

4th & Stewart church of Christ

"...upon this rock I will build my church;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
~ Matthew 16:18



December 22, 2019

Contact Us:

3201 4th Street
Brownwood, TX 76801

325-646-7102

www.4thstreetcoc.org
office@4thstreetcoc.org

Meeting Times:

Sunday:

Bible Study9:45 AM
Worship10:40 AM
Care, Inc. Service 2:30 PM
Worship 6:00 PM

Wednesday:

Ladies Bible Class 10:00 AM
Bible Study 7:00 PM

Elders:

Gene Bannister..... Billy Chism

Deacons:

Mike Bannister..... Don Smith

John Barnum

Preacher:

Johnny McCaghren

Works We Support:

Cherokee Home for Children
Gospel Broadcast Network
Heart of Texas Bible Camp (Bangs)
Mission Printing
Rohan Jones, Africa
World Bible School

Holiday Observances

It is that time of year again when one holiday after another is observed: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and then New Years. As usual for this time of year, the question arises as to how Christians are to treat these events. Should we celebrate them, or should we ignore them? Though ignoring them is quite difficult; besides the numerous advertisements by stores hoping to meet their sales goals this year, we find many denominations capitalizing on these same events. Bulletins run articles on being thankful in November, giving in December, and making resolutions in January. Even Halloween gets attention by being denounced as a celebration of witchcraft. Sometimes a denominational group makes the paper in their attempts to change horror houses into places that show the horrors of an immoral world.

Christmas is the big event in the denominational world. Lobbies are decorated, special events are held, concerts, musicals; it must be difficult for members to find a spare moment. A few years back one group in my area advertised a decorated slide that would deliver presents to your little ones (\$15 admission fee). Few resist the opportunities to profit from the season.

How It All Started

The calendar of "Christian" events arose as a result of apostasy from the simple forms of worship used in the first century. "The Christian church year, however, developed itself spontaneously from the demands of the Christian worship and public life, after the precedent of the Old Testament cults, with no positive direction from Christ or the apostles" [Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Third Period, AD 311-590, The Church Year]. Mr. Schaff further states that it was the strong desire to imitate the feasts found in the Old Testament that spurred Christians to create their own celebrations. Many had left Judaism and missed the numerous festivals authorized by God for the Jews to celebrate. In their eagerness to have their own fun, they forgot that Christ's Law is greater than Moses' Law (Heb. 8:6).

Our authority for worship does not come from man's spontaneity. The Christian's duty is to seek God and serve His desires. "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

Mr. Schaff goes on to explain, "The New Testament contains no traces of annual festivals; but so early as the second century we meet with the general observance of Easter and Pentecost, founded on the Jewish Passover and feasts of harvest." Imagine that! After all the arguments Paul made against returning to the observance of the Old Law, early Christians did so anyway.

"Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:14-23).

The feasts found in Moses' Law were mere shadows of the reality found in Christ. Yet people ran back to the shadows to find entertainment. Their justification for doing this had the appearance of wisdom, but the truth is that what they created was a useless man-made religion.

Mr. Schaff continues to explain that in the fourth century the Christmas festival was added to the two former feasts (Easter and Pentecost), and, in particular, replaced the earlier feast of Epiphany (a celebration of the birth and baptism of Jesus). That festival then evolved into a celebration of the manifestation of Christ among the Gentiles. Bit by bit, the early Christians found new things to celebrate and new ways to conduct their celebrations. Bit by bit they changed the laws of God to suit their desires, despite the warnings:

Let us know if you want to study
the Bible to know more about
Christ and His Church.

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“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18).

“Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:6).

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9).

To put it bluntly, these men created feasts to satisfy their own desires for annual festivities. They originated from the will of men and not of God. The people so doing saw it as a way to glorify God, but such could not bring glory to God because God did not ask for these feasts. How can God be glorified when men choose to disobey His commands? Is it any different from the Jews of Jesus’ day? They thought that by giving money to the Temple, they were justified in not taking care of their parents in their old age. Shouldn’t it be enough that the money went to better use? Hear what Jesus said about this innovation: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9).

After glowingly describing the rich symbolism of the Christmas celebration, Mr Schaff states, “Notwithstanding this deep significance and wide popularity, the festival of the birth of the Lord is of comparatively late institution.” In other words, despite his enjoyment of the holiday, Mr. Schaff admits that Christmas was not a part of the New Testament church as revealed by the apostles and prophets in the first century. In adding festivals, the church had left its foundational teaching (Eph. 2:19-22).

The comparatively late institution “may doubtless be accounted for in the following manner: In the first place, no corresponding festival was presented by the Old Testament, as in the case of Easter and Pentecost,” Mr. Schaff writes. Once again notice that Easter and Pentecost originated in man’s desire to copy the Old Covenant in order to provide annual feasts for the people. “In the second place, the day and month of the birth of Christ are nowhere stated in the gospel history and cannot be certainly determined.” As Adam Clarke, a Methodist minister and noted commentator said, the birth of Christ “has been placed by sects and learned men in every month of the year.” Thus the delay in developing a celebration of Christ’s birth was caused by a lack of information from God. So what God did not state, man took upon himself to determine. Man, not God, set the date for a feast that man, not God, wanted celebrated.

The Impact

Have you noticed how many of the so-called religious holidays distort the teachings found in the Bible? The fables that have arisen around Christmas are perhaps the worse offenders. Why have so many errors arisen in a story documented by God? It is because man has a tendency to embellish the storyline. Simple truth is too plain.

Perhaps you are wondering, “What does it matter? We know they are tales, but they hold the children’s imagination.” That is precisely the problem. By mixing fables with truth, children no longer have a basis to distinguish fact from fiction. Children are told about the birth of Jesus and that Santa brings toys to good little girls and boys. As they grow older, they discover that Santa is not real – he is just a myth. So what do they do with Jesus who was connected to the same tale? The same problem occurs when the story of Jesus’ resurrection is combined with the Easter bunny. Is it a wonder that so many grow up skeptical about the truth in God’s Holy Word?

Should Christians Observe Holidays? The question of observing holidays is addressed in God’s word. After all, many early Christians had recently departed their Jewish faith. What were they to do with the many holidays that their friends and family still observed? Some chose to make a complete separation from their past traditions, others put those customs to use. “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:4-8).

Paul’s words are puzzling to those who know how forcefully Paul argued against bringing Jewish customs into the church. However, recall that Paul observed Jewish customs at times. In Acts 21:20-26 you can read where Paul complied with the ordinances for purification even though the law of Moses was no longer in effect. Paul explains this in I Corinthians 9:19-22, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win

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Television

In Search of the Lord’s Way (Phil Sanders)

Sunday @ 7:30am on KTAB

Life In The Light (Chris McCurley)

Sunday @ 10:00am on KTAB

Radio

Preaching the Word (Michael Light)

Sunday @ 9:00am on KOXE 101.3

Internet

TheGospelRadioNetwork.org

Gospel Broadcasting Network (Gbnv.org)

God’s Plan for Redeeming Man

Hear Learn the saving message of Christ’s sacrifice (1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 10:17).

Believe Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24)

Confess Jesus as your Lord, Lawgiver, and King (Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33)

Repent of your sinful conduct (Luke 13:3,5)
Complete your initial obedience to the gospel by being **baptized** for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16)

Live faithfully (Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8)

Bible Reading Schedule

video.wvbs.org/access/interactive-bible-reading-plan/

Dec. 22 Amos 6—9; Obadiah

Dec. 23 Jonah (video)

Dec. 24 Micah

Dec. 25 Nahum; Habakkuk

Dec. 26 Zephaniah (video)

Dec. 27 Haggai

Dec. 28 Zechariah 1—5

Dec. 29 Zechariah 6—10

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

(2 Timothy 2:15)



The Known Sick:

Note from Dru Wilson:

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Words cannot describe how very much I enjoyed the Progress Dinner we had.
I have been a Christian 76 years, served in various congregations, but I have never seen such love and fellowship as I have known at 4th & Stewart!
God Bless you all.*

Visitation Meeting

- ◆ Last week **51** contacts were made.

Announcements

- ◆ Today **Justin Hopkins** is with us to give an update on their missionary works during the Bible class period. He will also bring the morning lesson. **Charles Hall** will present the lesson this evening. Johnny is on vacation this week.
- ◆ **We need a volunteer to make cards for Sunday Night for the Master**, one Sunday a month. Requires about an hour on Sunday afternoon. Please see Cindy McCaghren or Don Smith.
- ◆ **Ladies Bible Class** is cancelled until after the holidays. Normal schedule will resume January 8th.

Upcoming Special Events at 4th & Stewart

- ◆ March 15-18—Spring Gospel Meeting w/ Richard Massey.

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the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” Paul’s goal was to teach people about Christ, yet the people he approached all have personal biases and expectations of what constitutes religious practice. So long as those practices did not violate what a Christian must do, Paul was willing to personally conform himself to those expectations in order to have opportunity to teach people. He strongly stated that it was wrong to bind these foreign practices on the church, but as an individual he had some liberty.

In other words, if a Jew came out of Judaism and desired to continue to celebrate Passover with his family, such was not wrong as an individual. As a Christian he knows that the requirement for observing Passover had ended when Jesus died on the cross (Col. 2:14). Thus to him it is not a religious feast, but a secular one. Yet, by keeping it he is accepted in the Jewish community and has opportunities to teach about Christ. The actual keeping of the feast does not violate any command of Christ.

Another Jew coming into Christianity enjoys the freedom that it provides and decides to make a complete break from Judaism. He chooses not to follow any of the past customs. Should he look down at his fellow Christian who is still observing some of the Jewish customs? *“But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”* (Rom. 14:10-12).

I’m sure that some ex-Jews had a difficult time eating pork after a lifetime of avoiding it. But the truth is that it doesn’t matter if a person, as an individual, decides not to eat ham. *“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean”* (Rom. 14:14). Should then, the person who chooses to follow his old customs look down on his fellow Christian who does not do so? *“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ”* (Col. 2:16-17).

It is a two-way street. *“Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him”* (Rom. 14:3). The key is the fact that neither person is violating the laws of God. *“Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves”* (Rom. 14:22).

But such liberty in individual choice does not translate into new laws for the church. While an ex-Jew might choose not eat pork, he cannot bind on all Christians a ban from pork. *“For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving”* (1 Tim. 4:4). A person who decides to enter a synagogue and join in the Sabbath observance cannot tell other Christians that they must observe the Sabbath as well.

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Celebrate

“Rejoice with those who rejoice...” (Romans 12:15)

December Birthdays: Kaci Churchwell (18), Linda Griffith (20).

December Anniversaries: Allen & Linda Griffith (20), David & Glenda Milam (20), **Ken & Jo Maninger (25)**.

Mistakes? Left Out? Let Johnny know...



Records

	Dec. 8, 2019	Dec. 15, 2019
Bible Class	38	38
AM Worship	45	52
PM Worship	28	33
Wednesday PM	27	35
Contribution	\$1,797	\$1,839

Privileged To Serve

"...be ready to every good work," (Titus 3:1)

	This Week: 12/22/19	Next Week: 12/29/19			
Sunday AM:	Song Leader: Joe Dennis	Song Leader: Ken Maninger	<p>December 2019 Make Announcements: Don Smith Prepare Communion: Allen & Linda Griffith Clean Building: James & Cindy Fuller</p> <p>January 2020 Make Announcements: Ken Maninger Prepare Communion: Mike & Patti Bannister Clean Building: Mike & Patti Bannister</p>		
Greeters	John & Tina Barnum	Tom & Carol Wilcox			
Opening Prayer	Ken Maninger	Tom Wilcox			
Communion	Allen Griffith*, John Barnum Chase Churchwell, Ryan Rudloff	James Fuller, Coyce Reed Don Smith, Vernon Zier			
Closing Prayer	James Fuller	Gene Bannister			
Attendance Cards	Ian Barnum	Aaron Smith			
Sunday PM:	Song Leader: Joe Dennis	Song Leader: Ken Maninger			
Opening Prayer	Gene Bannister	John Barnum			
Scripture Reading	Kevin Ross	Joe Dennis			
Communion	Allen Griffith	James Fuller			
Closing Prayer	Tom Wilcox	Randy Huckaby			
Wednesday Devotionals:	December 25 Don Smith	January 1 Prayer Night	January 8 Joe Dennis	January 15 Rafe Smith	

Search the Scriptures

Be like the Bereans who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11)

Studies for the week of December 22, 2019

Sunday Class Justin Hopkins
 Wed. Class Singing

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Therefore, we reach the point where we need to ask, can Christians observe secular holidays? Many brethren observe the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and Mother's Day without a second thought as to whether they are right or wrong. These days are merely days set aside to enjoy special occasions. But like the old Jewish customs, it would be wrong to bring these secular holidays into the church. For example, Mother's Day is slowly being pulled into the denominations and becoming a part of their religious practices. If I chose to remember my mother on a particular day of the year, that is my business, but I cannot create a special day for the church to remember mothers because God did not authorize it.

But what about Christmas? It began in idolatry and false religious practice, so how can a Christian participate in it? The question is: does it continue to be viewed as idolatry? As an example, the days of our week are named after false gods. Should Christians not use those names because of their connection to idolatry? No, because no one makes the connection these days. To make an appointment on Tuesday doesn't cause anyone to assume that you are a pagan.

The fact that Christmas originated in pagan and false religious practice ought to make us pause and consider. But the same question needs to be asked: does my participating in the celebration cause others to make the wrong conclusion about my beliefs? I doubt anyone today would conclude that those celebrating Christmas are pagan idolaters. However, since Christmas and Easter are recognized as religious holidays, some observing us may think we are also keeping these holidays as a religious requirement. This could be a cause of concern.

So, consider this: when you see decorative lights on a house, do you assume the owners are celebrating Christmas as a religious holiday? I think most would honestly say, "No." I know atheist and Jews

who put up decorated trees and give out gifts. Thus Christmas is no longer strongly associated with Christianity. In fact, those in denominations are complaining that Christmas has lost its religious significance. That is why so many are chanting slogans, such as "Put Christ back into Christmas."

When people ask me what I'm doing to celebrate Easter at the congregation, I say, "The same thing we do every Sunday." The puzzled looks give me an opportunity to show them the passages proving that Christ's death is to be remembered every Sunday. Yet, we still decorate our home with pastel items and hide brightly colored eggs for the children. Nothing religious is connected with Easter in our home, but as a social custom we enjoy the holiday.

We are able to enjoy Christmas as well without turning it into a religious holiday. I don't have stars on my tree or a nativity scene in my yard. I can sing carols, but I skip the ones that speak of Bethlehem, angels, mangers, wise men, holy nights, and shepherds. I leave religion out of my holidays because God did not authorize them, but it doesn't mean I must cross the holidays off my calendar.

What about my brothers who strongly object to certain holiday observances? "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (Rom. 14:13). I'm going to try my best not to cause offense. If I know someone objects to Christmas, I'm not going to invite them over for a turkey dinner on December 25th. There are plenty of other occasions to get together without my making things awkward for them.

The instructions found in Romans 14 are often misapplied to situations they were never intended. But we mustn't forget to learn and use those laws in their proper context.

Jeffrey W. Hamilton (lavistachurchofchrist.org)