



## ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW

1. From a very young age, our grandmothers and our immediate and extended families would tell us stories about how they celebrated Christmas when they were children. They spoke of an oral tradition that shaped the customs and everyday life of our families. Year after year, as we grew older, we inherited those customs and added new ones—those that felt modern in our time. Listening to the stories of our ancestors now, from this perspective, I have come to realize that they were doing the very same thing: adding something new.

1.1 All of our ancestors came from one of the Christian denominations that have existed in our regions for centuries. Church ceremonial practices were—and still are—deeply rooted in the life of a Christian family.

1.2 Alongside the oral tradition of Christmas, we now also have a strong current of commercial Christmas that has extended its reach into the church's oral tradition. As someone who was born into such an environment, I love and cherish both.

1.3 But in this article, we are dealing with a different question:

“How did the apostles understand the meaning of Christmas?”

Although this topic has been worn thin throughout history, and many biblical teachers have offered their views on the “true and real meaning of Christmas,” I believe that the same thing happened to them as happened to our ancestors through the generations—each generation kept adding

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something new, something modern. I believe that throughout history, the “apostolic meaning of Christmas” has been changed, bent, misinterpreted, and wrongly taught. That is why today we are left with a completely mixed and colorful picture of what Christmas truly means.

## A DISTORTED PICTURE OF CHRISTMAS

2. The picture of apostolic Christmas and its meaning—and this is my personal conviction—deserves to be told by the apostles themselves, not by oral church tradition. The Christmas story as lived by the apostles is rich, deep, full of drama and wonder, and ultimately reveals to us the power, holiness, love, and righteousness of our God the Father, whose name truly deserves to be celebrated forever.

2.1 Perhaps to some of you, my introduction sounds very familiar. You may be thinking, *“Many biblical teachers have already claimed they know the true meaning of Christmas—who are you to say that you know what it really means?”* And I agree with you. I, as an individual, have no such authority. That is why I said earlier: my desire is simply to try to convey to you how the apostles lived the meaning of Christmas. In the end, you decide for yourselves whether what I am saying makes sense or not, and whether you want to accept what I will share here.

2.2 Before we turn to the biblical text, I want to say this: as an individual, I have no problem at all with the commercial Christmas that exists among us today. On the contrary—I love that time of year. The gatherings with our loved ones, singing Christmas songs, lighting fires in our stoves, drinking mulled wine, eating sweets, and watching the lights on the Christmas tree dance to the rhythm of carols. It is beautiful to be part of that. Who wouldn’t love such an atmosphere—the peace and love we feel during those few weeks?

2.3. But my desire is to show how far our church traditions have moved away from the truth. I believe that the “truth about Christmas” proclaimed by our Christian denominations has become a distorted picture of Christmas.

## THE POPULAR TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

3. All right—if we want to understand what I call “apostolic Christmas” (for the purpose of this article, that is how I refer to the “true meaning of Christmas” that we celebrate), we must turn to the Epistles written by the apostles themselves. From the Epistles, we can draw an idea of what apostolic Christmas is, and then apply that idea to our lives today.

3.1 One of the first truths we must understand is this: Christmas is not an event where “man loves man.” Christmas is a truth that speaks of “God’s love for humanity.” The apostle Paul writes in *Romans 5:8*: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Here, Paul speaks of a free gift that God gives us out of His love.

— God decided to give us a gift while we were still sinners! —

3.2 What does that gift look like? In His mercy, God gives the most wondrous and profound gift—but He does not give it to everyone; He gives it to “the chosen.” He grants the chosen entry into a

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kingdom that is to come in the future upon the earth. Along with that, He gives them a redeemed heart that will long, with all its strength, to inherit that kingdom.

3.3. With that said, today's popular truth about Christmas (oral tradition) roughly assumes this: "Christmas is the arrival of peace among people. If humanity as a whole would just believe in the spirit of Christmas, there would be no more wars, conflicts, or any other form of evil we know today. If we could only understand the meaning of Jesus' life, Jesus would eliminate the hatred and cruelty that exist between people. If only we could..."

## WHAT MATTERS IS WHAT THE APOSTLES SAY

4. Is that true? I believe it is not. But even that is not the most important thing. What matters is what the apostles say is the true picture of Christmas. The apostle Peter writes in *1 Peter 1:3–4*: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

4.1 I believe the same idea lies behind both the words of the apostle Paul and the words of the apostle Peter. What do I mean by that? Paul says, "*While we were still in our sins, He showed His love toward us.*" Peter says, "*He raised us from the dead and caused us to be born again for His kingdom.*"

— Who causes us to be born again? God does. It is a gift. It is grace. It does not come from us. —

4.2 We also see Peter describing what that kingdom will be like: it will be undefiled, imperishable, holy, righteous, and so on.

4.3 When we look at humanity throughout all of history, we realize that the promise Peter speaks of here has not yet been fulfilled. We are, just as in the past, a humanity inclined toward corruption and evil, and every kingdom that has existed—and still exists today—has committed all kinds of corrupt and evil deeds. From this, we can conclude that God has not yet established His kingdom on earth. In other words, Peter is speaking of a promise that will be fulfilled in the future.

4.4 In contrast to popular belief (oral tradition), which teaches that if we only believe in the spirit of Christmas the world will become a much better place, the apostles Paul and Peter tell us that God Himself must establish His righteous kingdom on earth. This is not our decision; it is God's decision as to when all this will happen. In *1 Peter 1:5*, Peter writes that all of this will be revealed in the last time.

4.5 Someone might say, "*This text is not speaking about a physical kingdom on earth; it is speaking about eternal life in 'heaven,' that is, a spiritual kingdom. After all, Peter himself writes about an inheritance kept in heaven.*" And of course, if we read the text literally—and through the lens of Christian tradition—it is often interpreted that way.

4.6 But when the apostle Peter, as a Jew, thinks about a kingdom, he is speaking of the kingdom God promised to King David. God promised David that his descendant (whom we know to be Jesus) would

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rule righteously over Israel and the rest of the world. When Jesus returns for the second time, that promise will be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

4.7 But someone may ask, *“Then what do Peter’s words mean when he says this inheritance is kept in heaven? Isn’t that a clear statement that the kingdom is in heaven and not on earth?”* We must try to understand the thought and the idea behind the author’s words.

4.8 When the authors of the Bible speak of heaven, they speak of a place no created being can enter. This is not the heavens within the created order; it is the dwelling place of our transcendent God, who exists *outside of space and time*. And if He has decided something in His heavens, then it will surely come to pass within our reality.

4.9 In other words, the apostle Peter encourages us that nothing and no one can change the will of the One who dwells in heaven. If He has decided to give someone that promise—an inheritance—then it will indeed be fulfilled on the earth where we live.

— We will never float in heaven as bodiless spiritual beings. That is not the biblical perspective. We were created as human beings, and we will always be human beings. —

## WITHOUT A KING, THERE IS NO PEACE

5. All right, let us move forward slowly. Even if all people on earth were to believe at the same time in the spirit of Christmas—as oral tradition teaches—I believe peace would still not come to the earth. Why? Because we, on our own, without Him (Jesus), are incapable of accomplishing this. Unless He literally and physically reigns as the supreme King—as a righteous King with ultimate military, political, and economic authority—peace can never be established among sinful, evil-inclined human beings. Evil always smolders within us, and it always will. That is why we cannot create such a society by ourselves. We need a King who is holy and righteous in order to build a society that truly enjoys peace and blessing.

5.1 The apostle Peter writes in *1 Peter 1:6–7*: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith—more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

5.2 What did the life of an apostle—or any other believer who celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ—actually look like? Although they loved and celebrated the day Jesus was born, their lives were marked by hardship, rejection, and persecution. Jesus Himself said: *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.”*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If you wish, read sermon no. 10 (Gospel of Luke 1:67–80). “Zechariah’s Song” beautifully describes the Kingdom of God—who it is promised to and where it will be fulfilled.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 10:34–36

5.3 Our Lord Jesus' statement is completely different from the idea oral tradition wants to serve us. At the same time, Jesus' words align perfectly with what the apostle Peter wrote above—that we must pass, if necessary, through various trials while we are here. Yet those trials ultimately glorify our Father; they are more valuable than anything humanity considers precious in this life—more valuable even than gold.

5.4 Our faith—if it is authentic—will appear foolish, incomprehensible, and ultimately offensive to the world. But in the eyes of the angels in heaven, in the eyes of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, it is glorious; it is the most precious and most important thing. It glorifies our God, who gave us faith as a free gift. That gift leads us to the knowledge of and love for our Creator.

5.5 Yet that same gift also makes us outsiders in this world. It makes us misunderstood, despised, and perhaps even persecuted. True apostolic Christmas does not bring us peace; it does not bring happiness in human relationships. It often brings sorrow and pain.

5.6 Recently I told one sister: *"These days bring me both sorrow and joy. Sorrow, because year after year—since I began walking with Christ—I see that most people do not want to know the true meaning of Christmas. And joy, because my wife and I have been blessed by God to understand the apostolic meaning of Christmas."*

## THAT WILL BE THE DAY

6. Someone might say, *"Who would want such a Christmas? Your Christmas sounds sad and depressing. I want gifts, a tree, Santa Claus movies, cookies, a fireplace, songs..."* And I want all of that too. But the truth about real Christmas matters more to me. The motivation—despite everything we must endure—is magnificent and beyond human understanding. Only a redeemed heart understands this truth. Peter reminds us of it in *1 Peter 1:8*: "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

6.1 Let us try to describe a Christian who rejoices in the One he has never seen. How did the apostles live the Christmas message and then pass it on to others? I believe the following thought lived in the mind and heart—in the very depths of the apostles' being—when they proclaimed apostolic Christmas to others: *"Jesus did not come to bring peace between people; He came to bring war. He came to fight the decisive battle in the war between good and evil. He came to bring hope of victory to the chosen ones who are in the midst of that battle. Christmas does not mean 'peace'; Christmas means 'victory.' Christmas does not mean the end of suffering; it means encouragement that leads us to persevere in our faith despite the trials we endure. A day will come when we will be able to lay down our weapons. A day will come when we will no longer have to fight the evil that dwells within us and around us."*

6.2 God calls that day "the Day of the Lord." It is the day when God the Father will literally and physically, through His Son Jesus Christ, establish His kingdom on earth. Then we—who have not seen Him—will see Him face to face and worship Him. We who were persecuted will then be

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glorified. On that day we will become priests of God,<sup>3</sup> and those who persecuted us will have to submit to our righteous King Jesus. We will teach them about God's righteousness, love, mercy, and His holiness.

6.3 But that day has not yet come. In the meantime, the true meaning of Christmas is this: "Our hero, our future King, entered the battle to fight for our lives and our souls. He drove our enemy into retreat, and because of this hope, the child of God celebrates Christmas—because it is no longer dead."<sup>4</sup> It celebrates Christmas because it is no longer a slave to sin as it once was. The gaze of the child of God is fixed on the promise that God will one day fulfill through His Son, Jesus Christ.

6.4 In other words, when Mary, Joseph, the magi, and the shepherds looked at that small child in the manger, they did not see an innocent baby who had now brought peace and joy to the earth. In their eyes, they saw a future King—one who would one day be mighty, fearless, holy, and righteous. They saw a King who would one day finally defeat evil on the earth. And those who belong to Him will at last enjoy that peace and will themselves promote that peace to the rest of the world when they become priests of God.

## ONLY IN GOD IS MY SOUL AT REST

7. Before we reach the end, I want to draw out a few practical applications for us today as we celebrate Christmas. Christmas is not something we celebrate for just a few weeks each year in order to blur or escape the reality happening around us. That temporary and false peace is not—and cannot be—the peace of God that He desires for us.

7.1 If we choose to believe in apostolic Christmas, then we commit ourselves to fighting evil for the rest of our lives. Why? Because God has promised us VICTORY OVER EVIL. When an individual truly comes to this truth in their own life and personally commits to persevering in faith, they become free from the illusory, false, and temporary joy of Christmas peace that our culture promotes.

7.2 Don't get me wrong, I love midnight Christmas services in church, lighting the Yule log, beautiful Christmas cards from family and friends, Advent events in our cities, ice rinks, Christmas stalls full of food, sweets, and lights. I love the Christmas music played live in city squares—where we dance together and laugh to the rhythm of the music. I love all of it.

7.3 But that is not the foundation of my joy. The foundation of my joy is the coming of the King who will one day defeat evil on the earth. And because of that, I can genuinely enjoy commercial Christmas.

—I do not seek peace in it, fully aware that it cannot give it to me.—

7.4 Can I live without it? Absolutely. But if I live in a time when I can enjoy the warmth of my home, a decorated tree in the corner, and sing songs with my family—why wouldn't I? I see this as a blessing from our God.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:1–6

7.5 I also have a short message for us who are parents. I believe we should not deny our children the joy of commercial Christmas, but at the same time we must warn them about the Pharisaic leaven that lives among us—the oral tradition of the church.

7.6 Just as Jesus and the apostles did, it is our duty to teach children about apostolic Christmas. We do this in the hope that one day they too will recognize how false and temporary the peace is that our culture teaches. Perhaps our children will one day personally commit themselves to taking part in the fight against evil. Perhaps they too will want to faithfully follow the path toward the gift God desires to give us—the salvation of the soul.

—This is the most important message of Christmas, and it is the most magnificent gift our children can receive under the tree this year.—

7.7 In closing, there is a time of peace and a time of unrest in the life of a believer. All of this is part of the process every child of God must go through. When the time comes for my culture to persecute me because of my convictions, because of my true love—namely, why Christ truly came into the world—then so be it. For that truth, I hope I am ready to die if necessary.

7.8 I hope this article helps you in making your decision: do you want temporary and false peace, or do you want eternal and true peace? King David wrote in *Psalm 62:6–7*:

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.”