

Coming Out of the Lethargy of Our Tradition

In 1994, the Lord placed the writing of the book, *A Call to Holiness* upon my heart – a book which I had to self-publish due to the fact that Christian publishers did not wish to publish the book, since it was highly critical of Christian religious practice today. The book spoke to the Body of Christ at large about coming back to God's standards of holiness as found in His complete Word and not relying upon man-made tradition to define the holiness incumbent upon believers in Jesus.

Then in 2006, I wrote the book, *What If???*, a book that challenged believers in the Lord Jesus to consider (or reconsider) where many of the Christian traditions and practices originate. I showed how many of them, including Christmas, Easter and the Sunday "sabbath" do not have their origins in the Scripture, nor in the Apostles – but from paganism. Again, I had to self-publish the book for the same reason: Christian publishers would rather publish books that would sell and make their readers feel good and think that everything is all right with them and God in their traditional Christian practice.

[On the side: I am *absolutely* certain that if John the Baptizer could have written a book on what he was preaching in his day, no Jewish publishing company would publish it either! It wouldn't sell! It wouldn't make the people considering it for purchase "feel good." So, it is no wonder that my books don't get published by Christian publishers either.]

If Jesus had any great criticism of the Pharisees and religious leaders of His day, it would be this: "**Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.**" (Mark 7:8)

They had traditions that invalidated and did away with the Biblical commandments of God. So do we.

Do we celebrate Christmas and Easter and do away with, or invalidate, God's Feast days, as commanded in Leviticus 23? Do we observe a Sunday "sabbath" instead of the Biblical Sabbath, which neither the Scriptures nor history ever state has been done away with?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:19 that "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others {to do} the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches {them,} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Does this apply only to the people of His generation, or does it apply to us as well? If we are neglecting what the Bible clearly says in favor of our traditions, can we afford to throw stones at only those violators of the First Century? Or does it apply to us as well?

Did Jesus not also say, "He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone?" (John 8:7)

How can we, in the Body of Christ, in good conscience cast stones at the Pharisees for observing their traditions over God's commandments, when in reality, we are doing *exactly* the same thing?

Too often we struggle, as did the religious leaders of His day, with the traditions we have been handed down from previous generations. Thinking them to be practices that are Scripturally-based, we mostly observe them without thinking. We are, in fact, as guilty of the same thing as Jesus criticizes the Pharisees of in Mark 7:6-7. That, **'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁷ 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'**

It calls to mind a story I once heard. The story went like this: A man and woman married. The wife wanted to please her new husband, so she cooked roast beef for him one night using an old recipe she learned from her mother. When she was preparing the meat, she sliced off both ends of the joint. The husband asked her why she did that and she answered, "Because that's how my mother taught me to do it." Being a good husband, he left it at that and told himself to ask his mother-in-law about it next time he saw her.

That Christmas the family got together and had roast beef. The wife's mother came for the dinner party and the husband remembered to ask her about cutting off both ends of the joint. She gave the same answer as her daughter: "It's an old family recipe, and that's how my mother taught me to do it." Once again the husband's curiosity was piqued, and he told himself to ask his wife's (still living) grandmother about it, if he ever got the chance.

Soon after, husband and wife were blessed with a baby boy. The entire family was thrilled. Even grandmother made the cross-country trip to be with her granddaughter when baby and mom came home.

For the occasion, the wife's mother (now a grandmother) decided to roast a joint of beef for the dinner celebration. Now, with great-grandmother there, the husband had his chance. He asked the old lady why, in the old family recipe, the ends of the joint of beef were always cut off. She replied, "In the old days, ovens were very small. The roast wouldn't fit inside of them if you didn't cut the ends off."

All those years, the ends were being cut off because that's the way it had always been done. No one stopped to question why.

Tradition is like that. It often starts off as something practical, even for the time, necessary. Then after a while, it becomes a practice. The practice then continues as an example to the children, who never ask "Why?" but they just continue it on as adults, which serves as an example to their children, who continue it and so on, and so on...

Eventually, it becomes an unquestioned practice until it holds the power of something that must not be challenged, and is considered sacred.

The word **tradition** comes from the Latin *traditionem*, acc. of *traditio* which means "handing over, passing on."¹ When speaking of the religious practice of the Church, they are the long-standing practices and beliefs of the Church, developed since the days of the Apostles, and revered as normative, along with Scriptures, for the life of the Church.

The first thing we must remember since reading the words of Jesus in Mark 7:7 is: tradition is NOT commandment! Tradition does NOT replace commandment, nor does it over-ride commandment. Considering that Jesus

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tradition>

observed Channukah (a traditional, not a Biblically commanded feast) in John 10:22-39, we can see that Jesus was not against tradition. He was against tradition replacing or invalidating God's commandments!

A rule of thumb should be: if a tradition does replace or invalidate a commandment, that Tradition should not be practiced.

It is incumbent upon all of us, in whatever faith we were raised in, whether Jewish or Christian, whether Protestant or Catholic, to challenge each and every tradition we have been handed – and to insure that it does not do away with, invalidate, or over-ride a Biblical commandment!

You cannot just come to God in the world-to-come and say to Him, “Well, I just didn't know.” There is a saying in law today, “Ignorance of the Law is no excuse.”

If so in our culture and time, how much more when it comes to God's Laws?

Only when we realize the seriousness of God's Word when it comes to His commandments [no, they're NOT options – they're commandments!] will we recognize that something has to be done about it – first in our own lives, and then in the lives of other believers.

It is hard enough to “buck the system” by our not observing the traditions of Christmas, Easter, and the Sunday “sabbath” to name a few – but then, to say to others that they should dispense with those traditions and go back to the well-stated commandments found in Scripture.

I remember the flack my wife and I took from fellow believers and family members when we stopped observing Easter, then Christmas and finally the Sunday “sabbath.” We were regarded as “cultic.”

I remember my dear grandmother, who has since gone on to be with the Lord said of us when we stopped observing those “holy” days, “You're going straight to Hell!”

That really hurt. Yet, eventually, over the years before she passed on, she understood where we were coming from. But this is because we took the time and shared with her the Scriptures in a loving way.

In reality, as she discovered, we were simply going back to what the Scripture was saying plainly and doing away with the traditions we were raised with.

The first question we must ask of ourselves is, “What am I going to do in my life?”

Am I going to simply go on as I am, thinking that everything is ok, and continuing in the “lethargy of my Tradition?”

I am sure that the Pharisees thought that they were ok. Jesus’ words: **‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁷ ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN’** indicates to me that they thought they were doing the right things and what was required by God!

They thought they were worshipping God – yet, as we find out – they were not. Often, it took a prophet from God who spoke to them in not so kind words to shake them from their lethargy, in the hopes that some would repent and turn back to the truth.

Every prophet from God cried to the people to repent, to turn back to God’s Word, and to observe it! Every prophet from God said to the people to observe God’s Laws! Even Jesus!

We, as the people of God, need ourselves to turn back to God and to His commandments; to observe His word over our traditions. Then, we need to exhort our brethren to do the same!

To be great in the Kingdom of Heaven, we must not only keep God’s commandments, but also to teach them (Matthew 5:19):

"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others {to do} the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches {them,} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Thus, after making that step to keep God’s commandments in our own lives, we must now ask ourselves, “Am I the one that is called to challenge (teach)

my fellow-believers and my family members, to question their traditions in the light of Scripture?”

Mordechai, Esther’s uncle asked Esther, “And who knows whether you have not attained royalty **for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:13, 14)

Perhaps the reason why you are reading this today – NOW - is that God has called you to be challenged TODAY! TODAY is the time that you have been raised as a believer to make a difference in yours and someone’s life! TODAY you can make an impact in your immediate neighborhood with your family, friends, and fellow churchgoers!

Are we called not only to intercede for our brothers, but to challenge them to turn back to God and His Word?

The answer to that is a resounding, “YES!”

So, when should we do this? When do we challenge not only ourselves to return to obedience to God’s Word, but also His people to do the same?

I believe the answer is NOW. The time is passing quickly.

There are many who subscribe to the principle of waiting until tomorrow to begin doing the right things that should have begun in the now. This kind of procrastination leads to *nothing* of significance being done.

I know of people that keep saying, “I need to write a book about that...” or “I really should do that, but not today...”

Months and years later when I see them, I ask, “Did you write that book?” or “Did you get that done?”

And the answer is most often, “No.”

The great rabbi Hillel once asked, “If not now, when?”

I ask you the same question.

“Well, what can I do?” you ask.

Not that I am pushing the books the Lord has given me to write, but a good start would be to read *What IF???*², and read *A Call to Holiness*³. Discover what God's Word says!

Then begin to change your life to reflect what God's Word says. Do away with the traditions of man that invalidate or annul God's commandments.

Finally, begin to share this message with those in your immediate influence. If you don't know what to say, challenge them to read *What IF???* and *A Call to Holiness*.

Many people have been challenged by these books and get back into the Word of God.

May the Lord bless and keep you and empower you to live a life pleasing to Him!

² Available at: <http://www.bethyeshua-idaho.com/brbooker/messianicbooks.html>

³ IBID.