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TRAIN up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

AND with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11)

BE careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. ⁹ Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)

If we take a serious view of Scripture, we must admit to their truthfulness and applicability to us at all times and at each stage of life. But we are often prone to the temptation of believing a slight deviation therefrom will be harmless – just a little ‘white lie’ from time to time is of no consequence. But white lies have brought down thrones and kingdoms and may lead to greater transgressions over time since to indulge in them will always lead to an insensitivity to sin. An example:

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

We can witness the sinful and heretical deviation from Holy Scripture taking place in many churches today. Denying the very admonition of God against homosexuality (ECUSA & SBC), denying priests the privilege of marriage (Roman Catholic), and

condemning others for eating the very meats and seafood that our Lord ate during His ministry (SDA). God's Word is complete and sealed – no need for man to add his own sin-stained hands to steady it as Uzzah had done in steadying the Ark of the Lord and died that self-same moment.

The point of my devotion today is directed primarily to parents who teach as fact, the myth of Santa Claus. I am not suggesting that the real and Godly character of St. Nicolas of Myra in Asia Minor should not be extolled in the teaching of children for the Bishop of Myra was a kind, generous and compassionate man of God. The Christian people of Turkey (Asia Minor) and eastern Europe pay much reverence to the sincere qualities of that good old saint. I visited churches in Serbia which have the name borrowed from St. Nicolas who is a popular and important spiritual and historical figure in the Orthodox churches. St. Nicolas is the progenitor of the modern day Santa Claus. He was born in 270 AD in Patara which today is in Turkey. He died in 345 AD.

St. Nicolas is known for helping the poor with gifts of his own personal wealth. He is the first bishop known to have done so. He once granted diaries to three girls, that would have otherwise been sold into slavery, by reputedly placing golden coins secretly in their shoes at night outside their door.

Being Bishop of Myra, St. Nicolas wore a red miter according to the custom of the eastern church of that day. He wore a white collar with purple or red cassock which is still worn in parts of the world by bishops such as in India. It was these vestments that led to the belief that Santa Claus wore a red suit, white collar, and a limp miter from traveling at high speed in a sled pulled by flying reindeer. How ridiculous can a myth become and yet be told as truth to the believing ears of young children.

Nicolas was severely persecuted under Diocletian and imprisoned for seven years until Constantine assumed the office of Roman Emperor. Nicolas attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

In summary, St. Nicolas was truly a saint of God like unto all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ – a man whose living testimony was worthy of emulation. But Nicolas was not at all on a level with our Lord Jesus Christ – no other mortal is! Yet, Santa Claus (derivative of the Dutch pronunciation of St. Nicolas – Sinterclaas) has taken the place of our Lord Jesus Christ in the minds of countless children around the world. Many such children may have no idea who Jesus is, but they will certainly know of Santa Claus.

Santa Claus seems a fitting imposter to take the place of Christ at Christmas. His mythical abilities include Omniscience in knowing exactly whether boys and girls have been good or bad. He knows the every movement of the child – sleeping or awake. He can traverse thousands of miles around the world in a single night (Omnipresence). His home is on the north part of the earth – the North Pole. Sound familiar? *"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, **in the sides of the north**: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."* In formal Temple worship, the north side represents the side of God. And Santa Claus possesses great wealth in providing whatever toys the child could dream of. He comes as a thief in the night just as the Second Coming of our Lord. There are too many parallels of the myth of Santa Claus to the truth of the Gospel to fully enumerate here. But my point is this: Santa Claus is not real – not the fat, jolly old man we have created from the reputation of a truly good man. Why teach children a myth as if it were true?

It is perfectly alright to call the myth of Santa Claus a fairy tale, but that is not what we teach children, is it? We teach them that Santa Claus is REAL. We warn them about misbehaving because Santa will know and not reward them.

On the other hand, Christian parents teach their children about our Lord Jesus Christ. He is REAL. He died for them. He was of absolute goodness. He will be with them in Heaven if they believe and conduct their lives accordingly. But we do not usually teach children that Jesus has any tangible presents for them if they obey Him. His rewards are all spiritual and distant in time. We may take them to Church every Sunday, but they have seen no tangible results for the faith of their parents. Jesus may not know if they have been good or bad. He may not know whether they are awake or sleeping. Jesus has no reindeer or flying sled – no presents to reward good behavior.

One day at an age of accountability, the child awakens to the fact that Santa Claus was a lie their parents repeated with great repetition. They were so very convincing! There never came a day when they sat down with the child and confessed, *“Sorry, but Santa Claus is not real. We just told you that to stimulate your imagination – to convince you that you will be rewarded for good behavior.”* The child had to discover the lie on his own. This realization must arouse a curiosity in his mind: *“My parents consistently lied about Santa Claus . . . perhaps they were lying to me as well about the Lord Jesus Christ?”* It was such a sweet and deceptive little white lie told about Santa Claus, wasn’t it?

If we must broach the subject of St. Nicolas, why not inform the child of the goodness, compassion, and example of the real St. Nicolas; but never construct a lie about him.

Why not teach the child, too, the REAL meaning of Christmas? When I was a child, I found Christmas Carols far more lovely than frivolous jingles about red-nosed reindeer and sleigh rides. The beauty and mystery of Christmas far exceeds the made up fictions of Santa Claus and flying reindeer. If we do so, we will never have to admit to the child that, yes, we lied about Santa Claus, but not about Jesus.

Today, if I ask any four year old what is important about Christmas, I believe more than 80% will respond, “Santa Claus!” Isn’t that a shame? That response is received in Tokyo; Seoul, Korea; Ankara; Buenos Aires; Peking; Moscow; and a thousand other places at which the true meaning of Christmas is unheard of.

Let us return to a reverent observance of Christmas for what it truly is – the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ at Bethlehem. Let us return to the holy Carols commemorating that event instead of the sensuous and frivolous tunes that have supplanted them in modern culture; and let us continue to call the holiday (derivative of Holy Day) for what it is – CHRISTMAS! Not Winter Break, Happy Holiday, or XMAS – but the genuine name of the event, CHRISTMAS!

I am fully aware of the indignation this devotion may arouse among those who wish to desperately hang on to the idol of Santa Claus. I am sorry for stepping on your toes, but better to enter Heaven with broken toes than into Hell with all limbs in good order.