or periodical days, the duty is observed on account of the day; and therefore the day must be of divine appointment, or it is sinful.--Abraham Anderson (minister and professor, Associate Presbyterian Church), *Lectures*

*on Theology* (1851).

Under the Jewish economy there were other set times and modes of worship, which were abolished when the Christian economy was introduced. Since then no *holidays* (holy days) but the Sabbath, are of divine authority or obligation. . . . --James R. Boyd (minister, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1854).

To those who believe in this form of regimen [keeping the Sabbath as a holy day of rest] it forms "the golden hours" of time; and finding no command nor fair deduction from Scripture warranting them to keep any other day, whether (in honor of the Saxon goddess Eostre, that is, the Prelatic) "Easter," "the Holy Innocents," or of "St. Michael and all the angels," they believe that "festival days, vulgarly called *holydays*, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be observed." --Alexander Blaikie (minister, Associate Reformed Church), *The Philosophy of Sectarianism* (1854).

No human power can make it unlawful for men to pursue their industrial avocations during the six secular days. The New Testament plainly discourages the attempt to fill up the calendar with holidays, Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-23. Even days of fasting or thanksgiving are not holy days; but they are a part of secular time voluntarily devoted to God's service. And if we are to perform these things at all, we must take some time for them. Yet none but God can sanctify a day so as to make it holy. The attempt to do this was one of the sins of Jeroboam, 1 Kings 12:33. --William S. Plumer (professor, Columbia Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.), *The Law of God, As Contained in the Ten Commandments* (1864).

In keeping the last day of the week as a day of religious observance, the Jews, by the very act, expressed their religious acknowledgment of God, who had appointed it, and did an act of worship to Him as its author, in the character of one Creator who made the heavens and the earth. In keeping the first day of the week now, Christians, by the very act, recognise Christ as the author of it, and do homage to Him as the one Redeemer, who on that day rose from the dead, and secured the salvation of His people. . . . And who does not see, that upon the very same principle the observance of holidays appointed by the Church, as ordinary and stated parts of Divine worship, is

an expression of religious homage to man, who is the author of the appointment,--an unlawful acknowledgment of human or ecclesiastical authority in an act of worship. In keeping, after a religious sort, a day that has no authority but man's, we are paying a religious homage to that authority; we are bowing down, in the very act of our observance of the days as part of worship, not to Christ, who has not appointed it, but to the Church, which has. We are keeping the season holy, not to God, but to man. --James Bannerman (professor, New College, Free Church of Scotland), *The Church of Christ* (1869).

Festival days, vulgarly called holy days, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be observed. --Synod of the Associate Reformed Church in North America, *The Constitution and Standards of the Associate Reformed Church in North America* (1874).

The [Dutch] Reformed churches had been in the habit of keeping Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide [Pentecost] as days of religious worship. The synod [Provincial Synod of Dordrecht, 1574] enjoined the churches to do this no longer, but to be satisfied with Sundays for divine service. --Maurice G. Hansen (historian, Reformed Church in America), *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands* (1884).

To take the ground that the church has a discretionary power to appoint other holy days and other symbolical rites is to concede to Rome the legitimacy of her five superfluous sacraments and all her self-devised paraphernalia of sacred festivals. There is no middle ground. Either we are bound by the Lord's appointments in his Word, or human discretion is logically entitled to the full-blown license of Rome. --John L. Girardeau (professor, Columbia Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.), *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (1888).

The Protestant Church is fast returning to the heathen ceremonies of the Church of Rome, vieing with her in the observance of "Easter Sunday," etc. By means of Christmas trees, Santa Claus is becoming a greater reality and the object of more affection to children than the Saviour himself. --Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanter), *Minutes of the General Meeting* (1889).

That Christians did observe sacred days in the apostle's time these writers [i.e., those who deny the divine sanction and authority of

the Lord's day] admit, and also that the usage was approved. But they say it was not founded on any divine authority; the apostle had just repealed all that. Then on whose authority? That of the uninspired church. Their view, then, is that the apostle, sweeping away all Sabbaths and Lord's days, invites Christians to ascend to his lofty and devoted experience, which had no use for a set Sabbath because all his days were consecrated. But as it was found that this did not suit the actual Christian state of most Christians, human authority was allowed, and even encouraged, to appoint Sundays, Easters and Whitsuntides for them. The objections are: first, that this countenances 'will-worship,' or the intrusion of man's inventions into God's service; second, it is an implied insult to Paul's inspiration, assuming that he made a practical blunder, which the church synods, wiser than his inspiration, had to mend by a human expedient; and third, we have here a practical confession that, after all, the average New Testament Christian does need a stated holy day, and therefore the ground of the Sabbath command is perpetual and moral. --Robert L. Dabney (professor, Union Theological Seminary, Virginia; Theological School at Austin, Texas; University of Texas; Presbyterian Church in the U.S.), "The Christian Sabbath," in *Discussions, Vol. 1* (1890).

[T]hose who quote those portions of Scripture in opposition to the idea of a divine obligation on Christians to observe the Sabbath are found for the most part, in one section of the Church, and as members or dignitaries therein they are very far from being consistent. Their reasoning on behalf of their theory and their practice are diametrically opposed. If the Apostle Paul were permitted to revisit earth, we might imagine him addressing them somewhat after the following manner:--'Ye men of a half-reformed Church, ye observe days and times. Ye have a whole calendar of so-called saints' days. Ye observe a Holy Thursday and a Good Friday. Ye have a time called Easter, and a season called Lent, about which some of you make no small stir. Ye have a day regarded especially holy, named Christmas, observed at a manifestly wrong season of the year, and notoriously grafted on an old Pagan festival. And all this while many of you refuse to acknowledge the continued obligation of the Fourth Commandment. I am afraid of you, lest the instruction contained in my epistle, as well as in other parts of Scripture, has been bestowed upon you in vain.' --Robert Nevin (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland and editor of the *Covenanter Magazine* in Ireland), *Misunderstood Scriptures* (1893).

*Q. 49. What are some of the festival seasons of the Church of Rome?*

A. They are very numerous; among them the following are the most prominent:  
--Christmas, Lady Day, Lent, Easter, and the Feast of the Assumption.

*Q. 50. What is the meaning of Christmas?*

A. It is a festival held on the 25th of December, in honour of the birth of Christ. On this day three Masses are performed: one at midnight, one at daybreak, and one in the morning.

*Q. 51 When was this festival introduced?*

A. The spurious decretals attributed its institution to Telesphorus, Bishop of Rome, in the first half of the second century; but the Fathers of the first three centuries make no mention of it.

*Q. 52. What is its most probable origin?*

A. That it was not Christian is manifest from the fact that the day on which the feast is observed could not have been the day of Christ's birth, inasmuch as from December to February is the cold and rainy season in Palestine, when the shepherds could not have been "keeping watch over their flocks by night." The festival is to be traced partly to the tendency in the fourth century to multiply such seasons, and, by introducing a festival for each period in Christ's life, to complete "the Christian year," and partly to the growing tendency in the church to conciliate the heathen by adopting their religious customs.

*Q. 53. Are there any features in the Christmas festival that point to a Pagan origin?*

A. There are several: the name, the time of its observance, and the ceremonies associated with it.

*Q. 54. Explain these features in detail.*

A. The name "Yule Day," given to Christmas, is Pagan. According to some the word Yule is derived from huel, a wheel, and was meant to designate the Pagan sun feast in commemoration of the turn of the sun and the lengthening of the day. According to others it was the Chaldee name for "infant," and was meant to designate the feast in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian Queen of Heaven. The time indicates a Pagan origin, for it was at the time of the winter solstice that the Pagan festival just referred to was celebrated. The ceremonies of the "Drunken festival" of Babylon have their counterpart in the wassail bowl and the revels that in

all Popish countries have been characteristic of Christmas.

*Q. 55. Is this festival warranted in Scripture?*

A. No. The Scriptures are silent regarding the day and month of Christ's birth, and it is admitted by the best writers that the precise day cannot now be ascertained from any source. Christ commanded His disciples to commemorate His *death*, but He gave no command concerning His *birth*. --John M'Donald (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland; member, Scottish Reformation Society), *Romanism Analysed in the Light of Scripture, Reason, and History* (1894).

There is a ritualism against which George Gillespie delivered a destructive blow by his work on "English-Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the (Reformed) Church of Scotland"--the ritualism of saints' days and holy days--and in which he described these and other ceremonies as the "twigs and spriggs of Popish superstition." These and other similar rites and ceremonies have been repudiated by the Presbyterianism of this northern kingdom without a dissentient voice for the last 300 years. . . . If a number of ministers in Presbyterian charges where no ritualism exists were to resolve to ritualise and Romanise their congregations, could they adopt better measures than those in operation by ritualists? Their plan of campaign would be marked by the following stages at considerable intervals:--adverse comments on the simplicity of the worship observed; . . . introduction of saints' days and holy days, including Ash Wednesday, Maunday Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday; . . . Would they not be toying all this time with the trinkets of Babylon? --Dr. James Kerr (pastor, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland), "The Scriptural Doctrines Violated by Ritualism," in *Romanism and Ritualism in Great Britain and Ireland* (1895).

[Things forbidden by the fourth commandment]: The erection and regular observance of other holy days. Had God seen their regular recurrence was desirable they would have been appointed. Their use has been spiritually damaging. They often become centers of ceremonialism and sensual worship. --J. A. Grier, (professor, Allegheny Theological Seminary, United Presbyterian Church), *Synoptical Lectures on Theological Subjects* (1896).

There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holy days, rather the contrary (see Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-21), and such observance is contrary to the principles of the Reformed Faith, conducive to will worship, and not in harmony with the simplicity

of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. --General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern Presbyterians), *Deliverance on Christmas and Easter* (1899).

Q. 7. Is it not a daring intrusion upon the prerogative of God to appoint as a stated religious festival any other day or season, such as Christmas or Easter?

A. It is an impeachment of the wisdom of God and an assertion of our right and ability to improve on his plans. --James Harper (professor, Xenia Theological Seminary, United Presbyterian Church), *An Exposition in the Form of Question and Answer of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1905).

The observance of Holy Days had been rejected at the Reformation, and the people of Scotland desired no change [as mandated by the Perth Articles passed in 1618]. . . . An Order in June 1619 commanded universal obedience to the Articles. . . . So strong was the opposition that little impression was made by such proceedings. . . . The general result was that only a small minority, and these chiefly official persons, kneeled at Communion or observed Easter or Christmas; even this was due simply out of deference to the king's wishes. --Sheriff Orr, *Alexander Henderson: Churchman and Statesman* (1919).

Festival days, commonly called holy-days, having no warrant in the Word, are not to be observed. --Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod, *Constitution of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (1937).

In former times the Reformed Presbyterian Church was solidly opposed to the religious observance of Christmas, Easter and other special days of the same kind. . . . [W]e should realize that we Covenanters, in opposing the observance of Easter and other "holy" days, are only holding to the original principle which was once held by *all* Presbyterians everywhere. It is not the Covenanters that have changed. . . . [T]he apostle Paul regards this observance of days as *a bad tendency*: "I am afraid of (for) you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." . . . Paul wondered what was wrong with their religious knowledge and experience, that they should have become so zealous for the observance of days. --J. G. Vos (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), "The Observance of Days" in *Blue Banner Faith and Life* (1947).

Here I am alone in the library and apparently everyone has gone from Machen Hall until Friday morning. Now it is 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday. You may think this dismal. Well, I love it. It is a delightful change from the usual stir. I have had two good days in the Library. Monday was taken up with committee meetings, forenoon and afternoon. I hope to be here all day tomorrow. I have not even accepted a dinner engagement for what they call 'Christmas.' I hate the whole business. --John Murray (professor, Westminster Seminary, Orthodox Presbyterian Church), "Letter to Valerie Knowlton, Dec. 24, 1958," in *Collected Writings*, Vol. 3 (1958).

*1. What was originally the conviction of the churches in regard to the holy days?*

The Reformers such as Calvin, Farel, Viret, Bucer and John Knox were opposed to observing the holy days.

*2. What were their motives for this?*

- a. That they were not divine but human institutions.
- b. That they brushed aside the importance of Sunday.
- c. That they gave occasion to licentious and heathen festivities.

*3. What then did they prefer in regard to preaching the facts of Christ's birth, death, etc.?*

That it be done on regular Sundays. On the Sunday before Christmas the Christmas story was preached, etc.

*4. How is it then that the ecclesiastical synods still made provision for the observance of the holy days?*

- a. They did so as a concession to the Authorities, which clung tenaciously to the holy days as vacation days for the people.
- b. The churches permitted the ministers to preach on these holy days in order to change a useless and unprofitable idleness into a holy and profitable exercise.--K. DeGier (minister, Netherlands Reformed Church, the Hague; teacher, Theological School at Rotterdam), *Explanation of the Church Order of Dordt* (1968).

It is just this attitude of indifference to the Constitution that has brought us to the state we are in in the P.C.U.S. Whereas, earlier, as is reflected in the 1899 deliverance about Christmas and Easter, there was meticulous concern for staying with the standards, and the strict interpretation of Scripture on even such a matter as these two days. Now there is a complete reversal to the point of adopting the liturgical calendar of past tradition, without any Biblical basis.

--Morton Smith (professor, Greenville Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Church in America), *How is the Gold Become Dim* (1973).

*Holy Days.* The Free Presbyterian Church rejects the modern custom becoming so prevalent in the Church of Scotland, of observing Christmas and Easter. It regards the observance of these days as symptomatic of the trend in the Church of Scotland towards closer relations with Episcopacy. At the time of the Reformation in Scotland all these festivals were cast out of the Church as things that were not only unnecessary but unscriptural. --Committee appointed by the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church, *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. 1893-1970* (ca. 1974).

Recently denominations that never had calendars before were induced by the National Council of Churches to adopt the practice. . . . How can such non-biblical forms of worship be defended? The Puritan principle, that is, the Biblical command, is that in worship we should neither add to nor subtract from the divine requirements. . . . [Professor] James Benjamin Green, *Studies in the Holy Spirit* (Revell, 1936), has urged Christians to celebrate Pentecost: "There are three great days in the Christian year: Christmas, Easter, and Whitsunday, and we are not true to our faith when we allow Whitsunday to fall into the background. . . . It has ranked with Christmas and Easter. The three together are the three throned days of the Christian year."

It is amazing that a professor in a Presbyterian seminary should be so Romish and anti-Reformed. Scripture gives us our rules for worship, and, to repeat, from them we should not subtract, nor to them should we add. We should turn neither to the left nor to the right. Now, Scripture does not authorize us to celebrate Pentecost. The same is true of Christmas. It began as a drunken orgy and continues so today in office parties. The Puritans even made its celebration a civil offense. And yet an argument for celebrating Pentecost was, "Don't all Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter?" No, they do not. My father's family and church never celebrated Christmas, nor did the two Blanchard administrations in Wheaton College. But what about Easter? Surely we must celebrate Easter, shouldn't we? Yes indeed, we should, as the Scripture commands, not just once a year in the spring, but fifty-two times a year. --Gordon H. Clark (professor, Covenant College, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod), *The Holy Spirit* (1993).

Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter are Romish sacred days. By this we mean that they have their source in Roman Catholic tradition, rather than in Scripture. . . . [T]here have been times in the history of the Reformed churches when the truth on the subject of sacred days received reverent attention. Already, before John Calvin arrived in Geneva at the time of the great Reformation, the observance of Romish sacred days had been discontinued there. This had been done under the leadership of Guillaume Farel and Peter Viret. But Calvin was in hearty agreement. It is well known that when these traditional days came along on the calendar, Calvin did not pay the slightest attention to them. He just went right on with his exposition of whatever book of the Bible he happened to be expounding. The Reformers, Knox and Zwingli, agreed with Calvin. So did the entire Reformed church of Scotland and Holland. At the Synod of Dort in 1574 it was agreed that the weekly Sabbath alone should be observed, and that the observance of all other days should be discouraged. This faithful Biblical practice was later compromised. But that does not change the fact that the Reformed churches originally stood for the biblical principle. The original stand of the Reformed churches was Scriptural. That is the important thing. --G. I. Williamson (minister, Orthodox Presbyterian Church), *On the Observance of Sacred Days* (n.d.).

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#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), chap. I, sec. 6.

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<sup>2</sup> An instance of historical example is Lord's day public worship. There is no explicit command or divine imperative changing public worship from the seventh day (Saturday) to the first day (Sunday) of the week, recorded in Scripture. Yet in the New Testament, the change from the seventh day to the first day is recorded as an accomplished fact (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, Rev. 1:10). Not every divine command or prophetic word has been inscripturated (i.e., included in the Bible). The universal practice of the apostolic church, such as Lord's day public worship, is binding because of the unique authority given to the apostles (by direct revelation). When the apostles died, direct revelation ceased and the canon was closed, and now our doctrine, worship, and all historical examples are limited to the Bible, the Word of God. Those who appeal to church traditions, invented after the closing of the canon, for authority in establishing worship ordinances are, in principle, no better than Jeroboam the son of Nebat (1 Ki. 12: 26-33).

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<sup>3</sup> James H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1872), 2:163.

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<sup>4</sup> Chap. XXI, sec. 1.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Peck, *Miscellanies* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895), 1:82.

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<sup>6</sup> "The first idea contained in them, is that they are religious duties, prescribed by God, as an instituted method in which he will be worshipped by his creatures. . . . Now, the ordinances, as thus described, must be engaged in according to a divine appointment. No creature has a warrant to enjoin any modes of worship, pretending that these will be acceptable or well-pleasing to God; since God alone, who is the object of worship, has a right to prescribe the way in which he will be worshipped. For a creature to institute modes of worship would be an instance of profaneness and bold presumption; and the worship performed would be 'in vain'; as our Saviour says concerning that which has no higher sanction than 'the commandments of men' " (Thomas Ridgely, *A Body of Divinity* [New York: 1855], 2:433.)

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel-Worship* (London: Peter Cole, 1650), pp. 2-3.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

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<sup>9</sup> William G. Blaikie, *Commentary on Second Samuel* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), p. 88.

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 240.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, [1692]1881), p. 267.

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<sup>12</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), chap. XXI, sec. 1.

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<sup>13</sup> Calvin's Commentary, on Jer. 9:21-24 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 9:398.

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase "inspiration of the Holy Spirit" does not mean that the early Presbyterians believed that their prayers were "God Breathed" and inerrant like the Scriptures. It simply means "with the help or aid of the Holy Spirit".

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<sup>15</sup> J. King Hewison, *The Covenanters* (Glasgow: 1908), 1:41-44.

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<sup>16</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1961 ed.), 5:643.

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<sup>17</sup> "Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen, at that precise time of the year, in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may be fairly presumed that, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the numbers of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ" (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons* [Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, (1916)1943], p. 93).

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<sup>18</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1961 ed.), 6:623.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:642.

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<sup>20</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, (quoted in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (1961 ed.), 5:643).

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<sup>21</sup> "The Saturnalia, like Christmas was a time for giving presents. Small dolls were a popular gift-though for an unpleasant reason. They commemorated a myth that Saturn ate all his male children at birth, to fulfill a pledge that he would die without heirs" (The United Church Observer, *Santa's Family Tree*, Dec. 1976, p. 14).

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<sup>22</sup> *World Book Encyclopedia*, (1955 ed.), 3:1425.

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<sup>23</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5:643.

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<sup>24</sup> G. Lambert, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1976) 1:805.

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<sup>25</sup> George Gillespie, *English Popish Ceremonies*, (n.p., 1637), Part III, p.19.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III, p. 35.

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Bucer quoted in William Ames, *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship*, (n.p., 1633), p. 360.

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<sup>28</sup> Gillespie, p. 146.

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<sup>29</sup> G. I. Williamson, *On the Observance of Sacred Days*, (Havertown: New Covenant Publication Society, n.d.), pp. 9-10.

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<sup>30</sup> "There is no day commanded in the scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called *Holy-days*, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued." (The Westminster Assembly, *The Directory For the Publick Worship of God*, 1645).

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<sup>31</sup> Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, (Riverside: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1961), pp. 160-1.

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, the world loves puppy dogs, apple pie and baseball as well, but these hold no religious significance. They are not associated with Christ and are not religious ordinances.

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<sup>33</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965,68), pp. 177-8.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

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<sup>35</sup> Out of 24 commentaries consulted, only one entertained the possibility that these days were non-Judaical.

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<sup>36</sup> Murray, p. 178.

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<sup>37</sup> In Gal. 4:10-11 and Col. 2:16-17, the observance of days is condemned by Paul because in these instances the celebration of days was connected with heresy. The situation at Rome was different. The days were kept because of a genuine misunderstanding. Heresy and ideas of works-righteousness were not involved.

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<sup>38</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (1647), chap. XXI, sec. 5, proof- text (a).

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<sup>39</sup> God's people are the church whether they meet in a church building, barn, park or house. When Christians gather together to hear the Word and worship God, it is the church meeting. It is public worship whether they meet at 7:00 a.m. or 11:00 p.m. Public worship *must* occur on the Lord's day, but that does not mean that public worship is limited to that day alone. The idea that teaching and worship at 10:00 a.m. is not public, but at 11:00 a.m. it is public is totally irrational and arbitrary. It is based on human tradition. If this imaginary line really existed between 10:59 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., then could not Reformed churches have two worship and teaching services each Lord's day? One could be run by women. The women could teach and lead. They could sing uninspired hymns and charismatic camp fire songs. They could burn incense and wear popish dress. They could have intricate popish liturgies, candles, bells, dance and so on. Then at 11:00 a.m. they could have "public worship" in which they have Psalm singing, preaching by men, etc. Those who arbitrarily set up a sphere of private worship in which human innovations are permitted have no recourse, on their own presuppositions, in which to avoid such bizarre dualities.

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<sup>40</sup> As noted earlier, Christmas is a monument to past and present idolatry; therefore, even apart from the regulative principle it is still wrong to celebrate it in the home, office, church, country club, and so on.

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On the front cover:

Santa Claus as depicted by Thomas Nast in an 1879 issue of *Harper's Weekly*.

The Santa Claus myth of a fat, white bearded, jolly old man, who wears a red suit, lives at the North Pole, makes toys for children, and

distributes gifts to children all over the world at Christmas time, developed from the Roman Catholic veneration of Saint Nicholas. Nicholas was a real person who lived in the 3rd and 4th centuries in Asia Minor (Turkey). He became the Bishop of Myra and was apparently both generous and popular with the people for after his death various legends surrounding his life arose. Nicholas was declared the patron saint of children by the church. He was venerated (i.e., worshipped) yearly on December 6 by both the Greek and Latin churches. "The celebration of St. Nicholas Day was important for a long time in the Low Countries and Rhine provinces; but the growing concentration of the winter festival on Christmas Day and the rise in importance of the Christmas tree during the last 200 years have caused the St. Nicholas customs to be absorbed into the Christmas celebration" (*Encyclopedia Americana*, (1953 ed.), 20:313).

What is particularly offensive about the Santa Claus mythology from a Christian perspective is the fact that the Divine attributes of omniscience and omnipresence are attributed to Santa Claus. The popular Christmas carol says: "He knows when you are sleeping; he knows if you're awake; he knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake." Santa knows what everyone in the whole world is doing, even in secret. He is portrayed as a coming judge and as having the ability personally to deliver gifts to over two billion children in a few hours. Thus what millions of professing Christians regard as harmless, innocent, and good for their children is nothing less than rank idolatry. The objection that "we know it's not true, therefore it's okay" is unscriptural. The Jews and Christians who were killed for not bowing the knee to idols knew that the false gods were mythological. Santa-god is a myth as are all false gods. Christians have no more business teaching their children to believe in Santa Claus than to believe in Molech, Ashteroth or Baal.

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### ***The Regulative Principle of Worship And Christmas***

*"...which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart."*

"...God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, "I have not commanded them," whatever the Jews devised. There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions, than that they are not commanded by God: for when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to his commands, they pervert true religion.

And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship, in which they absurdly exercise themselves, would fall to the ground. It is indeed a horrible thing for the Papists to seek to discharge their duties towards God by performing their own superstitions. There is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears. Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying his word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error. The Prophet's words then are very important, when he says, that God had *commanded* no such thing, and that it never came to his mind; as though he had said, that men assume too much wisdom, when they devise what he never required, nay, what he never knew."

--John Calvin, Commentary on Jeremiah 7:31

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