

Christmas | Preparing for Your First Time

- I. **the best way will be to identify where we're not following Christ and then get back on track.**
- **Christmas has been secularized.**
 - Colossians 1:18; Romans 11:36
 - To secularize something is to remove the genuinely spiritual element.
 - It's in our and our disciple's best interest to focus on the spiritual element of the celebration.
 - You cannot truly separate the spiritual from the physical. There is no detachment between the sacred and the secular. Not that there isn't a difference between righteousness and evil; there is simply no word or deed or thought or belief that is void of the spiritual dimension. The spiritual is always at play whether we want to acknowledge it or not.
 - So, it's our responsibility to stop ignoring the spiritual. We need to *own* the spiritual nature of Christmas. No Christian should ever participate in a secularized version. To ignore God and His will is always a sin whether it's at Christmas or not.
 - **Christmas emphasizes noble desires to the exclusion of God.**
 - The world has been putting a greater and greater emphasis on *family* during what they call "the holidays." Is emphasizing family wrong? By no means! Generally speaking — family ranks higher in importance than our jobs and even church. Those who don't care for their families are guiltier than unbelievers.
 - Emphasizing family during Christmas isn't bad at all . . . but when you mix that with secularization, you're in trouble.
 - When love of family — which is meant to glorify God — is divorced from God, it doesn't glorify Him.
 - **Christmas has become a sacrifice to self.**
 - When you take biblical concepts and remove God, you've stolen what should have been used for His honor and glory and used it for your own self instead.
 - God wants me to interact with my family in His ways for His reasons for His glory. But when I interact with my family in my ways for my reasons . . . or even when I interact with my family in *His* ways for my reasons . . . I'm engaging in idolatry because I've offered to my own pleasure the sacrifice that should have been offered solely to God.
- II. **So how do we break the cycle? How can we know for certain that God is glorified by our Christmas celebration?**
- **We must prepare our hearts to worship God.**
 - **We must study the Bible.** II Timothy 3:16
 - **We must pray.**
 - **We must obey.** When you encounter something in the Bible — let's call it a "good work — then we need to do that work. We need to submit to Christ and obey His commands. If we love Him, we'll keep His commandments.
 - **We can prepare our spaces to make it easier to worship God.**
 - John 1:14; Luke 2:10-14
 - Take a few passages from that reading list, put them on your Celebration Wall, glance at them throughout the day, commit them to memory, allow them to act as a prayer prompt, record blessings on the Wall, whatever it takes to purposefully draw your mind back to the fact that God must have first place in everything we do.

- **We must prepare our fellow disciples to worship God.**
 - This point is very similar to our first. We will still utilize the Scriptures and prayer. We still need to obey what we learn in the Bible. But the key difference is that we're sharpening a brother or sister in Christ. We're praying together, studying the Word together, we're talking about God's will for our lives.
 - All of us have people with whom the Lord wants us to have a redemptive relationship. It may have to start as an evangelistic relationship which will eventually — Lord willing — lead to a discipleship relationship, or it may start as two disciples worshipping God together.
 - Either way — whether the individual is born again or not — we should speak of the Gospel. In the Northern Hemisphere this season is called winter, in the Southern Hemisphere it's called Summer, but regardless, this is the Season of Grace.
 - This season is all about exploring the glorious intricacies of God's grace including the future gift of glorification.
 - Last Season we discussed our need for the Gospel, why do we talk about glorification before talking about justification?
 - Glorification is the one of the key motivations for justification. God created us to fellowship with Him in eternal perfection, but sin makes that impossible. No one who doesn't want to fellowship with God in sinless perfection is ever going to follow Christ. But the person who recognizes that God's way is best and that worshipping Him forever in glory is the highest calling we could ever have — that person — will enter into a relationship with God through justification.
 - Advent and Christmas and Valentines Day are wonderful opportunities to look forward to the awesome future day that God removes our sin and we are finally able to fellowship with Him as He originally planned.
 - We encourage you to talk about these glorious truths with your fellow disciples. Strengthen and sharpen each other so that when Christmas Day arrives, whether you are together or not, both of your minds will be reeling in the astonishing truths in which you've both been basking!
 - It will be pretty hard to be distracted by a lame God-substitute when you've spent four weeks Preparing to see God for Who He truly is.