

Sunday Services Cancelled For Christmas

By Kevin R. Fermentick

Strange things regularly occur in the religious community. With so many denominations and sub-groups, thereof, that is not particularly unusual. However, what has occurred this past year is note worthy.

Several megachurches around the country decided to cancel their regular Sunday services. The reason? This particular Sunday was also Christmas Day.

I am not advocating the celebration of Christmas as a religious holiday. There is no scriptural authority to do so. It is the *death* of Christ that is significant for our salvation, not His birth. No one, not even those who promote its celebration, have any idea as to a certain time of year, much less a specific date when Jesus was born. The holiday is pagan in origin (in close conjunction to the winter solstice). I could go on.

Their reasoning for such an action, however, is most illuminating. It tells us quite a bit about how they view themselves and how they view Christianity. It is essentially a telling example of post modernism. It also illustrates how far we can go in straying from Bible authority, when we no longer feel a need for a "thus saith the Lord" in our spiritual activities.

The number of the congregants for these churches (Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL; Southland Christian Church and Crossroads Christian Church, both of Lexington, KY; Fellowship Church, Grapevine, TX; Mars Hill Bible Church, Grandville, MI; and the North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA), range from 7,000 to 20,000. I suppose that trying to accommodate such massive crowds tempts themselves to act as businesses as much as churches. There is no other way to explain their actions (more on that later).

The most egregious error of these churches that I see is getting their priorities twisted regarding their worship responsibilities. They are focusing on the holiday of Christmas, and not on the fact that last year, the 25th of December fell on Sunday, the Lord's Day, the "first day of the week." It is the Lord's Day that is of importance, not the holiday. Christmas was not celebrated in New Testament times, but the saints worshipped on Sundays!!!

We are to worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. It is the day our Lord rose from the dead (John 20:1-19). It is the day the church began (remember that the day of

Pentecost, Acts 2, always fell on the day after the seventh Sabbath from the Passover, Leviticus 23:11, 15-16, *ergo* Sunday). It is the day that we read of saints congregating to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

I heartily agree that a Christian's worship to God encompasses far more than the Sunday congregating of the local church members. Nevertheless, that does not excuse missing the Sunday assembly. Worship is personal *and* collective in practice.

You can't partake of the Lord's Supper (Communion) without assembling with the saints, Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20, 33-34. The Apostle Paul instructs us in "...*speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord*" Ephesians 5:19 (emphasis mine KRF). Paul further instructs us, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.*" Colossians 3:16 (emphasis mine KRF). Preaching and teaching is rather pointless without an audience of students, so assembly is required for these activities as well. A member of a local Portland area church, also forgoing Sunday services on December 25th, said to a radio reporter, "You don't have to go to church to celebrate Christmas." True enough, but you do have to "go to church" to worship with your fellow saints! That people seriously accept the celebration of Christmas, as a holiday, as legitimately trumping our regular Sunday worship to God is flabbergasting to me.

MSNBC.com reported that officials from megachurches around the country had consulted with each other prior to making their decision to cancel December 25th services. What happened to reading your Bible to see how and when God wants you to worship Him? Since when is conferring with each other a valid Bible based method of determining divine authority for any action (Colossians 3:17)? This reminds me of when Jesus was told that the Pharisees had taken issue with His teaching. They were not viewing what Jesus had to say as authoritative either. Just as today, people were looking for ways other than those divinely given to justify their actions. Jesus called the Pharisees blind guides, "*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" Matthew 15:14 KJV. How do you suppose Jesus would describe these church officials today?

The reasoning of these officials demonstrates their view of Christianity. Southland Christian Church officials said the decision was to allow staff and volunteers a day off to spend Christmas with their families. In other words, church staff are given the holiday off. Willow Creek spokeswoman, Cally Parkinson said that the decision was more than "family friendly" it was being "lifestyle friendly" because people are just "very, very busy."

The “me” generations of the post modernism era are coming to full bloom. Nothing is sacrosanct anymore. Even the assembling of ourselves together to worship our Lord, on the regularly assigned day, takes back seat to having a holiday off. You think I’m being harsh? The preacher for the Crossroads Christian Church noted that Christmas is “viewed more as a holiday than a holy day.”

The family is what is important for so many religious organizations today. Willow Creek Church member, Karyn Kulpinski, opined that Christmas is “about community and being with your family...” Never mind that most people are confusing the issue of a holiday against the fact that it is Sunday worship being forsaken. But even those who celebrate Christmas as Christ’s birthday have now effectively denied that.

Christmas is now a family holiday. Christ is secondary. Jesus said, *“For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: and a man’s foes (shall be) they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* Matthew 10:35-37. Jesus did not tell us that family is not important. Elsewhere He commands us to honor our father and mother, but He is to be first in our lives. Oh, by the way, note the next verse, verse 38, *“And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me.”* Self sacrifice is commanded of us. I would hardly think that coming to worship services for a few hours out of your holiday in order to worship your Savior is too much to ask. Not much of a cross to bear is it?

These folks counter by saying they have up to eight Christmas Eve services to compensate. Again, they are not considering the Lord’s Day as important. These services are offered as substitute services. I’m reminded of God being incensed at the Israelites for offering Him the culls of their flocks rather than the unblemished, as commanded, Micah 1:7-10.

Finally, a pathetic excuse is offered, as if they know of their error but have no courage to correct it. They say not many came to services last time Christmas fell on a Sunday (1984). That is a real, but very different problem. That some members demonstrate a weak faith does not obligate nor authorize us to join them. Two wrongs have never made a right. Again, let me emphatically state that I am not condoning the celebration of Christmas as a religious holiday in any way.

Not every church closed its doors on December 25th, but the fact that any did is sad commentary on how far man has gone in worshipping himself rather than His creator.