

Santa Pause

A Biblical Perspective



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

From time to time I get emails asking me for the article I wrote on Santa. I thought I would post my article. This article was written 8 years ago and though I would add a bit to it today were I to write it again, I would not change anything already written.

Interestingly, one individual recently made some rather snarky and ill-informed comments on social media regarding this article and me personally saying that I assert that “Santa can spell Satan.” Well, rearrange the letters and, yes, that is factually true but it is also absolutely meaningless and never appears in my article. I think I am above such sophomoric argumentation and reasoning though the one accusing me apparently is not. Oh well.

The article discusses the history of Santa (which is darker than most imagine) and the theological reasons Santa deserves a critical eye. The concerns are not primarily about how Santa affects children, but how Santa affects, so to speak, God. What does God think about Santa? So, I invite you to read this article with Bible open and we will see there to be ample reason we should give pause to Mr. Claus. Enjoy the article.

Years ago a pastor told me, “Justin, never preach about Santa Clause. You just can’t win preaching about Santa Clause.” At the risk of going against his advice, I am going to address an icon with which we are all familiar but few really consider to be an issue, Santa Clause.

To do away with any suspense, I’m not a fan of Santa. I’ve never cared much for him ever since I learned that he was not real. As an adult, I cared for him even less and even began to have a bit of animosity toward the “jolly old elf.” However, it was not until last year, 2010, that I, through circumstances in my life, was actually forced to sit down and think through exactly who Santa is and wrestle with the biblical implications. As I write this I can already imagine the emails and comments that will pour in and charge me with being legalistic, pharisaical, and, well, a Grinch, for wanting to ruin for people what is deemed by most to be harmless, fanciful fun for children on just one day of the year. I can assure you that these are not at all my motives for writing. Two years ago I

would have never dreamed of writing an article like this because, quite frankly, I never dreamed there to be a *need* for an article like this. So, gentle reader, I ask only that you read the following piece and consider its thesis not with an open mind, but with a theological mind. Consider the points forwarded and evaluate them not against family tradition, common sense, culture, majority opinion or emotion but rather against the teachings of inerrant and sufficient Scripture. Our standard for what is true, right, appropriate, beneficial, and both edifying to the believer and glorifying to God can be nothing but the Word of God (John 17:17).

In this piece we will examine the history of Santa Claus, his characteristics and attributes and will then draw some conclusions about the proper biblical approach to this familiar icon of Christmas. It is my prayer that upon reading this article and reflection upon the arguments and conclusions drawn that the reader will give pause to Mr. Claus.

History

The history of Santa is not as well documented as many assume. The most widely held view is that the legend began with St. Nicholas, a fourth century Catholic bishop of Myra in southern Turkey. A cult grew up around the bishop and prior to the Protestant Reformation had become one of history's most widespread religious movements. According to *The Christian Almanac*, "By the height of the Middle Ages, St. Nicholas was probably invoked in prayer more than any other figure except the Virgin Mary and Christ Himself."¹ Various acts of generosity and miracles were attributed to Nicholas including the distribution of gifts to the poor, salvation of a city from famine, and the resurrection of three young boys who had been sadistically murdered and mutilated. After his death Nicholas made various visionary appearances to people in distress and need. He provided comfort and even deliverance from execution for those falsely accused. The documentation of Nicholas' life is

¹ Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. *The Christmas Almanac* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004, pg. 131). Allow me, Justin Peters, to state that I am diametrically opposed to the Catholic doctrine of praying to saints and the virgin Mary. The Bible gives no allowance for such practices.

actually quite sparse and little is known of him. Some speculate he may not have even been a real person at all. Nonetheless, the legend and the cult grew.

Despite the Islamic advance across southern Turkey beginning in the eighth century and the Protestant Reformation which swept northern Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, both of which served to hinder the Catholic-oriented Nicholas cult, the legend had grown outside the borders of the church and survived. Some speculate that a revised version of the legend came to America via the Dutch “Sinter Klaas.” The legend/cult appeared to be largely dormant in American culture until new life was breathed into him in the late 18th century in Manhattan. “Sinter Klaas” became known as Santa Claus and slowly began to be associated with gift giving. Author Washington Irving (1789-1853), most famous for “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” in his 1809 work “The History of New York” described St. Nicholas as an old man in dark robes who traveled on a flying horse bringing gifts to children. In the poem “The Children’s Friend” published in 1821 Santa acquires his flying reindeer and chimney-top stops. Just one year later Dr. Clement Moore, theology professor at Union Seminary, undoubtedly inspired by both Irving and “The Children’s Friend” wrote his own poem entitled “A Visit from St. Nicholas” which begins with the familiar words, “Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house... .” It was Moore’s poem which gave us the number of Santa’s reindeer (8 with Rudolph being the 9th), their names, and his travels up and down chimneys leaving gifts for boys and girls. Political cartoonist Thomas Nast developed Santa further by giving him a home in at the North Pole and a workshop filled with busy elves.

Not everyone agrees with this history, however. Some point toward a much darker origin of Santa. Some researchers trace the legend back to the Norse god of Odin who rode through the sky on a white eight legged horse. Like Santa, Odin’s home, Valhalla, was in the north country. Odin had a long white beard and would fly during the winter solstice between December 21st and 25th with the mission of rewarding good children and punishing the naughty.

Others trace Santa to the Norse god Thor. Thor was generally represented as an older, friendly man who also sported a long white beard. He was associated



Krampus

with the element of fire and generally wore red attire. His mode of travel was a chariot drawn by two white goats named Cracker and Gnasher. He, too, lived in the "Northland," had elves to assist in craftsmanship, was said to come down the chimneys and perform benevolent acts for humans.² More ominously, though, according to Scandinavian mythology he "was regarded as the chief antagonist of Christ."³ In fact, in many traditions from Holland, Scandinavia, Germany, Bosnia, the Sinter Klaas did not travel alone but was accompanied by a sinister, demonic being known variously as Hans Trapp, Knecht Rupprecht, Krampus, the Dark Helper, and Black Pete(r) whose responsibility it was to punish children and even drag them to Hell. The Pennsylvania Dutch had their

version of the Dark Helper known as Belsnickel, "Furry Nicholas," or "Rough Nicholas." The Dark Helper was not only "dark" by nature, but also because he was covered in soot from his travels up and down chimneys. Though Thomas Nast is rightly credited for creating the modern image of Santa, some argue that his inspiration was not St. Nicholas at all, but rather the Dark Helper.

Images of Saint Nicholas portray a tall, slender man attired as a Catholic bishop and look nothing at all like Santa. Drawings of the Dark Helper, however, portray a horned man clad in fur and carrying a bag on his back. The Dark Helper actually does bear some resemblance to modern Santa leading many researchers to argue it was actually he, rather than St. Nicholas, to whom we ultimately owe our conception of the iconic yule-tide figure. Researcher Phyllis Siefker states:

It seems obvious, therefore, that Santa Claus can be neither the alter ego of

² Guerber, H.A. *Myths of Northern Lands* (New York, NY: American Book Company, 1895, pg. 61).

³ Davidson, H.R. Ellis. *Scandinavian Mythology* (New York, NY: Peter Bredrick Books, 1982, pg. 133).

Saint Nicholas nor the brainchild of Washington Irving. ...If we peek behind the imposing Saint Nicholas, we see, glowering in the shadows, the saint's reprobate companion, Black Pete. He, like Santa, has a coat of hair, a disheveled beard, a bag, and ashes on his face. In fact, it is this creature, rather than Irving's creation or an Asian saint, who fathered Santa Claus.⁴

The truth of Santa's history is hard to know for certain, but there certainly seems to be enough evidence to make plausible the theory that his origins are not quite as genteel as popularly imagined. Though Santa's origins may be of interest to some, for the vast majority of people, Santa is about as far from ominous as one could get. He is a gentle, roly-poly, grandfatherly figure who gives good gifts to children once a year. What could possibly be the harm? Right?

Characteristics and Attributes

We now get to the meat of the matter. This is where I must ask you as much as possible to put aside personal preferences, majority opinion, tradition and preconceived notions in general dealing with Santa Claus. Here is where I ask that you consider the following information from a purely biblical point of view. In this section we will examine who Santa is and Who God is. We will look at his characteristics and attributes and compare them to God's characteristics and attributes. Until this past year I had never given this much thought at all. In fact, just a little over a year ago I was in much more need of *reading* an article such as this, not writing it. I invite you now, though, to join me as we "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) and consider if there is biblical warrant for us to give Santa, pause.

Eternal – Santa is often portrayed as having a wife, but never a mother or father. He seems to have no real beginning and certainly no end. He's just always been around and always will be. Eternality is one of God's attributes. As with all of His attributes, eternality is uniquely His. He is the great I AM. He has always been and always will be (Ex. 3:15; Is. 41:4; 43:13; Ps. 90:1-2; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:8).

⁴ Siefker, Phylis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1997, pg. 15).

Immutable – Closely related to his eternality, Santa is also, apparently, immutable. In other words, he does not change. Year after year after year on December 24th he boards his sleigh and makes his appointed rounds with just as much energy, enthusiasm and strength as he has in years past. Time seems to stand still for Santa. Unlike all of the other created plants, animals and we humans who grow old and undergo decay, Santa appears immune from the passage of time and the curse of the Fall. He never gets sick, never tires, and never seems to age. God is also immutable (Mal. 3:6; Hebrews 6:17; 13:8; James 1:17).

Omnipresent – Santa is, in effect, everywhere at the same time. True, he does go from one house to another to another but he visits every child's house in the world all in one night. In my research I came across a rather humorous engineering analysis of Santa's feat of flying. Assuming that Santa does not visit Buddhist, Hindu, or Islamic children, etc. he still manages to visit some 91.8 million homes in one night. Just to be generous, this author⁵ allowed Santa a full 24 hours with an additional 6 provided by different time zones with the assumption of east to west travel. According to this author, Santa must visit 822.6 homes per second so, for all intents and purposes, we can say that he is omnipresent. Humor aside, omnipresence is one of God's attributes. He is limited neither by space nor time and is everywhere present in His fullness (Deut. 4:39; 1 Kgs. 8:27; Ps. 139:8; Jer. 23:23-24; Eph. 1:23).

Omniscient – This is one of Santa's creepier attributes. He seemingly knows *everything*. Consider the words of John Coots and Haven Gillespie's 1934 song "Santa Clause is Coming to Town:" *He knows if you've been sleeping, he knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake.* From his home at the North Pole Santa possesses the ability to know when each and every child (and presumably adult) on earth is sleeping and awake. Compare Santa's power with that of God: Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." Eerily similar, is it not? Santa knows our behavior and is apparently qualified to make judgments as to its meritorious value. He sees all and knows all. Omniscience is also one of God's unique attributes (Job 21:22; Ps. 33:13-15; 139:1-4; Mat.

⁵ Source: <http://www.inflection-point.com/jokes/86.htm>

6:4).

Goodness – Santa is portrayed as kind, gentle, jovial and *good* via his authority to determine which children have been “bad or good.” “Good” is a word that we often use to describe everything from people to some desired outcome or to fried chicken. Some will undoubtedly think I am stretching here, but describing Santa as “good” is problematic when coupled with all of the other divine attributes ascribed to him. God’s standard of goodness is moral perfection and complete obedience as measured by the Ten Commandments. None of us measure up to that standard. We have all sinned (Rom. 3:23) and all of us have hearts that are “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). The Apostle Paul knew that “nothing good dwells” in us (Rom. 7:18) and that there are “none good, no not one” (Rom 3:10- 11). Except Santa. Santa is good by his nature. This, too, is in direct opposition to Scripture. In a statement affirming His own deity, Jesus told the rich young ruler plainly, “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). God’s goodness (His omnibenevolence) is original to Him and is not possessed by any of the fallen created order (Ps. 52:1; 107:8; 119:68; 1 Jn. 1:5). Santa’s “goodness” separates him from every other created thing and puts him in the class of God.

Gift Giver – That Santa gives gifts to good children and leaves lumps of coal for the bad is inextricably tied to his goodness. Only One who is intrinsically good by character and nature is truly qualified to make judgments about good and bad behavior and render the appropriate rewards and punishments. Aside from this, though, Santa’s activity all year is for him and his elves (ponder that Santa has elves and God has angels) to create toys for worldwide distribution. He is a gift giver and gives with no expectation of anything in return (save for the milk and cookies dutifully left by children). In this aspect, too, Santa looks just like God. God is the only true gift giver because only He gives with truly pure motives. He gives light (Gen 1:3), He gives man the fruit of his labor (Ecc. 3:13), He gives individual personal abilities (1 Cor. 7:7), He gives love (2 Tim. 1:6-7), He gives spiritual gifts (Rom. 11:29), He gives faith and repentance (Heb. 12:2 and Acts 5:30,31; 11:17; 2 Tim. 2:24-26 respectively) for the gift of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9) in the Gift of His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16). God is not only the ultimate gift giver, but it also the only true gift giver for “every good thing and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

Though we could press on and cite others, this list is sufficient to establish that Santa Claus shares many of the *very same* characteristics and attributes of God. This should be extraordinarily sobering to all who profess Christ. Santa diminishes the glory of God by sharing in His glory. Glory is a term that we often hear and use. We often speak of “giving glory to God,” or affirm that He is “glorious,” but what does that really mean? I fear that the magnanimity of this term all too often eludes us. It will elude us today as well. It will elude us because it is really not even *possible* to give an adequate definition of the glory of God. So, to define glory is to define the indefinable. The glory of God is inextricably connected to the *holiness* of God. This raises the question, ‘what is meant by *holiness*?’ Holiness is not one attribute among His many others, but rather is the totality, the *summation* of all of God’s perfect attributes. God’s holiness denotes the incomparable perfection of His divine nature and His *glory* is the manifestation or revelation of His holiness. Glory is, in short, holiness revealed. Jesus Christ is God incarnate and reveals to us the fullness of God’s holiness and “is the radiance of God’s glory” (Heb. 1:3). He was God in flesh and now is at the right hand of the Father. While incarnate on earth, Jesus was the revelation of God’s glory and is revealed to us today in God’s inerrant, sufficient Word.

None of God’s attributes can be fully and perfectly manifested in any of the created beings. Santa, however, manifests not merely one but *many* of God’s attributes. We have taken many of God’s unique attributes and fashioned them into a figure known as Santa Claus. Though fictitious, by encompassing so many of God’s attributes, he is a manifestation, of sorts, of God’s holiness. In other words, he is a man-made reflection of the glory of God. At this point, many will cry foul. Many will object by saying, ‘Oh, c’mon! Who thinks of it that deeply? There’s not a kid on earth that would ever think such things! Adults don’t even think of Santa like that! That’s not what we teach! We don’t think Santa is God!’ This is just the point. Most of us do not think about Santa this way. However, our ignorance, willful or not, does not change the fact that *that is who he is*. Please hear me, I know that no professing Christian would ever dream of consciously ascribing to Santa the attributes of God. The problem is not so much that we would do this, but that it has already been done. Whether or not we *think* of Santa as embodying the attributes of God does not change the fact that he *does*.

Yet another one of God's attributes is jealousy. This may at first seem contradictory. After all, how could an omnipotent God be jealous of anything His lesser? How could God be jealous and still be righteous and good? Though jealousy most often carries a negative connotation, it can be a good thing. For example, any decent husband upon seeing another man trying to seduce his wife's affections would become immediately and appropriately jealous. Jealousy, unlike envy which is always bad, is often *good*. God's jealousy is always good. Of what or for what is He jealous? Himself. God is jealous for Himself, His attributes which comprise His holiness manifested in His glory. To some this might seem egotistical. Not at all. Pride is sinful in humans because we do not deserve honor. God does. God is all about Himself because He is the Creator of all things and He seeks to defend His honor and His glory. He is consumed with Himself and wants us to be consumed with Him as well. He is jealous of believers because we are His possession, His people. God is zealous to protect that which is His own: His people, His name, His word, His honor and His glory. The biblical term for "zeal" is the root word for "jealous" and denotes an intense heat.⁶ The Hebrew root denotes a "redness in the face that accompanies strong emotion." God is jealous of Himself, His attributes. He says "I, the Lord your God am a *jealous* God" (Ex. 20:5) and "the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14). So they would be sure not to miss the point, God warns Israel against going after other gods: "for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a *jealous* God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth" (Deut. 6:15).

Granted, people who do Santa in their homes are not consciously going after other gods. Not consciously. However, the truth of the matter remains. God describes Himself as jealous – *exceedingly* jealous. God says in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the LORD: that is my name: my glory I will not share with another, nor my praise to graven images." We must not miss this. God will *not* share His glory with another. He will *not*. Like it or not, dear reader, by sharing so many of the same attributes, God is sharing His holiness, His glory with Santa. There is no other way around it. I completely understand that very, very few people think of it at this level. I did not myself until about a year ago - and I have two degrees from a seminary (I say this to my own shame). Whether or not we

⁶ See Psalm 69:9 and its usage In John 2:17.

think of it at this level, however, does not make one bit of difference as to whether or not it is right. Whether or not we *intend* Santa to have the attributes of God is irrelevant; He *does*. Ultimately it does not really matter what you or I think about Santa. What does matter, however, is what *God* thinks about him. God will give neither His glory nor His praise to another. By definition, Santa is a graven image that shares God's glory. If we were able to ask God directly, 'Lord, are you ok with Santa?,' how do you think He would respond? I honestly cannot imagine any scenario in which He would say, "Yes." In fact, He has already told us more than enough in His Word that He is not. Consider the second commandment:

You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in Heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God Exodus 20:4-5

Some will object again by saying that we do not worship Santa because he is not real. Neither are the graven images. A graven image is no more real and *yet just as real* as Santa. No, there are no real deities behind the graven images; those created by the Israelites were wood and stone. But we can see them just as we can see Santa in a book, on television, or sitting in a chair in the mall. 'But we don't worship Santa,' you say. Maybe not directly. However, by ascribing to Santa the attributes of God we are, in fact, ascribing to him *worship*.

This is a crucial point, dear reader, and not to be missed. *By ascribing to Santa or anyone or anything else any of the attributes of God we are ascribing to him worship*. That we think of it in this way or not does not negate the truth of it. Truth is truth regardless of whether or not we believe it. We worship God not primarily because of what He has done but because of *Who He is*. God is worthy of worship because of His attributes and these same attributes have been given to the fat man in the red suit.

In 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 Paul addresses an issue that had arisen in the Corinthian church. Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth, God saved His elect and a church was born. After spending about 18 months with them in discipleship, Paul left the young church and went on to other destinations. A problem arose (actually many, many problems but that's a whole other series of sermons) concerning the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. Some of these

young believers were going back into the pagan temples and participating at least at some level in some of the accompanying pagan rituals including, but not necessarily limited to, the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. These Corinthians were not going with the intent of actively participating in the worship of pagan gods. They simply wanted to maintain friendships and fellowship with their friends who were not believers. So, they would go to the rituals and eat some of the meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Paul writes to them and gives them a stern warning in 1 Corinthians 10: 14-22:

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

Paul is warning them that simply by being present and giving implicit approval by not speaking out against the pagan worship and by eating the meat sacrificed to idols that they are unwittingly dining with demons. The idols did not have real deities behind them and Paul readily acknowledged this in verse 19 and 20a. *However*, there *were* very real spiritual forces very much at work – *demons*. Paul warns them that the things that the pagans sacrificed they sacrificed “to demons and not to God.” This was not a neutral experience for the Corinthians as they naively assumed. It was demonic because behind every false religion no matter how primitive it may seem to us today are demons. Satan and his demonic horde have inspired *every single* false religion that has ever existed. Satan, Lucifer, the “son of the morning,” was the highest angel created. He was closest to God and orchestrated His worship. However, he came to desire worship for himself. He longed to have for himself the worship rightly given to God. Iniquity and pride were found in his heart and he along with a third of the angels whom he persuaded to follow his lead were cast out of Heaven.⁷ Satan longs more than anything to be worshipped and will deceive by any means necessary to acquire it. He is worshipped by non- Christians by

⁷ For Scriptural reference see Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-19.

creating for them false religions and false gods such as Egyptian deities, ancestor worship, deities of nature, Buddha, Mohammed, etc., etc. What he most desires, though, is to be worshipped by those claiming to worship the true God.

For those who profess Christ as Savior, he must be more cunning. For these, he devises clever counterfeits. He offers the prosperity gospel, the social gospel, worship of and prayer to dead saints and the Virgin Mary, a watered-down gospel devoid of calls for repentance. He makes it look as close to the real thing as possible without it being the real thing. He does not come to the Christian red and scaly carrying a pitchfork. No, he disguises himself as something innocent, harmless, an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:4). Something like Santa.

Some of you are reading this right now and are livid, I know. You think that if you do Santa with your children I am accusing you of worshipping Satan. Please, gentle reader, if this is you, I am not accusing you of *anything*. I am simply offering to you a warning from compassion and love. Paul was not accusing the Corinthians, he was warning them. Note that he was not warning them out of self-righteousness and pride. He did not consider himself any better than they. In fact, Paul referred to himself as the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). He was warning them from a heart burdened with concern, compassion, and love. He dearly loved these Corinthians. He loved the socks off of them. As the one who first brought the Gospel to them he thought of them as his spiritual children. Paul is warning them that by participating on any level with the pagan rituals they are unwittingly and innocently exposing themselves to demons. As believers they were in no danger of losing salvation – that is not at all the issue. However, they were exposing themselves to demonic influence and there would be spiritual consequences.

Lest you think yourself immune from the influence of Satan and his demons, consider that Satan went after none other than the Son of God Himself. Satan led Jesus into the wilderness, showed Him the kingdoms of the world, and took Him to the top of the Temple tempting Him (Luke 4:1-13). What did he want? He wanted the same thing that he wants now - Worship. If Satan had the audacity to come after the Son of God, the One who created him, rest assured he will not hesitate to come after you and me. It is an argument from the

greater to the lesser.

Is Santa real? No. But Satan is and Satan has always desired to make himself look as much like God as possible and to do whatever he can to diminish His glory. Anything that takes on the attributes of God and is the object of any warm feelings (recall the meaning of the root word for jealous) of affection is inspired by Satan. Children love Santa. They have warm feelings of affection toward him. They trust him, they respect him, they even fear displeasing him. For those who maintain that they can do Santa and still teach their children that Jesus is the real reason for the season, allow me to pose this question: For whose arrival do they most eagerly await? Do children lay awake at night in their beds on Christmas Eve excited about the incarnate God or Santa? Of course, it is Santa. They are children and can be expected to do nothing else. I laid awake excited about Santa on Christmas Eve too. It does not make it right. Anything that draws attention away from Christ is not approved by Christ. It is no coincidence that on the two most revered days in Christendom, Christmas and Easter, there are two fictitious icons possessing divine attributes which garner much of our attention.

Considerations

I know that I will not likely make many friends with this article. It goes against the overwhelming majority opinion and many will say that I am being alarmist, over-reactive, legalistic, accusatory, maybe even arrogant and self-righteous. I assure you that these are neither my motives nor intentions. Nor am I saying that if you do Santa with your children you are a bad parent and are not saved. Again, it was not until last year that I finally thought through the Santa issue myself. There are however aspects of this issue which we as Christians simply must consider.

Lying – This is an objection we have heard before but have not yet mentioned. If we tell our children about Santa aren't we lying to them? In short, yes. When we tell children about Santa Claus (leaving his divine attributes aside) we are, in fact, lying. "Thou shalt not lie" is the ninth commandment and even though we say that it is just for children for fanciful fun once a year, the inescapable conclusion is that it is still lying. Yes, we have all lied, this writer included. Anyone who says he has never lied is a liar because he lied in denying that he

has lied! It does not make it right, though. We are to busy ourselves in teaching our children the *truth* of God's Word and living that truth out. I remember vividly the day my Mom told my sister and me that there was no Santa. I can see the scene in my mind's eye even now, sitting at our kitchen table in some yellow and green 70's era chairs and Mom looking down at the table telling us there was no Santa. It did not come as a surprise to me – I had pretty much figured it out already. I had heard that there were (at the time) almost 6 billion people in the world and though I didn't know exactly how big of a number that was, I was pretty confident it was too many homes for Santa to visit in one night. I can remember my first thought, though: 'My parents lied to us. What about what they're telling me about God?' That was genuinely my very first thought. Now, my parents are as kind and loving people as I could have ever hoped to have had for parents and I love them dearly. They taught us about Santa because they wanted us to have fun and excitement on Christmas morning. I still remember my first thought though. Aside from this, it is still the ninth commandment.

Distortion of Motives for Right Behavior – Children are on their best behavior around Christmas. Why? Because Santa is watching and “he knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake.” This teaches children that they should behave and be obedient to parents not because it is commanded by God⁸ but because Santa may not bring them toys. This cultivates an unbiblical motive for obedience.

Attributes – Though I need not belabor the point into which we have gone into so much detail, Santa looks an awful lot like Jesus. He has many of the same attributes and he does many of the same things. As an aside, have you ever noticed how Santa is often shown wearing a crown of holly? Holly, with its sharply pointed leaves and red berries, was known in middle Europe as the “Christ-Thorn” and was recognized as the archetypal reality of the Crown of Thorns. Jesus bore the crown of thorns and yet Santa wears it too. That is too close for my comfort. That Santa has God's attributes is likely the single biggest issue because its implications are so widespread. Remember the lesson from 1 Corinthians 10: Even though the pagan gods are not real, the demons that lurk

⁸ Obeying their parents is the only thing Scripture specifically commands children to do (Eph. 6:1).

behind them are. Any phony impersonation of Christ that mimics Him and/or draws attention away from Christ has a dark element about it. It is idolatry. Even without active, purposeful worship, it is idolatry. Paul warns his beloved Corinthians – Flee! Do not pass “Go.” Do not collect \$200. Just *flee*. There is real danger lurking behind the façade of innocence.

Training Our Children – The church is in trouble. I tell people often that the church is safe because Jesus is her Head and His plans and promises are irrevocable, but nonetheless, Christianity is on a steep decline. Recent studies show that some 75 – 85% of children who are raised in church, make “decisions” and are baptized, upon growing up and leaving home also leave the church and do not return. Alarm bells have been sounding for decades.⁹ The Southern Baptists are now seeing steep declines in baptism rates. Thinking that the church is somehow no longer “relevant,” churches have begun to look more and more like the world to draw the world in. We have invented a “ministry of entertainment” and softened the Gospel to make it more appealing and less demanding. Most, not all, but most youth ministries are heavy on entertainment and emotional manipulation but lite on the teaching of sound doctrine. We have raised generations of young people who claim to be Christians but have no biblical theological framework. They know the key catch phrases and have prayed the “sinner’s prayer,” but there has been no transformation in their lives. They can articulate on a very superficial level the basics of the Gospel but cannot articulate why they believe what they claim to believe. They have no ability to “give a reason for the hope” (1 Peter 3:15) they say is within them. Our churches bear their fair share of the blame to be sure, but not all of it is the church’s fault.

Men, I make my appeal to you here. We are the spiritual leaders of our homes. If you are a believing father the responsibility to teach your family the Word of God falls on your shoulders before it does anyone else’s. It falls on your shoulders before it falls on the shoulders of the church or of any other

⁹ For a sobering look at the decline, the reasons for the decline, and how to reverse the decline in biblical literacy among our families please purchase Ken Ham’s book *Already Gone*. Ham is the president of an excellent ministry known as Answers in Genesis. The website is www.answersingenesis.org and *Already Gone* may be purchased here <http://www.answersingenesis.org/search/?q=already%20gone&site=store-products>

institution. Most husbands and fathers think that as long as they take their families to Sunday School and church and say the blessing over family meals that they are being the spiritual leaders. We think that our children are getting everything they need in Sunday School or in the youth group. Think again. This mindset is the very thing that has led to the stunning drop in biblical literacy among professing Christians today. Declining biblical literacy results directly in a declining church which results in a declining society. Lives are not being transformed because the only thing that *can* transform lives, the Bible, is being ignored, minimized, watered down or taken so out of context that it is rendered powerless. Men, your children need to see you reading God's Word. They need you to teach them sound doctrine. Sunday School should be a supplement – at most. The teaching of God's Word should begin in the home, not Sunday School. Did you know that Sunday School was originally designed solely for men? Its original purpose was to biblically equip men so that they could, in turn, biblically equip their families. It is not the Sunday School teacher's job to instruct your children – it is yours. Hear the Word of God:

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. – Deuteronomy 6:6-7

This is exactly what is missing in the vast majority of Christian homes today. The laws, precepts, and doctrines of God are not being taught by the husbands and fathers in the homes. Have you ever wondered why if God is the center of our lives and is everything to us that He is so rarely mentioned six days out of the week? If we believe Him to be as beautiful, magnificent, powerful, sovereign, involved in our lives, and so all-encompassing then why do we so rarely speak of Him? We do we not take joy in discussing His magnanimity with other believers? Why do we not marvel at His goodness and discuss the beautiful doctrines of His word? Why do we not 'talk of them when we sit in our homes and walk in the way?' Could it be because we don't know enough of Him *to* talk about Him? It is not enough for you to take your children to church. It is not enough for you to bless family meals. It is not enough for them to see you live a moral life. Your children need you to teach them the Word of God more than they need anything else. Biblical instruction must begin in the *home*.

For God's Sake – Many will see all of this as much ado about very little. What

has already been presented should be reason enough to reconsider Santa. As I said earlier, though, in the final analysis it really does not matter what you or I think about Santa Claus. What matters is what *God* thinks about him. Knowing what He has said about Himself, I can honestly envision no circumstance in which God would look upon Santa with an approving anthropomorphic eye. He is not even neutral on it. We know how He feels because we know how jealous He is for Himself. He will not tolerate anyone or anything claiming even a single one of His attributes. Again, the second commandment:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or in the water below.

He does not make an exception for Santa. Our real motive for jettisoning Santa should not be a legalistic one. Our real motive should be out of love for God. He has done so very much for us. How could we ever approve of anything that shares in His glory? He is our Heavenly Father! He loves us and gave Himself for us. We should obey Him because we *love* Him. We love Him because He first loved us. Our love for God should result in us being jealous for Him. There is an enlightening story recorded for us in Scripture. Phinehas, driven by jealousy for God, ran a spear through an Israeli man and a Midianite woman with whom he had joined himself in Baal worship.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his [a]descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'" – Numbers 25:10-13.

This is not teaching that we are to be running anyone through with spears today, but notice how God was pleased by Phinehas' jealousy for Him. God subdued His own wrath. God is pleased and will honor us when we are jealous for Him. Our dismissal of Santa should be out of jealousy for our Heavenly Father.

Conclusion

In conclusion dear reader, please let me say again that it is not my intent in any shape form or fashion to disparage you in any way if you do Santa with your

children. I am not saying you are a bad parent and am not saying you are not a Christian. I am saying however, that as Christians we need to think through the issue of Santa from a purely biblical perspective. As Christians, everything we do should all be done – *all* be done – for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). There is no way that Santa can be done for the glory of God. In light of biblical truth there can be no legitimate reason for the Christian to do Santa. None of my pastor friends who faithfully preach the Word of God do Santa with their children for all of these reasons and likely more. Maybe you are reading this and are already midstream with your children on Santa. You’ve been doing him for years. What to do? Just tell your kids the truth. One of my friends with whom I went to seminary just told his 8 year-old daughter the truth about Santa. She seems to be no worse for the wear and they are all looking forward to Christmas. Your children will understand. In fact, as they grow and look back upon it, they will admire you for it. There’s no shame in doing the right thing. And you know what? I can promise you that Christmas will not only be just as meaningful as before, but even more so. The absence of Santa cannot diminish the significance and enjoyment of Christmas for the believer. It can only enhance it. It is my prayer that God will use this article not only to lead us to give Santa, pause, but will also lead us to ponder anew the beauty and majesty of our great King.¹⁰

¹⁰ For an excellent book on the miracle of the Incarnation, see *God in the Manger* by Dr. John MacArthur. Though out of print, used copies may be purchase at <http://www.amazon.com/God-Manger-John-MacArthur/dp/B000C4STOW>