

QUESTIONS ATHEISTS ASK: WHY SICKNESS?

David Halbrook

We who know God should be ready to answer genuine questions, though our knowledge is limited (1 Pet. 3:15; Deut. 29:29). Sometimes atheists, who hear that the intricacies of the human body are evidence of God's existence, ask, "If God is the creator, why are there terrible diseases like cancer?"

God never intended for the physical body to be an indestructible machine. Many people assume otherwise. When God made man, He also made the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:22). The need for the Tree of Life proves that God created man vulnerable to injury and illness. (Genesis 3 tells why we no longer have access to the Tree.)

Though God created man with weaknesses which could lead to death, He told us how to live and enjoy this temporary life (Eccl. 12:13). After allowing us to experience life with a body limited by design, He planned to give us a body which will never decay or die. That body will be given on the resurrection and judgment day (Jn. 5:28-29; Eccl. 12:14). Sickness does not prevent you from knowing God. Do not use it as an excuse to avoid Him or truth (Rom. 1:20-21).

-- *Editor's Note:* As our society tries to push God out of our nation's mind, some people genuinely interested to learn of Him have no access to someone who will answer genuine questions. Most people did not grow up with parents who taught them who made all things. As American religion becomes increasingly shallow, we may be surrounded by those who were taught of God but who have doubts. We may not even know who they are, so find someone to share this *Arkansas Weekly* article with, trusting that God might use this article to help those who are searching (Heb. 11:6).

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

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CHRISTMAS & JESUS' BIRTH: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

David Halbrook

What is the difference between Christmas and the Bible's record of Jesus' birth? Jesus' birth was planned by God (Galatians 4:4). Christmas was not. The events surrounding Jesus' birth were recorded by writers guided by God. God guided no one to write about Christmas. Paul briefly reminded the Roman Christians of Jesus' birth (Romans 1:3). He never taught them about Christmas. Christians and atheists alike can read about Jesus' birth in Scripture. Neither can read about Christmas in Scripture.

The "holy day" called Christmas is viewed as an annual festival of the church, but who put the church in charge of universal festivals or holy calendars—God or man? The Holy Spirit brought "all truth" to the apostles, but said nothing of annual holy days (Jn. 16:13). Scripture equips us for every good work but equips no church with annual holy days (2 Timothy 3:17).

Christmas' origin lies in man-made councils and decrees where the opinion of man was put on an equal plane with God's revelation. If you do not believe that is true, then ask any local Catholic or Protestant leader, "Which of these is more important to the church—the first day of the week or Christmas?" Then compare their answer with Scripture where the first day of the week is a day God identifies for its historical significance (as the time of Jesus' resurrection, Mt. 28:1) and for its significance to His people (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). God did not make any annual day equally as important as the first day of the week, but most churches today have done just that. They have created and elevated their own "holy day" (Christmas and many others) and made it equal to the day God revealed and elevated (first day of the week).

Consider another way to illustrate this problem. If any church leader announced today that Christmas was to be moved to August 25, would you object? If so, on what basis would you object? What if he also announced that churches must assemble on Friday instead of Sunday? Would you object? On what basis? I'm not sure which change would upset people the most, but I know which one would conflict with Scripture. Do you?

The problem with Christmas is not that people remember Jesus' birth. The problems with Christmas are--

1. that man-made authority has made it a doctrine of the church, which God never revealed (Matthew 15:9; Acts 15:24).
2. that man-made authority created this holy day and bound it upon all churches, when only God has authority to give laws for all churches (Ephesians 1:22-23).
3. that it has been elevated alongside, or above, the day which God elevated (the first day of the week).

If you remove these three things from Christmas, then the holy day called Christmas would no longer exist. Then, we could read about, sing about, and thank God for the birth of Jesus' Christ on April 25, August 25, December 25 or any day of the year without erasing or blurring the lines between God's revelation and man's opinion. But as of 2011, the "holy day" of Christmas carries all the above baggage, which is much too heavy for men content with the yoke of Christ.

LET THE HOUSE COME TO ORDER

Irvin Lee

We are all human, and none knows everything, so differences certainly will arise. This does not mean that the church is destroyed and must divide. Acts 15 gives a wonderful example of sharp contention followed by a happy conclusion. The latter part of that same chapter mentions the sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. They found a way to work that out so both could be happy, and two teams went out into the field of labor. Evidently each could pray for the other. They preached the same gospel. Mark later proved himself to Paul, since Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark, "For he is profitable to me for the ministry." (2 Tim. 4:11.) This was at the end of Paul's life.

Many problems that seem big can be solved if we take time to teach, pray, and let all understand. Many problems cannot be solved at one sitting. It takes time as well as

surgery and medicine to heal the body. The time is absolutely necessary. Some unstable churches grow up at times, and everything looks good, but a problem arises. In such instances the church scatters to the four winds before there is time for a calm investigation to learn the facts and correct the errors. Do not forget the necessity of time for healing. The couple that lives together past a happy golden anniversary is not a couple who never had any problems between them. They just solved them or learned to live with them. Read Romans 14. It is a little difficult to understand so maybe you should read it twice, slowly this time. The Roman church surely had some members with Jewish backgrounds and some of different types of pagan backgrounds. It was not easy for them to dwell together in unity. Evidently they were to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Some members of the churches that seek to conserve the Bible pattern will see great pleasure in all the church supported social life and join the liberal movement. They are the ones who were bored by sermons, did not prepare for Bible classes, or listen with interest while in class. There is a sense in which it can be said that the church described in the New Testament is not for everyone. Actually Christ tasted death for everyone and thus made it possible for all to be saved. (Heb. 2:9). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9.) Paul mentioned "Them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. 2:10-12.)

The god of this world has blinded the minds of some. (2 Cor. 4:3, 4.) Preaching to them is no more effective than the farmer's planting seed in the hard roadbed. They receive the truth as hogs would pearls. We are to preach the gospel to every creature, but comparatively few will enter through the narrow gate. It is not necessarily the preacher's fault if some walk out on his sermon. During Christ's personal ministry some of His disciples turned back and walked no more with Him. (John 6:66.) We would have all men happy with the truth, and remain faithful to God, but there are some who in time of temptation will fall away. (Luke 8:13.) The Lord Himself did not convert all to whom He preached, neither did the Spirit-filled apostles. They found some with eyes closed and ears stopped. (Matt. 13:15.) To be converted one must be willing to receive the Word. (Acts 2:31; 16:11.) None is forced to accept the narrow way that leads to life. (Matt. 7:13, 14.)

(excerpt from Chapter 8 of Preaching in a Changing World, p151-152)