

Should Christians have Christmas trees?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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John MacArthur

As the Christmas Season approaches, questions like this sometimes arise. Like everything in life, it is important to approach these issues with biblical discernment.

In this case, we see nothing wrong with the traditional Christmas tree. However, some have taught that it's wrong for anyone to have a Christmas tree in their home. But are their reasons valid? We don't think so. Let's look at the two most common objections people make against having a Christmas tree.

First, some object on the basis that Christmas trees have pagan origins. It is believed that Boniface, English missionary to Germany in the eighth century, instituted the first Christmas tree. He supposedly replaced sacrifices to the god Odin's sacred oak with a fir tree adorned in tribute to Christ. But certain other accounts claim that Martin Luther introduced the Christmas tree lighted with candles. Based on that information you could say the Christmas tree has a distinguished Christian pedigree.

However, even if a pagan background were clearly established, that wouldn't necessarily mean we could not enjoy the use of a Christmas tree. Perhaps the following analogy will help.

During World War II the American military used some remote South Pacific islands for temporary landing strips and supply depots. Prior to that time the indigenous tribal people had never seen modern technology up close. Large cargo planes swooped in filled with an array of material goods, and for the first time the islanders saw cigarette lighters (which they deemed to be miraculous), jeeps, refrigerators, radios, power tools, and many varieties of food.

When the war was over, the islanders concluded that the men who brought cargo were gods, so they began building shrines to the cargo gods. They hoped the cargo gods would return with more goods.

Most people do not even know about this religious superstition. Similarly, few know anything about the worship of trees. When a child pulls a large present out from under the Christmas tree and unwraps a large model cargo plane, no one views that object as an idol. Nor do we view the Christmas tree to be some kind of gift god. We understand the difference between a toy and an idol just as clearly as we understand the difference between an idol and a Christmas tree. We see no valid reason to make any connection between Christmas trees and wooden idols or the worship of trees. Those who insist on making such associations should take note of the warnings in Scripture against judging one another in doubtful things (see Romans 14 & 1 Corinthians 10:23-33).

Another common objection is the claim that Christmas trees are prohibited in Scripture. Jeremiah 10 is commonly used to support this viewpoint. But a closer look at the passage will show that it has nothing to do with Christmas trees and everything to do with idol worship. Verse eight says, "A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine."

Idol worship was a clear violation of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3-6 says, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

There is no connection between the worship of idols and the use of Christmas trees. We should not be anxious about baseless arguments against Christmas decorations. Rather, we should be focused on the Christ of Christmas and giving all diligence to remembering the real reason for the season.

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