

BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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# **BIBLE STUDY**

## **Topical Bible Study** **Traditionalism and the Church**

Dr. Michael Oyedokun II, Pastor



# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

The word tradition can have two meanings, one **secular** and one **religious**. The secular understanding is that tradition is a long-established ritual, custom, or belief that is passed down from one generation to the next. For example, families have certain traditions in the way they celebrate holidays, birthdays, or vacations. Family traditions can be a healthy and positive way to maintain family cohesiveness.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Social traditions can help create a sense of belonging within a community. A school may have a tradition that each year the incoming freshmen are escorted to the first football game by the seniors. Following those traditions builds unity and helps maintain social norms. In the religious arena, however, tradition can blur the line between God's truth and man's invention, thereby confusing many. Christians should view religious tradition with caution.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

**Traditionalism** is the practice of adhering to tradition as **authoritative**. Traditionalism can further be defined as the belief that moral and religious truth comes from divine revelation that is passed down by tradition, rather than attained by human reasoning. Traditionalism seeks to uphold these traditions and is resistant to change.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Jesus addressed "**Traditions of men**" in Mark 7 and John 8. His objective was to shake people from their firm faith in their man-made traditions with the **truth**. Sadly, then as now, some people won't let go of their religious upbringing even when faced with the fact that it is unbiblical...They are scared...or stubborn!

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Religious tradition was in full force during Jesus' earthly ministry. He often scolded the religious leaders, saying, "*You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down*" (Mark 7:13). The scribes and the Pharisees had added so many of their own ideas to God's Law that the common people were confused and felt helpless to obey it all.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Mark 7 shows how traditions can control people.

## Notice:

Verse 3 they were, *"holding the tradition of the elders."*

In verse 5 they tried to hold Jesus to these. *"Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders?"*

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

In Mark 7:6–8, Jesus quoted from Isaiah to reprimand the religious leaders, saying, “*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’*” Notice that the “commandments of men” were being taught as if they were divinely inspired “doctrines.” And that was the problem.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

In one respect, religious and moral truth does come from **divine revelation**—the Bible is full of moral and religious truth. However, human tradition is fallible. Divine revelation is the ultimate authority, not the human tradition that has developed around it.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

There are Biblical traditions which must be **held**, and there are unbiblical traditions which must be **forsaken**. In Mark 7 the Pharisees tried to please God by **washing their hands**. That was a tradition received from their fathers. **Where does the Bible tell you to Baptize Babies? Where does the Bible tell you to confess your sins to a priest? Where does the Bible say to be confirmed? Where does the Bible say to rehearse catechisms? Where does the Bible say to Worship God only on Sunday?**

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

They are traditions received from your fathers. Jesus said in vs. 13 that they made the *"Word of God of none effect through their tradition."* They cancelled the effect of the Word of God.

As long as a person holds **unbiblical traditions**, they will reject God's Word and make it of none effect.

**THAT INCLUDES "CHURCH TRADITIONS"**

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Often, debates over traditionalism crop up in comparisons between **Protestantism** and **Catholicism**. Protestantism adheres to **sola scriptura**; that is, Protestants hold to the authority of Scripture alone in matters of faith and practice.

Catholicism, on the other hand, gives equal weight to church tradition.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

When we look at what the Bible actually says, including Jesus' rebuke of the traditionalists of His day (see Luke 11:37– 52), it is clear that the Bible is to be our authority. This is not to say that tradition is without merit, but that tradition is only authoritative insofar as it is based on biblical truth.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELIGION AND RELATIONSHIP

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

The day Jesus rose from the dead, He met with two disciples walking to Emmaus. They did not recognize Him at first and were discussing the events of the past few days (i.e., His crucifixion). *“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself”* (Luke 24:25–27). Jesus did not refer them to tradition but to the Scriptures.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

In Acts 17:11 the Jews in Berea are commended for testing the teachings of Paul and Silas against Scripture. Timothy is encouraged to *“preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.”*

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:2–5). **Timothy is not told to observe human tradition but to stay strong in the Word of God.**

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

**Hebrews 4:12** and **Ephesians 6:17** refer to God's Word as a sword. In the power of the Holy Spirit, it is God's Word that is our weapon against Satan and the deceptions of this world.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Humans are fallible, and, thus, so is human tradition. **That is the weakness of traditionalism.** We must not keep tradition simply for the sake of tradition. Rather, we must carefully examine our traditions and measure them against God's Word.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

That being said, there can be much value in tradition. Some traditions are **commanded in Scripture**. The Jews were to keep the Feasts of the Lord to help them remember God's faithfulness and rejoice in His blessings. Other traditions are not expressly commanded in Scripture, yet they can honor the Lord.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

One of the many traditions kept by the Pharisees of Jesus' day involved a ritualistic hand-washing before meals. The observance of this tradition had nothing to do with cleanliness; the Pharisees' concern was ceremonial purity.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Once, when a Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him, Jesus bypassed the tradition: *“His host was amazed to see that he sat down to eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony required by Jewish custom”* (Luke 11:38, NLT). Jesus had broken no law—nothing in the Mosaic commandments required such hand-washing—but the Pharisee **expected conformity** to the custom, nonetheless. Jesus’ outright disregard of that manmade tradition sets up a clear distinction between what is binding (**God’s commands**) and what is not binding (**human tradition**).

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Traditions can be instructive to us on many levels, and there is nothing inherently wrong with observing tradition. Traditions can give a sense of identity, unite us as the unique family of Christ, provide teaching opportunities, and help us remember important truths. **But we must always maintain a distinction between divine commands and human traditions.**

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

God's commands are **binding**; manmade tradition is **not**. Traditions, no matter how ancient they may be, only have value if they are grounded in God's truth and point us to Him. Tradition must be under the authority of God and His Word; any tradition that contradicts God's Word or distracts us from **it should be discarded**.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

Tradition may be a way we practice our faith, but our faith is founded in God's truth, not fallible human tradition.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PREFERENCE AND PRINCIPLE

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Worship Music

If there's something that has caused much trouble in church congregations, it's worship music. If you're a part of a church that doesn't over-emphasize music, you've been blessed to avoid the battle, but if music is an expression of worship at all, so often are the disagreements.

Worship choruses and hymns can have powerful lyrics and melodies that can honestly help us submit our hearts to God. Unfortunately, we often let music styles dictate if we'll accept or reject a particular song. The contemporary voice rejects the traditional; the traditional voice rejects the contemporary.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Worship Music

One of the closest biblical descriptions we have of our modern-day worship is found in **Ephesians 5:19-21**:

*19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

That sounds like a call to unity, **not dissension**. We need to realize our musical preferences **aren't biblical in nature, but traditional**.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Service times

The Early Church started meeting on Sundays as a celebration of the **resurrected Messiah**. Fast forward to today, and many meet together Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and often another time for Sunday School.

A friend of mine held their services Sunday afternoon at 2 pm because that's when they made the biggest impact in the community.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Service times

The church service time we prefer and how many times a day we go, aren't specifically mentioned in Scripture. For that matter, Sunday itself really isn't mandated. The Seventh Day Adventist Church gathers on Saturdays (the true Sabbath).

Many choose to attend only one service a Sunday. In our context, we have parishioners who live 40 minutes away from our building. I don't blame them for only attending one service. We are more excited that they found a place to belong, then trying to figure out how to get them to attend more services. Especially if it isn't biblical to do so. **This, of course, isn't a reason for apathy.**

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Service “liturgy”

While some components of a Christian service are actually quite biblical (i.e., Holy Communion and The Lord’s Prayer), and the mainline denominations often base their liturgy on Scripture, the actual service format (beginning to end) is really church-made.

There are no biblical references mandating **an ‘order of service’**.

If there are ever disagreements among church members, it isn’t whether or not the wording of a service was incorrect. What people often protect is their “order of service” – what happens, when it happens, and how it happens. **We have no biblical sources for order or format.**

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Dress code

“Every believer must wear ‘Sunday best’ to church each week” (Hezekiah 19:11). While you go look that up, the rest of us will actually read what scripture says about dress code.

Here is a good passage on the topic:

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Dress code

*James 2:1-4 ESV - 1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Dress code

The message we have from scripture is simply to gather together as believers as you are able. Some people will dress formally, others casually, **but all are holy in Christ.**

Another biblical dress code reference concerns modesty (1 Timothy 2:9-10). The issue is about holiness and how we express that outwardly by what we choose to wear.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## Dress code

1 Timothy 2:9-10 - *9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness--with good works.*

**Dress as you feel comfortable** — and for any believer, the Spirit should make you **uncomfortable if modesty is an issue**. Either way, our typical formal dress code is traditional and not biblical.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

## **Wearing White for Communion**

Why is white worn when partaking of communion? The answer is wearing white represents holiness and uniformity.

# TRADITIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

When we cling to tradition—whether denominational, theological, or structural—as if it were God’s Word, we keep the door closed on God’s revelation of truth to us. He wants to keep surprising us with **Who He is** as we continue to pursue Him (Jeremiah 29:13). But religious tradition is often in the way. “That’s not how we’ve always done it,” is the battle cry of the **traditionalists**. Breaking tradition can be uncomfortable for many, just as it was for the Pharisees (Matthew 5:33–34; Luke 6:26–27). But when we can clearly see the dividing line between our own traditions and God’s truth, we stay humble and pliable as God continues to transform us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

# SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Questions?