

“THE GOSPEL OF CHRISTMAS”

1 Timothy 1:15-17

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INTRODUCTION:

1) The secular aspect of Christmas: Many Christians are happy to see that celebration of Christmas is popular all around the world, including many non-christian countries, like China, where religion is still strictly under political control. There isn't much difference in the celebration of Christmas as another popular holiday like other holidays. Even in this country, people pay more attention on things at Christmas like buying and giving gifts, throwing parties, planning vacation trips, travel to visit family and friends on the long weekend holidays. While all these activities are not bad on themselves, but none of them has anything to do with the true essence of Christmas, celebrating the birth, or coming, of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. (Matt 16:16)

2) The biblical aspect of Christmas: From the promise of the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament, Micah 5:2, to the words of the angel in Matt 1:21, to the text of today, we see the true purpose of Christmas is a gospel message: God sent His Son, in the form of a human baby named Jesus to die on the cross for the remission of the sins of all men, so men could be reconciled with God in eternity. Yes, we need to celebrate Christmas, and to remember why did God send Jesus to this world. This is more than just a day to be joyful in celebration, it is also a day to reflect on the love of God and the need of salvation of all people.

THE CENTER OF THE GOSPEL: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1:15b) According to the Chinese Bible, Union translation.

1) Christ Jesus came into the world: While all religions in the world have their founders such as Mohamed to Islam and Buddha to Buddhism, Christ Jesus is entirely different from them. The very words “Christ Jesus” means “Savior and king”, who came to this world, not from the world. Many of you were born in this country and you are of this country, but some of us came to this country from some where else. All founders of religions are of this world, except Christ Jesus came to this world but isn't of this world. God sent him into this world for a purpose. Jesus wasn't born by the power of man but by the power of God. (Luke 1:35) In John 1:1-2, the Bible tells us Jesus is the incarnation of God, came to this world. All other founders of religions are human beings who are of this world.

2) Christ Jesus came to save sinners: The purpose of Christ coming to the fallen world was to save sinners. Before his birth, the angel told Joseph, “it is he who will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:27) In Luke 19:10, Jesus stated the purpose of his coming into the world, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.” To save is to deliver, rescue, from death and darkness of sin, judgment and hell. Sinners is a word used to denote man’s constant violation of God’s law. Men are sinners by nature.

THE OBJECTS OF THE GOSPEL: “Of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1:15c-16)

1) Who is the worst of all sinners? Paul described his own life as the worst of all sinners in the world. Why and how? In Phil 3:4-6, Paul listed all the unique background on his religious dedication and pursuit of a perfect life in the law. But that human pride became the stumbling block from seeking God and his forgiveness of sin. We may think sin is related to ferocious crimes like murder, stealing, cheating, rage, immoral acts, etc. But the Bible has a different way to define sin, and that is “intentionally ignoring God”, despise God, snob at God like the atheists do today. All acts of human sins may be forgiven with heartfelt repentance, but rejecting God cannot be forgiven because men don’t believe in God to seek his forgiveness.

2) God will never give up on anyone: Read 1:16 again and we can see that God will never give up on anyone, even the worst of all sinners like Paul. God will continue to show mercy and patience to anyone who will come to seek His forgiveness of sin. Paul says: God’s mercy and patience is unlimited. No one is too sinful that God cannot save.

THE PROPER RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL: “It is a trustworthy saying, that deserving full acceptance.” (1:15a)

1) Recognize the word of God: “This is a trustworthy saying,” (1:15a) is the key to the above teaching, and the key word is “logos”, the truth of God. All religions have books of teaching of their founders, but they are all words of men, not of God. Because the truth is the word of God, it is trustworthy in all time, to all people. If you are familiar with books of religions, they were written by men, from the mind of men, mostly on helping man to do right so they may achieve their goal in this life and hope for next time. Only the Bible

is the word of God, particularly on the forgiveness of sin that paths the way to salvation of the souls of men. Because it is the word of God, it is worthy to be trusted. If you are seeking to know the truth of life, the life in the world, and the life to come, there isn't another place you need to go, just go to the Bible, the word of God. The gospel message in this passage is worthy of your trust. God can never lie, so you can always trust his word.

2) Accepting the word of God: “Deserves full acceptance,” is the proper response to the trustworthy word of God. When we face with the truth, the only truth in this world, there is only one choice we can make: fully accepting the word. Accepting, *apodoxomai* in Greek, means to receive, welcome, accept with all of the heart and satisfaction. To all people with normal sense, that is the proper way to do: Receive God's word into their hearts, and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior for their soul. God made a promise to all of us in John 1:12, “To all who received (accepted) him, to those who believe in his name, he gave (them) the right to become children of God.”

ACTIONS WE NEED TO TAKE:

1) Make this Christmas special: I am not against celebrating Christmas with gifts, dinners, travel to see family and friends, but I will encourage all of us to make this Christmas lot more special than all other Christmas in the past: Get to know more about Jesus and what his birth may bring you. Without Jesus, any celebration has very little meaning, because it is just another day in life.

2) Make the best decision of life: This is one step further, mostly for people who have not believe or accept the meaning of Christmas: Christ Jesus came to this world to save you. Remember you have a soul that will live forever after you finish your journey on earth. You need to prepare in advance where you may spend eternity after physical death. God has done his part to prepare a way for you. Now it's your choice how you will respond to God's invitation. What I hope is you will accept God's gift today, believe in Jesus Christ, and be sure of your eternity in heaven.