Precious Brother,

I am hoping you observed the fulfillment of my commitment to make teaching regarding the birth of Christ to be a valued thing. I have always enjoyed the story and fully understand the birth of Jesus in the scheme of redemption. My feeling is growing that people in the world need to know the truths in the story because many people today don’t grow up in church setting to learn Bible stories.

I have been working on this lesson for quite a while, but refrained from sending till after your trip. I wanted you to enjoy fully your trip to be with family and to have a white Christmas. I am hoping that as you read this, you will hear me speaking with a gentle loving voice and NOT an angry strident one. We are to love one another and always teach in love. I really do love you, your wife, and all the young ones. I plainly say, the five of you have brought me many blessings.

I fully understand the matter of Christian liberty as it is taught in the book of Romans. Most people who exercise liberty in observing a day often forget that the liberty goes both ways and a brother may choose not to observe a day. Each must be persuaded in their own mind. If we are recognizing the context in which this principle was stated, it was in reference to whether or not a Christian has the obligation to observe the Sabbath. This being the initial context, the general principle applies to the whole issue of observing days. It is important to recognize that understanding a general principle in the light of the context means that in Galatians 4 the fact that the context is understood to be observance of Jewish feast days does not change the general principles stated regarding the special day observances.

Over the past eight weeks or so, I have really thought about Christmas as a “church” holiday. I have prayed and studied, and I have come face to face with several questions for which I cannot find a satisfactory answer in scripture. Let me begin with a story.

Quite a number of years ago, I was sent by the College Board to Memphis to help with a math teacher training. During the week of the training, I met every night with an elder from the non-instrument church of Christ. We had pretty interesting discussions on instrumental music over the course of the week. On our final night of fellowship, I said this to him: “It is my belief that if people who knew nothing about the controversy over instrumental music started reading the Bible in Genesis and read all the way through the book of Revelation, that when they were finished, they would not think that singing with instruments was sin.” Here is his response to that statement: “That is right, and that is why we have to teach them better.” Consider his response. He acknowledges that the doctrine teaching the use of instrumental music being sinful is not evident in scripture and then proceeds to grant the non-instrument church the authority to make sure people are taught their “correct” understanding. Isn’t that sad?

So, here we are in the twenty-first century with a similar statement. If a person who knew nothing about Christmas started in the book of Genesis and read all the way though the book of Revelation, they would not think that the New Testament church celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25 or any other day. The interesting thing is that I know you agree with this, because you yourself have acknowledged to me that a Christmas celebration picked for any special day is not found in the New Testament.

As I said earlier, I totally understand liberty and my family has always treated December 25 as a cultural day of fellowship, sharing and expression of love. I don’t have a tree as big as yours, but if you had come to my house, you would have found a small tree with lights and ornaments. We just don’t celebrate the day as the birthday of Jesus because it isn’t His birthday. We also don’t seek to oppose our liberty on the church. We let each one make up their own mind.

I have also really had on my heart several passages that don’t say anything about Christmas or special days, but they are extremely relevant to this discussion.

II Timothy 3:16, 17

 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

This passage normally gets used to promote the divine inspiration of the scripture, and indeed is useful for that purpose. However, there is something else in this passage that just keeps pounding my head over and over again since we began this discussion. Consider this:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God,…, that the man of God may be complete,…

Are you seeing this? An expressed function of the scripture is to be sure that I am complete. I fully understand that this relates to spiritual things and is not related to learning a trade or other worldly issues. Yet, the fundamental thing that stands out is that in my spiritual walk, I don’t need special days like Christmas to make me complete. The church and the saints did not need to wait 300 years for a pope to declare the birthday of Jesus to be December 25 in order for the Christians to be complete. All the stuff about how important it is to have a day to remember the birth of Jesus does not come from the Holy Spirit. If that were so, the scripture lies. Because the scripture does not teach these things, I don’t need them to be complete. They were not important to the Lord God. I fully realize that the whole western world has bought into December 25 and the eastern world has bought into January 7. They are both in dispute over something that God didn’t think we needed in the first place. Why do I say that? Because God tells me I am complete without knowing that. That Jesus was born and His birth details are important, yep that is stuff God wanted me know to be complete. What day Jesus was born and should I celebrate that annually on the prescribed day, God didn’t care a thing about it. How do I know that? He made me complete without telling me anything about that in scripture. Do I have liberty to pick a day and celebrate? Yes, I do. Do I have permission to tell others it is a very important thing to do? No, I don’t. I do not have liberty to tell them they are not complete without the celebration when God says they can be complete without it.

My dad used to tell me when I was a boy to be determined to believe what is right. He would say something like this. You may be the only person who is telling the truth, but the truth is still the truth even if every other person in the world denies it.

2 Peter 1:2-4

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

This is the other passage that just keeps hammering me over the whole question of celebrating the birthday of Christ on December 25 or any other day someone picks. Here Peter the apostle declares that “divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Did Peter get this wrong? Does a Christmas celebration on December 25, or whatever day, pertain to life and Godliness? The answer has to be NO. The selection of the date and the observance of it begins some 200+ years after Peter writes that “we have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness.” So, if I declare that people need the Christmas celebration, I am telling Peter the apostle that his understanding is faulty.

2 Tim 4:1-5

*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

Here is another passage that is pushing me. I am to preach the word. I am to be ready in season and out of season. I am to convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching. I need to do this because the time is coming when people will not endure sound doctrine. People will want teaching related to their own desires and will find teachers who will give them what they want. They will be turned from the truth and will be turned to fables.

Let’s think about this. I am totally convinced I need to teach that the birth of Jesus was the implementation of the giving to the Christ a body in which to die on the cross. I know that this birth is a fulfillment of a prophecy of hope. I know this preparation was an essential part of God’s plan. I know that this birth was a moment of great joy in heaven and to us all. I know that this birth was part of God’s design to bring peace between Himself and me and to bring peace among men. I teach that without any hesitation.

Here I am telling the lost person that the Bible tells us all of this and that we are guided by the word of God. This person says, “Where in the Bible does it say that Jesus was born on December 25?” Here is the dilemma. There is no way to defend this day from the word of God. It is not from the Word. It is from man. It was not given by an apostle nor by prophetic utterance. It was given by a Roman pope to make pagans more comfortable about being a Christian. It was given for this reason: *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

The correct answer is to say that the date is not biblical. The date was picked by a Roman pope in 336 a.d. on his own authority. It was picked to please people who had left paganism to make the Christian faith something they liked better. You have no responsibility to observe the birth of Jesus on this day. It is strictly a personal choice.

Rev 22:18-19

*18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

This passage has been critically used to stop people from claiming they have new truths to add to the word of God. The modernist treats this as applying only to the writing that John has just revealed by the authority of Jesus. Why is that? Men want the capacity to keep changing the scripture to meet their personal wants and needs. It is exactly what the Roman church did in the 1400’s by including apocryphal books into their version of the Bible. Interestingly, they didn’t choose to add to the New Testament, but to the old. They were savvy enough to recognize the uproar that would have occurred by touching the New Testament. Sadly, the Roman church by papal teaching has altered the beliefs of the people by adding all of the dictates of the papacy to “church” doctrine. When we elevate the date of December 25 to the birthday of the Christ and teach that the whole church should celebrate this date as an annual observance of the church, we have become guilty of adding to scripture.

My brother who I love, I cannot escape the fact that unless we can show from scripture the validity of celebrating the birthday on a day people have picked, I am honestly faced with the facts:

 1. I don’t need this practice to be complete for it is not in scripture. I need the doctrine of the birth of Christ, for it is plainly revealed, but I don’t need a special day to observe the birth and I am not free to pick one that all must accept. I am complete without Christmas as it is being taught and practiced.

 2. I don’t need to accept this practice of celebrating a special day for the birthday of Christ because it is not something that pertains to life and godliness. It was not given in scripture, but is clearly a decision made by men simply to fill a gap they believe needs to be filled. Again, the story of the birth of Jesus is a teaching that pertains to like and godliness, but the date of His birth and an annual celebration of that birth is not something that pertains to life and godliness. Again, I may celebrate a day if I wish, I am given that freedom, but I not free to promote the idea that somehow others are missing something that God wants them to do when He clearly not include it in scriptures as pertaining to life and godliness.

 3. I cannot in good conscience promote Christmas as an idea that the church needs because I am to preach the word. Christmas as an idea related to celebrating the birth of Christ on December 25 is NOT the word of God. As much as people may want it to be, it is not found in the word of God. The annual celebration on December 25 was created to satisfy man’s own desires. It is a fable that turns men from the truth. Again, I may make a personal observance of date for the birth of Christ, but I need to be sure I remember it is NOT a doctrine from the Scriptures and it is strictly by my own personal desires that I do the observance.

 4. I cannot in good conscience teach the practice of Christmas for the church knowing it is not in scripture and that I would be guilty of adding to the scripture by doing so. Will I try to force people to abandon their individual liberty by celebrating a day if they wish? No, but I will ask that they not try to teach the whole church that such a day is something needed to improve the spiritual nature of the whole church. Why would I do that? Simple, it is not a teaching revealed by God. It is a human teaching.

See, my precious brother, if the scriptures are designed so that I will be complete and that I will have all things that pertain to life and godliness, then I have to admit to myself that as much as I may like a tradition taught by men, I have no business pushing it on to everybody else in the church. And if challenged as to the scriptural nature of the tradition I am pushing, I need to openly acknowledge it as a personal liberty I am exercising and my personal choice and not something taught in the scripture. I also have to acknowledge that I am not mature in the faith when I let a human tradition not in scripture have such value in my life that I do not have the capacity to lay it aside.

My father also stressed this idea. We need to be as narrow as the scripture is narrow and as broad as it is broad. May we wear the armor of God have the belt of truth and be armed with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.