



solutions that transform

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Gleanings

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“Happy Holidays”? No . . . This Year It’s “Merry Christmas”!

According to a recent *USA Today* article (“Wal-Mart Wishes You a Merry Christmas,” by Jayne O’Donnell, *USA Today*, 11/18/06), a Wal-Mart spokeswoman claims that Wal-Mart learned its lesson last year. No longer will Wal-Mart associates be forbidden to say “Merry Christmas.”

Boycotts by groups opposing Wal-Mart’s self-imposed ban on saying “Merry Christmas” negatively impacted Wal-Mart’s Christmas sales last year. The boycotts were led primarily by organizations identified with Christianity. Why did Wal-Mart’s management initiate the ban in the first place? What did they hope to gain by this practice?

It appears that Wal-Mart was seeking to distance itself from Christianity. Given the religious pluralism that is sweeping the United States, and indeed the world, perhaps Wal-Mart viewed the greeting “Merry Christmas” as a detriment to increasing sales to non-Christians. So perhaps Wal-Mart’s management assumed that using a greeting such as “Happy Holidays,” which has no religious overtones, would offend no one and would therefore be more efficacious for increasing sales. For Wal-Mart, as with most companies, the bottom line is money, which means that, in general, companies need increasing sales to sustain increasing profits. There is nothing wrong with wanting to grow the top and bottom lines, in fact, that is a good goal. But money should not be the ultimate goal in the game of life; it is simply a by-product of faithfulness to God. (See the Old Testament book of Haggai for an example.)

Much to Wal-Mart’s chagrin, their assumption was wrong. Wal-Mart’s ban on the greeting offended many Christians. The bias against “Merry Christmas”—the greeting that reflects the traditional annual celebration of the birth of Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith—was an affront to many Christians and led to last year’s boycott. Wal-Mart has now repented and is allowing its associates to once again say “Merry Christmas.”

I would like to stress that I don’t know Wal-Mart’s motivation for this change. Was it conviction of sin for offending Christians or was it simply about money? You be the judge. In any case, Wal-Mart changed its policy, so this year you can enjoy hearing “Merry Christmas” at your local Wal-Mart.

“Merry Christmas” is a meaningful greeting. It is a reminder of the birth of Jesus who transformed the world and provides the way for every human being to relate to his or her Creator. Jesus is the most significant person who ever has or ever will live. Such a significant person should be venerated, and

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traditionally Christmas has been a time to honor Jesus.

Sadly many don't understand the vital importance of Jesus. Recently, my wife shared a story with me about the workers at the hair salon she patronizes. A few months ago, the salon owner was diagnosed with cancer. The employees, all of whom are non-Christians, were greatly stressed and felt a sense of doom, because they believe death is the end—there is no life after death. This view of reality leads to discouragement, despair, and hopelessness.

Such is the life of those who don't know Jesus. The solution for these discouraged workers is simple—to embrace Jesus and all the reality that He offers, including peace with God. Note what the apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1: *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (niv).

Peace with God comes only through a relationship with Christ. What a magnificent gift! How fitting to take time each year to thank the Lord for the gift of His Son Jesus. Christmas is a wonderful time to celebrate Jesus. He alone brings encouragement and hope to the world. There is life both now and after physical death for those who accept Jesus as their Savior. This is great news. Let's freely share it with whoever has an ear to hear.

So I say to you—*Merry Christmas!*

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