

Celebrating or Not Celebrating Christmas with a Clear Conscience – Part 1

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So today we're going to do a special topic, and it may be this week and next week. We'll see, see what time it is. I anticipate it'll be this week and next week. But what I was wanting to do was address, since we are coming up on, The holiday season and specifically Christmas coming up here at the end of December.

Last year, there was no little controversy among us concerning these things. And really, after everything blew up into what it was, this issue was never really addressed or put to rest properly as I think was needed. And, and then also I know that there was still some lingering uncertainties or You know we don't, on the one hand, we don't want to practice things just because, well, it's what we've always done.

And not be reflective and not be thinking and conscientious about what we're doing. So we need to have good foundation for what we're doing. But then at the same time, we don't want our consciences to be unsettled when they shouldn't be unsettled. When there's no basis for such unsettling. And I feel like that was happening with some people last year, that there was Some walking on eggshells, some fear and apprehensions.

Not because people had convictions biblically about what they were doing, but just because they were afraid that others were going to judge them and look down upon them over those things. So, what I want to deal with is just kind of deal with this issue once and for all. And kind of be done with it at that point and tell you what my thoughts are and what are the passages I think that are pertinent to this issue in terms of whether one does or does not participate in any types of observance, festivity, commemoration during the time of, of Christmas and what I would call it, actually I want to amend the title, Brayden and that is, My original title was celebrating Christmas with a clean conscience.

What I want to amend it to is celebrating or not celebrating Christmas with a clean conscience, because I think either way you can have a clean conscience in what, in what you do in terms of those things. So that's kind of what I would like to do. This week and then probably next week as well because I do want to bring into this topic What is some of the historical?

Interpretation and the way that you know, whenever there's something controversial It is good for us to look back and see how have other pastors and theologians in previous generations How have they handled how have they looked at these issues? So that whenever there's not complete unity or conformity, even in the churches, even in the reformed churches on such a topic, I think that it is beneficial to look not only to the Bible primarily at the Bible, but then secondarily to bring in other voices and what have.

Others from previous generations, how have they dealt with these things, those that we would consider to be faithful interpreters, expositors, faithful pastors and theologians from previous generations. So that's kind of what we'd like to do. And I want to begin, these are just some opening remarks in terms of, of these things.

And really what we're dealing with is the matter of the observance, recognition, the celebration, the commemoration. of significant events in the history of redemption. Is it a sin for the church to set aside a day or a season to commemorate some event in the history of redemption? Whether that be something historical in terms of the universal church, such as the issues of redemption that we read about in the Bible, or is it wrong for a specific church If there is some peculiar act of God's kindness, of his love, of his mercy and blessing upon a particular congregation, or even you could say upon a particular family, if they receive some blessing from the Lord, is it wrong for them to yearly set aside a day or a time to commemorate those things, to remember what God has done for them and to give thanks to God for such things, right?

That's really the issue at hand. Is it a sin? To celebrate Christmas, to celebrate Good Friday or Easter or some other holiday, Thanksgiving or something in your own life, such as an anniversary or the birth of a child and to yearly have a commemoration of this great act of kindness from the Lord, right?

Is that a sin or is it not a sin? Now we recognize that in the old covenant under the law of Moses, there were various festivals. That were set apart and that was a part of the worship that God instituted for Israel under the Old Covenant, right? The festivals that the Jews were obligated to observe, such as the Day of Atonement, such as the Passover, right?

These were festivals, these were holy days or feasts that were instituted by God and they were obligated to observe those. It was in keeping of part of their worship of God. These were not optional. These were obligatory. And if they fail to keep the Passover, or if they fail to keep the Feast of Booths, then they were committing a sin against God, right?

It wasn't something that was optional. They were holy days or sacred days by divine authority, set apart by God, and the people were commanded to keep these days. When we're talking about Christmas, or Easter, or Good Friday, we're not thinking about them in that way. Because God has not, in his word, instituted them in a divine way, right?

There is no commandment in the Bible that says that all the churches are commanded by God to celebrate Christmas on December 25th. Or to celebrate Good Friday on this day or Easter on this day or any other holiday. Only God has the authority to institute a holy day. Man does not have that authority.

The church does not have that authority. And certainly in the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles did not institute by the authority of God. Christian festivals or feast days that would be comparable or similar to the Day of Atonement, to the Feast of Booths, to the Feast of Weeks. Those things were obligatory for the people.

So we're not talking about whether or not we can do that, because obviously we don't have the authority to do so. Nor are we talking about the practice of Roman Catholicism. Of Roman Catholicism in which there are many holy days established by the church. The people are required to keep these holy days.

And in keeping them, they do penance, they refrain from work, they are to attend mass, right? And they have to do these things in order to have any hope of salvation. These are a part of the merits in their terms of their theology and of their salvation. Salvation is not by grace through faith. Salvation is partly grace.

It is partly faith, but it also includes your own merits and the things that you do and the grace that you receive from the church and from the saints and from Mother Mary and all of these things combined together bring about your salvation. And one of the things instituted by the Roman Catholic Church.

For which the people were to obtain salvation for themselves was the observance, the keeping of various holy days that they had instituted. Where the people were required to attend Roman Catholic Mass, to do penance, to refrain from work in order to have any hope of salvation. As a form of merits that you keep in order to obtain that.

Now, I've never met a single Protestant or an Evangelical Christian or a Reformed Christian. Who thinks about Christmas or Easter or Good Friday the way the Roman Catholics think about these things. Their theology is shaping the way that they think about these holidays and these types of events. And we're not wanting to think about those in that way, right?

If you think celebrating Christmas Gives you merits that's going to get you into heaven, then by all means, do not celebrate Christmas, right? You should not be doing that because that is you're making it into an idol. It is superstitious. It is idolatrous to do such things, right? We cannot, by our own activity, obtain merits by which we commend ourselves to God.

Only Christ has the merits to commend us to God. Only His righteousness can do so. And I'm quite confident that Here today, there are many who likely have celebrated Christmas in some capacity your entire life and never once in such celebrations Has the idea of merits to earn your salvation ever entered into your mind that at the end of the holiday season you sat back Congratulated yourself for knocking a couple of hundred years out of your stay in purgatory in the life to come Has anyone is anyone thinking about Christmas in those terms?

Okay, if you are, then there's greater problems that we need to deal with, and you may need to look for a different church, but I highly doubt that that is the case. So we're not talking about whether Christmas is a divinely appointed holy day. Of course it is not, right? That is obvious. Nor is Easter or Good Friday or any other holiday.

Nor are we talking about whether we should attend Roman Catholic Mass on Christmas. We should not attend Roman Catholic mass on Christmas or any other day of the year, right, in which they have their mass. Of course, we should not do so. The issue is does the church have the freedom to set aside certain days or seasons to commemorate, to celebrate, the great works of God in redemption?

Not as a holy day, but as a commemoration, or as an anniversary, to bring to mind these great things that God has done, to draw our minds to them, so that they don't fall out of

memory, or so that there is a constant yearly reminder of these great things that God has done. Right. In addition to the Lord's day, right?

Can the church call special services to commemorate and celebrate the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ in his Incarnation at Christmas in his death at Good Friday in his resurrection at Easter in his Ascending to the Father at the Ascension in his giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in the reformed church history of the churches, these were considered the five evangelical feast days, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost, right?

Those were the days that were set aside by the reformed churches to remember and to celebrate and commemorate and to draw these things into the attention of the people and to focus on these events. For the benefit and for the edification of the people, right? And this has been the case in the history of the Reformation, and we'll show you that in the historical part.

That this is not some harebrained idea that I came up with, but from the Reformers, such as Bullinger, such as Calvin, such as Ursinus, the Heidelberg Catechism, and others, that there was this Desire and this freedom that they gave to the churches to commemorate and to celebrate these things in the reformed churches.

These days were not regarded as holy days. They were not seen as sacred days set apart by God. The people were free to participate or they were free to refrain as each saw fit. Each individual church had the liberty to celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. Or the church had the liberty to not celebrate the Birth of Christ on December 25th and just continue on in their normal preaching activities and teaching activities of the churches, and it was seen in these churches as a matter of indifference, a matter of indifference, a matter of Christian liberty and prudence.

By which it was left to the individual churches under the leadership of their elders and pastors to make those decisions, right? What was best and what was most suitable and fitting for the congregation. And they urged for unity, peace, harmony within the churches. And to not let these issues become matters of fighting and dividing in the churches, right?

Which is what I've been saying from the beginning. I do not think that this issue is worth dividing churches over. I don't think that it is worth one way or the other condemning people and saying that they're going to hell. If someone wants to celebrate Christmas, so long as what they do is not in and of itself sinful, my view is leave them alone and let them do those things and don't say that you're going to hell and you're an idolater because you're doing so.

If a person doesn't want to celebrate Christmas and they want you to just treat it like any other day, my position from the beginning is leave them alone and don't disdain them and don't pass judgment on them and say that you're an inferior Christian because you don't celebrate Christmas and that you don't love Jesus and his birth and the incarnation because you don't celebrate Christmas.

We can't say those things, right? Well, what basis of authority can we say it one way or the other? My, from the beginning was. Just leave people alone so long as what they're doing isn't sinful, isn't sinful. Now if they're getting drunk on Christmas as a part of their Christmas celebration, then that's a problem and therefore it should be addressed.

But if what they're doing is in itself not sinful, then it's not something worth fighting and dividing churches and families over. We cannot command. We cannot accuse another of sin because he doesn't celebrate Christmas. But we also should not accuse others of sin because they do commemorate the birth of Christ or any other, the resurrection Good Friday, the death of Christ.

Again, so long as what they do is not in and of itself sinful. And in that way, we're not talking about Holy Days. Because Holy Days are obligatory. But these are not obligatory. And no one is making them obligatory. It's optional. If you want to come, you can come. If you don't want to come. You don't have to come the same as it is with our Wednesday night service.

Sundays is obligatory. Sunday is the Lord's Day and it is expected of all Christians unless they are unable to come, unless there is something that is preventing them from coming, that it should be a priority and they ought to attend the worship of God on Sundays. But I cannot expect the same commitment and the same attendance on Wednesday as we do on Sunday.

Now, is it good to be there on Wednesday? Of course it is. Anytime we're meeting together and we're studying and if we can come, then we ought to be able to come. But it's not the same issue as not attending the Lord's Day. Because the Lord's Day is instituted and appointed by God, but Wednesday is not.

Wednesday is instituted by the church, by us, as a day for us to meet weekly. To have Bible study again and because we like each other so much, right? We want to be together and I know you would, I'll be depressed if you had to go a whole week without seeing me. So, it's, it's for that reason that we come together to meet, to be with God's people, to study the Word, to offer prayers, to be in fellowship.

And it's beneficial and helpful to the church. But we can't expect the same, it's not the same expectation as the Lord's Day. Because one is divinely instituted and the other one is It's a matter of prudence. It's a matter of indifference. And then, whether we meet on Wednesday or Tuesday doesn't matter.

Whether we meet on Wednesday or Thursday doesn't matter. There's nothing sacred about Wednesday for midweek meetings. If in the church's in what is best for the church, it is determined that Wednesday there's conflicts and half the congregation can't come, but Tuesday there's no conflicts and everyone can come, then what would be the prudent thing for the church to do?

To have your meeting on Tuesday instead of having it on Wednesday, right? That would be the prudent thing to do. And there would be no problem with us changing from Wednesday

to Tuesday. Because it's optional. It's something that we are doing out of, that is a matter of indifference. It is the circumstances of worship.

It's not the elements themselves. It's just a matter of when we meet. Then also when we think about Sundays, we meet at 1030, but would it be a sin if we met at 10? No, would it be a sin if we met at 11? No, we meet according to what is best for us. We meet from 1030 to 12, then we have lunch, and then we have a second service.

But there are other churches who have Sunday school Bible study hour from 9 to 10 or 9 30 to 10 30 and then service from 10 30 to 12 and then they don't have lunch and are they sinning by not having lunch? No, are we sinning by having lunch? No, and again, whatever is best for each congregation Right, and if our congregational situation was different, or if it changes in the future, then maybe we'll alter what we do even on the Lord's Day.

But we will never alter what we do in terms of the elements of worship. We're not going to say, you know what, preaching the word of God is optional. So we're not going to do that as a part of our services. Singing psalms and hymns is optional, so we're not going to do that as a, we can't do that. These have to be incorporated in a part of the worship of God.

We don't have the right to institute a new ordinance. We can't say, well, we're going to do the Lord's supper. But then after that, I've come up with a new one that I think is really going to be swell. It's really going to help us out. And then this is obligatory on all the churches. We can't do that. We can't do that in terms of the elements of worship.

So there are these things that are indifferent circumstances of worship. And then there are those things that are the very worship of God, the very elements. Itself. Those are unchangeable. Those are instituted by God. But the circumstances we must determine ourselves as to what is best and what is most fitting for the church.

So again, we're not talking about establishing a holy day, a sacred day, the observance of which is commanded as a necessity of faith. And if that is the way that one views Christmas, then that is idolatry and it is a sin and we shouldn't look at it that way. But if one sees it as an anniversary day, or as a commemoration day, some significant event in the life of Christ, in the history of redemption, and as a matter of liberty and prudence, right?

This is the way the Reformed churches have typically looked at it. The Reformed pastors have looked at it. They say that it is good to have a yearly reminder. Of these great acts of redemption, these great things that God has done, things that have been in the history of redemption. And so the church is appointed a time when the church would focus on this particular aspect of our redemption or this particular event that God has brought about.

Like the incarnation and that we're gonna set aside one day of the year and during that time We're going to give particular focus to this Significant events, this incarnation, and we're going to meditate on it. We're going to think about it and we'll formulate a service around those things for the edification of the people of God, whether that's the incarnation,

whether that's the death of Christ, whether that's the resurrection, whether that's the Ascension, whether that's the day of Pentecost.

And this is why the churches established a yearly calendar, a yearly calendar so that every year. These high points, these significant points of doctrine would be brought to the attention and that there would be specific teaching on these elements for the people throughout the year, these yearly reminders.

Now again, we could do that spontaneously. We could just draw a day out of the hat and say this day we're going to focus on the incarnation. But what is wrong with doing that yearly at a set time, right? Yearly at a set time as a reminder over and over again. To draw our minds to meditate on some aspect of salvation.

I don't see the problem with those things. Right? Did the incarnation of Jesus Christ take place? Is this a true event or not? It is a true historical event. It took place in this world. Is his incarnation a significant event for our salvation? Absolutely! Without it, there is no salvation. Then what is wrong with setting aside a day once a year to focus on this truth and the implications for our salvation, right?

What is the sin in a church having a service where we read scripture about the incarnation, where we choose Psalms and hymns about the birth of Christ, where we teach on this topic and we thank God for the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Right. What is evil about a Christian father reading Luke chapter two to his family on Christmas day and Explaining to his children the incarnation of Christ and its significance for our salvation Thanking God for sending Christ into the world that we might live through him, right?

What is wrong with doing that right you wouldn't be wrong to do that at random For me to say this day, we're going to focus on this truth and teach my children those things in the home. It would never be wrong to do that. Well, why is it okay to do it at random, but it's not okay to do it as a yearly tradition, or as a yearly practice that is established and has been happening in the church for a number of years.

Because often those who oppose these things say it's okay to do spontaneous random times, special services. But you can't do them regularly. You can't do them in the form of a practice or a tradition that is established in the life of the church. But who gives, how can you make that distinction between random special services but not yearly special services?

It doesn't make any sense to me. Did Jesus die on the cross? Yes or no? Absolutely. Is that significant for our salvation? Yes it is. Very significant for our salvation. Then what is the sin? In meeting every year on Good Friday and on that day, reading scripture about the death of Christ, teaching on its significance, singing psalms and hymns about his death and thanking God for sending his son into the world to die in the place of sinners like us.

What is the evil that will come from that? Right? I see benefit. I see edification. I see it as something that is good and can be useful and helpful to the church. Did the resurrection

take place? Yes, it did. Is the resurrection significant for our salvation? Of course it is. So what is wrong with, on that day, setting aside the service to focus on the resurrection of Christ?

Right? So much of the Bible is set aside for this purpose. To think about and to meditate on these things. Did Jesus ascend into heaven? He absolutely did. Is that significant for our salvation? Absolutely he is. So what would be wrong with us having a special service and saying, at this service, we're going to focus on the ascension of Christ and what it means for our salvation, why this is so important for us in our redemption.

Did Jesus send the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost? Absolutely he did. Is that important for us, for our salvation? Now this one is one that is grossly misunderstood in our own day, grossly mistaught in even the Reformed churches and certainly in the Baptist churches. But does the Holy Spirit have great implications on our salvation?

Yes, absolutely it does. So what would be wrong with setting apart a time for the church to meet and have a special service and select passages that deal with the day of Pentecost or the Holy Spirit, teach on this important topic, pick songs and scriptures, verses or scripture songs and hymns that focus on these things.

I don't see the problem in the evil that will come from that. We've been having a Good Friday service since I've come here. And I don't, I see it as being beneficial. That's been my experience, and it's been the experience of many of you through your own testimony. That it is very edifying, it's very encouraging.

It's good because it draws your mind to think about these things. We've also done some form of a Christmas service every year. And no one else. Has ever seen it as a stumbling block that's causing them to commit great sins and great idolatries against God. And this year, Lord willing, my hope is that we will have a special service for every one of these events.

Some of them will be in proximity to the Sunday, a couple of them will be in addition to what we do on Sunday. It never made any sense to me from the first time that I heard this teaching about the idolatrous practice of Christmas. It never made sense to me. This was a thing that unsettled me from the beginning that it's good and fine to read.

Isaiah chapter nine, verses six to seven, that it's good and fine to read Matthew chapter one and two. It's good and fine to read Lew, to read Luke chapter one and two. Right. It's good to have meetings other than the Lord's Day, and we do that. We have a Wednesday meeting every week and no one is saying that we're C.

We're creating a holy day. Although, did you know in Geneva that John Calvin was accused of creating a holy day because they had a Wednesday service? His opponents were criticizing him of creating a holy day. And he said, no, it's not a holy day because it's not obligatory. It's optional. And it's after the work day.

And we, it's just a time for us to teach the Bible. And we do that every week, right? We have a Wednesday service. We also have a monthly men and women's Bible study that we do every Saturday. And we've been doing that for many years, right, since 2014. In that way, is it not a tradition? Is it not a practice that has been in our church for nearly 10 years?

Well, where did this tradition come from? Which passage in the Bible tells us explicitly to have a men's Bible study once a month? There is no such passage, but it's not going to regulate every single thing that we do, right? In fact, it leaves freedom, the Bible does, for us, for the churches. To have meetings as they see fit for the good and for the benefit of the church.

We have these meetings. These are religious meetings that are in addition to the Lord's Day. We've also have had conferences that we've called for on special topics that we will pick. And we'll have special teachings in addition to what we normally do in order to address those things. And again, those who are against any Type of holiday or commemoration days.

We'll say well, it's okay to do those because they're spontaneous but But our Saturday meetings are not spontaneous They're not anymore. They were at the first but they're not now we've been doing it for 10 years Our Wednesday night meetings are not spontaneous. You know that this is what we're gonna do every single week We've been doing it since I've been the pastor here They were doing it before I became the pastor here and long after I'm dead and gone.

They probably will still be doing it So why is it okay to do it spontaneously, but if you do it as a practice or a regular custom or a regular tradition, right? Then all of a sudden, then it becomes sinful and harmful and idolatrous to do those types of things, right? There's nothing sinful about giving good gifts to your children, right?

Doesn't the Bible teach us to do such things? If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask? It's good for us to spend time with our family. It's good for people to decorate their homes. Who wants to live in a house with no decorations?

It's going to be boring and drab, cold, dead in there. There's nothing wrong. If you don't decorate your house, that's fine. But yeah, most of you probably have some kind of decorations, right? Right? There's nothing wrong with doing those things. But if what's prompting you to do that is Christmas or Easter or Good Friday or Thanksgiving, then then it becomes a sin.

Then it becomes idolatry. Things that in themselves are not sinful, but good. Things that are fine the rest of the year, but if done in proximity to Christmas or any other holiday, then it becomes a sin. It's okay to give gifts, but just not at Christmas. Wait till after the New Year. It's okay to decorate your home, but just not for this.

It's okay to read Luke 2, but don't read it in between Thanksgiving and Christmas. You see how absurd that is? Right, and you're talking about straining out gnats, or straining out coyotes, or you're straining out a gnat and you're swallowing, you're swallowing a camel whole, is what you're doing. You're dealing with minutiae in these types of, of arguments, which are just completely futile and absolutely worthless.

It also never made sense to me that it's okay to celebrate national secular holidays, but it's forbidden to celebrate religious holidays. To me it was always all or nothing. If it's a sin to celebrate Christmas, then it's a sin to celebrate Thanksgiving. Because where does the Bible say, if the expectation is it has to be instituted by prophet or an apostle, then what prophet or apostle instituted Thanksgiving?

Which one instituted the 4th of July, Memorial Day, Labor Day, any of the other holidays that we celebrate. And again, these were arguments that were being bantied about and being said. Well, it's okay to celebrate Thanksgiving or 4th of July because those are secular holidays. So long as the focus isn't on Jesus Christ, then it's okay.

And my head almost exploded when those kinds of things. It's like, how is that even possible for a Christian? Right, how is it possible for me as a Christian to celebrate the 4th of July and it not have some religious component to it? And if I read Romans chapter 13 to my family on the 4th of July, because it talks about government and our obligations and the Christian relationship to the government, Then now is that a sin?

Because now I've made it a religious thing. Is it okay to eat turkey on Thanksgiving and watch football and spend time with your families but just don't pray? Don't thank God. Because the minute you do that, what are you doing? Now you're making it religious. And if, is that, does that make it idolatry?

These things make me want to run through this wall over here and just beat my head against it. Those things didn't make sense to me. Never did. Okay, one last thing in terms of opening remarks. It was also said that we just want to have a good time, that we just want to have fun, and we don't want to upset our families, and we don't want to upset our practices.

Of course, we want to live a life pleasing to God. This should be the desire of every Christian. We must desire to please God, and we need to examine our practices. Whatever we're doing, we need to think about it, and if anything good has come from this, This big scandal is at least it has hopefully caused us to be more reflective and to think more about why we do the things that we do and to have sound convictions for why we do those things.

We need to make sure that our practices and our traditions, that they do not contradict the commandment of God. And if we find that something that we're doing does contradict the command of God, then we need to amend our tradition, our practice, to conformity to Christ. Even if that means disappointing our families and upsetting our traditions and our practices, we cannot pursue peace at all cost.

This cannot be the case in the Christian life. Peace that is established through compromise is not peace that's worth having. It is the world's peace. It is not founded upon the truth. We should not pursue peace at all costs. However, there is another side to this as well. And that is that we should not needlessly stir up controversy and divisions and cause strife and conflict in homes and upset our families for no cause.

Right if there is not some biblical reason to do so right and both evils must be avoided Peace at all costs must be avoided but also needless strife and divisions and controversy must be avoided as well in Adopting a position that is obscure and extreme Just for the sake of being contrary is not in keeping with the commandment of Christ to live at peace with all men if possible So far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men, and that all men includes your family, it includes your friends, it includes your neighbor, it includes the church.

We should strive for peace in our homes, in our families, in our church. We are, whether we like it or not, we are the product of our time and our generation in which we live. We have a culture that has been passed down to us. We have families that we have been born into, that have traditions, that have expectations, some good, maybe some not so good, that have been established for many years.

Going to grandma's house, maybe for some of you, not for me, my grandma's are all dead, but for some people, going to grandma's house every Christmas day and having Christmas dinner with the family is something that they've done for 30 years in a row. And if they call grandma and say, grandma, we can't come because this is idolatry.

If it is indeed idolatry, then that's what we need to do. But if it's not idolatry, then what are we doing to grandma? My sinner to her grave early, right? If you do such things to needlessly upset families and people, right? Without any purpose, without any reason to do so is not a good thing to do. Just for the sake of being contrary or just for the sake of, of having some position that is in this way, right?

If I'm going to call my mom and dad and tell them that my family is not coming to their house for Thanksgiving and coming to their house for Christmas this year, as we have every year since we've been married and as we have every year since we've had children, that is going to cause untold heartache and grief.

Upon my mom and dad, it's also going to cause it upon my wife and my Children and my brothers and my sister and my nieces and my nephews. So if I'm going to do that, then I better have good reason to do it. I better have rock solid, crystal clear, black and white reasons and arguments to do it without any doubt.

But to do so based upon one hour of teaching from one person. without any reflection, without any thought, without looking at what other people have said, but just doing it with little to no biblical evidence would be very foolish for me to do so, and I think it would be very cruel to do so to my own family.

It would be to needlessly cause division, strife, turmoil, and heartache for no reason. And for a pastor to come in and throw this burden onto the church and tell them That you can't go to your family either, and to do that one month before Christmas when plans have already been made, when expectations are already there, that is not exercising prudence as a pastor over the flock.

It is very foolish to do such things, and it leads to strife and conflict and all sorts of turmoil that is not good. So, we shouldn't do these types of things needlessly. Right. Yes, it is true that Jesus says, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. And that is true. He did come to set father and son against each other, mother and daughter against each other.

And the Bible does teach us that we must hate our father and mother in terms of our love for Christ. Our love for Christ must be above all. However, the Bible also teaches that Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and he also comes to turn the hearts of the fathers toward their sons and the hearts of mothers toward their daughters.

It's not one or the other. Both of those things are true. But to insist upon division all the time, it's not good. And in terms of what we are to pursue, Jesus tells us he did not come to bring peace but a sword. He tells us that there will be division, there will be controversy, there will be conflict in the home.

But he's stating that as a matter of fact, of what is going to happen because of our faithfulness to Christ. But does the Bible ever tell us to pursue division? Does it ever tell us to pursue strife? To pursue conflict? It tells us that those things are going to happen inevitably, and that we need to be ready and prepared for those things.

But in terms of what we pursue, what are we to pursue? We're to pursue peace. We're to pursue harmony. We're to pursue love. We're to pursue charity. This is the way that we are. So, my goal then in all of this, these are just the opening remarks, but my goal in all this is to show that commemorating the birth of Christ, or the death of Christ, or the resurrection of Christ, or the ascension of Christ, or the day of Pentecost, or if a church has some significant event that happens in their own life, for them to set aside a time to commemorate and remember those things.

Or if a family has some significant blessing given to them by God in the life of the family, for them to set aside a time yearly to remember and reflect upon those things. Right, if the mother and the wife of the home is diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, and then God heals her, and the day that she receives her diagnosis that she's cancer free is on May 13th, Is it wrong every year at May 13th for that family to get together and go out and have a meal together and to rejoice and thank God and praise God for healing the wife and mother of that home?

That kind of a family tradition or celebration because of some particular act of kindness from the Lord? What about our children? Aren't those blessings from God? Is it wrong for me every May 30th? 30th, right? Yes, 30th. April 2nd. Okay. She was born in April. She's born too close to my anniversary. Every April 2nd or May 30th or whatever other days these kids were born.

To set aside that day and say we're going to have a, you get to pick the meal. And we're going to give them their meal. And then we read scripture and we pray over them. And we always make everyone in the house go around and say whatever they're grateful for about the one whose birthday it is. Or for a husband to take his wife out on his anniversary.

Because he's grateful to God for giving him a wife and to commemorate those kinds of things. But again, where are those practices taught in the Bible? You don't have a command that tells husbands to take their wives out. I mean, you have it in general. Husbands love your wives. But the specificity of how you do that, it's not said to do that in relationship to this anniversary.

So, my goal then is to show that commemorations of this type. Whether they be family events, whether they be events in the life of the church, or whether they be events in the history of redemption, that these things are not in and of themselves sinful, but that there is a place for people to participate in these things.

There is, I think, a biblical justification that if one so chooses and if one so desires to participate in certain activities this time of year, So long as that activity is not sinful, then it is permissible, and that one can celebrate or not celebrate Christmas either way with a clean conscience. And then the way that we need to live toward one another is we need to promote liberty within ourselves, right?

So that what you do in your home and what I do in my home may not be identical, right? It may not be that our practices are in 100 percent conformity. That you have liberty to do one thing and I have liberty to do another so long as neither one of us are committing sins against God and then to promote charity, love toward one another, to not bite and devour one another over these types of issues.

And then if we do that, will it not promote unity in the body of Christ? We've mentioned this before. It's hard enough for us to all get along, right? Unlike, no, we're all, we all have the flesh, right? And we all have our own desires and our own selfishness. It's hard enough for us to get along and for there to be unity in the church.

But much less when we're creating arbitrary Controversies that people typically when it comes to these things, this is what they get so hot about, right? They want to talk about it all the time They they come with these very dogmatic views and approaches to these kinds of things and then they bite and devour and condemn and they Consume one another so that Okay is enough for that now biblical justification biblical justification and then We'll deal with historical justification as well.

And so we'll look at a couple of passages this week, and then a couple of passages next week, and then the historical components next week as well. Okay? All right, the first passage, Esther chapter 9. Esther chapter 9.

Esther chapter 9. Verses 18 to 22. Esther chapter 9, verse 18. And we all know the story of Esther and evil Haman, who sought to destroy the Jews. And then God provided this miraculous deliverance from their enemies. In that instead of their enemies destroying them, they destroy their enemies.

Right? And God used Esther and Mordecai to bring about this great deliverance. Then Esther chapter 9, verse 18, this is the aftermath. of this great deliverance that took place says, but the Jews who are in Sosa assembled on the 13th and the 14th of the same month. And they rested on the 15th day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.

Therefore the Jews of the rural areas who lived in the rural towns made the 14th day of the month of Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another. Then Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to celebrate the 14th day of the month of Adar and the 15th day of the month annually.

Because on those days, the Jews rid themselves of their enemies. And it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another. So here is the establishment of what is the Feast of Purim, which was this yearly celebration and commemoration of God's deliverance of the Jews from their enemies.

This was not an original part of the covenant that God made with the people of Israel at Sinai. This is many, many years later, right? Nearly a thousand years later is when these events take place. So this was not instituted by Moses. It was not ratified there at Sinai in terms of the Old Covenant and their worship, nor is this celebration and rejoicing restricted to Jerusalem, right, where they have to go yearly to Jerusalem, to the temple or to the tabernacle, wherever it was located before, in order to celebrate, in order to keep this feast, but it is one that is done in their towns, right, wherever they are found, they're in their towns with their families, with their friends.

And it is a day of rejoicing, a day of feasting as they remember and commemorate the salvation that God gave to them. This blessing of God when he delivered them from their enemies, right from their enemies, a day of rejoicing, feasting, sending portions of food to one another. So one of the ways that they commemorated this is they would send food to each other.

Which sounds like a great idea to me, right? We could give food to each other and also gifts to the poor. This is how they are keeping it or how they're observing it and showing their thankfulness to God. And this took place around 480 to 470 BC, about a thousand years after the time of Moses. And it was commemorating this great event of God.

Now, one of the objections that would be brought up at this point was that Mordecai was a prophet. So he had the authority to establish a feast day, but we're not prophets. Therefore, we do not have the authority. And it is true that Mordecai was a prophet, and it's true that

we're not prophets. So no one here claims to be a prophet, or that we have the authority that someone like Mordecai possessed.

However, the question is, is this something that we can follow the example of? Is Mordecai Giving us an example by which we can follow so that when other great events happen in the life of the church or in the history of redemption, that the church has a precedent, right, has a principle that was established by which they can follow this example, right?

A principle of remembering the great works of God, but that's what Mordecai doesn't want to happen. He wants them to be grateful for what God has done for them. And he knows that a yearly reminder, right? Because what are we so often? What is one of the problems that we have because of our flesh? Do we not easily forget what God has done?

Isn't this a problem throughout the life of Israel that they forgot what God had done for them? Right? And of course, with a perfect man, when with one who is not forgetful, with one who doesn't have the flesh rising up, then he doesn't need such reminders, right? Because his whole life is devoted to God.

But that's not us because none of us are perfect. So for there to be reminders for there to be times that keep these things in our mind and in our view so that we remember what God has done. This is what Mordecai is fighting against, what he's trying to mitigate against. is the tendency of men to forget the good works that God has done.

And one of the ways he saw fit to keep this in their mind, so that the people, not only in their generation, but in the next generation, and in the next generation, was by establishing this feast, this feast day, by which it would always be in the life of the people. And so then later, in the next generation, the children grow up.

And they say, why are we doing this? What does this mean? Then the father can sit down and explain to them, this is what God did for us. And that is a teaching time, right? An anniversary, a reminder of what God did. And that is how it is a blessing to the people. So he didn't want it to be forgotten. So he set aside this yearly reminder, this yearly anniversary day to celebrate what God had done.

By rejoicing, by feasting, by sending portions of food to one another, by giving gifts to the poor. Why can't we follow the example of the prophet? Right, nearly every example that we have of godliness in the Bible is a prophet. Is that not true? It's a prophet, it's an apostle, it's our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Can we only follow their example if it's accompanied with an explicit commandment to do such things? Is there not times where we just see their example and in their example we have laid out for us the principle, the implications of their example and for us to follow in the way that they live. So, I don't find the argument that, well, they're prophets and you're not a prophet.

That is the basis for not being able to use the Feast of Purim as a justification for celebrating Christmas or Good Friday or Easter or any other significant event in the life of Christ. It's because we're not prophets, therefore we don't have the authority to do so. Also, I do find it highly disingenuous and quite hypocritical.

That some of those who say that we can't follow the example of the prophets in commemorating the works of God on the basis that we're not prophets. Yet the same ones are happy to follow the example of the prophets when it comes to ridiculing and mocking anyone who disagrees with them. What passage in the Bible explicitly tells us to make fun of people?

To come up with pithy names to mock people? What passage in the Bible tells us to ridicule and scoff at our enemies constantly? There is no passage where there's an explicit commandment to do so. However, this practice is being justified, and it's being justified using Jeremiah chapter 20. Jeremiah chapter 20, verses 1 to 3.

Jeremiah 20, verse 1. When Pashur, the priest, the son of Emer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. Pashur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the Lord. On the next day, when Pashur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, Pashur is not the name the Lord has called you, but rather Magar Misabib, which means terror on every side.

So there, Jeremiah the prophet He gave a new name to Pashur that was fitting with his character and with his conduct. But Jeremiah is a prophet, right? But if we can't follow the example of the prophet, then why is it okay to follow the example of the prophet here to call, you know, people names? Like John MacArthur, John McMillions.

Like Vody Bokum, Vody Bunkum. Like. I could go on all day long. Many, many examples of such things. And this is the passage used to justify that. But it's a prophet who's doing that and there's no explicit command. So using those things to justify calling people filthy feral hogs, calling a man a jackal, right, calling him scary Jerry, right, those kinds of things.

Justifying calling a man's wife a prostitute. calling his children depraved, deranged people using these kinds of passages because we need to follow the example of the prophet, but then when someone else brings up the example of the prophet to support something that they're against, well, then you can't follow the example of the prophet.

Do you see the contradiction there? It's okay in the one, but not in the other based upon whatever fits one's own agenda and whatever fits one's own desires. So I don't feel like there was. Fairness and justice in terms of the arguments that were going on in relationship to these things. Okay, next another passage.

John chapter 10. John chapter 10, and again, none of these are, now I will say in terms of Esther chapter 9, Esther chapter 9, and we'll read this when we get to the historical

justification, but I'm going to, Teej you with it now. Okay. In Esther chapter 9 22 in the Westminster confession, when the Westminster confession in chapter 21 article five is addressing religious worship and the Sabbath day there, they talk about special occasions of thanksgiving to God that the church has the authority or the liberty to call For special services to give thanks to God for blessings that he gives to them, and the passage they use to justify that is Esther chapter nine, verse 22.

So the Westminster Divines, were using that to say that it's okay for the church to commemorate in their own day the great works of God with special services or meetings for such events. Okay, then John chapter 10 22 to 23. John 10, 22 to 23 says, at that time, the feast of dedication took place at Jerusalem.

It was winter and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon here now again. There's not a lot here, but what there is happening is that there is the Feast of Dedication. The Feast of Dedication that is taking place in Jerusalem, though this feast also was not confined to Jerusalem only.

It was one that could be celebrated in other towns as well, but also it was being celebrated or observed in Jerusalem. And Jesus is there in Jerusalem during this time. Now, it doesn't say explicitly that he was there celebrating this festival or celebrating what was going on. But there's nothing in Christ that gives the indication that he disapproves of what is taking place.

And he never addresses this issue in terms of the people of Israel and in their sins against God. Though he spoke against the scribes and Pharisees and the people of Israel in many of their sins, he never mentions that the Feast of Dedication is idolatry. And you guys are committing idolatry because this is a feast that was not instituted in the law of Moses.

Nor was it instituted by a prophet. This is a feast that was instituted in that intertestamental period in between the end of the Old Testament canon and the coming of Christ. And the feast of dedication was established in 164 BC. 164 BC. This was when the Greeks, after Alexander the Great and his empire after he died, his empire was divided up into four different regions.

One of those regions was over the territory where Israel is found. And it came to be under the rule of a king called Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus Epiphanes. And he was a horrible, horrible man. Okay, horrible man, a very wicked and a very ruthless king. And he hated The Jewish people with a passion and ruled them as a tyrant and in a very cruel and a very wicked way.

And one of the things that he did is that he went into the temple and he sacrificed pig's blood, a pig, there on the altar. And then he set up a statue of Zeus in the temple. Which is It's highly desecrating of, of, of that place. Okay. Could you imagine the outrage that would happen today if a Christian went into a mosque and put up a cross, or even if a Muslim went into a Buddhist temple and put up whatever they do.

Okay. I mean, it would be outrageous for such a thing, but this is what he did. He did this kind of, of evil thing there in Jerusalem, in the temple in Jerusalem. He also forbid the Jews from worshiping God, from reading Scripture, from circumcising their boys, from observing the Sabbath day. So he was persecuting and oppressing them because of their religion.

Well, in due time there was a revolt against such things under a man named Judas Maccabee. Judas Yeah, Judas Maccabeus. It's called the Maccabean Revolt. And it was kind of like a insurrection, guerrilla warfare, and they fought against the Greeks, and they eventually drove them out, and they threw them out of the country.

And then after they did this, they had a rededication of the temple. Where they purified it, they purged it of this idolatry and what had happened there. And they rededicated it to the Lord and then they reestablished the sacrifices and the worship of God at that time. And then they had a feast or a yearly celebration to remember and commemorate this deliverance from the Greeks and the rededication of the temple.

And that is the Feast of Dedication. What came to be the Feast of Dedication, what we know today as Hanukkah. Hanukkah is the Feast of Dedication that is still celebrated today by the Jews. And here we find that Jesus is in Jerusalem during this Feast. He's not saying anything about it. He's not rebuking them for, for doing such things.

But it seems that his appearance there, at least, gives some indication of his approval of such a thing. In that he didn't have anything against it, even though it was a feast that was instituted after the law of Moses and not instituted by a prophet because the Maccabeans were not prophets. So there's that.

Okay, then one last passage and that'll be Joshua 22, Joshua 22, 10 to 34.

And then next week we'll deal with. The passages like Galatians 4 and Colossians 2 with Romans 14, 1st Corinthians chapter 10. I think that these passages have bearing as well on this issue. It will give us some more insight into how we ought to think about and practice these things. Okay, Joshua 22 and we'll begin reading in verse 10.

Okay, this is after The Israelites come in and conquer the land. And we remember there were two and a half tribes that took their portion. Their allotment of land was on the east side of the Jordan. They were compelled to go in with their brothers and fight in the land. And then after the rest of the land was conquered, they were then released by Joshua to go back to the east side of the Jordan, back to their territory and to start their lives there, okay?

So this is what is happening. That's the context of what is going on, okay? It is these two and a half tribes that are now going back to their portion on the east side of the Jordan. And naturally, being on the other side of the Jordan, this river serves as a natural boundary between these two piece, these two territories.

So all of them are the tribes of Israel, but there is this natural barrier that is separating these two and a half tribes from the rest of the ten and a half tribes on the other side of Israel, okay? And there is the fear that they're not going to be included or that they're going to be ostracized or treated differently.

Because of this natural boundary that exists, okay? That's the context. Joshua 22:10, When they came to the region of the Jordan, which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and of the half tribe of Manasseh, built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance. And the sons of Israel heard of it.

Behold, the sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, have built an altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, on the side belonging to the sons of Israel. When the sons of Israel heard of it, The whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh to go up against them in war.

Then the sons of Israel sent to the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh into the land of Gilead, Phineas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, one chief from each father's house, hold from the each of the tribes of Israel and each one of them was the head of the father's household among the thousands of Israel.

They came to the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh to the land of Gilead. And they spoke to them saying, thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, what is this unfaithful act which you have committed against the God of Israel, turning away from following the Lord this day and by building yourself an altar to rebel against the Lord this day.

Is not the iniquity of Peor enough for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves to this day, although a plague came on the congregation of the Lord, that you must turn away the day from following the Lord? If you rebel against the Lord today, He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow.

If, however, the land of your possession is unclean, then cross into the land of the possession of the Lord. where the Lord's tabernacle stands and take possession among us. Only do not rebel against the Lord or rebel against us by building an altar for yourselves besides the altar of the Lord our God.

Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully in the things under the band and wrath fall on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the sons of the half tribe of Manasseh answered and spoke to the heads of the families of Israel.

The Mighty One, God the Lord. The Mighty One, God the Lord. He knows and may Israel itself know. If it was in rebellion, or if an unfaithful act against the Lord, do not save us this day. If we have built us an altar to turn away from following the Lord, or if to offer a burnt

offering or grain offering on it, or if to offer sacrifice of peace offerings on it, may the Lord Himself require it.

But truly we have done this out of concern for a reason saying in time to come, your sons may say to our sons, what have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel for the Lord has made the Jordan a border between us and you. You sons of Reuben and sons of Gad, and you have no portion in the Lord, so your sons may make our sons stop fearing the Lord.

Therefore we said, let us build an altar, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice, rather it shall be a witness between us and you and between our generations after us, that we are to perform the service of the Lord before him. With our burnt offerings and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings so that your sons will not say to our sons in the time to come, you have no portion in the Lord.

Therefore we said, it shall also come about. If they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, then we shall say, see the copy of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made not for burnt offerings or for sacrifice. Rather, it is a witness between us and you. Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn away from following the Lord this day by building an altar for burnt offering, for grain offering, or for sacrifice besides the altar of the Lord, our God, which is before his tabernacle.

So when Phineas, the priests and the leaders of the congregation, even the heads of the family of Israel who are with him, heard the words with the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the sons of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them. And Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the priest, said to the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the sons of Manasseh, Today we know that the Lord is in our midst, because you have not committed this unfaithful act against the Lord.

Now you have delivered the sons of Israel from the hand of the Lord. Then Phineas, the son of Eliezer, the priest and the leaders returned from the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan to the sons of Israel and brought back word to them. The word pleased the sons of Israel and the sons of Israel bless God.

And they did not speak of going up against them in war to destroy the land in which the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad were living. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar witness for they said, it is a witness between us that the Lord is God. So here, this altar that is built, what is its purpose?

Why did they do this? Well, it's not to offer sacrifices and burn offerings. If it was to offer sacrifices and burn offerings, then what would they be guilty of? It would be guilty of sinning against God. It would be guilty of idolatry. When they find out about it, when the tribes on the other side find out what they have done, their initial suspicion is that they are building this altar to commit idolatry against God and that they're going to commit sin against God.

And by doing this, they're going to bring guilt and shame upon the entire body of the people, just as it happened with Achan. And that all of them are going to suffer the consequences of their actions. And this is why they send this delegation to them to confront them and to find out, right, what is going on, right?

What is the intention? What is it that you are doing? But when they come to them and they find out that this altar is not for religious purposes, right? It's not for Offering sacrifices and burnt offerings but what's its purpose is is to be a witness an Altar that they can look to or look at and remind them and their sons that where are they supposed to worship?

The true altar right over in Jerusalem and as a sign of their solidarity in their unity in worship as a people with those on the other side of the Jordan. Now who commanded them to build this altar? Did Joshua tell them to do it? Did Eliezer tell them to do it? Did any prophet tell them to do this? No, they did it on their own freedom, right?

They did it according to their own will. Was it a sin for them to do this? No, now they might have lacked a little foresight in telling the other people what they were doing that might have been good to let Them know but when Phineas and these ten chiefs come and find out what they're doing, they don't tell them Well, you need to tear it down If it was a sin, they would have told them to tear it down It pleased them when they hear their answer and they don't tell them to tear it down So I do think that this is an example Again, while we're not dealing with a day, we are dealing with a symbol.

And what is a day but a symbol or a ceremony? It's of a like kind as this. And they built this as a way of commemorating as an object, a symbol to remind them to worship God at the true altar that was at their tabernacle over wherever it was located at this time and later would be located in Jerusalem.

And they did this without the approval or without the explicit command of a prophet or an apostle or a direct command of God because they saw that this was a part of what it is to. Practice our faith to practice faithfulness to the Lord that these types of things were not forbidden. Now, was it obligatory for them to build this?

If they had not built it, would it have been a sin? No. So it wasn't a sin for them to build it, nor was it a sin if they wouldn't have built it. It's a matter of indifference. It's a matter of liberty. And they built it and they built it for the right reasons. And they use it for the right reasons. Now, if later in time they started offering sacrifices on it, then it would be a problem.

But at this point, it's not a problem. And so they're permitted to do such a thing and they're given the liberty to do so. And they have a clean conscience in doing such things in the same way. I think that it's okay for us to set aside days to commemorate the great works of God. So long as it's not idolatrous, so long as it's not superstitious.

If at any point our celebration of Christmas or Good Friday or Easter becomes idolatrous, then it's a problem. But so long as we are regulating what we do by the Word of God and by what the scriptures lay out for us, then there's freedom and liberty to partake or to abstain. And we shouldn't judge and we shouldn't look down upon others because what they practice or what they do may be different or look differently than us.

So we'll stop there for today. And then we'll pick up next week and we'll look at some of these passages in the New Testament, dealing with days and weeks and moons and festivals and those kinds of things and how they're dealing with it there in the New Testament. And then also some historical context as well in terms of the history of redemption or the history of interpretation, how other pastors and theologians and churches.

Have handled these things, especially in the reformed tradition, right in the reformed tradition, which we find ourselves squarely in okay. Well with that we'll conclude for the day and then we'll pray and we'll be dismissed So let's pray and then we'll be dismissed Heavenly Father we thank you Lord for your word and Lord.

We thank you that you do give to us Lord all that we need for life and godliness Lord we Lord we pray that We would be conscientious, Lord, that we would always be examining our life and our practices. Lord, we don't want to do things just because we've always done them that way. But Lord, we also don't want to just discard things and throw them away when there's no reason to do so.

So Lord, we need wisdom and we need understanding from you. So that we can, Lord, practice that which is pleasing to you. Lord, we know that. Our faithfulness to you, Lord, that inevitably it will bring division, Lord. There will be conflict that we will have, and Lord, we pray that you would help us to be faithful and not to compromise in such situations.

Lord, we know as well that we are to pursue peace with all men, yet so often we find, Lord, within us a cantankerous root of bitterness. Lord, that seeks out quarrels and controversies needlessly, Lord, for no other reason than simply to fight and to brawl with others. Lord, we want to avoid both of these evils.

And Lord, we want to have a conscience that is at peace and at ease in what we practice before you. Lord, we want to have love toward one another. And Lord, to not pass judgment and not to disdain our brothers in Christ. And, Lord, we want to live in unity with one another. So, Father, we pray that you teach us how to bear with one another, Lord, how to be patient and to practice long suffering and tolerance for each other in that, Lord, you would bind us together in harmony and peace, Lord, preserve and keep us, Lord, from ever committing idolatry or superstition against you.

Lord, we pray that as we do begin to enter into this time of year when there is much frivolity. Lord, there is much that is going on in the world. Lord, that is sinful and contrary to your word. Lord, we pray that we would not practice such things, but only those things that are pleasing to you. So, Lord, we pray that you help us to have discernment and to practice it.

Lord, with wisdom and with love and charity toward one another. Lord, be with us as we go from here today. Lord, give us safety as we travel home and Lord bless us this week. And it is in Christ and that we pray. Amen.