Do I Ever Mix My Christianity with Paganism?

Isaiah 52:11: *Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD.*

One of the foundations of true Christian discipleship is the obvious focus on following in Jesus' footsteps. Jesus himself taught us about leaving the world behind and being willing to live a life of dedication and sacrifice as he did. One important but sometimes overlooked challenge to this is the practicality of what it means to leave the world behind. This is where an understanding of paganism needs to come into play. It's important to realize that paganism is not a single, unified religion; rather, it is a broad umbrella encompassing many different spiritual beliefs and practices, often connected by a reverence for nature and the natural world.

So, what are the differences and what are the similarities between paganism and Christianity?

Are there any aspects of paganism that have become part of my Christian walk?

Let's begin by generally defining the very broad topic of paganism.

(Source: www.paganclub.com, excerpts from "Paganism Overview: Exploring Earth-Centred Spirituality") Paganism, derived from the Latin word *paganus*, meaning "country dweller" or "rustic," was a term in use by early Christians to describe the polytheistic and animistic religions of Europe, the Middle East and Northern Africa.

These traditions were seen as the beliefs of rural or backward peoples as Christianity spread across the Roman Empire and beyond. In reality, however, pagan traditions were the dominant spiritual systems in many societies long before the rise of monotheistic religions like Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

One of the hallmarks of ancient paganism is its polytheistic nature. In other words, the belief in and worship of multiple gods and goddesses. Ancient pagans would look up to deities, of course. This is because they often linked them to natural elements like the sun, moon, wind and earth.

This is a broad overview of the earth-based foundation of paganism. We will get into more details as we go along.

Let's now look at the context of our theme scripture.

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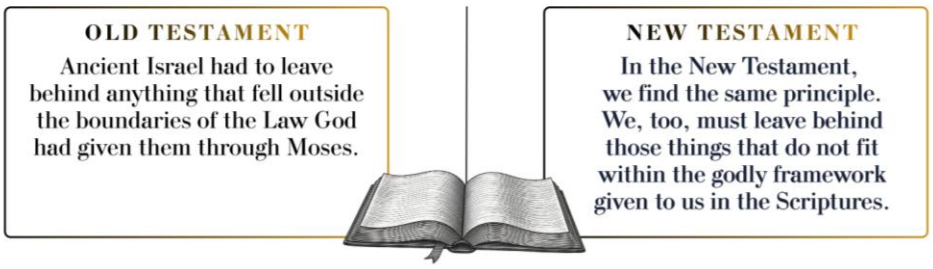
The release of Israel from the 70-year captivity in Babylon was prophesied in Isaiah. Isaiah describes the responsibilities of this newly-given freedom:
Isaiah 52:11-12: *11 Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. 12 But you will not go out in haste, nor will you go as fugitives; For the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.*

Isaiah is saying, Go back to your land, renewing your service to and faith in God! When Israel left Babylon to return to their land, they were to *touch nothing unclean*. They were to *purify* themselves, separate themselves from the pagan influences of Babylon, and follow only the Lord who would go before them. This was a dramatic change—not just relocating, but reallocating their hearts and minds toward God.

The generation of Israelites taken captive had been idolatrous. Their idolatry was one of the primary reasons God sent them into captivity. The generation that would be freed 70 years later had essentially grown up surrounded by idolatry.

(Source: Biblical Commentary by Albert Barnes) Though the captivity was at first attended with every circumstance suited to give pain, and though they were subjected to many privations and sorrows in Babylon (see Psalm 137), yet… many of them became strongly attached to a residence there, and were strongly indisposed to return. They were there seventy years. Most of those who were made captive would have died before the close of the exile. Their children, who constituted the generation to whom the command to return would be addressed, would have known the land of their fathers only by report. It was a distant land… They had been born in Babylon. It was their home… many, it is probable, had lands, and friends and property in Babylon.

They weren't only leaving behind a place, they were leaving behind a way of thinking that had become normal to them. It's what they knew. Seventy years is a long time. They had become accustomed to a way of life, but now God reminded them how they were His chosen people. What they had grown comfortable with must be left behind.



In 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul takes this ancient event from **Isaiah 52:11-12** and brings its lessons and principles into play in our current everyday Christian lives. Before reading his message, we again need background. Why would he quote Isaiah? To understand 2 Corinthians, we have to go back to 1 Corinthians.

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1 Corinthians was written to a church whose priorities were very confused. They closed their eyes to dark moral sin while engaging in a sectarian brand of Christianity that was not disciplined. They were stuck in spiritual pride, misuse of the gifts and neglect of the most important things. The Apostle Paul wrote to them firmly to straighten them out.

Corinth was a major Greek city in the Roman Empire. The Christians there were living in a culture saturated with pagan religion. They were accustomed to it. It was "normal," much as it was for the Israelites during their captivity in Babylon in the Old Testament. They were familiar with their surroundings, having grown up in that environment. We can see why the Apostle Paul draws on this well-known period in the Old Testament to make his point.

2 Corinthians was later written to them after they had heeded Paul's warnings and were beginning to grow in Christ. Paul loved them unconditionally and encouraged them to continue putting away their humanness. He gave general admonitions that would clearly apply to the context of their lives and their deeply pagan background.

1 Corinthians was written to help them understand the big picture, while 2 Corinthians was more like saying, "Good, good! Keep going, keep going. Keep walking away, keep walking away."

We're going to look at several verses in 2 Corinthians and take them apart piece by piece:

2 Corinthians 6:14: *Do not be bound together <2086> with unbelievers <571>…*

Bound together: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2086 *eterozugew heterozugeo*; from a compound of 2087 and 2218; to yoke up differently, i.e. (figuratively) to associate discordantly

The Greek words for *bound together* refer to being yoked together, like animals joined in the same harness. Paul is warning against being connected to someone who is moving in a different spiritual direction. Animals were yoked in this way to do a specific job. If they are tied together but going in different directions, the job will not get done.

The King James Version says, *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*. The root words in the New Testament are always tied to a committed relationship, either in a positive or a negative sense.

Positive example:
Matthew 11:29-30: *29 Take my yoke <2086> upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For my yoke <2086> is easy and my burden is light.*

We are to be yoked to Christ in a position of submission and discipleship. We work with him and follow in his footsteps so the work of the gospel is accomplished.

Negative example:
Acts 15:10-11: (Here the Apostle Peter describes the Jewish Law as a yoke): *10 Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke <2086> which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.*

The Law was a *yoke*, meaning a burden that sinful people were unable to bear because they could not keep it perfectly. Peter was addressing the efforts of Jewish and Gentile Christians to work out their understanding of the gospel. He warned the Jewish Christians not to place this yoke—the Jewish Law—upon the Gentiles. Jesus emphasized the spirit of the Law, and his followers were to walk in his footsteps. Rather than placing the burden of the Law upon one another, they needed to be yoked together in following Jesus.

Unbelievers: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #571 *apistos*; from 1 (as a negative particle) and 4103; (actively) disbelieving, i.e. without Christian faith (specially, a heathen); (passively) untrustworthy (person), or incredible (thing)

Do not be bound together with unbelievers—When Paul says *unbelievers*, he uses a word meaning those who do not share faith in Christ. He is warning against binding ourselves into partnerships where our deepest spiritual commitments are fundamentally different.

In other words, do not be tied together with those who do not share the same belief system. This does not mean we stay out of the world or refuse to go to work tomorrow based on this text. Rather, it means we do not want to make spiritual choices that join us to the wrong thinking and the wrong belief systems that conflict with our Christian beliefs.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers

How do the Scriptures describe "unbelievers"? Here are just two examples:
Matthew 17:17: *And Jesus answered and said, You unbelieving <571> and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to me.*

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Jesus is referring to the Jewish people who did not believe he was the Messiah in spite of obvious evidence.

- **1 Corinthians 6:5-6:** *5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers <571>?*

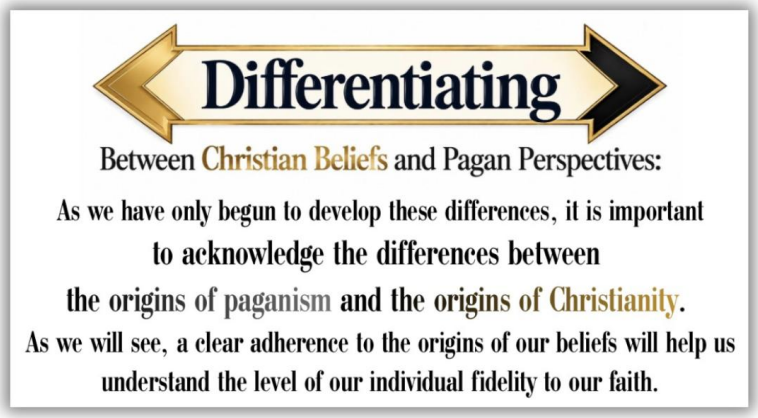
  Before unbelievers—before Gentiles.

  - In the first example, Jesus is referring to unbelieving Jewish individuals.
  - In the second, Paul is speaking about unbelieving Gentiles.

  The admonition is to ensure our focus is to be tied together with the appropriate people. Both those who were Jews in name only and those who are simply outside of the Christian faith are considered *unbelievers*.

  Are we to look at unbelievers and consider them to be "bad" people? No! They are simply *unbelievers*. God has salvation planned for them in a different way and at a different time.

  So to sum up, paganism in both ancient Israel and the early Christian church was something people lived alongside every day. It was easy to get used to and easy to stop noticing how it could negatively influence their thinking, and ultimately their relationship with God. We certainly experience this in our day.



And that's the key we're looking for: What is my individual fidelity to my faith?

To grow in Christ requires a solid foundation to build upon. Defining what we walk toward and what we walk away from gives us something firm to stand upon.

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As we begin to compare the fundamentals of paganism and Christianity, what impact do the belief origins have?

The impact is enormous, as the origins of a belief establish the foundation for that belief. As we now begin to dig a bit more deeply into the "how" and "why," we will begin to understand why the Apostle Paul made such a clear statement about not being bound together with unbelievers.

Let's expand our understanding of paganism by continuing with this article, written from the perspective of those who hold these beliefs.

(Source: www.paganclub.com, "Paganism Overview: Exploring Earth-Centred Spirituality")
…At the core of many ancient pagan traditions was animism—the belief that all elements of the natural world—rivers, trees, mountains, animals—possess a spiritual essence or consciousness. This reverence for nature manifested in countless ways, from the worship of the Egyptian sun god Ra to the sacred oak trees of the Druids…

…The 20th century saw a renewed interest in ancient pagan traditions, often called the "pagan revival" or "neo-paganism." This revival emerged out of a longing to reconnect with nature, reject the dogma of organized religion, and explore alternative forms of spirituality. Neo-paganism is diverse, encompassing a variety of movements, each drawing from different ancient traditions…

"Neo" just means "new," so this is referring to the modern adaptation of paganism.

Paganism has been around for a very long time. Neo-paganism is a revival of these older traditions, with some adaptations to fit into modern day.

One particularly interesting belief is that elements of nature—such as rivers, trees, mountains and animals—possess a spiritual essence or consciousness. Keep that idea in mind as we examine these scriptures and consider them from a biblical perspective.

2 Corinthians 6:14: *… for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness…*

What partnership have righteousness (a spiritual state of being made right with God) *and lawlessness* (literally, illegality; in a spiritual sense, meaning a state of disfavor with God)*?*

This is a contrast between spiritual righteousness and spiritual lawlessness in relation to godliness. This does not imply that those who are not believers are bad people—they are simply outside of favor with God. From a Christian perspective, this is a bad condition to be in. Christians seek a relationship with God by pursuing godliness. Unbelievers, however, do not share this belief in God and therefore do not pursue that same relationship.

As Christians, it is important that we treat pagans with respect. Many are good people. However, we are not to become involved in pagan beliefs or practices.

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What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? Paul is asking the Corinthians—and us—to think about what we once were and compare it with what we are becoming.

We have covered some of the origins of paganism, including beliefs associated with the natural world and the newer adaptations of those traditions.

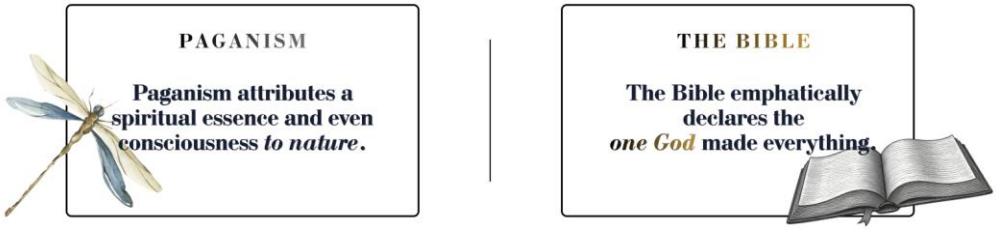
Now, let's turn to the origin of Christianity. From the beginning, there was intentional action by the one God. This is a very different approach from that which is found in historical pagan traditions.

The Bible's creation account in Genesis:
Genesis 1:1-3: *1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, Let there be light; and there was light.*

The first four words of the Bible help us understand the basis of Christianity: *In the beginning, God.* We put Him at the center as the Creator, the Designer and the Executor who brought all things into existence. *Let there be light*. God did this. This was intentional action that created the vast ecosystem of our planet.

Let's look at why He created the vast ecosystem of our planet:
Genesis 1:11-12: *11 Then God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them; and it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.*

God put the elements in place and built in the perpetuation of life through the seed system. As a result, we have beautiful, intentional vegetation growing into place by the design of the Creator.



The comparison shows a stark contrast. If all the elements of the natural world—rivers, vegetation, mountains and animals—possess a spiritual essence or consciousness, the implication is that these elements developed independently of one another but somehow work together.

Rather, it makes sense that if all things were created by one Creator, they would be part of a balanced system, designed specifically to work together.

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Why? Biblical creation continues with the direct creation of humanity:
Genesis 1:26-28: *26 Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it…*

There is a difference with the creation of humanity. While all of creation was intentional, the creation of mankind was unique. Humans were given dominion over the earthly creation so that this system would sustain and nurture them. This was not an invitation to abuse nature, but rather a responsibility to work together with it—a God-driven, intentional ecosystem with mankind at the center of it all.

Pagan beliefs differ considerably, but many forms of paganism explain the origin and sustaining of life in terms of various gods, goddesses, spirits or supernatural powers, depending on the specific tradition.

The Bible tells us that God created the earth and its abundance as a support system for His directly-created human family. That support system itself (sky, sun, moon, vegetation, animals, etc.) can hardly be "the gods"—that puts things in a backwards perspective. When we read the Bible's account of creation about how God brought things into existence, it is easy for us to choose what to believe in.

Does my Christianity in any way attribute the intricacy and beauty of our world to anyone or anything but God?

We don't often see an average Christian going out and worshiping a tree, so how does this affect me?

We don't want to have the tendency to, even casually, attribute guidance or destiny to cosmic powers, saying things like:

- "The universe is trying to tell me something."
- "I want to put good energy out into the universe."
- "My computer isn't working. Mercury must be in retrograde."

Christians might credit "Mother Nature" without even thinking about it.

When I'm amazed at a breathtaking sunset, does my appreciation stop with the creation itself, or does it lead me to worship the Creator?

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Let's understand the foundation of what we believe and always return to the Founder, God Almighty, the Father of Jesus Christ. Let us give Him the praise and honor, and let the awe inspired by everything else in creation draw us upward to Him.

2 Corinthians 6:14: *…or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

Fellowship: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2842 *koinōnía*; from 2844; partnership, i.e. (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) (financial) benefaction

What partnership can light have with darkness? None! Darkness cannot abide in the presence of light. From a spiritual perspective, light overcomes darkness. This is a picture of two very strong opposites.

Spiritually, what constitutes light and darkness?
Ephesians 5:6-9: *6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth).*

This is not necessarily referring to the physical world, but rather contrasting the spiritual darkness that covers the world with the light of God's plan of salvation for all through Jesus.

Light and darkness are separate and distinct:

They are clear opposites. Darkness is described as the absence of the light of God. The light of God is inherently good, righteous and truthful. Keep in mind that we are drawing a spiritual picture here. People of all faiths, as well as those who do not believe, can have a good conscience and do what is right. That is praiseworthy. We are talking, however, about reaching for a higher level of motivation. This is where the light of God helps us.

Another scripture that helps define this difference between light and darkness:
Isaiah 60:1-3: *1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*

☼ The light is God's light—this is a spiritual picture.

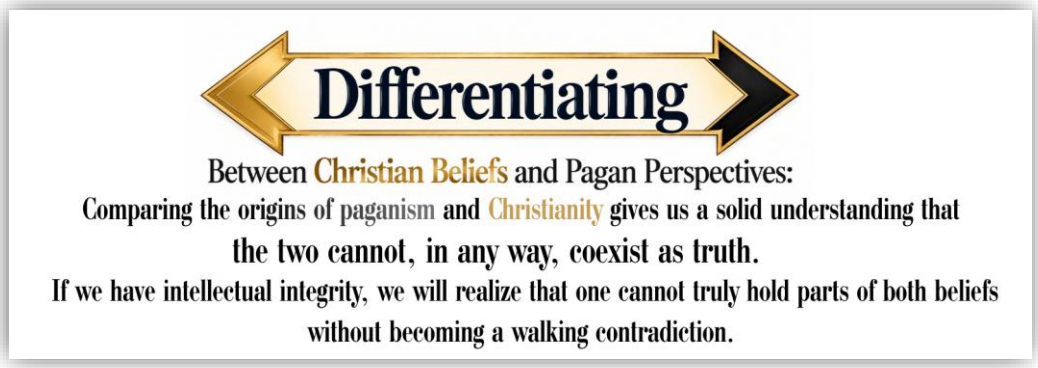
2 For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.

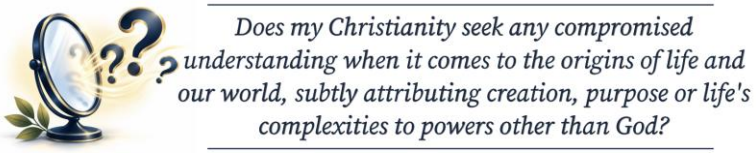
☼ This glory is God's glory. *Darkness will cover the earth… and the peoples*. This is not talking about a literal eclipse of the sun. Rather, it speaks of the goodness of God

and His plan, which remain unseen by the world. Yet, we have God's glory upon us!

3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

☼ What a beautiful prophecy of what is to come! This is a prophecy of the coming kingdom of God through Christ. *Nations will come to your light*—the spiritual light of God through Jesus. This light does not—and cannot—mingle with darkness!





These are questions we need to consider and ask ourselves so we can be sure our Christianity does not have little pieces of paganism creeping in.

The Bible clearly states our God-driven, God-created system is the absolute basis for all we hold sacred. Let's stand on that obvious foundation.

So far, we've established a foundation of beliefs relating to our origins and the fundamental differences between Christian and pagan beliefs. What are the differences regarding our individual Christian or pagan approach to life?

Here is where we need to pay very close attention to what many may consider to be subtleties. Our technologically advanced world has brought the ability to choose ways of thinking before us that have never been so easy to access. As Christians, caution should guide our thinking!

(Source: www.paganclub.com, "Paganism Overview: Exploring Earth-Centred Spirituality")
While ancient paganism became community-focused, modern paganism tends to be more individualistic. This means practitioners craft their own rituals and belief systems. However, many key elements remain consistent across various pagan traditions.

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These key elements include: Reverence for Nature: Whether through seasonal celebrations like the equinoxes and solstices, or daily rituals that honour the earth, modern pagans maintain a deep connection to nature. This often extends into environmental activism, with many pagans committed to ecological causes.

It is not a surprise that modern paganism tends toward being more individualistic. The range of beliefs is broad, allowing individuals to choose what appeals to them. They can take a piece of it and create their own gods, rituals or belief system.

As Christians, we need to be very cautious about this individualistic approach. We can't simply create our own rituals and belief systems. We have been given guidelines in the Scriptures we need to cling to and embrace.

Our clear focus as Christians is to respect nature as it was created by God for humanity's good:
Romans 1:18-21: *18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Paul is essentially saying that we have ample evidence of the power of our one God as demonstrated through His creation. When we look at nature, especially in the 21st century, we can see that this ecological system—despite the destruction caused by mankind—is still self-perpetuating. It can't be by chance that the system repairs itself when given time. It has to be because the design is God's. In the Romans scriptures above, it says the Designer can be *understood through what has been made*. It warns about walking away from God and as a result, becoming *futile in their speculations*.

In paganism, practitioners craft their own rituals and belief systems based on what they feel is right.

Does my Christianity in any way make room for an inappropriately elevated respect of nature?

Christians should be grateful for creation and care for it responsibly, but we worship the Creator, not the creation. There is nothing wrong with enjoying hiking or gardening or bird watching. But we don't want to start thinking there is inherent spiritual energy in a crystal, a tree, a mountain or a body of water. The issue is not in appreciating creation, but whether creation begins to receive the honor that belongs to God alone.

We *should* have an awestruck respect for nature, but always in the context of godliness. Observing and appreciating nature should be used as a means to bring us closer to God.

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Continuing with the rest of the key elements from the article:

(Source: www.paganclub.com) Magic and Spellwork: Magic—often spelled 'magick' within pagan communities to distinguish it from stage magic—is viewed as a natural extension of one's will, intent and energy. Spellwork can involve various tools like candles, herbs, crystals and incantations. The focus is generally on personal growth, healing and harmony rather than controlling others.

Divination: Many pagans practice forms of divination, such as tarot, rune casting or scrying, to gain insight into the future or their own subconscious.

Ethics and the Rule of Three: While ethical systems vary across pagan traditions, Wicca ("white" witchcraft) is known for the "Rule of Three." This states that whatever energy a person puts into the world—positive or negative—will return to them threefold. Other pagans follow similar principles, emphasizing personal responsibility and harm reduction.

Many aspects of paganism involve personal will, taking control of our lives, and even rising above our human station. We can understand why people might be attracted to these ideas. They often emphasize personal power, individual action and the ability to control circumstances or even one's own destiny. And, of course, we would all love to know the future.

Let's now examine a few of the practices that were forbidden by God's specific instructions. Remember, forbidden means prohibited, not permitted or allowed; we can't have it.

These prohibitions are found in the Old Testament and are reaffirmed in the New Testament:

Deuteronomy 18:10: *There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses <7080> divination <7081>, one who practices witchcraft <6049>, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer.*

Uses: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7080 *qacam*; a primitive root; properly, to distribute, i.e. determine by lot or magical scroll; by implication, to divine

Divination: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7081 *qecem*; from Old Testament #7080; a lot: also divination (including its fee), oracle

Witchcraft: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #6049 `*anan*; a primitive root; to cover; | used only as a denominative from Old Testament #6051, to cloud over; figuratively, to act covertly, i.e. practice magic

The prophet Jeremiah later warned God's people not to listen to *enchanters*, *diviners* or *sorcerers* in **Jeremiah 27:9** and **Jeremiah 29:8**.

Jeremiah 27:9: (KJV) *Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters <6049>, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon.*

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Jeremiah 29:8: (KJV) *For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners <7080>, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.*

Jeremiah also condemned false prophets who relied upon *false vision and divination* rather than God's revelation in **Jeremiah 14:14**.

Jeremiah 14:14: (KJV) *Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination <7081>, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.*

Divination is the practice of obtaining supernatural knowledge apart from God.

The New Testament continues to reject occult practices. Here are a few examples:

- **Acts 13:6-12:** Paul condemns Elymas the sorcerer.
- **Acts 16:16-18:** Paul casts out a spirit of divination from a slave girl.
- **Acts 19:19:** New believers publicly burn their books of magic. They renounced these practices rather than incorporating them into Christianity.
- **Galatians 5:19-21:** Sorcery is listed among the works of the flesh.
- **Revelation 21:8; 22:15:** Sorcerers are condemned.

We looked at just a few Old and New Testament scriptures that clearly state these practices are forbidden. They are contrary to the teachings of Judaism in the Old Testament and to Christianity in the New Testament.

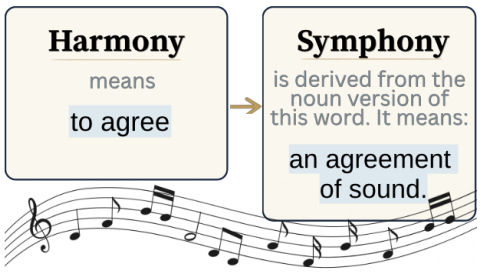
2 Corinthians 6:15: *Or what harmony <4857> has Christ with Belial or what has a believer in common <3310> with an unbeliever?*

Harmony: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4857 *sumphonesis*;
from 4856; accordance:— concord

In common: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3310 *mer-ece'*; a portion

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) a part as distinct from the whole
2) an assigned part, a portion, share

Harmony is an interesting word.



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Who is *Belial*?

(Source: Matthew Poole's English Annotations on the Bible) *Belial*: The term is used only in this place in the New Testament, but very often in the Old Testament, to express men notoriously wicked and scandalous, Deuteronomy 13:13, Judges 19:22, 1 Samuel 1:16, 2:12, 25:17, 2 Samuel 16:7, 2 Chronicles 13:7.

There is no subtlety here. The Apostle Paul is telling us that this is not something we need to parse through to understand. The point is dramatically clear! What harmony can there be between those who are under Christ and a world under Satan's rule?

Ours is a "spiritual symphony." If we add instruments that do not belong and create discord, we disrupt the harmony and ruin the message of that symphony.

Is my Christianity in any way drawn towards the drama and power that paganism seems to offer?

The appeal of horoscopes, so-called "angel numbers" (where you see the same number over and over again and think it has special meaning), crystals, energy healing and manifesting often lies in the promise of answers or a sense of control over situations we cannot control. Manifesting is increasingly popular, promoting the idea that visualizing what we want can make it come true. It can replace prayerful submission to God's will with confidence in our own ability to shape reality.

See Bonus Material for a link to an excellent article at ChristianQuestions.com about manifestation.

We should also ask whether we are drawn to these things because they seem mysterious, ancient, forbidden or sexy. For some, the idea of possessing secret knowledge is hard to resist.

Are these practices truly harmless, or do they reveal a desire to look beyond God's providence for answers or control?

Rather than being satisfied and allowing God's will to unfold, are we taking matters into our own hands, attempting to use some kind of energy or power to make things happen? This is a very pagan approach, in contrast to the Christian approach of submitting to the will of God.

As Christians, we seek spiritual harmony in accordance with God's word and will—this is what should drive us:

1 Peter 1:13-16: *13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,*

We once lived according to our former lusts because we didn't know any better.
But now, because we are in Christ, we know better.

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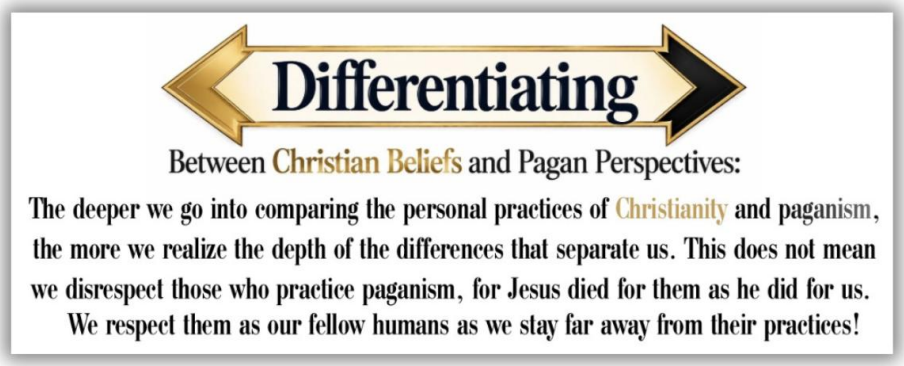
15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.

Remember our discussion about Israel's captivity in Babylon? They had to walk away from their former way of life and establish new habits. We might also have had to walk away from a former way of life. We had to establish new habits.

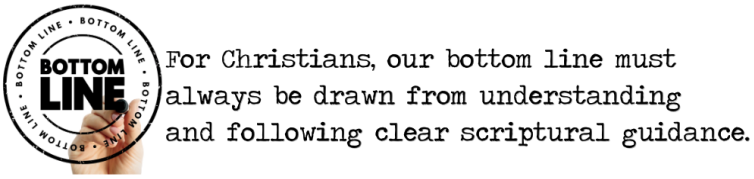
When we walk away from something, by definition, we leave it behind. The place we walk toward is holy—it is sanctified; set apart for the purposes of God—to work actively in our lives.



We can see how the differences between paganism and Christianity are growing more and more dramatic. We really do need to pay attention!

After reviewing many aspects of paganism through a lens of biblical perspective, what is the bottom line?

First of all, it bears repeating that we should always respect our fellow human beings as they seek to follow what they believe to be good and righteous.



Everything we have seen regarding pagan beliefs can be summed up in one clear biblical teaching: **Flee from idolatry!** This is based in the Old Testament and repeated in the New Testament.

Let's go to the Old Testament origin from the Ten Commandments:
Exodus 20:4: (ASV) *Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

Remember how the second generation of Israelites who left Babylon were warned to leave behind the pagan practices they grew up with? Similarly, Moses restated the Second Commandment as a warning to the second generation of Israelites who grew up in the wilderness, just before entering the Promised Land. He went into more detail in **Deuteronomy 4:15-20**. They were not to make images of God or be drawn into worshipping the sun, moon, stars, animals or other parts of God's creation. God's invisible nature (we have no idea what He looks like!) distinguished Him from the many pagan religions that represented their gods through idols and images. We don't need to make an image of God.

The Scriptures are clear on the importance of avoiding idolatry, but idolatry can involve more than physical idols. Other potential "gods" in our lives could include ego, people, success, comfort, wealth, power, social media or social position. These can become "gods" or "idols" when we prioritize them over our relationship with our heavenly Father.

In my opinion, paganism seems to especially appeal to the ego. It offers a sense of power and strength, along with the ability to divine or direct outcomes. Other forms of idolatry can also feed the ego by placing undue importance on people, success, comfort, wealth, power and social position.

All of these can fall under the heading of idolatry. If we are serving the one God through Jesus, we must recognize these influences and turn away from anything that draws us away from Him.

2 Corinthians 6:16: *Or what agreement <4783> has the temple of God with idols?...*

Agreement: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4783 *soong-kat-ath'-es-is*; from 4784; a deposition (of sentiment) in company with, i.e. (figuratively) accord with

How do these two things work together? They don't!

A temple is where religion is kept. For religious people, including pagans, a temple signifies a place of sacred meaning and worship. Where is *the temple of God* that the apostle references in this verse? Paul's answer is in the next phrase of this verse:

2 Corinthians 6:16-17: *16 ...For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,* (quoting from **Isaiah 52:11-12** that we already read) *I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 17 Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE, says the Lord. AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; and I will welcome you.*

The Apostle Paul is essentially applying Isaiah's command to Christians. Just as Israel was called to leave Babylon behind, we are called to leave behind any worldview that competes with wholehearted devotion to God.

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What does this mean for me as a Christian?

I am not my own. Therefore, I must be and do only what is in accord with sanctification—with being set apart for a holy purpose. I am called to be a temple, and I am obligated to live accordingly. This is the reason I was called, and I MUST therefore sanctify myself, setting myself apart for that holy purpose, because that is what I promised to do. I promised to walk in Jesus' footsteps, and that is exactly what he did.

What agreement has the temple of God (us) with idols? None whatsoever!

As Christians, our lives are SO much bigger than the spiritual searching associated with paganism. We have the spiritual clarity that comes from true Christianity:
1 Peter 2:4-5, 9, 11-12: *4 And coming to him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

We are *being built up as a spiritual house*—a temple. For what reason? *For a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus.* We have a higher way of life.

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light…

We *are called out of the darkness* into this spiritual life. Those who faithfully follow Jesus are called *a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, a chosen race*. We have become something different! We cannot mix what we have left behind in our lives—or whatever else is out there—with what we have been given.

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers…

In other words, we are now foreign to the world in which we were once comfortable. Paul urges us to live *as aliens and strangers* in this world. Our purpose is different from that of the world around us.

What is that purpose?

…to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

This is a great responsibility. It will be costly and difficult to maintain such a high standard while living in the midst of darkness. Yet, at the same time, we are set free in Christ.

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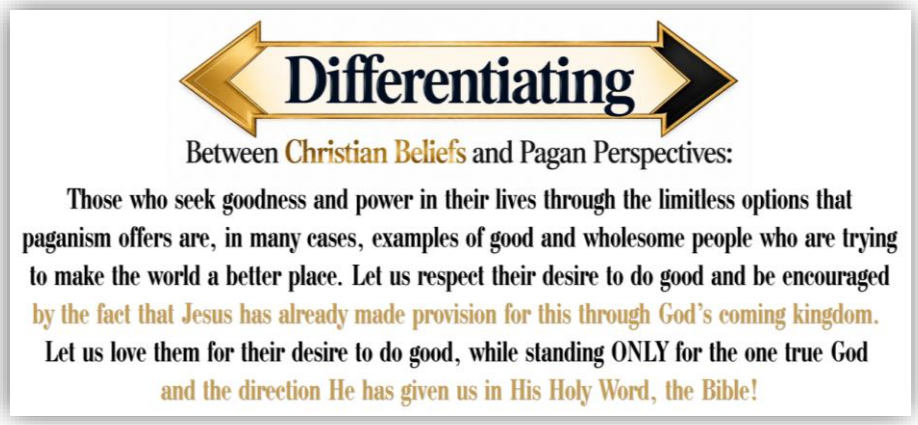
There is a cost—the world slanders those who *keep their behavior excellent*. But because of who we are as followers of our Lord, because of what we stand for and what we do in his service, we can serve as an example to them.

In the day of visitation (the day of judgment in the future), they will remember our behavior now and how we were *aliens and strangers* in this world, setting an example of godliness. That is the point. We must stay away from the pull of the world and run toward Christ—there is no middle ground.

What is the result of all of this setting apart of our lives?
2 Corinthians 6:18: *And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.*

It is truly unbelievable—it is hard to get our heads around the depth, clarity, focus, sincerity, promise and magnitude of being able to call the Creator of all things, "Father."

Earlier we quoted **Genesis 1:1**: *In the beginning, God created…* Now, we are being told that if we walk away from these *fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul*, we can be His children. That means we are His family. And it all came about because of Jesus.



It's clear that we live in a world with all kinds of belief systems with their promise of power, influence and belonging. And then you have true Christianity, which says to follow something higher so that in the future, we can bless the whole of mankind.

Flee idolatry, flee pagan beliefs and trust in God through Christ.

So, do I ever mix my Christianity with paganism?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions…
…Think about it!

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.

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Next episode

Episode 1462:
Are Gossip and Slander Part of My Social Connections?

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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

Bible Q&A: Is manifesting (bringing something into reality through focused visualizations) allowed for a Christian?
https://christianquestions.com/bible-questions/manifesting/

Ep.1445: How Do I Keep Idols Out of My Life?
Defining 21st century idolatry and the steps necessary to avoid it (Ten Commandments Series)
https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1445-second-commandment-no-idols/

For children, parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

- **Why should we avoid fortune telling, witchcraft and ouija boards?**
  https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/witchcraft-2/
- **Should Christians visit fortune tellers or mediums?**
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- **What is idolatry?**
  https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/what-is-idolatry/

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1461: Do I Ever Mix My Christianity with Paganism? **See:** CQ Rewind SHOW NOTES
https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1461-christianity-and-paganism/

1. Why was the Israelites' departure from Babylon and return to the Promised Land more than simply a physical relocation? How had 70 years influenced them? What did they need to change? (Isaiah 52:11-12)

2. Are there any ideas, expressions, habits or practices I have accepted because they are popular, familiar, entertaining or culturally normal, without carefully examining whether they align with my Christian faith?

3. Relate how the concepts of 2 Corinthians 6:14 and Matthew 11:29-30 support each other. How can Christians maintain respectful relationships with others while remaining faithful to Christ?

4. How does the biblical account of creation establish God as the Creator and Designer of the earth and its living systems? How does this differ from pagan beliefs? What responsibilities does the God-given dominion over the earthly creation demand of man? (Genesis 1:1-3, 11-12, 26-28)

5. What does it mean to "walk as children of light"? What is the fruit of this walk? Explain the spiritual contrast between light and darkness. Why should a Christian's motivation be at a higher level than even a good and moral person? (2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 5:6-9, Isaiah 60:1-3)

6. How can Christians appreciate the beauty and wonder of nature while ensuring their gratitude and worship remain directed toward the Creator? (Romans 1:18-21)

7. Which kinds of pagan practices are forbidden in the Old and New Testament? (Deuteronomy 18:10, Jeremiah 14:14, 27:9, 29:8; Acts 13:6-12, 16:16-18, 19:19, Galatians 5:19-21, Revelation 21:8, 22:15)

8. In what way can things in our lives become idols? Can this happen with things not inherently wrong? (2 Corinthians 6:16-18, 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9, 11-12)

9. Why would anyone choose to become a Christian with all the restrictions they must submit to? What is promised to those who choose to live a life set apart for God? (1 Peter 1:13-16, 2 Corinthians 6:16-18)

10. What specific steps can I take to separate myself from influences which compete with God for my deepest loyalty, so that I can walk more faithfully in Jesus' footsteps and truly be a "temple of God"?