

Truth or Tradition?

By Pastor Mark Tossell

“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”

Mark 7:5-16

Introduction:

Our neighbour, Pat, is very religious. She burns incense; she has an altar in her house; she says many prayers; and, she sings religious songs. She even talks about God a lot. She is extremely dedicated to her church, even staying out at services until after midnight. The priests at her church wear black robes with large crosses, and have long hair. Their church building is very fancy, ornate and expensive. But, although they have much religion and many traditions, they do not have salvation. They have many TRADITIONS, but they don't have the TRUTH.

What makes our church different from such religious institutions? Think about some issues for a moment. Why don't we christen babies? Why don't we use prayer books or rosary beads? Why do I wear a suit, not a robe or a dress? Why don't we confess our sins to a priest? Why don't we have confirmation and catechism classes? Why don't we have pictures of Jesus and Mary in our home? Why do we baptise Christians by immersion, even if they were "baptised" as a baby? Why don't we pray to statues, or kiss them? Why don't we pray to Mary or to the so-called saints? Why do we practice confrontational soul winning? Why am I an independent, fundamental Baptist?

Answer: Because the TRUTH of God is more important than the TRADITIONS of men.

Let me explain in this study why the truth is much more important than traditions.

1) Christianity started in its purest form in the early churches.

First-century Christianity was very simple, Scriptural, and powerful. There was very little formalism, and denominations were non-existent. Each church was led by one or more pastors, and there was no hierarchy. Traditions were subject to the rule of Scripture, the inspired and authoritative words of the Apostles. For example, consider the first church in Jerusalem,

Acts 2:41, 42 “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Some people would not consider our church to be much of a church. We don't own a building; we just meet in a simple school hall. We don't have an organ, and we don't have a choir yet. There are no stained glass windows, statues, candles, robes, crucifixes, religious paintings, and the such like. But, neither did the early churches have such things - and they spread the Gospel all over the world!

Compare the early churches to the churches of today:

- Show me a pope, archbishop, or denominational president in the New Testament.
- Find an example of infant baptism in the New Testament.
- See if any of the New Testament Christians prayed to Mary or the saints.
- Show me one place where the disciples used repetitive, formal prayers.
- Look in the New Testament for any instructions that tell the minister or pastor to wear robes, fancy clothes or religious symbols.

2) The Devil attacked the truth by adding tradition to truth.

Until the 4th century, the Christian churches were mostly independent, Bible-believing, informal assemblies. There was little traditionalism, and there were few hierarchies or denominations. Early in the 4th century, the Roman Emperor Constantine declared himself to be a Christian, and made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. But, Constantine knew that he could not take away all the people's pagan traditions without a mass riot, so made a compromise. He mixed Bible Christianity with paganism and idolatry and thus created a new hybrid religion. This mix of paganism and Bible Christianity finally evolved into the Roman Catholic religion. Later, in about 900 AD, the catholic churches split into the Roman Catholic church and the eastern orthodox churches (Greek Orthodox, etc.). What kind of pagan traditions were added to Christianity to form the Catholic religion?

- Salvation by works.
- The veneration of dead saints.
- The worship of idols.
- The worship of a mother goddess and her child.
- The use of Pagan symbols.
- The elevation of a man to the position of mediator.
- The mass.
- The Eucharist.
- Prayers for the dead.
- The Rosary.
- The pope's title and office of Pontifex Maximus.
- Relic worship.
- Worship of the sacred heart.

Sincere people in the catholic religion are taught that such practices are Biblical and spiritual, but they have been deceived! The origins of all these practices are as pagan as could be.

For example, consider the title, office, and tools of the Pope:

- **His title**, Pontifex Maximus, comes from the head of the ancient Roman Pagan College of the Pontiffs.
- **His keys**, symbolising his authority, are supposedly derived from the keys that Jesus is said to have given to the apostle Peter. They are actually descended from the symbols of two pagan gods, Janus and Cybele, who bore keys of supernatural authority.
- **The pope's famous chair** is also derived from the pagan spiritual head, Pontifex maximus, who sat upon a chair that symbolised his authority and wisdom.
- **The pope's mitre**, a pointed hat that is also worn by some Anglican Church leaders, is actually the very mitre worn by Dagon the fish god of the Philistines and Babylonians. It was also worn annually by the Chinese emperor as the high priest of his nation.
- **The crossier**, or pope's rod, is actually descended from the lituus, or divining rod, of the ancient Romans who consulted the heavens in the pagan practice of astrology.

Now, consider these two important questions:

- 1) Where did our modern Protestant churches come from?
- 2) Why do they have many traditions similar to the Catholic religion?

The Protestant reformation was essentially begun in 1520 by Martin Luther and his followers. They protested against the Catholic Church's false teachings and their sale of indulgences and religious relics. Over the decades, those who left the Catholic church for religious and political reasons started various Protestant denominations: the Lutheran Church; the Church of England; the Presbyterian

Church; the Methodist Church; etc. In Australia, the Methodist churches and Presbyterian churches combined, mostly, into the liberal Uniting Church. Why do the Protestant churches have so many unscriptural traditions and practices? They retained them from their mother, the Roman Catholic religion.

For example, what was the New Testament condition for baptism?

Acts 8:35-38 “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”

This passage teaches us that the Ethiopian eunuch, won to Christ moments ago by Phillip the evangelist, wanted to be baptised. In answer to his question, Phillip replied that the eunuch could be baptised if he fulfilled the one and only condition for baptism found in the New Testament: He must put all of his faith in Jesus. In other words, he must be saved first, then he can be baptised. Now consider churches today: Some practice infant “baptism.” Others hold confirmation and catechism classes. Some churches examine the convert for weeks and months before they will baptise him. But, what they are doing is placing tradition before Scripture, taking the word of men as more important than the Word of God. Such is the case for many traditions in Protestant churches.

On the other hand, Baptist churches are descended from Bible-believing congregations that have been in existence, sometimes underground, for almost 2,000 years. True Baptist churches do not have such unscriptural traditions because they are not Protestant churches - they have always been existing independently outside of Catholicism, under such names as the Novatians, Donatists, Waldenses, Lollards, and Anabaptists.

3) It is wrong to obey a tradition rather than the commands of God.

Colossians 2:8 “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

Consider the passage given at the start of this study, Mark 7:5-16. The Lord Jesus sternly rebuked the Pharisees because they paid strict attention to their complicated traditions, but rejected the simple commands of God.

Mark 7:9 “And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”

And so it is today. Millions of people follow the teachings and traditions of their "Christian" religion, regardless of what the Word of God says. Professing Christians will cling to the teachings and practices of their church and church leaders, even when those teachings and traditions clearly contradict Scripture. This is nothing less than outright sin and rebellion against God.

We must note that some traditions are harmless, whereas others are against the Word of God. For example, our church meets at 11:00, and goes until about 12:15. That is a tradition, but it is a harmless. But if we had a tradition that said you can join the church even if you are unsaved, that would not be harmless; it would be sin.

What gives a person the right to obey his church rather than the Bible? People say, "Well, that's just the way I was brought up. That's what I've always been taught." Let God be true, and every man a liar!

4) We must always be sure that we obey the Bible, rather than tradition, opinion or feeling.

When you stand before God and give an account for your life, you will not be judged by how well you obeyed church tradition. You will not be judged by whether or not you thought you did the right thing. You will not be judged according to how you felt about your life. You will be judged according to the standard of the Word of God:

John 12:48 “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

By way of illustration, imagine if your dad was a habitual fast driver, that he constantly broke the speed limit. That was just the way that he was brought up, and that is how he taught you. You think it's okay to speed, and break the law. It's your family tradition, and you feel no guilt about breaking the speed limit. But, one day the police pull you over for doing 155 in a 100 zone. They won't judge you by your tradition or your feeling - they will judge you by the LAW. Traditions hold no authority over the law, as much in the spiritual realm as in the judiciary.

Conclusion:

We don't teach what we teach and do what we do because we are a Baptist church. We teach what we teach and do what we do because we believe we Bible, and we reject the traditions of men when they go against the Word of God. What about your beliefs and practices? Are they based blindly upon the traditions of men, or, are they based firmly upon the plain teachings of Scripture? If you follow tradition rather than the truth of the Bible, then the words of Jesus still apply to you,

“... Full well ye reject the commandment of
God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”