

12-25-11

Reflections

# Two Trees





## Reflections

At this time of year, most homes, stores, cities, and many public buildings are replete with pretty evergreen trees festooned with tinsel, lights, ornaments, candles, and many other types of decorations. This “Christmas” tree has become a part of most holiday celebrations related to the Christmas season. When we look for the origin of the modern Christmas tree tradition, we find many times, nations, cities, and special events linked to the historical origins of what has become a symbol recognized as an important element of most families annual celebrations during the Christmas season. Today most houses have decorated trees where gifts, brightly wrapped, are placed and where curious children lift, shake, and study while trying to guess what the contents might include, hoping that some of their gift list priorities might actually be in those mysterious packages.

From the first act of decorating to the final event of taking the packages and opening them on Christmas Day, the Christmas Tree is a fun, pretty, and special tree in our lives. Some traditional uses have included symbolic reasons for the type of decorations used and what they were meant to represent. Some nations used the tree to symbolize religious meaning, others to represent other types of celebrations, but in the modern day the trees tend to be relegated to a place to store the family gifts and to brighten the holiday period.

As believers in Jesus, we must also pause to recognize another “tree”. In the Scripture we see the cross of Jesus referred to as a tree. The books of Acts, Galatians, and I Peter, all refer to the cross as “the tree”. This tree is not a pretty one. It is not festooned with decorations and pretty colors. It was a roughly hewn construct of wood timbers. It was a place of slow painful death. It was designed to kill slowly with the maximum amount of pain. The only color on this tree was the red of the blood of Jesus shed for our sin. It was a cruel instrument of death reserved for the worst crimes against the Roman government. Peter describes the “tree” of crucifixion as he tells us... *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: <sup>22</sup> "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; <sup>23</sup> who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup> who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness-- by whose stripes you were healed. (1Peter 2:21-24 NKJ)*

This tree of death became the “altar” upon which the perfect lamb of God gave His life as the ultimate and eternal sacrifice for sin. His gift of redemption was finalized as He declared... *"It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:30 NKJ)* The price of sin had been paid. The “tree,” the cross of Jesus the Christ, has become the well-known symbol of Christianity for generations but the power of the Gospel didn’t stop at the cross, it actually began there because the resurrection that followed three days later has demonstrated that Jesus gave His life, it was not taken, and that He took it up again. He stepped out of the grave in power and great glory. He then has made this wonderful gift of life, found only in Him, now available to all who would believe in Jesus as Savior. Jesus has said.. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6 NKJ)* What a gift! There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved.

As time has passed, the trees that used to be cut from the forest have been replaced by farm-grown trees, and more recently by trees that are artificial copies of the real thing. In a similar manner, the cross and its message of redemption has been replaced by numerous religious “traditions” that reflect, not the magnificent gift of God’s grace that led Jesus to the cross, but that replace salvation with pious practices of men. Paul warns the Colossians to avoid being taken captive by such artificial practices and philosophies. He warns them to... *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8 NKJ)* Accepting a human philosophy as a substitute for the price paid on the cross is the greatest deception that one can be taken in by and, in so doing, the sacrifice of Jesus is nullified in their lives.

While we decorate and enjoy the pretty trees in our living rooms and watch kids and grandkids scan and test each package to guess what might be hiding inside them, let’s not forget that the ugly “tree” on which the One, whose birth is the real reason for what we call Christmas, gave His life. His gift of life was sealed by His death on the cross and He endured the cross for you and me. In our house there are two trees remembered, the most important of which is the Cross. Have a blessed Christmas time, but don’t forget the other “tree”. **Pastor Doug.**