

# An Un-Traditional Christmas Sermon

*By Frank Zimmerman*

I NOTICED walking home the other day that quite a few houses have their lights out now, and one house in particular had quite a display of lights, statues, giant illuminated candy canes, and the like. Quite the sight! Oh, and I saw some people decorating their tree, too, as the bus passed by their house one evening. Have you ever questioned why? Why a tree, why the decorations, why the lights? What do these things mean?

Out of all the festivals celebrated in our country, Christmas has come to stand for the time of “peace on earth, good will towards men,” a kind of striving for an ideal society where all is love, joy, and happiness, and each looks after the needs of the other. Did you ever ask yourself as a child (or even now), why can’t this last all year round? I mean, if we can strive to attain this ideal for a few days or weeks, why not just make it the way of life for the whole year, and then instead of dreaming about a better way, we’d actually have it among us?

I can remember that as a child, Christmas was a very big event. It was the crowning time of the year, and one that I looked forward to with excitement and awe. We were raised with the Santa Claus myth too, and I can remember being shocked when I learned that my dear mother whom I loved greatly had actually “lied” to us about Santa Claus and that there really was no such thing. I probably wouldn’t have even doubted it, except some kids at school started saying that it was all a story, and I rather doubted them, since I was pretty sure my mother wouldn’t deceive the children she loved. I was wrong, and it was a bitter disappointment.

You don’t need a university education to figure that if they lied to you about the Santa Claus thing, maybe they lied to you about the Christ child miracle-birth thing also? I mean who ever heard

of a virgin having a child? And who ever heard of reindeer flying?

My dad related a story a number of years ago which was along the same line. He was sick during one Easter, and so was put in a special room, just off from the kitchen. He woke up one night to see his Mom and older sisters busily at work in the kitchen, getting all the Easter things together (this was late at night). Apparently these Easter things (not too sure what they were in a poor country home in Switzerland, but something roughly analogous to our eggs and chocolates) were supposed to be magically delivered or conveyed into the children's baskets, probably by bunnies or something similar. It quickly dawned on his young mind what was actually happening, and that the "magical bunnies" were none other than his mom and older sisters. He thought to himself,

"I'll bet Christmas is the same thing too!"

And he was right. Ever since I had a similar experience that he had as a young lad, I've always doubted that Christmas was really what it was made out to be. After all, how can an ideal of "peace on earth" be based upon lies and deception? It's not a very good foundation to be building such a noble temple upon.

"Ah, but Christmas is for kids, and kids need things to dream about, things to inspire them!"

But what are we really telling them? That their noblest aspirations are just imaginary and can never be attained? Isn't this a bit like the boy who cried wolf? Deceive someone enough times with a false message, and then when the true comes, they'll go "oh, another one of those," and just ignore it. They've "heard that one before." Thus the seeds of distrust which were planted early, bear their sure harvest.

"But...Christmas is the time for giving!"

I've wondered though how it is that the poor can live off one meal a year...and can we really consider ourselves "good people"

when we only take care of someone's needs once a year, and that when they may not need it the most? And further, why do we give to a charity or organization, and thus miss out on the blessing of contacting the needy ourselves, of talking to them, of taking a personal interest in them, and hearing their heartfelt words of thanks to us?

In the constitution of the laws of ancient Israel, many provisions were made for those suffering poverty:

### **God's Care for the Poor**

*from Ellen White, Patriarchs & Prophets, p. 530-536*

To promote the assembling of the people for religious service, as well as to provide for the poor, a second tithe of all the increase was required. Concerning the first tithe, the Lord had declared,

#### **Numbers 18**

<sup>21</sup> I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel.

But in regard to the second He commanded,

#### **Deuteronomy 14**

<sup>23</sup> You shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks; that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

#### **Deuteronomy 14**

<sup>29</sup> And the Levite, (because he has no part nor inheritance with you,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

#### **Deuteronomy 16**

<sup>11</sup> And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite that is within your gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord your God has chosen to place his name there.

<sup>12</sup> And you shall remember that you were a bondman in Egypt:

and you shall observe and do these statutes.

<sup>13</sup> You shall observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that you have gathered in your corn and your wine:

<sup>14</sup> And you shall rejoice in your feast, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within your gates.

This tithe, or its equivalent in money, they were for two years to bring to the place where the sanctuary was established. After presenting a thank offering to God, and a specified portion to the priest, the offerers were to use the remainder for a religious feast, in which the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow should participate. Thus provision was made for the thank offerings and feasts at the yearly festivals, and the people were drawn to the society of the priests and Levites, that they might receive instruction and encouragement in the service of God.

Every third year, however, this second tithe was to be used at home, in entertaining the Levite and the poor, as Moses said,

**Deuteronomy 26**

<sup>12</sup> ...that they may eat within your gates, and be filled.

This tithe would provide a fund for the uses of charity and hospitality.

And further provision was made for the poor. There is nothing, after their recognition of the claims of God, that more distinguishes the laws given by Moses than the liberal, tender, and hospitable spirit enjoined toward the poor. Although God had promised greatly to bless His people, it was not His design that poverty should be wholly unknown among them. He declared that the poor should never cease out of the land. There would ever be those among His people who would call into exercise their sympathy, tenderness, and benevolence. Then, as now, persons were subject to misfortune, sickness, and loss of property; yet so long as they followed the instruction given by God, there were no beggars among them, neither any who suffered for food.

The law of God gave the poor a right to a certain portion of the produce of the soil. When hungry, a man was at liberty to go to his neighbor's field or orchard or vineyard, and eat of the grain

or fruit to satisfy his hunger. It was in accordance with this permission that the disciples of Jesus plucked and ate of the standing grain as they passed through a field upon the Sabbath day.

All the gleanings of harvest field, orchard, and vineyard, belonged to the poor.

#### **Deuteronomy 24**

<sup>19</sup> When you cut down your harvest in your field, and have forgot a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to fetch it....

<sup>20</sup> When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again....

<sup>21</sup> When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

<sup>22</sup> And you shall remember that you were a bondman in the land of Egypt.

#### **Leviticus 19**

<sup>9</sup> And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.

<sup>10</sup> And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.

Every seventh year special provision was made for the poor. The sabbatical year, as it was called, began at the end of the harvest. At the seedtime, which followed the ingathering, the people were not to sow; they should not dress the vineyard in the spring; and they must expect neither harvest nor vintage. Of that which the land produced spontaneously they might eat while fresh, but they were not to lay up any portion of it in their storehouses. The yield of this year was to be free for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and even for the creatures of the field.

#### **Exodus 23**

<sup>10</sup> And six years you shall sow your land, and shall gather in the fruits thereof:

<sup>11</sup> But the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie still; that the poor of your people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner you shall deal with your vineyard, and with your oliveyard.

### **Leviticus 25**

<sup>5</sup> That which grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, neither gather the grapes of your vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.

But if the land ordinarily produced only enough to supply the wants of the people, how were they to subsist during the year when no crops were gathered? For this the promise of God made ample provision.

### **Leviticus 25**

<sup>21</sup> I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.

<sup>22</sup> And you shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in you shall eat of the old store.

The observance of the sabbatical year was to be a benefit to both the land and the people. The soil, lying untilled for one season, would afterward produce more plentifully. The people were released from the pressing labors of the field; and while there were various branches of work that could be followed during this time, all enjoyed greater leisure, which afforded opportunity for the restoration of their physical powers for the exertions of the following years. They had more time for meditation and prayer, for acquainting themselves with the teachings and requirements of the Lord, and for the instruction of their households.

In the sabbatical year the Hebrew slaves were to be set at liberty, and they were not to be sent away portionless. The Lord's direction was:

### **Deuteronomy 15**

<sup>13</sup> When you send him out free, you shall not let him go away empty.

<sup>14</sup> You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, and out of your floor, and out of your winepress: of that wherewith the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give unto him.

The hire of a laborer was to be promptly paid:

### **Deuteronomy 24**

<sup>14</sup> You shall not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of your brethren, or of your strangers that are in your land within your gates:

<sup>15</sup> At his day you shall give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it...

Special directions were also given concerning the treatment of fugitives from service:

**Deuteronomy 23**

<sup>15</sup> You shall not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto you.

<sup>16</sup> He shall dwell with you, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of your gates, where it suits him best: you shall not oppress him.

To the poor, the seventh year was a year of release from debt. The Hebrews were enjoined at all times to assist their needy brethren by lending them money without interest. To take usury from a poor man was expressly forbidden:

**Leviticus 25**

<sup>35</sup> If your brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with you; then you shall relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with you.

<sup>36</sup> Take no usury of him, or increase: but fear your God; that your brother may live with you.

<sup>37</sup> You shall not give him your money upon usury, nor lend him your victuals for increase.

If the debt remained unpaid until the year of release, the principal itself could not be recovered. The people were expressly warned against withholding from their brethren needed assistance on account of this:

**Deuteronomy 15**

<sup>7</sup> If there be among you a poor man of one of your brethren within any of your gates in your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother:

<sup>9</sup> Beware that there be not a thought in your wicked heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand;" and your eye be evil against your poor brother, and you give him nought; and he cries unto the Lord against you, and it be sin unto you.

<sup>11</sup> The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, saying, You shall open your hand wide unto your brother, to your poor, and to your needy, in your land,

<sup>8</sup> ...and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wants.

None need fear that their liberality would bring them to want. Obedience to God's commandments would surely result in prosperity.

### **Deuteronomy 15**

<sup>6</sup> You shall lend unto many nations, but you shall not borrow; and you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you.

After "seven sabbaths of years," "seven times seven years," came that great year of release—the jubilee.

### **Leviticus 25**

<sup>9</sup> Then shall you cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound... throughout all your land.

<sup>10</sup> And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and you shall return every man unto his possession, and you shall return every man unto his family.

"On the tenth day of the seventh month, in the Day of Atonement," the trumpet of the jubilee was sounded. Throughout the land, wherever the Jewish people dwelt, the sound was heard, calling upon all the children of Jacob to welcome the year of release. On the great Day of Atonement satisfaction was made for the sins of Israel, and with gladness of heart the people would welcome the jubilee.

As in the sabbatical year, the land was not to be sown or reaped, and all that it produced was to be regarded as the rightful property of the poor. Certain classes of Hebrew slaves—all who did not receive their liberty in the sabbatical year—were now set free. But that which especially distinguished the year of jubilee was the reversion of all landed property to the family of the original possessor. By the special direction of God he land had been divided by lot. After the division was made no one was at liberty to trade his estate. Neither was he to sell his land unless poverty compelled him to do so, and then, whenever he or any of his kindred might desire to redeem it, the purchaser must not refuse to sell it; and if unredeemed, it would revert to its first possessor or his heirs in the year of jubilee.



The Lord declared to Israel:

**Leviticus 25**

<sup>23</sup> The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.

The people were to be impressed with the fact that it was God's land which they were permitted to possess for a time; that He was the rightful owner, the original proprietor, and that He would have special consideration made for the poor and unfortunate. It was to be impressed upon the minds of all that the poor have as much right to a place in God's world as have the more wealthy.

Such were the provisions made by our merciful Creator, to lessen suffering, to bring some ray of hope, to flash some gleam of sunshine, into the life of the destitute and distressed. The Lord would place a check upon the inordinate love of property and power. Great evils would result from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class, and the poverty and degradation of another. Without some restraint the power of the wealthy would become a monopoly, and the poor, though in every respect fully as worthy in God's sight, would be regarded and treated as inferior to their more prosperous brethren. The sense of this oppression would arouse the passions of the poorer class. There would be a feeling of despair and desperation which would tend to demoralize society and open the door to crimes of every description. The regulations that God established were designed to promote social equality. The provisions of the sabbatical year and the jubilee would, in a great measure, set right that which during the interval had gone wrong in the social and political economy of the nation.

These regulations were designed to bless the rich no less than the poor. They would restrain avarice and a disposition for self-exaltation, and would cultivate a noble spirit of benevolence; and by fostering good will and confidence between all classes, they would promote social order, the stability of government. We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and whatever we can do to benefit and uplift others will reflect in blessing upon ourselves. The law of mutual dependence runs through all classes of society. The poor are not more dependent upon the

rich than are the rich upon the poor. While the one class ask a share in the blessings which God has bestowed upon their wealthier neighbors, the other need the faithful service, the strength of brain and bone and muscle, that are the capital of the poor.

Great blessings were promised to Israel on condition of obedience to the Lord's directions.

**Leviticus 26**

<sup>4</sup> I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

<sup>5</sup> And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

<sup>6</sup> And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.

<sup>12</sup> I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be My people.

<sup>14</sup> But if you will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments;

<sup>15</sup> And if you shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that you will not do all my commandments, but that you break my covenant:

<sup>16</sup> I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

<sup>17</sup> And I will set my face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and you shall flee when none pursues you.

There are many who urge with great enthusiasm that all men should have an equal share in the temporal blessings of God. But this was not the purpose of the Creator. A diversity of condition is one of the means by which God designs to prove and develop character. Yet He intends that those who have worldly possessions shall regard themselves merely as stewards of His goods, as entrusted with means to be employed for the benefit of the suffering and the needy.

Christ has said that we shall have the poor always with us, and He unites His interest with that of His suffering people. The heart of our Redeemer sympathizes with the poorest and lowliest of His earthly children. He tells us that they are His representatives on earth. He has placed them among us to awaken in our hearts the love that He feels toward the suffering and oppressed. Pity and benevolence shown to them are accepted by Christ as if shown to Himself. An act of cruelty or neglect toward them is regarded as though done to Him.

If the law given by God for the benefit of the poor had continued to be carried out, how different would be the present condition of the world, morally, spiritually, and temporally! Selfishness and self-importance would not be manifested as now, but each would cherish a kind regard for the happiness and welfare of others; and such widespread destitution as is now seen in many lands would not exist.

The principles which God has enjoined, would prevent the terrible evils that in all ages have resulted from the oppression of the rich toward the poor and the suspicion and hatred of the poor toward the rich. While they might hinder the amassing of great wealth and the indulgence of unbounded luxury, they would prevent the consequent ignorance and degradation of tens of thousands whose ill-paid servitude is required to build up these colossal fortunes.

They would bring a peaceful solution of those problems that now threaten to fill the world with anarchy and bloodshed.

Now those were practical laws that applied all during the year. But Christmas, as we keep it, cannot possibly be kept all during the year, and pretty well everyone, except our imaginative children, realize this. So it seems that we have an ideal being celebrated, but the way in which we celebrate it makes it impossible and impractical of being carried out.

The ideal is: putting away selfishness and self-centeredness we look each one after the needs of others.

The way we keep it is: put a few dollars towards charity, and then lavish the rest on clothes, ornaments, cards, gifts for our

friends and loved ones, all manner of rich and fine foods, etc. In essence, we have a feast! We put away selfishness by indulging ourselves. That's a bit like saying,

“Abstinence? I'll drink to that!”

You have to go through Christmas practically penniless one of these years to really understand what the season is like to a poor person. I did this one year, and during the time couldn't help wondering at the extravagance and waste. While I was wondering how to pay for next weeks groceries, strings of colored lights were going up on houses all around, the cost of which could have filled my cupboard for many days. All these trappings which people delighted in merely mocked my wretched state, and made it seem even more wretched.

Now I had God, and friends who did not need to wait until the right time of the year to give, so I wasn't bitter or anything of the sort, but the experience did make me wonder. And surely there are souls out there that don't have the things I had to sustain me, and are waiting, hoping, for some person to reach out to them, to reveal to them that God lives in the hearts of other humans and cares about them too.

### **Romans 8**

<sup>19</sup> For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Which brings me back to the tree...consider the tree. Here we have two trees:

1. A living tree, out in the wild forests, stretching its arms in the free, open air, sheltering birds and other small creatures, and sending out its life-giving oxygen for all to breath;
2. A dead tree, sitting in someone's living room, it's boughs drooping under the weight of artificial adornments, instead of dwelling under the light of stars it has the light of col-

ored bulbs, instead of sending out a living fragrance it is drying up and withering.

One of these trees is a living tree, unadorned and plain, yet wholly alive and shedding blessings on all sides. The other tree is a dead tree, but adorned in such a way as to make it appear living, nay to make it appear supernatural! Yet underneath the disguise it is dead, and no longer serves the purpose it was intended to serve. It is deceptive, for while it shows itself as being alive, it actually is dead. This is an allegory. Trees are a symbol of the heart of man, for

**Matthew 7**

<sup>17</sup> ...a good tree brings forth good fruit, and an evil tree evil fruit.

One heart is pure and free, the way God intended it to be, with the disposition to bless others springing continually from within. This one needs no artificial adornment for its life is its adornment.

The other heart is not free, nor does it have that living principle springing forth. To cover its lack it must decorate itself with “good works”, deceitful imaginations, an outward show...with celebrations and ceremonies. While initially these celebrations seem to make the soul “alive”, it all turns out to be a dream and an excitement, and falls so far short of the real life within that it only makes the lack more evident and leaves the soul with an unsatisfied emptiness.

And so, just as the tree is eventually stripped of its ornaments and thrown out, so does this soul find that its pleasures and excitements are short-lived, and that it must with bleakness face the coming days.

Just as there was a heightened expectation and excitement, so is there a corresponding disappointment and depression. This is the nature of all artificial pleasures and put-on strivings.

Now we have not even discussed the pain and trauma of being “forced to give” (ie. “I must get them something or they’ll think I don’t love them”), or of being judged if the gift is not expensive

enough. These and so many other things brand this ceremony, which superficially seems to be the closest thing to heaven on earth, as something that has in no wise the signature of heaven upon it, but is instead the grasping of barren souls at something they know they've lost but don't know how to regain.

Here is one more interesting point before I end this. You know how gold and silver decorations are quite popular in this season. Perhaps you didn't know that these colors will actually be seen on the foliage in the earth made new, but it will again not be a put-on thing, like they are now, but something inherent.

**Testimonies vol. 1, p. 61:**

Within the city we saw the tree of life and the throne of God. Out of the throne came a pure river of water, and on either side of the river was the tree of life. On one side of the river was a trunk of a tree, and a trunk on the other side of the river, both of pure, transparent **gold**. At first I thought I saw two trees; I looked again, and saw that they were united at the top in one tree. So it was the tree of life on either side of the river of life. Its branches bowed to the place where we stood; and the fruit was glorious, which looked like **gold** mixed with **silver**.

**Testimonies vol. 1, p. 68:**

And I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers, and as I plucked them, I cried out: "They will never fade." Next I saw a field of tall grass, most glorious to behold; it was living green, and had a reflection of **silver** and **gold**, as it waved proudly to the glory of King Jesus. Then we entered a field full of all kinds of beasts—the lion, the lamb, the leopard, and the wolf, all together in perfect union. We passed through the midst of them, and they followed on peaceably after. Then we entered a wood, not like the dark woods we have here; no, no; but light, and all over glorious; the branches of the trees waved to and fro, and we all cried out: "We will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods." We passed through the woods, for we were on our way to Mount Zion.

And so ends my Christmas sermon. If you made it this far you have done well! I hope you can find in these words not just a

tearing down of old traditions, but at least a hint of something better, more satisfying, and more enduring.

**Question:** “But how do you speak so poorly about Christmas? I have been happy enjoying the sights of the season, the opportunity for families to spend time together in harmony, for neighborhoods to unify for a simple goal: beauty.”

**Answer:** I have sought these things too, and could not find enough of them in these celebrations to satisfy my soul. What? Unity, harmony, and beauty only once a year? How hard is this to endure. Perhaps some might say, “well that’s all there is to life, and you would be wise to just enjoy it and make the best of it.” I can’t buy that. There **is** more and there is better. I have tasted it, and can no longer settle for the shadow.

Let my heart be the manger that the Christ-child is born in and in which he resides, let me have the fellowship of the rich and poor, high and low, the conversation with kindred spirits, the guardianship of angels, let me exercise kindness to the humbler animals that come near this stable, let the light of God’s guiding star ever direct my ways, and the ways of all pilgrims of like mind, until we meet together in a land reserved for those who have not been ashamed to shelter the despised child. That is my Christmas.

**Question:** “I’m sorry you were so hurt by the dissolution of the Santa myth. I myself still believe in Santa Claus and all the wonder of Christmas. But I believe that Santa is within everyone, that he merely represents the giving spirit. Isn’t this a good thing?”

**Answer:** Why do we have to be so ashamed of the “giving spirit” that we hide him in a strange personage? Wouldn’t it be a great blessing to our children to know that it was “us”, their parents, or older friends, who were so filled with the giving spirit that it overflowed to them? Why do we trick them into believing it was a stranger? It pains me to see our young ones robbed of

this knowledge by a myth. This does not bind the hearts of the young to the older.

**Question:** “It sounds to me like you only find selfishness and greed in this festival. I am sorry to hear that.”

**Answer:** This is not true. I find a *striving* after a better ideal, and inasmuch as this is there, it is good. But this striving is not the end in itself. It is merely an outward indication to us that there is something better and we should not stop searching for it. It is a tragedy when we stop and become satisfied with the striving when the reality lies just before us.

It is like the role of the Law. The Law was meant to lead us to Christ, the life. Christmas is like this, it is a “law” that at this time of the year, all should be joyful and give. Some enter into this law with a willing heart, and some with reluctance. But you cannot establish love with laws and regulations, so Christmas has come and gone for almost 2000 years, and we are no closer to “peace on earth, good will toward men” than when it was first kept. It is not working! Can’t we see this?

There is no question that much of what is expressed during this season comes from real and sincere desires. This is not to be condemned, but rather cherished. But to stop with these desires is to miss the whole purpose of them. They are to lead us to the reality: that which does not pass away with the season, but endures.

This season is supposed to be all because of Christ. Consider Him then: a man who did nothing of Himself, nor for Himself (that is, not by His own planning), but always sought first to reveal God, and secondly to heal, forgive, and release souls that were bound and burdened by guilt, sickness, and the shackles of inherited and cultivated habits of sin. This man did not need a once-a-year Christmas, for his whole life was one constant outpouring. This is the weapon he used to overcome darkness: the outpouring of his life. He destroyed the works of evil by restoring men in body, mind and soul. That is what his birth represents.



That is what his life was. That is what we are to be. To settle for anything less is to have a manger with no child in it.

**Question:** “But if we are too weak or too busy or too hypocritical to celebrate Christmas all year long, is it so wrong to lament the celebration when it does come? I can understand wishing the feelings of ‘good will toward man’ were more constant, but knowing that they are not, why not join in the expression when it does occur?”

**Answer:** Because we cannot honor Christ in this manner. We treat Him as if He were a man, as if we could please Him with our show and display. But this is not what He wants of us. He desires to see truth and peace in the inward man, something that lasts beyond the confines of a once-yearly celebration. Now don’t misconstrue this; I’m not saying that it’s a “sin” to keep Christmas or anything like that, just that it will not gain us any particular merit with God, unless it works in us a change that is lasting.

Every great reformation that God wrought in the past was done in this simple manner: God worked upon the heart of a man to free it from the thralldom of sin. That man then taught this truth to others and the influence extended out like waves on a lake. Look at the great Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A single monk struggled to find acceptance with God. Finally God quelled the storm that was in his heart and put His peace there. This monk then taught others and the stranglehold that the Catholic church had on the bodies, souls, and consciences of men was broken. No political enactments or laws of men could have done it, but God did it by His word alone.

This is the way to establish “peace on earth, good will toward men.” When God has been honored in this way, real abiding results have been seen.