

# Your Questions Bible Answers

## ***Why do we do what we do? (Part 4)***

### **Traditions & the church**

"That's just your tradition." Those words have been spoken numerous times over the years, typically when engaging someone in a religious discussion. Whether talking about instrumental music, the work of the church or how one can be saved, differences in doctrine are often times mischaracterized as differences in tradition. But in recent years I've heard more and more brethren speak of "CoC traditions" and "the traditional church of Christ". The terminology is troubling to me because it betrays a denominational concept of the church. However, it is worth considering the idea of traditions in the church. Do we have traditions? Is it wrong to have traditions? Are we a "traditional" church of Christ? If so, what does that mean and how should we view those traditions?

### **Anatomy of a tradition**

1. Traditions are spoken of in a negative context (Mark 7.1-8).
  - a. Was there anything wrong with the tradition itself? Was it sinful to wash hands before one ate? Important to note that the problem was that their traditions had been elevated to law, that they required of others what God did not require.
2. However, traditions are also referenced in a positive manner (2Thessalonians 2.15).
3. The Biblical concept of a tradition involves the handing down of something by one party and receiving it by another.
  - a. The words *paradosis* and *paradidomi* speak of things that are handed down.
  - b. The word *paralambano* speaks of things received.
4. The New Testament often speaks of Christians receiving what has been handed down from the Lord and the apostles.
  - a. Paul's message was received (*paralambano*) from the Lord (Galatians 1.12).
  - b. This message was then handed down (*paradosis*) to other Christians who were exhorted to receive them as from the Lord (1Thess. 2.13; 2Thess 2.15; Phil. 4.9. Cf. 2Timothy 2.2).
  - c. Exactly what was envisioned by the Lord as He delivered what we term the Great Commission (Matthew 28.20).

### **Do we have traditions? Yes, we do!**

1. Absolutely, in that we aim to follow the words and pattern left by the apostles and the early church (cf. Philippians 4.9).
  - a. The reason why we only sing in worship (Eph. 5.19; Col. 3.16). No, God never said "it's wrong to use instruments" but this is what we know the early church did. This is how the worship of the early church looked and that tradition has been handed down. (Important Note: we don't need to diminish the idea of apostolic tradition. They are the ones who were guided by the Holy Spirit and since they are the ones who helped

- establish the pattern of worship in the church, we don't need to dismiss the New Testament pattern as a tradition that we can take or leave)
- b. The reason why our assemblies are conducted in such a "formal" way (1Cor. 14.26-38). Some of this, particularly women keeping silent, seems so backward to us. However, this was a part of the traditions that were handed down.
  - c. Challenge: let's not think about any particular issue as a "church tradition". Let's aim to have one tradition: to follow the words and pattern found in the Scriptures.
2. Do we have other traditions? Without a doubt!
- a. Tied with the concept of general authority.
    - i. Example 1: we are commanded to assemble and encourage each other (Heb. 10.24-25). We have the example that this happened on the first day of the week, (Acts 20.7). The elders have set aside two occasions on Sunday and one on Wednesday night so that we can come together to study and encourage each other. This is our tradition.
    - ii. Example 2: We are commanded to teach the word (Matt. 28.20; 2Tim 3.15; etc.) We do this in a variety of ways, including "gospel meetings", VBS, special themes, etc. That is a tradition.
    - iii. Example 3: The NT pattern shows that Christians should sing, teach, pray, observe the Lord's Supper and contribute on the first day of the week. However, our order of doing those things is our tradition.
  - b. Is it possible for other congregations to have other traditions? Absolutely.
    - i. Two services on Sunday is not a command, but it is our tradition. Not bound on anyone else.
    - ii. Wednesday night Bible study is not a command, but it is our tradition. Other congregations opt for neighborhood Bible studies. That is their tradition.
    - iii. However, I hope you understand that there is no such thing as a non-traditional church. You could worship with a church where the order of services and even times of worship change every week. Their tradition would be that of constant flux..

### **Questions to ask when evaluating non-biblical traditions**

1. Do our traditions violate the authority of God's pattern?
2. Do our traditions help us accomplish God's purposes?
  1. Would you be willing to change the sign if it aided in evangelism? I recently heard an elder from a congregation in California who tearfully explained that his congregation had been maligned because they took "church of Christ" off of their sign. Their reason was that the International church of Christ was headquartered in their town. Their congregation was trying to distance themselves from this cultish denomination.
  2. We should constantly evaluate all of our traditions (service times, Bible class structure, gospel meetings, etc.) to see if they are the best ways of accomplishing God's purposes for us: evangelism and edification.
  3. Word of caution: sometimes we may suggest changes that we may feel would help us to better achieve God's purposes. But we must remember that God has appointed

the elders to rule over the church. They will do their best to set "traditions" to help us achieve God's purposes. We should submit to them (Hebrews 13.17).

3. Do we make our traditions a law?

1. If so, we have sinned (Mark 7.8). We have elevated our tradition to law and have created a denomination..