

TRADITION – Good or Bad?

Tradition is a part of our lives. We have national traditions (holidays and their associated events), special occasions (birthdays, anniversary, etc.), maybe even things that we do regularly in our own lives. Some people view traditions more highly than others. Traditions are also a part of religion and have been since early in the history of man.

Tonight, I would like to address religious tradition. Is it good or bad? What does the Bible say about this? I see this a supplement to this morning's lesson and the subject of authority. There are many who hold to tradition for their authority. The Bible speaks of this term in both the positive and negative.

I. What is tradition?

- a. Defined – “1. The passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation, especially by oral communication. 2. A mode of thought or behavior followed by a people continuously from generation to generation; a custom or usage. 3. A set of such customs and usages viewed as a coherent body of precedents influencing the present. Syn – heritage. 4. A precept or a body of precepts that are not written in the sacred book of a religion, such as the Bible, but are considered holy or true.”¹
- b. Tradition within itself is neither good nor bad. The Bible talks about both good and bad traditions. It depends upon the purpose and whether or not it is based upon authority.
- c. Many religions today appeal to tradition as authority for what they do. Catholicism views tradition as equal to scripture and thus binding. According to www.catholic.com², a tract entitled, “Scripture and Tradition”, the second paragraph states, *Catholics, on the other hand, recognize that the true “rule of faith”—as expressed in the Bible itself—is Scripture plus apostolic tradition, as manifested in the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church, to which were entrusted the oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles, along with the authority to interpret Scripture correctly.*
- d. As we will also see, the Jews who challenged Jesus took a similar view concerning their traditions.
- e. The Greek word, translated tradition, παράδοσις (paradosis) is found 13x in NT, in English 14x – add 1 Peter 1:18 which is a derivative of the other word. It is defined as something that has been handed down.

II. Tradition – good and bad

- a. Improper usage –
 - i. Matthew 15:2-6 (3x), [Mark 7:3-13](#) (5x) – in both of these passage, Jesus is challenged for He and his disciples failing to wash their hands before eating. Mark explains this is not about sanitary actions, but rather a tradition that had been passed down by the elders. When they asked Jesus, He responded in vs. 6-13.
 1. Vs. 6-7 - Jesus exposed their motives by quoting Isaiah 29:13 where Jerusalem's blindness and disobedience is challenged. Jesus noted, what they did was outward appearance, but their hearts were NOT with God.

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition. Tradition.

² <https://www.catholic.com/tract/scripture-and-tradition> , 9/13/2024.

2. Vs. 7, teaching the commandments of men made their worship to God vain (empty). NOTE that Jesus called what they were teaching “doctrine” – the point is they were binding these practices as if they were from the LOM. They were not!
 3. Vs. 8-9 – Jesus noted that in their traditions, they were laying aside the commandments of God
 4. Vs. 9-10, He continued calling their traditions a “rejection” of God’s commandments. He gave another example by citing the LOM about honoring parents (Exodus 20:12, 21:17). Vs. 11 – He notes that they had created a “loophole” (involving money) that released (or perhaps even forbade – e.g., “permit”) the keeping of God’s law.
 5. Vs. 13, He concludes, “*making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.*”
 6. We see how their traditions CONTRADICTED or dismissed the pattern God had set forth.
- ii. Galatians 1:14 – Paul describes his past history in Judaism when he persecuted Christians. He describes how he was “*more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*” Paul acknowledges (at least then) that what he is practicing was NOT the LOM but tradition (though he THOUGHT He was doing what was pleasing to God – Acts 23:1, 26:9-11, etc.).
 - iii. Colossians 2:8, *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.* Here Paul like has in mind the Judaizing teachers, but his warning is more generic. He is saying, “Do NOT let men’s philosophies take you away from God’s word.” He notes that what they are teaching is “not according to Christ.”
 - iv. 1 Peter 1:18, *knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,*... Peter notes that what they had been practicing as religion (whether false Judaism or idolatry), was “aimless conduct” in God’s eyes.
 - v. Other passages to consider: Matthew 23:4 – they bind heavy burdens... - Jesus condemns the religious leaders for binding heavy burdens and not lifting a finger themselves. Jesus will give an example of their “traditions” in vs. 16-22 where they justified lying and deceit, especially to Gentiles.
 - vi. When men change God’s law, by adding, subtracting or reinterpreting what He says, and passes that down, not only are they guilty of doctrinal error, but they have passed it on and bound it to others (perhaps for generations). Such is the traditions of man and condemned. While sometimes done in ignorance, at other times it is corruption or selfishness. But it is STILL error.
- b. Proper usage of tradition: Primarily 3 passages.
 - i. 1 Corinthians 11:2, *Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*
 - ii. 2 Thessalonians 2:15, *Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.*

- iii. 2 Thessalonians 3:6, *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw from every brother** who walks disorderly and **not according to the tradition which he received from us**.*
- iv. Other passages to consider: Acts 2:42 – continued in the apostles doctrine. 1 Cor. 15:1-4 – the gospel I preached and you received...; Jude 3 - ...contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.
- v. **What traditions is Paul talking about?** He is talking about what he has learned from Christ about salvation. Paul is VERY clear that what he is teaching is from God. Consider some texts –
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 – Paul describes what is **revealed** and **received**.
 - 2. Galatians 1:6-9 – again Paul is clear about the **ONLY gospel** they had received. Note also vs. 11-12 where he describes the source of his gospel. When man enters the picture and CHANGES the message it is a different gospel.
 - 3. 1 Corinthians 11:23 – recall how in vs. 2 he spoke of traditions. Now notice where his “traditions” came from – he **received** it from the Lord.
 - 4. Paul’s oral teachings were NO different than what he wrote.
- vi. **Other writers concur:**
 - 1. 2 John 9-10 – John, another writer, declares the “doctrine of Christ” must be received. Anything different is to be rejected.
 - 2. 1 Peter 4:11 – if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God... (oracles is from the Greek word “logos” which speaks of meaningful sayings.
 - 3. Also consider 2 Timothy 3:16-17, John 20:30-31, Ephesians 3:2-4.

III. **Making application:**

- a. We need to let God’s word determine what we do – ALWAYS! Colossians 2:6-8, 2 Timothy 2:15, Jude 3 – contend for the faith (defend it). His written word is the ONLY sure standard that we have today!
- b. We must not think of men more highly than we ought – 1 Corinthians 4:6. Respect God’s boundaries. Time will not permit a study of the NT warnings against the teachings of men!
- c. It does not matter how long something has been practiced.
- d. Consider: If someone appeals to tradition for a specific action, they will likely do so for anything they do not like or want to change.
- e. There are things we do by “tradition” that are not wrong within themselves (e.g., Wednesday night assembly, order of services, etc.).
 - i. They are not wrong because we are carrying out an authorized act.
 - ii. BUT, we CANNOT bind such things on others.
 - iii. And we should not let tradition keep us from progressing (e.g., “We’ve always done it that way”).

So is tradition important? Yes! And for continuity’s sake there are some things that we can do traditionally. Others, the traditions of the apostles and NT writers, are not up for discussion. What they taught was God’s word and they must be regarded as such (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13). It is when man’s traditions conflict with God’s word that we must reject it.

We need tradition in our lives. IF the Christian faith is a habit in your life, there is some tradition there. And if that is based upon God’s word, keep it up. If it is not, be willing to put Jesus first, before yourself or anyone else. Just KNOW what the origin of your traditions are. What about you? Are you faithfully holding to the traditions of the Lord? Think about it!