**Christmas As We Know It In America**

 Early vestiges of Christmas started very slow in America with the Puritans, pilgrims, and Protestant groups in the colonies. They viewed Christmas negatively because it was too closely linked to pagan traditions and there was no biblical scriptural connection in their opinion.

 The early 19th century brought with it the influx of European immigrants to the colonies, they brought with them their customs and traditions. Charles Dickens and Washington Irving helped in popularizing this Christmas tradition with their fictional portrayal of a season of family gatherings, generosity, celebrations, and festiveness.

 The mid-19th century saw a shift in America’s thinking about Christmas towards a commercial gold mine led by the retail industry. The Germans and the Dutch contributed by incorporating the cedar tree as a symbol of Christmas. The celebration was made even more secular with the introduction of a fictional character named Santa Claus whose identity was marked by the giving and receiving of gifts. The federal government bought into the celebration by making it a federal holiday in 1870. With this addition, it served to solidify the celebration of Christmas as a national holiday.

 The media, writers, entertainers, and songwriters assisted in the creation of the imagery of Christmas in America as the greatest of holidays. Some examples of their contributions were: A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, Frosty the Snowman, Deck the Halls, Silver Bells, and Silent Night to name a few of the books. Some movies in the early 1900’s that helped the movement along were; White Christmas, Jingle All the Way, It’s a Wonderful Life, Miracle on 34th Street, A Christmas Story, Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer, The Man Who Invented Christmas, A Christmas Carol. The fictional characters in these books and movies were interwoven with Biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus to create an experience called Christmas in America. The twentieth century saw a massive explosion of Christmas celebrations fueled by a spirit of consumerism, championed by retailers like Macy’s and Coca-Cola, and huge parades to usher in the season. Christmas in America started to take on an identity marked by shopping, decorations, gift giving, partying and festivals.

 Christmas in America is not just celebrated by those who view it as a day of acknowledging the birth of Christ. Christmas is celebrated by people of various beliefs and cultures, not as a religious holiday but as a secular cultural celebration. The history of Christmas in America reflects a complex mixture of religion, cultural, and commercial alignment to create this massive money-making system called Christmas in America.

 Many pagan traditions have found its way into the celebrations; The Yule Log often burned in fireplaces during the Christmas season was a tradition common in the ancient Norse and Celtic winter solstice celebrations. They were celebrating the seasonal return of the warm sun from a cold winter season. The Evergreen trees, wreaths, and garlands have their roots in winter festivals symbolizing the end of the cold winter season. These festivals were celebrated long before the birth of Jesus. December 25th coincided with a pagan Roman Festival called Sol Invictus or the “Unconquered Sun”. This feast was celebrated to mark the return of the warmth of the sun after the cold winter. Another Christmas tradition of gift-giving can be traced to another pagan tradition practiced by the Romans called Saturnalia which involved the custom of exchanging gifts as a symbol of goodwill. Mistletoe decoration was also contributed by the Druids and Nors. The mistletoe was believed to possess magical powers that contributed to good fortune. The image of Santa Claus has been a continuous evolving character. Fiction writers, movie directors, and songwriters have continued to add other supernatural elements to his image; like flying reindeer, life at the North Pole, all knowing whether you have been naughty or nice. The Santa Claus character continues to be perpetrated as a supernatural character. The practice of an extravagant meal celebration coincided with a feast that was celebrated in Ancient Rome to celebrate the end of the cold winter season ending the year and the beginning of a new year. In summary, Christmas in America celebrations are mixed with many pagan festivals and practices, heavy shaping by writers and movie directors, the retail merchants, and the inclusion and popularizing of a fictional character called Santa Claus with supernatural qualities that rival the attributes of Jesus. Finally, the followers of Christ have so embraced these traditions also and have continued to do great harm to our identity as disciples of Christ.

The following scriptures serve as a rebuke to present-day disciples to be on guard against:

1. **Matthew 6:24 AMP**: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Money, possessions, fame, status, or anything valued more than a relationship with God.)
2. **1 Timothy 6:10 AMP**: For the Love of money (that is, the greedy desire for it and the willingness to gain it unethically) is the root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves (through and through) with many sorrows.
3. **Luke 12:15**: Then He said to them, “Watch out and guard yourselves against every form of greed, for not even when one has an overflowing abundance does his life consist of nor is derived from his possessions.
4. **Colossians 3:2 AMP**: Set your mind and keep focused habitually on the things above (the heavenly things), not on things that are on the earth (which have only temporal value).
5. **James 5:1-3 AMP**: Come (quickly) now, you rich (who lack true faith and hoard and misuse your resources) weep and howl over the miseries (the woes of the judgment) that are coming upon you.2 your wealth has rotted and is ruined and your (fine) clothes have become moth-eaten,3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. You have stored up your treasure in the last days (when it will do you no good).
6. **Proverbs 23:4-5 AMP**: Do not weary yourself (with the overwhelming desire) to gain wealth; Cease from your own understanding of it. 5 When you set your eyes on wealth, it is (suddenly) gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies to the heavens.
7. **1 John 2:15-16 AMP**: Do not love the world (of sin that opposes God and His precepts), nor the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world- the lust and sensual craving of the flesh and the lust and longing of the eyes and the boastful pride of life (pretentious confidence in one’s resources or in the stability of earthly things) these do not come from the Father, but are from the world.
8. **Proverbs 22:16 AMP**: He who oppresses or exploits the poor to get more for himself Or who gives to the rich (to gain influence and favor) will only come to poverty.
9. **Mark 8: 36 AMP**: For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world (with all its pleasures), and forfeit his soul.
10. **Ecclesiastes 5:10 AMP**: He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its gain. This too is vanity. (emptiness)

The following scriptures provide instructions to disciples in celebrating Christmas in America.

**1. Gratitude**- John 3:16 AMP: For God so (greatly) loved and dearly prized the world, that He (even) gave His (One and) Only begotten Son, so that whoever believes and trusts in Him (as Savior) shall not perish but have eternal life.

**2. Joy**- Luke 2:10-11 AMP: But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great Joy which will be for all the people. For this day in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ The Lord (The Messiah).

**3. Generosity-** 2 Corinthians 9:15 AMP: Now thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (which is precious beyond words)!

**4. Worship** - Matthew 2:11 AMP; And after entering the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then after opening their treasure chests, they presented to Him gifts (fit for a king, gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

**5. Humility**- Philippians 2:4-7 AMP: Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.5 Have the same attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus (look to Him as your example in selfless humility).6 who although He existed in the form and unchanging essence of God (as One with Him, possessing the fullness of all the divine attributes- the entire nature of deity), did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped or asserted (as if He did not already possess it, or was afraid of losing it) 7 But emptied Himself (without renouncing or diminishing His deity, but only temporarily giving up the outward expansion of divine equality and His rightful dignity) by assuming the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men (He became completely human but was without sin, but fully God and fully man.)

**6. Unity** -Colossians 3:12-14 AMP: So, as God’s own chosen people, who are holy (set apart, sanctified for His purpose) and well-beloved (By God Himself, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (which has the power to endure whatever injustice or unpleasantness comes, with good temper) 13 bearing graciously with one another, and willingly forgiving each other if one has a cause for complaint against another, just as the Lord has forgiven you, So should you forgive.14 Beyond all these things put and wrap yourselves in ( unselfish) love, which is the perfect bond of unity ( for everything is bound together in agreement when each one seeks the best for others),

**7. Compassion**- Ephesians 4:32 AMP: Be kind and helpful to one another, tender-hearted (compassionate, understanding), forgiving one another (readily and freely), just as God in Christ also forgave you.

**8. Contentment**- Philippians 4:11-12 AMP: Not that I speak from (any personal) need, for I have learned to be content (and self-sufficient through Christ, satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or uneasy) regardless of my circumstances.12- I know how to get along and live humbly (in difficult times) and I also know how to enjoy abundance and live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret (of facing life), whether well fed or going hungry, whether having an abundance or being in need.

**9. Hope**- Romans 15:13 AMP: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing (through the experience of your faith) that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will abound in hope and overflow with confidence in His promises.

**10. Love** – 1 Corinthians 16:14 AMP: Personally, I am convinced about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, amply filled with all (spiritual) knowledge, and competent to admonish and counsel and instruct one another.