

ROMANS: CHARTER OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
"Part XX: Relating To Our Secular Society With God's Blessing"
(Romans 13:8-14)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Often, we Christians who **know** the "true meaning of Christmas" find ourselves confronted with a *secular world view* that is decidedly lacking the godliness of that first Christmas. The difference the believer senses with the world can leave him wondering how to relate to those in our secular society at this season of the year:

(1) An area family counseling center this week mailed a notice to churches, advertising its services. The flyer announced "Losses incurred during this year...are often magnified during and following this [Christmas] season." Among therapy services for those who have lost a family member through death, it repeatedly highlighted services re: "divorcing parents" and "Divorce recovery for children and adults."

The trauma of grief over losing a spouse or a parent through death or of going through a broken marriage makes this holiday difficult for those affected, but it also strains the believer who wants to help but who stands Biblically opposite the hopelessness of the world's view of death and divorce. He wonders "HOW do I relate to those in the secular world with these needs?"

(2) Years ago, while working at a store one Christmas Eve while in college, the manager got on the microphone and told me not to bother coming in the day after Christmas as had been scheduled. He finished the announcement, saying, "Have a Merry Christmas, Don!"

When the day after Christmas arrived, I got a curt call from him 20 minutes after the store opened. He wondered why I hadn't come in as scheduled! I told him about his announcement over the intercom the Christmas Eve before, but he denied he had ever said such a thing!

When I arrived at the store, one of the store clerks told me the manager had been drinking earlier on Christmas Eve, and wasn't responsible for what he had said. I was never again to listen to what he said in future Christmas Eves as a rule of thumb!

It was frustrating, because I felt my testimony had been compromised through no fault of my own!

Stresses with close and extended family members, substance abuse, greed, materialism -- with such trappings of the SECULAR world's Christmas surrounding us, HOW are WE as BELIEVERS in Christ to RELATE to our secular society in it all?

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "As a Christian, I see the world's Christmas with its focus on presents, spiked eggnog, job bonuses and endless grief over losses in death or divorce as a far cry from the Bible's baby in the manger scene. How do I relate as God wants to such a society this season?!"

- I. **Romans was written to believers in a nation that saw December 17-24 as a time that is similar to our SECULARIZED Christmas:**
 - A. Early Romans whose national economy revolved around agricultural pursuits celebrated December 17-24 as the feast of Saturnalia where agricultural deities were worshipped with sacrifices, Zon. Pic. Ency. of the Bib., v. One, p. 804; Camb. Ancient History, Vol. VIII, p. 437.
 - B. This festival included "a spirit of merriment, gift giving to children and other forms of entertainment," Ibid., Z.P.E.B.
 - C. As Christianity became the official religion of Constantine's "Holy Roman Empire," the traditions of Saturnalia gradually melted into Christendom's celebration of Christ's birthday, Ibid.
 - D. Today's world has laid claim to its role in the economic and social parts of this theme, leading to today's **secularized** Christmas.
- II. **As a MAIN and CONSTANT focus, believers must relate with God's unconditional, righteous love to ALL of society, 13:8-14:**
 - A. Paul's admonition in Romans 13:8-14 deals with the believer's very *general* and **constant** demeanor and focus to secular society at large:
 1. Having established the theology for living in Romans 1-11, Paul urged believers to live selflessly for God's glory in Romans 12.
 2. Beginning in Romans 13:1-7, he directed the believer's attention to relating properly to secular government and its officials.
 3. However, his attention drifts away from government specifically to society in general at Romans 13:8 where Paul says, "Owe **no man any thing**, but to love one another . . ."
 - B. In doing so, Paul revealed how a believer is to relate to a secular society at all times, **especially** during our secular Christmas season!
 1. In keeping with God's gift of His Son to die for the world's sins as taught in John 3:16, we believers are to view ourselves as always obliged to love to all people in our secular society, Romans 13:8a.
 2. The **reason** for this obligation is rooted in God's righteousness: the entire righteousness of God as reflected in the Old Mosaic Law is fulfilled in a nutshell by one's love to his neighbor, Rom. 13:8-9.

3. **Now, such RIGHTEOUS LOVE is OPPOSITE the greedy commercialism of our secular world's Christmas: such a love is SELFLESS, doing NO damage to one's neighbor, Rom. 13:10.**
4. Thus, the believer is to exercise such a righteous, selfless love toward the world as living **above** the world's **selfishness**:
 - a. Paul called his readers to awaken out of an insensitivity to righteous love that typifies the dark world around them, for the believer's rescue out of the world at the Church's rapture necessitates their taking such a different view, Rom. 13:10-11.
 - b. He then itemized specific actions to expose what such different living involves: instead of (a) excessive feasting (*komois*, Arndt & Ging., Grk.-Engl. Lex. of the N.T., p. 462), (b) instead of drunkenness (*methais*, Ibid., p. 500), (c) instead of unbiblical sexual conduct (*koitais*, Ibid., p. 440; Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, fn. to Rom. 13:13), (d) instead of sexual excesses (*aselgeiais*, Ibid., p. 114) and (e) instead of quarrels (*eridi*, Ibid., Arndt & Ging., p. 309) and (f) being jealous (*dzaylo*, Ibid., p. 338), they should live decently (*eusxaymonos*, Ibid., p. 327), Romans 13:12-13.
 - c. Hence, Christians should figuratively "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ's style of thinking and living, and make no allowance for their sinful nature's fulfillment of lusts, Romans 13:14.

Application: To EXCELL in our experience of the Christmas Season, let alone all year long, we must (1) believe on Christ, God's Christmas Gift to the world Who died on the cross in our behalf, John 3:16. (2) In view of that righteous love of God, we are to depend upon the Holy Spirit to avoid the sinful nature's expressions, Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16: that leads to our (3) replacing worldly greed with godly sharing, (4) replacing worldly jealousy with honoring others, (5) replacing worldly sexual misconduct with godly self-control and upright living, (5) replacing worldly substance abuse and excessive partying with godly decency and (6) replacing strife over getting stressed out with trust on and fellowship with God: this approach leads to a peaceful Christmas as we refocus on selflessly seeing others in our needy, secular world come to know the God of Christmas!

Lesson: God calls us to express His unconditional love to all men as seen in His love of His giving His Son to the world that first Christmas: that means living SELFLESSLY this season before the world that others needing Christ might be attracted to our Savior, and come to know Him.

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

In 18 years of Christmas Caroling at our Church, the Lord has ministered to us with rich doses of comfort and encouragement amidst the setbacks of life that defeats people in our secular world:

(1) In December of 1988, a week after my wife's mother passed away, Nadine stayed in bed with fibromyalgia while the children and I went caroling. The loss of Nadine's mother made it hard even to feel like singing Christmas carols, but we went as part of my job anyway!

While singing that night, our daughter Joanne lost the white knitted scarf Nadine's mother had made, and that somewhere in the snow. Because the scarf was irreplaceable to us, I prayed I could find it, and set out to look for it the next morning. In retracing her steps of the night before, I found the scarf under a thin cover of snow on the path where a policeman's family now lives. All I had to do was shake off the fresh snowfall and the scarf was as clean and good as new. The God of all comfort had come through for us in a very uplifting way!

(2) Again the next year, in 1989, while caroling, almost on cue, Connie lost a handmade earring from her Aunt Mickey Shell. It included a white string of beads that would blend in with the snow, and Connie was pretty sure it had dropped somewhere along Route 202!

As we drove the car along the road that night to see if we could find it, I wondered what to tell Connie when we didn't find it! I felt the earring had been demolished under thrashing, wet car tires or lay hidden in the corrosive, dirty snowdrifts by the road until spring. Then, in the glare of the head lamps, we saw the earring! It rested in bright contrast on that thin, dry, sand border that divides the passing car tire path from the snow bank at the roadside! Had the earring been anywhere else, we could not have seen it in the snow or retrieved it in its original, useful form! Again, our God of peace had helped us!

(3) In each of our 18 years of caroling at the church, though they have come by donation only, we have always had enough sweet breads to give out to our primary homes! God always helps us!