

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 69

Dearest Grandchild,

Today's letter is an article I wrote years ago. It was published in the Christian Standard. It is rather long, but perhaps someday you will have time to read it. I hope and pray that you will always have a MERRY CHRISTMAS!

MERRY CHRISTMAS! This is among the most familiar phrases in the English language. It brightens the eyes of little children, brings cheer to those imprisoned on beds of suffering, and gives hope to those in dungeons of deep despair. In spite of political correctness, these precious words still echo throughout every city and village in America. Even those who do not read, speak, or understand the English language, can say these words with a smile and find blessed relief from the difficulties of life.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! These words are music to the ears of our brave men and women in the military. Their fathers heard these same words at Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima. Their grandfathers heard them at Verdun and Flanders Field. Their great-grandfathers at Shiloh's Woods and Harper's Ferry. When surrounded by suffering and death there is a certain relief in dreaming of a White Christmas, and hoping to be home for the holidays. Their sense of duty, however, compels them to fight and die over there so Christmas can be merry over here.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! These magic words even put a smile on the face of Ebenezer Scrooge. Before he learned to speak these words he was both miserly and miserable. He was the proverbial small package of conceit. He was the master of his own tiny little world but his life was both puny and pathetic. When he learned the message of Christmas, however, his self centered cocoon vanished like a vapor. Remarkably, he found more happiness in helping Tiny Tim than he had ever known before. The miracle of Christmas, as you know, involves a paradox. The best way to have a Merry Christmas, is to give one.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! Sometimes these words are difficult to say. Many children have nightmares instead of dreams. Their treasure chest of memories is filled with monsters. They survive by developing mental calluses to protect themselves from the harsh realities of life. They fear that opening their heart to love will only pick off the scabs and make them vulnerable to sadness too deep to be described. The message of Christmas, however, is like a seed that can take root in the morass of their misery and blossom into the beauty of selfless generosity.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! This is like a talisman phrase that can transform a cottage into a castle, and a pauper's home into a palace. The happiest memories of Christmas have nothing to do with the price of a present, or the size of a home. They transcend physical suffering and financial woes. To meditate upon these words can make a rough road smooth, a long journey short, and a heavy burden a little lighter.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! Yes! I know that there is no Biblical command to observe

Christmas. Yes! I know that our modern observance of Christmas has pagan roots. Yes! I know that Christ was probably not born in December because travel to pay taxes would have been more difficult at that time of the year. Yes! I know that our Pilgrim forefathers even considered the observance of Christmas a piece of “Popish frivolity”. None of these facts, however, should keep us from teaching the truth. The truth about Jesus is relevant every day of the year, but perhaps will be more easily received during the Christmas season.

Think of it like this. Jesus, the Master Teacher, often used what people were already thinking about to teach eternal truth.

- In John 4, for example, a Samaritan woman came to Jacob’s well to draw water. Since she was already thinking about water, Jesus took advantage of her thoughts and explained: **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14)**
- In John 6 the people were already thinking about bread because Jesus had just fed the multitudes with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus took advantage of their thoughts and explained: **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)**
- On the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, as the priest was pouring out water from the Pool of Siloam Jesus said: **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” (John 7:37-38)**
- Since millions of people are already thinking about Jesus during the Christmas season, why not take advantage of this situation and teach eternal truth.

Let us suppose, for example, that you are witnessing to a foreign exchange student. As Christmas approaches you will have a wonderful opportunity to teach them the truth about Jesus.

Here are a few facts for your consideration:

- It is a fact that there was a man named Jesus upon the earth. No honest historian can deny this. In fact, His impact on the earth is so significant that the civilized world divides all of history into B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (The year of our Lord).
- It is a fact that every major aspect of the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus was predicted in advance and recorded in the Bible. The essence of the Gospel is that Jesus lived, died, and rose again “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).
- It is a fact that the teachings of Jesus transform society. Charles Darwin, for example, could not help but notice that the message of the Christian missionary was like an enchanter’s wand. When he returned to England and heard some speak disparagingly of Christianity, he rebuffed them with these words: *“They forget, or will not remember, that human sacrifices, and the power of an idolatrous priesthood—a system of profligacy unparalleled in any other part of the world—infanticide a consequence of that system—bloody wars, where the conquerors spared neither women nor children—that all these have been abolished; and that dishonesty, intemperance, and licentiousness have been greatly reduced by the introduction of Christianity. In a voyager to forget these things is base ingratitude; for should he chance to be at the point of shipwreck on some unknown coast, he will most devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary may have extended thus far.”* (Journals of Research by Charles

Darwin p. 414.)

- It is a fact that many of the most famous scientists in the world have been Christians. The late Dr. Henry Morris listed 101 believing scientists in his book *“Men of Science - Men of God”*.
- It is a fact that Christians have also made significant contributions in music, art and literature.
- It is a fact that Christians have founded institutions all over the world to care for little children, the aged, and the infirm. Howard R. Russell, in his book *“A Lawyer’s Examination of the Bible”* (Pages 191 - 192) quotes James Russell Lowell as saying: *“I will challenge such skeptics to find a place ten miles square on the globe, where a man can live in comfort, security, and decency, where he can find education for his children, reverence for infancy and old age, honor for womanhood or any sacred regard for human life, where the gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way, laying a foundation for such a condition of affairs. If they can find such a place, it will then be in order for them to emigrate thither and advocate their unbelief. Scoffers against religion are dependent upon the religion they discard for every privilege they enjoy as citizens of a Christian community.”*
- It is a fact that Christian missionaries have helped preserve the history of hundreds of indigenous people groups by living in their midst and reducing their languages to writing.
- It is a fact that man is mortal and destined for the grave.
- It is also a fact that the tomb of Jesus is empty and receiving Him as Savior offers to mankind the most rational hope on earth of life beyond the grave.
- It is also a fact, that the foreign exchange student will probably not care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

That’s one reason why wishing someone a MERRY CHRISTMAS is so powerful. If you are homeless and destitute, this season of the year provides your greatest opportunity for help. If you are physically tired and emotionally drained, this season is a ready made prescription for relief. If you are confused and lonely, be prepared at Christmas time for some Good Samaritan to notice your need and offer a helping hand. The world will probably not be impressed if you speak with the tongues of men and angels, they will, however, invariably respond to love. In reality, that’s what following Christ is all about. Paul passed the message of Christ’s love through the prism of his inspired intellect and wrote: **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”** (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Love is what Christ is all about. He was patient, kind, and without envy. He did not boast, and was not proud, rude, or self-seeking. He was not easily angered and is still eager still to erase our record of wrong. Jesus would never delight in evil, but will always rejoice with the truth. He always protects, always, trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, and never fails. Love is what Christ is all about and love is also what Christmas is all about!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Grandpa Boyce