

*Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc.*

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**CHRISTMAS, EASTER, AND THE CROSS**

by Ralph Woodrow

As a young person, sensing God's call on my life, I had a desire then—as I do *now*—to do His will. I did not want anything that would hinder the flow of the Holy Spirit in my life. I did not want anything “pagan” to muddy the waters. I wanted to believe and do just what the Bible says.

While all of this was honorable, as I grew in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, I would eventually learn that some of the things I perceived as spiritual hindrances, had no real bearing on spirituality. They were side issues. Claims about “pagan” origins, I would come to see, were often based on misinformation. And while what we believe and do should be according to the Bible, not every detail of the Christian life is spelled out in so many words in the Bible. Even the word “Bible” is not in the Bible.

Consider the celebration of Christmas. Its observance is not commanded in the Bible. The Bible does not spell out the date of Christ's birth. It is highly commercialized. There are abuses. Some claim it all started in Babylon, that December 25<sup>th</sup> was Nimrod's birthday, that the Christmas tree honors Tammuz, that the round-shaped decorations are images of the sun-god Baal, that the star on the top of the tree came from astrology, etc. For these reasons, some Christians hold an anti-Christmas position.

As a young preacher, I passed on some of the negatives about Christmas. But, to my credit, I never regarded a person's belief about Christmas, *pro* or *con*, as an essential of the Christian faith. I never believed that differences about Christmas should bring divisions in families or churches. It was never my desire that people become fanatically anti-Christmas in their attitude.

But as time went on, I would be quoted as though I were some “authority” on the anti-Christmas position, in *numerous* books and booklets, some of which were very radical. Eventually I sought to bring balance and clarification to the subject with the publication of my book *Christmas Reconsidered*.

An anti-Christmas preacher has written the following article against my book. He even claims that people who are deceived

by it *will not be saved*—that *all* who celebrate Christmas are committing *idolatry!* This article is included here because it demonstrates the divisive and fruitless extremes to which the anti-Christmas position leads:

“*Christmas Reconsidered*” is the name of Ralph's catharsis. In it he recants Christmas is pagan. Now it is time to “reconsider Ralph Woodrow” if he is for real or a made-up person all along. The man cannot be trusted to be real any longer...he is not only a flip-flop, he has shown us how men cave in when they get old and their minds are no longer fresh with clear thinking. Once Ralph's hair turned white, he started thinking how he and Santa Claus favored and suddenly came to the conclusion the papacy was right about Christmas, Santa Claus and Rudolph.

What happened to Ralph Woodrow is called apostasy! He fell away from the truth about the paganism of Christmas. He compromised, backslid, and recanted all in one Christmas day....

Ralph Woodrow came out of the closet! He was dressed in a Santa costume greeting all with “Ho, Ho, come forth”! Some looked at him with shock and wonder...Woodrow hurried back into the closet stroking his white hair backward. On the shelf under his newly purchased Easter Bunny costume he found his old Bible....He began to read with great excitement: *Ho, Ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the North* (Zech 2:6).

Now in the land of Woodrow fantasyland...Ralphie turned to his audience and spoke: “Verily, verily I say unto thee, watch for Ho Ho to come forth from the north. He that believeth in Santa Claus has not sinned but has come from darkness into light. In ancient days Santa was called ‘Ho Ho.’ And see right there, he comes from the North Pole! I have a new revelation: Christmas and Santa Claus are not pagan....I'm looking the Bible over again and I believe in time I'll find the Easter Bunny and turn him lose too.”

Ralphie is a certified and confessed hypocrite....For those who cherish the Word of God and know it teaches against idolatry in all forms, let me encourage you not to take up the celebration of Christmas because this

white-haired Santa Claus look-alike has recanted....This is a warning to all who have Ralph Woodrow books; toss them into the garbage....Anyone who is deceived by him and his changing winds of doctrine, will not be saved. Christmas is pagan and all who celebrate this day are in the sin of idolatry.—Florida.

I am not distracted by such criticism, recalling the words of Jesus: “Woe unto you when all men speak well of you!” (Lk. 6:26).

While there is no command in the Bible about celebrating the birth of Christ, does there need to be? In the Old Testament, some days were celebrated by *command*, but others were celebrated by *custom* (cf. Judges 11:40; Esther 9:19). Jesus attended the Feast of Dedication, even though there was no biblical command to do so (John 10:22,23).

I have known families who have left fine evangelical churches—victorious churches that are growing and glowing in their communities—over some fine point like Christmas. They either quit church altogether, or end up in a small group that is going nowhere, majoring on minors, pitifully divided over side issues. But they don’t celebrate Christmas! The real victims are the children and young people in these families. They commonly lose interest because staying at home, or attending a small group, provides no activities for them or fellowship with other young people.

I am not saying people need to necessarily rush out and join a mega-church. A church that is small enough to know you, but large enough to serve you, generally speaking, is probably best.

Most people consider Christmas as a day set aside to celebrate the birth of Christ. So when *Christians* preach against Christmas, it sends a confusing message. It compares, in a way, to some extreme holiness groups that preach against wearing rings, including wedding rings. Most people recognize a wedding ring as a symbol of marital faithfulness. As such it is a *good* symbol. But because people of another time and place may have used rings in idolatrous or superstitious ways, some insist that wearing rings is *still* a pagan practice!

Whatever harm is supposedly caused by people celebrating Christmas, *more harm*, in my judgment, is caused by the anti-Christmas teaching. It has caused unnecessary division, confusion, and misunderstanding. To some degree, Christians who oppose Christmas end up on the side of Atheists. They also oppose Christmas! What message does this send?

Atheists and others who advocate the coldness of a strictly secular society—a society void of religious names or symbols—don’t like the greeting “Merry Christmas”! They don’t like the words “one nation under God.” They don’t like “In God We Trust” on our money. They don’t like any display of the cross. Some seek to promote their opposition by filing lawsuits, attempting to use legal technicalities to make their points.

One such case that has been in the news for some time, involves the 29-foot cross monument atop Mount Soledad near San Diego, California. Another lawsuit—this one filed against the city of Las Cruces, New Mexico—opposes the use

of three crosses in the city logo, even though the very *name* Las Cruces, means “The Crosses”!

I suppose there are some radicals who would like to change the names of all cities that have a religious meaning. Consider that Santa Cruz means “Holy Cross”; Santa Fe means “Holy Faith”; Los Angeles means “The Angels”; Sacramento means “The Sacrament”; and Corpus Christi means “The Body of Christ.” Numerous cities with names that begin with San, Santa, or St. (all meaning “saint”) include San Francisco, San Pedro, Santa Maria, St. Paul, etc.

Whether people who named these cities long ago totally understood the biblical truths concerning the cross, faith, angels, saints, or sacraments, does not really matter now. These names are not bad names; they are Christian names, at least in a general sense.

There are Christians of various persuasions (not just Jehovah’s Witnesses) who have been led to believe that the cross symbol came from paganism, that it has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. Some circulate the unsubstantiated idea that it stands for the initial letter of the name Tammuz! The oft-quoted Hislop’s *The Two Babylons* says, “The cross is the emblem of Satan himself.” So, believing such things, Christians of the anti-cross persuasion place themselves (in a sense) over on the side of Atheists. After all, *if* the cross is *Satan’s* emblem, Atheists who seek to have it removed from public display would be doing God’s work!

It is true that images of the cross have been used in superstitious and idolatrous ways—especially in centuries past—as even some Roman Catholic writers have admitted. But, in my judgment, more harm is done, more confusion is generated, by the anti-cross teachings.

Because the Bible says the cross was “the accursed tree,” a device of torture and “shame” (Heb. 12:2), there was a time when some of us supposed the cross was not a Christian symbol. But this failed to take into account that *bad* can become *beautiful* through Jesus Christ! Even the *place* where the cross was located, “Calvary” (Lk. 23:33), meaning place of a *skull*, has taken on an entirely new significance, so that we sing:

*Mercy there was great and grace was free,  
Pardon there was multiplied for me,  
There my burdened soul found liberty,  
At Calvary!*

If we allow that Calvary (skull) can acquire a new significance, certainly the *cross* of Calvary, can also. The cross itself was not glorious; no one supposed it was. But because of Christ, it becomes glorious, so that even Paul says he gloried in the cross (Gal. 6:14).

A church where I spoke some years ago, when singing “The Old Rugged Cross,” would change the words. Instead of singing, “I will cling to the old rugged cross,” they said, “I will cling to the *Christ* of the cross.” Though well-intended, this change in wording is not really necessary. In the normal use of language, a single word can include a larger meaning, as when Paul spoke of the “cup” of the Lord or the Lord’s “table” (1

Cor. 10:21). So, when he says he gloried in the “cross,” it included that for which the cross stood: Christ’s death on the cross, shedding his blood for our sins (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20).

Over the centuries millions of people have believed that Christ died on the cross for our sins—and also that he *rose again* from the dead to give us eternal life. Because a day on our calendar is set aside in honor of his resurrection—commonly called Easter in English-speaking countries—people all over the world have been made aware of this grand truth.

There are people that attend church on Easter who may not go any other time of the year. Not that this is the ideal, of course, but even with this the Holy Spirit can work. Years ago a man who did not know the Lord decided to go to church on Easter—it was the “traditional” thing to do. Fortunately that morning he heard the gospel, his life was changed, and he later went into the ministry. He was my pastor during my teen-age years and under whom I had my beginnings in the ministry.

Despite all the potential for good, some oppose the celebration of Easter. Why even the name “Easter,” they would have us believe, is the name of a pagan goddess. If studied out, this claim is very weak. But, even *if* this were the case, it proves nothing. If the observance of Easter is a continuation of the worship of a pagan goddess, who is it that worships a goddess on Easter? I can tell you about Christians who at Easter time worship “the MAN Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5)—but not a female goddess. Even with the emphasis that many Roman Catholics place on Mary, Easter is not Mary’s day!

As with Christmas, some argue there is no command in the Bible to celebrate Easter. The common objection is that the Bible says to remember Christ’s *death* (1 Cor. 11:26)—not his resurrection. But when we consider that Christ’s *resurrection* was at the very heart of the gospel (Acts 2:23,24; 3:15; 4:23; 10:39-41; 17:3; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:4; 1 Peter 1:3; etc.), what could be wrong with a day set aside in honor of that event?

Not just Easter Sunday, but *Sunday* itself, has been called into question. Some tell us this was the day on which *pagans* met each week to worship their Sun-god—that’s why it’s called Sun-day!

But if we trace it back to its source, worship on the first day of the week actually originated among Christians.

Picture, if you will, two men standing on the bank of the Arkansas River where it flows into the Mississippi. One of them poses the question: “Where is the source of the Arkansas River?”

“Its source is in *Arkansas*,” the other affirms. “That’s why it’s called the *Arkansas* River.”

If we did not know any better, this response would *seem* to make sense—why else would it be called the *Arkansas* River?

But if we were to actually follow the Arkansas River to its source, we would learn otherwise. Moving upstream we would pass through Little Rock and all the way across Arkansas. Passing Fort Smith, we would enter Oklahoma! We would continue on through Tulsa and up into Kansas! Passing by Wichita and Dodge City, we would continue westward into

Colorado! After Pueblo we would pass through the Royal Gorge, beneath the famous suspension bridge, 1,053 above the river. And still we would continue on, ultimately finding the source of the Arkansas River, 1,450 miles from where we began—not in Arkansas, but a few miles northeast of Leadville, Colorado. Having personally been to this location, I can verify this!

So, while we sometimes hear statements like: “Sunday worship began with pagans who worshipped the Sun-god on this day—that’s why it’s called Sun-day,” if we work our way back through the centuries to the source, worship on the first day of the week actually began among Christians—not pagans. For this there is considerable historical evidence in the writings of the early church fathers. In an effort to counter this evidence, some imply these men were all insincere compromises, liars, and forgers. But this hardly seems to be the case, especially when we consider that some of them were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Sunday was not named Sunday because people worshipped the sun on this day, any more than Saturday, named after Saturn, was so named because people worshipped Saturn on that day.

We admire Christians who desire to stand for the purity of the gospel, who do not want paganism in the church. But we must be certain that what we reject is *indeed* pagan, so that in pulling up weeds, we do not pull up the wheat also.

Finally, let me assure you I don’t claim to have the final word on everything! I am simply sharing with you where my studies over the years have led. Space here has only allowed some highlights. For those who would like to pursue these subjects further, I want to offer my books *Christmas Reconsidered* and *Easter—Is it Pagan?* See advertisements and ordering information on the following page. Costs for printing and postage are up, our ministry faces financial needs, but I don’t want anyone left out. If you cannot afford the price, you may send an offering in any amount.

*The Lord bless you; the Lord keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you; and give you peace!*

**Ralph Woodrow**



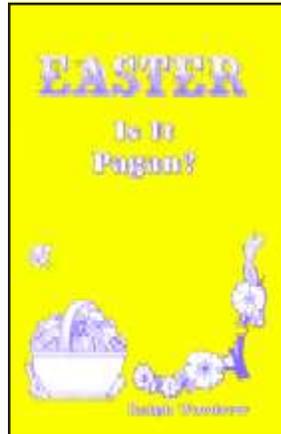
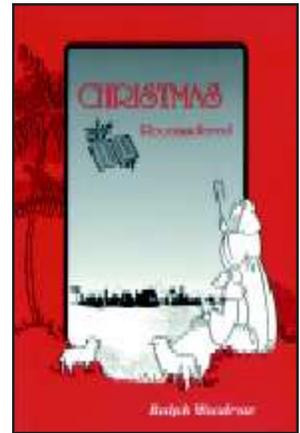
**Ralph and Arlene Woodrow**



**Fred and Leah Horner**

Fred and Leah Horner are special friends of ours that go back many years. Fred and I met at a church camp in the 50s when we were teenagers and the friendship has continued ever since. Both of us went on into full-time ministry. When Arlene and I married, Fred performed the ceremony. He, along with Leah, have pastored churches in southern California—at Port Hueneme, Monterey Park, and Ojai. Feeling a call to the mission field, over the past years they have served in the Philippines, Singapore, and other foreign lands. Both are people of integrity who have a deep love for God’s work and the people of God, regardless of denominational tag. We are honored that Fred serves on the board of the Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association. The Horners, who are parents of three children and eight grandchildren, presently have a home in Hemet, California.

Is Christmas an ancient festival to which the name of Christ has been falsely attached? Should the celebration of Christmas be rejected because the word is not mentioned in the Bible? Does “mas” in “Christmas” give it a Roman Catholic meaning? Was Nimrod the first Santa Claus? Was the birth of Christ in winter? Shepherds did not “abide in the fields” in winter—*or did they?* Did Jeremiah condemn Christmas trees? Are birthday celebrations “pagan”? 64 pages. \$7. Price includes postage.



For any who have doubts about Easter, this book presents reasons why the anti-Easter teaching should be rejected. Some have speculated that “Easter” is the name of a pagan goddess, yet no one who celebrates Easter does so to honor a goddess! Constantine did not start Easter at the Nicene Council. The 40 days of Lent did not start in Babylon. Christians who attend sunrise services are not worshipping Baal. Eggs and rabbits are not vile, abominable objects! 64 pages. \$7. Price includes postage.

Payment for books or offerings can be made by check, money order, credit card, or PayPal—by mail, phone, fax, or Internet.

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