# "Upon the Lampstand"

"After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon a Lampstand so that those who come inside may see the light."—Jesus of Nazareth, Gospel of Luke 8:16-17.

**Question:** As a Christian Witness of Jah, what are your good reasons for celebrating or for not celebrating one holiday over another (such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Halloween), or for celebrating or for not celebrating birthdays or various other festivals?

**Answer:** I believe for good reasons which I will provide below that each Christian is *individually* both capable of and responsible for deciding which days to celebrate or not to celebrate, but that no such celebrations should come between Christians when it comes to praising Jah God and Jesus Christ. Further, based on the same good reasons which I will here provide, I believe this individual responsibility is precisely what the Master and Lord of all Christians, Jesus of Nazareth, *wants* us to accept so that *he*, and no one else (John 5:22), can judge us as individuals and not in comparison with others.—Compare Galatians 6:4-5.

Consider the following from the New Revised Standard Version (1989) of Romans 14:1-10 and 15:7 (with my underlining added):

## Romans 14:1-10

- <sup>1</sup> Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.
- <sup>2</sup> Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables.
- <sup>3</sup> Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.
- Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? <u>It is before their own lord that they stand or fall</u>. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.
- <sup>5</sup> Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.
- <sup>6</sup> Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.
- <sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.
- <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.
- <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.
- <sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

#### **Romans 15:7**

<sup>7</sup> Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, <u>for the glory of God</u>.

The above is the primary basis for our beliefs on this subject. Of course, nothing is ever as simple as it seems, not even for Christians' remembrance of Jesus' death during "the Lord's supper"! For it, too, can be abused if we overindulge "in an unworthy manner," which Paul goes on to show involves being "hungry" to the point where the purpose of the Lord's meal is lost by becoming an occasion for "eating and drinking" and even getting "intoxicated," rather than one for "proclaiming the death of the Lord, until he arrives."—1 Corinthians 11:21-22, 26-27.

Thus, whether we individually decide to celebrate a birthday, a holiday, an anniversary, or whether we partake of a certain meal at a certain time we must "observe/partake in honor of the Lord" (Romans 14:6). For example, if a person chooses to honor Jesus by celebrating his human birth on December 25, or on any other day, then it should be honorable, and it should be used to further his glory and that of his Father, Jah, who sent him.—John 8:16, 54; compare Philippians 2:9-11.

Yet, many today continue to shove aside the freedom and personal responsibility given to Christians in Romans Chapter 14, and instead they have attempted to enslave others to their own views about what should or should not be observed or celebrated, in effect stealing the judgment from God and from the Christ and taking it upon themselves. Consider one such example from an organization which, each year, cannot seem to 'pass enough judgment' (Romans 14:4, 10) on others where it concerns the 'observance of different days' (Romans 14:5):

If you are now an adult, have you ever felt embarrassed when, in your presence, people showed photographs of you as a baby? True, such pictures remind your parents of their joy at your birth. But now that you have an identity of your own, do you not usually prefer others to see you as you are? In a similar vein, think how disrespectful it is toward Christ Jesus when those who claim to be his followers become so engrossed each year in the pagan traditions of Christmas and in honoring an infant that they fail to honor him as King. Why, even in the first century, the Christian apostle Paul reasoned on the propriety of thinking of Christ as he now is—a King in heaven. Paul wrote: "Even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, certainly we now know him so no more"!—2 Corinthians 5:16. ["Christmas—Is It Truly Christian?" The Watchtower, December 15, 1994, pages 6-7 (underlining added; italics original).]

How can this group or anyone else possibly know the intentions of each Christian when and if he or she decides to celebrate the birth of "our only Owner and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4)? Again: "Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall" (Romans 14:4). Further, it is hard to fully understand how *The Watchtower* could misapply 2 Corinthians 5:16 as they have done here. When Paul speaks about 'no more knowing Christ according to the flesh' he is not talking about Christians forgetting the time when Jesus was a baby because it is 'embarrassing' to him now that he is a heavenly King! In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul uses "according to the flesh" for their knowing him *before* he "died for [us] and was raised up" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Indeed, for Paul "the good news which was declared" to him was "not something human," because in his case 'he did not receive it from man" but "through revelation by Jesus Christ," who had at that time been raised up from the dead as a "life-giving spirit."—1 Corinthians 15:45; Galatians 1:11-12; compare Acts 9:3-6, 17-22.

Indeed, two of the four Gospel records in the New Testament record the time of Jesus' human birth (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-40). This would not have been done if Jesus did not want us to remember him "according to the flesh" in a way that rightly caused us to reflect upon his human life, even his human birth. In fact, such records provide very good reasons for Christians to both reflect upon *and to celebrate* the birth of Jesus, a time when even the angels of heaven rejoiced:

## **Luke 2:10-14 (NWT)**

[The angel said:] "I am declaring to you good news of a great joy that all the people will have, because there was born to you today a Savior, who is Christ [the] Lord, in David's city. And this is a sign for you: You will find an infant bound in cloth bands and lying in a manger." And suddenly there came to be with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying: "Glory in the heights above to God, and upon earth peace among men of goodwill."

This account goes on to teach that there were "shepherds" who then "went with haste and found Mary as well as Joseph, and the infant [Jesus] lying in the manger (Luke 2:15-16). Then:

## Luke 2:17-20 (NWT)

When they saw it, they made known the saying that had been spoken to them concerning this young child. And all that heard marveled over the things told them by the shepherds, but Mary began to preserve all these sayings, drawing conclusions in her heart. Then the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all the things they heard and saw, just as these had been told them.

If we, therefore, choose to do the same things today during a time when people "upon the earth" are more likely to be reflecting on the these very things, it is inappropriate for the Watchtower Society or any other group or man or woman to say it is wrong or "disrespectful" to do so and so judge the intentions others in complete defiance of Romans 14, "It is before their own lord that they stand or fall" (verse 4); we do not stand before the Watchtower Society, or before any man or woman in judgment. Or: "Is it, in fact, men I am now trying to persuade or God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were yet pleasing men, I would not be Christ's slave."—Galatians 1:10 (NWT).

I cannot think of any other day during the year when more people are likely to be inclined to listen to the things which have been recorded about Jesus than December 25. But that does not mean everyone *must* celebrate or use this day to teach others about the "peace" his birth brought to "men of goodwill" (NWT). The Bible provides good reasons for empowering Christians to "judge" on their own whether "one day [is] better than another," or to let "others judge all days to be alike" (Romans 14:5). Similarly, if a father chooses to take his daughter or son out during Halloween for the purpose of showing the differences between ghosts, goblins, ghouls, and devils, and between princesses, furry

creatures, or a firefighter (and also for some candy!), it between that father, or mother, and the Christ, for each of them will "stand before the judgment seat of God" (Romans 14:10), not before any one of us:

## Colossians 2:16-22 (NWT)

Therefore <u>let no man judge you in eating and drinking or in respect of a festival or of an observance of the new moon or of a sabbath;</u> for those things are a shadow of the things to come, but the reality belongs to the Christ. ... If you died together with Christ toward the elementary things of the world, <u>why do you</u>, as if living in the world, <u>further subject yourselves to</u> the decrees: "Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch," respecting things that are all destined to destruction by being used up, in accordance with <u>the commands and teachings of men?</u> [Underlining added.]

"But," some might ask, "what about the teaching of the Bible concerning the division between 'darkness' and 'light' (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)?" I will respond as a Christian Witnesses of Jah and say that this involves being "unevenly yoked with unbelievers," not with observing 'days, festivals, new moons, or sabbaths' "in honor of the Lord" (Romans 14:6)! I do not know any Christian Witness of Jah whose intentions in celebrating or observing such things is creating or accepting a "sharing" between light and darkness, between Jesus and Satan, or between an unbeliever and a believer. In fact, as I have tried to highlight above, the purpose is and must always be to "honor the Lord," but to let each Christian make such decisions without being coerced into thinking wrongly about what can be used to bring light into the darkness!

Anyone who claims otherwise in regards to this teaching concerning our freedom to decide which "day," "new moon," "festival," or "sabbath" to observe or not to observe, or what foods we can eat, is assuming they know our intentions. Yet, that is the very thing which the NT texts from Romans 14 and Colossians 2 (quoted above) warn Christians against! This is not my teaching, or something I have come up with of my own originality (compare John 7:17-18). This is what the Bible teaches, and its simplicity and clarity should never be complicated or confused by those who want to control others and "further subject" anyone "to the ... commands and teachings of men."—Colossians 2:22.

Therefore, when we come together in "Jesus' name," as "two or three" or more (Matthew 18:20), let nothing separate us while giving praise to Jah and honor to Jesus. Leave your personal preferences for days, festivals, foods, or anything else out of your "gathering together" (Hebrews 10:25), except for the "Lord's supper," that is, should you have occasion to partake of it with others in order to jointly "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes/arrives" (1 Corinthians 14:26). "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you," not to further your own beliefs, or to "quarrel" about who should eat what, or what days should be judged as "like" or "better than another," but "for the glory of God."—Romans 15:7.

Never let how any individual Christian views a particular day, festival, or food cause you to judge that person, or to stumble before the Christ. For if you or another Christian 'observes the day in honor of the Lord' (Romans 14:6), rather than because they fear or honor men, then "it is before their own lord that they [will] stand or fall" (Romans 14:4). If you find that other Christian Witnesses of Jah celebrate or view "a festival" or "an

observance of the new moon or of a sabbath" as you do, then join in with them in 'honoring the Lord'! But "let no man judge you" concerning it (Colossians 2:16), and you must not judge others in the same way, for "there is One that is seeking and judging" (John 8:50), and it is not me or you, or any man, woman, or organized group of one or both.

When you are together with other Christians who do not share your view of days, festivals, new moons, sabbaths, or foods, then "pursue the things making for peace and the things that are upbuilding to one another," and "stop tearing down the work of God just for the sake of food [or days, festivals, new moons, or sabbaths]," so long as you observe all such things "in honor of the Lord" (Romans 14:6; 19-20). For "the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the holy spirit," and "the one who in this way serves Christ is pleasing to God."—Romans 14:17-18.

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