

The Spirit of Christmas

Christmas is my favorite time of year. I love Christmas lights, the smell of cold, crisp air, the sight & sound of falling snow, and most of all I love the attitude that goes along with this special time of year. However, I am becoming increasingly alarmed at the commercialization of & desensitization to what Christmas is all about. “Merry Christmas” has, at the whim of radical humanist activists, been demoted to a mere “Happy holidays.” The saddest part to me is the fact that many people who claim Christianity and should know better are the very ones who propagate this attitude. What is Christmas about, and what can your family do to put Christ back in the center of this season?

The commercial Christmas season now begins so early that it nearly makes Thanksgiving obsolete! Large department stores use television screens and posters to scream, “Give the gift of . . .” when in reality they mean “Buy, spend, you need, you want.” Layaways, credit cards, and “specials” encourage people to go into debt under the guise of making families happy. In recent years, I’ve noticed a sinister and selfish change of tune to “Treat yourself this year,” or “This season give yourself . . .” Apparently the justification of giving is no longer even necessary. Now, simply appealing to selfish motives and desires is enough to sell the commercial side of Christmas. However, before you get too upset about it all, I encourage you to take a serious look at your own family, and think about how you yourself may be falling into this trap. What are you teaching your own children about the meaning of Christmas? Sure, you may read the story of Christ’s birth on Christmas morning *before* ripping into vast piles of commercial wares, but are you really getting the significance of what happened 2,000 years ago?

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:4-8) I don’t know about you, but when I compare my Christmas spirit to this one, I come up *very* short. I believe that the Christmas spirit shown in this passage is not one of amassing a large pile of treasures under one’s own Christmas tree to give to one’s own family, but rather one of giving yourself, your time, your money, and ultimately who you are for the good of others. Try as you might, this probably is not going to happen all in one year. However, I want to give some practical suggestions that our family and others have found helpful.

This year, instead of giving gifts to your immediate family members, have a talk about the true spirit of Christmas. If your family is in accord about changing the way you do things (a heart change it would be best to allow each one to make voluntarily), then you can agree on one or more of the following or similar ideas.

1. Figure out what you would be spending on gifts for each other. Then, find a worthy Christ-like cause to donate to (such as a pro-life pregnancy care center, a family struggling with medical bills or the loss of a job, the homeless or poor in your own community, etc.), then take the money and use it for those causes. This may mean your children shopping for Christmas gifts they themselves would love, then taking them to a

- needy family in person. Maybe it will take the form of buying & delivering groceries for a family whose breadwinner recently lost their job. Be creative, and have fun!
2. When relatives ask what you would like for Christmas, ask them to use the money they would have spent on your family to do similar things. Ask them to donate to the local food bank, homeless shelter, etc. You probably won't miss the gifts terribly, and the true spirit of Christmas will have an opportunity to spread in this way.
 3. Donate your time to a soup kitchen this Christmas. Take the time to visit people from your own church that are sick or needy. Don't simply offer to pray for someone this year – find out what they actually need, and volunteer to help them, whether financially or physically.
 4. Does your church have an outreach ministry? I mean, a true ministry that does not bring any income or prestige to the church, but ministers right where people are hurting most? You'll notice that Christ's ministry focused on these things, and thereby opened the doors to the hearts of people who otherwise would not have cared to listen. This year, volunteer to start a free clothing ministry, a free financial advice ministry, a free food pantry, a free legal advice ministry, a free medical or dental clinic, a free . . . you get the idea! The Church is the body of Christ! You are His hands and feet, and He expects you to reach people where they are, not simply expect them to walk into your cozy church building! You probably have a specific set of skills that could be very helpful to other people. Can you cook well? Start a free cooking & nutrition class. Are you a good writer? Be a catalyst for change. Can you build, weld, or do woodworking? Teach someone else, or use your skills to lend a helping hand. The opportunities are endless . . . I believe that Christ expects us to use them! Don't forget the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30).
 5. Spend this Christmas day with your family volunteering at a homeless shelter, food pantry, or some other outreach. This will instill the true spirit of what Christmas is all about, as well as bringing happiness to yourself and others!

Now, I realize that some will criticize this article as advocating the “social gospel.” However, it is not. Christ's ministry focused on the society around Him. He lived the “social gospel.” But, like Christ, we are not supposed to do good things as an end in themselves. Doing good things does not save us, but rather demonstrates that we have been saved. It also opens doors to hearts that will never open if you stay inside the walls of your home and your church. I would like to end with James 2:14-18, 26 which says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’” The chapter goes on to give examples from Scripture of this very thing, then ends with, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” Faith alone is sufficient to save your soul, but how does a dying world know your faith? How does the man across the street struggling to feed his family know the difference Christ can make? He won't come to your church to find out. This Christmas season, take Christ to the world. Try worrying less about getting gifts, and consider instead how to be a gift. It's what Christ did, and this is the true Christmas spirit.