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Christian Biblical Church of God

Post Office Box 1442

Hollister, California 95024-1442

(831) 637-1875

truthofgod.org • churchathome.org • biblicaltruthministries.org
afaithfulversion.org • theoriginalbiblerestored.org

Fred R. Coulter
Minister

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Dear Brethren,

From the very beginning, God gave Adam and Eve *freedom of choice*—and all human beings down through time have had that same freedom to make decisions concerning right and wrong. You can make such choices *God's way* by following His teachings, or you can follow your own way, leaning on your own understanding—that is, taking from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

At this time of the year, the world as a whole is celebrating Christmas—which is their choice. Yet Christmas is actually a celebration that revolves around pagan characters such as Baal (or Nimrod) and his son Tammuz and his wife Ishtar. It has *nothing* to do with the Jesus of the Bible, and never did. Thus, Christmas emanates from Satan, the god of this present world (II Cor. 4:4)—who has fully *deceived* the whole world (Rev. 12:9).

The result of such deception is described by Isaiah: “Woe to those who **call evil good and good evil**; who **put darkness for light and light for darkness**; who **put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter**! Woe unto them that are **wise in their own eyes**, and **prudent in their own sight**!” (Isa. 5:20-21). Indeed, Christmas is a perfect example of such thinking!

In Jeremiah 10, God condemns the practice of using “**Christmas trees**” as a component of worship. He says, “Do not learn the way of the heathen, and do not be terrified at the signs of the heavens; for the nations are terrified at them. For the customs of the people are vain; for one cuts a tree out of the forest with the axe, the work of the hands of the workman. They adorn [deck] it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers, so that it will not move. They are upright as the palm tree, but cannot speak. They must surely be carried because they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them; for they cannot do evil nor good, for it is not in them” (verses 2-5).

These pagan tree-idols have found their way into “Christianity”—utterly amazing!

Again, Christmas—with all of its trappings and customs—has *nothing* to do with Christ. It never did. Jesus was not born anywhere near December 25. The Catholic leadership took pagan practices and put Christian names on them in order to increase the number of pagan converts to Christianity. *That* is the true source of “Christmas” and the Christmas tree.

In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer notes this: “An instructive relic of the long struggle [between true Christianity and occult Christianity (Mithraism)] is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival. In the Julian calendar the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the sun to increase from that turning point of the year.... The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun [with] the image of an infant,

which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshippers [called a “nativity scene” today]. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the great Oriental goddess whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in the Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte [the queen of heaven]. Now Mithra [the infant savior] was regularly identified by his worshippers with the sun, the Unconquered Sun, as they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December.”

A better, righteous tree

Let’s look at another situation concerning a “better tree.” In Psalm 1, David wrote: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful” (verse 1). In other words, this man does not take of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”—which is Satan’s way and always ends in destruction. Rather, “his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law does he meditate day and night” (verse 2). (If you really want to meditate on the laws of God, study Psalm 119; you will see how God’s way is based on obedience and love, on truth and righteousness.)

Now look at that *better tree*: “And he shall be **like a tree planted by the streams of water that brings forth its fruit in its season**, and its leaf shall not wither, and all that he does shall prosper” (verse 3). The water pictures God’s Holy Spirit—leading such a person in the true way of God. But notice what God says of those who follow their own ways: “The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish” (verses 4-6).

A similar passage is found in Jeremiah 17: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is in the LORD. For he shall be **like a tree planted by the waters**, and sends out its roots by the river, and it shall not fear when the heat comes, but its foliage shall be green, and shall not be worried in a year of drought, nor will it cease from yielding fruit” (verses 7-8).

Returning to Jeremiah 10, let’s look at the *true* God—which “Christmas” ignores! “But the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to stand His fury [a prophetic reference to the return of Christ]. The [false] gods who have not made the heavens and the earth, they shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens. He has made the earth by His power; He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens by His judgment” (verses 10-12).

Continuing in verses 13-15: “When He utters His voice, there is a noise of a multitude of waters in the heavens. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings with rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasures. Every man is stupid for lack of knowledge; every refiner is put to shame by the graven image; for his molten image is a lie, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, the work of delusion; in the time of their judgment they shall perish.”

Now notice verses 23-24, a very profound statement: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself; **it is not in man who walks to [rightly] direct his steps**. O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.”

Keeping Christmas is a perfect example of men doing what is *right in their own eyes*: “There is a way which **seems right** to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). Indeed, this is the key problem with mankind, going all the way back to Eden—choosing the wrong tree. “All the ways of a man are **clean [and right] in his own eyes**, but the LORD weighs the spirits” (Prov. 16:2). People need to think about this: Christmas by design *feels good*, so it *seems* good and right. But nominal Christians fail to realize that this is all part of Satan’s deception!

Even Job got so wrapped up in himself that he thought he was more righteous than God. That's exactly what has happened in mainstream Christianity. They think they know better than God. They reason, *So what if we borrow from paganism, we are doing it to honor Jesus*. But God says He will not accept such worship (Deut. 12:30). They may use the name of Jesus, but they are unknowingly worshipping a *false* Jesus.

Repentance—as found in Proverbs

The answer to keeping such pagan holidays as Christmas is simply to *repent*—to stop going against God's teachings. He says in Isaiah 55:6: "Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near"—not in all the do-good-ism of the world, but in the *truth* of God's Word. God says to each individual: "**Let the wicked forsake his way**"—all the ways that seem right to men, all the ways that seem good but lead to false worship—"and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and **let him return to the LORD**, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (verse 7). In verses 8-9, He adds that our thoughts and ways are not like His: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." That's why we are to forsake our ways and look to God's ways.

The book of Proverbs gives us a roadmap to repentance. "Commit your works unto the LORD, and your thoughts shall be established" (Prov. 16:3). You repent, you examine your own ways, you see that it's not working—that you need God's help.

Notice verse 6: "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged, and **by the fear of the LORD men turn away from evil**." In other words, you change your thinking and you replace that with the thoughts of God as found in Scripture. That's why Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word of God*."

Look at Proverbs 2. "He keeps the paths of right judgment and preserves the way of His saints. Then you shall understand righteousness and judgment and equity, [and] every good path" (verses 8-9). The Christianity of this world doesn't understand true *righteousness*—because it is based on obedience to God's commandments; it is based on love and on God helping us to change and overcome sin.

"Wisdom shall enter into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasing to your soul; discretion shall preserve you and understanding shall keep you" (verses 10-11). Again, *you're like a tree planted by a river of water—you're drinking in of the Holy Spirit*.

What will be the result? "To deliver you from the way of the evil man, from the man who speaks wicked [and false] things" (verse 12). Even things that sound so good. When deceiving Eve, Satan sounded so good, so convincing. When you follow false ways, you do what verses 13-15 say: You "leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the way of darkness" and you "rejoice to do evil and delight in the perversities of the wicked, whose ways are crooked and are devious in their paths."

But God will deliver you from such deception and sinfulness if you love the truth and keep His commandments.

Now notice verses 20-21: "In order that you may walk in the way of good and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land and the perfect shall remain in it." The *perfect* are those who are in right relationship with God—and growing. On the other hand, "the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (verse 22).

So how do we get our thinking straight? "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commandments" (Prov. 3:1). This is why Psalm 119 emphasizes focusing and meditating on God's law. "For they"—that is, the ways of God and the keeping of His teachings—"shall add length of days and long life and peace to you" (verse 2). And that ultimately includes eternal life.

"Do not let mercy and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them upon the tablet of your heart" (verse 3). This ties in with having God's laws *written in our hearts and inscribed in our minds*, as we see in Hebrews 10:15-16.

If we focus on living by these first three verses of Proverbs 3, we will “find favor and [have] good understanding in the sight of God and man” (verse 4). The key is found in verse 5: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart”—don’t be fooled by what looks good and feels good, like Christmas does—“and lean not to your own understanding.” Verse 6: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” You want God to bless you, to lead you, to help you in times of troubles and difficulties—and He wants to!

Matthew 7—a “good tree” produces good fruit

Continuing with the “tree” theme, if a good tree (a true Christian) is planted by the “rivers of living water”—led and empowered by God’s Spirit—then that person will grow in grace and knowledge and understanding. They will grow to have the mind of Christ—which is the whole purpose of conversion. And they will produce good fruit—and they will be *known* by their fruit: “You shall know them by their fruit” (Matt. 7:16). It will be quite evident, because you do not gather “grapes from thorns” or “figs from thistles”—right?

But a corrupt tree produces evil fruit. Just as brought out by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. In other words, once sin makes its entrance and you don’t repent of it and you don’t get rid of it, *it will grow*. And that will lead to more and more sin, until that person becomes totally evil.

Indeed, every good tree produces good fruit—because of God’s Spirit and our desire to love Him and keep His commandments. Indeed, a good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree produce good fruit (verses 17-18).

Ultimately, every tree that is not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire (verse 19). Today’s “Christian” teachers and pastors—those who promote pagan holidays such as Christmas—will one day have to answer for their false teachings. Here in Matthew 7, Jesus warns them: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who is doing the will of My Father who is in heaven” (verse 21). But they ignore the will of God because they do not take the Scriptures seriously. Despite their claim of “good works” done in Jesus’ name, He will ultimately declare that they were never true servants—that He never knew them (verses 22-23). Jesus then admonishes us to not just *hear* His words, but to *practice* them. This, He says, is true wisdom (verse 24).

Related to the idea of a “righteous tree” thriving by “living waters” is the idea of one being like a *tree of life*—that is, a blessing to others. The phrase “tree of life” occurs several times in the book of Proverbs, generally referring to the blessings and happiness that come from a life of obedience to God. Wisdom and understanding are said to be “like a **tree of life** to those who lay hold of her, and happy is everyone who holds her fast” (Prov. 3:18). The knowledge and correction of God, sound wisdom, discretion—all are to be highly prized in our lives (verses 21-23).

Proverbs 11:30 says, “The fruit of the righteous is a **tree of life**”—again indicating the blessings that come with righteousness. And again, “hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when [one’s] desire is fulfilled, it is [like] a **tree of life** (Prov. 13:12). This means we find favor from God, and He gives us life and watches over us.

Lastly, “a wholesome tongue is a **tree of life**”—wherein one uses wisdom in their speech in order to be a blessing to others—“but perverseness crushes the spirit” (Prov. 15:4).

How to be a “good tree”: genuine fellowship with God

In his first epistle, the apostle John emphasizes the need to *stay close to God* and do what is good and right. He wants us to know that through Christ we have love, we have fellowship, and we have forgiveness of sin. God wants to have a *special relationship* with all who come to Him. And when we come to Him, we’re to learn to love Him with all our heart and mind and soul and being.

Then God's Spirit will be with us, will be leading us, will be guiding us, and helping us to change and grow and overcome—to get rid of the sin within.

John focuses on our *fellowship* with God: “That which we have seen and have heard we are reporting to you in order that you also may have fellowship with us; for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—is with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ” (I John 1:3). That fellowship is based on intimate prayer, the study of Scripture, and meditating on God's Word. This fellowship is “so that [our] joy may be completely full” (verse 4).

John goes on to help us understand the dangerous reality of sin: “If we proclaim that we have fellowship with Him, but we are walking in the darkness [sinfulness, Satan's way of living], we are lying to ourselves, and we are not practicing the truth. However, if we walk in the light [the *truth*, as opposed to living by the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”], as He is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us” (verses 6-10).

True Christianity is all about growing and changing and overcoming—getting rid of the sinfulness within. And that can only be done with the help of the Spirit of God—and, as Jesus said, living by every word of God. Still, we do sometimes sin—but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

John continues in chapter 2: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (verse 1). How do we avoid sin? By believing God, by walking in His commandments, by trusting in Him—and not our own thoughts and not our own ways. Like adopting Christmas, when it is clearly contrary to God's Word. He continues, “And yet, if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but [ultimately] also for the sins of the whole world” (verses 1-2).

In verses 3-5, John gives us the “litmus test” to know if we really follow Jesus—really “know Him”: “And by this standard [measure] we know that we know Him: **if we keep His commandments**. The one who says ‘I know Him’ and does not keep His commandments, [he] is a liar, and the truth is not in him. On the other hand, if anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is **being perfected** [the ongoing process of conversion]. By this means **we know that we are in Him** [in an intimate relationship with Him].”

It is so simple. If you really “know” Jesus—and the Protestants love to say, “Do you know Jesus?”—you will be keeping His commandments and teachings and following His example in every way. Yet Protestants say the Law is obsolete, done away with. So they can never really know Jesus! They can never pass the “litmus test”! And keeping Christmas—the biggest holiday of the “Christian” world—is a perfect example. Everything about Christmas is a *lie*—there is *no truth* in it. Those who keep Christmas are not of the truth and the truth is not in them!

Indeed, as verse 6 says, we are *obligated* to “walk just as He walked.” That is the key to our relationship with God—the key to becoming a “good tree” planted by *living waters*.

The “living waters” of Revelation

Concerning a true Christian, we saw in Psalm 1 that “his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law does he meditate day and night” (verse 2). Indeed, he or she is “**like a tree planted by the streams of water that brings forth its fruit in its season**” (verse 3). The water pictures God's Holy Spirit—it is “living water”—producing much spiritual fruit.

The Bible is full of parallels. From the idea in Psalms of being “**a tree planted by streams of water**,” you can find similar imagery in the book of Revelation. For example, in Revelation 21 we read: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were

passed away, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from heaven say, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men; and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall not be any more death, or sorrow, or crying; neither shall there be any more pain, because the former things have passed away.’ And He Who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ Then He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful’ ” (verses 1-5).

Verse 6 is key: “And He said to me, ‘It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the one who thirsts, I will give freely of the **fountain of the water of life.**’ ” Like the “streams of water” of Psalm 1, these *living waters* likewise produce much fruit—for eternal life. Indeed, “the one who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son” (verse 7).

In chapter 22 we read: “Then he showed me a pure **river of the water of life**, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And in the middle of the street, and on this side and that side of the river, was the **tree of life...**” (verses 1-2).

So here we have the *righteous tree*—as opposed to the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” and as opposed to the satanic “Christmas tree.” The **tree of life** is linked to the **water of life**—all resulting from God’s grace as we are led and embowered by the **Holy Spirit**. And ultimately, this “tree” produces the fruit of *eternal life*.

“And behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each one according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. *Blessed are those who keep His commandments*, that they may have the right to **eat of the tree of life**, and may enter by the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:12-14).

So, brethren, let us strive to become a good tree, a fruitful tree—growing and thriving because we are “**planted by rivers of living water.**”

Indeed, we must endeavor to draw close to God in heartfelt prayer and in the daily study of His Word—so that we can grow in grace and knowledge and always be overcoming. We thank God the Father and Jesus Christ daily for the goodness and mercy shown to all of God’s people. We thank you for your continued love and faithfulness to God and to each other. We thank you for your prayers for us and all the brethren, and for your faithfulness in tithes and offerings. We pray that God will bless you and keep watch over you in everything. We continue to pray for you, for your health and your healing. May God’s love and grace continue to be upon you.

With love in Christ Jesus,

Fred R. Coulter

FRC

PS: Our program of distributing Bibles and Greek-English Interlinears continues to be a success! And we still have plenty of Bibles and Interlinears left—so feel free to request copies if you can place them into the hands of those who have a sincere desire to study the Scriptures. You can order copies individually or by the box—paperback, 8 in a box; vinyl, 6 in a box; and Interlinears, 4 in a box. Thank you and keep up the good work!