

Understanding Church Tradition

Introduction

What is Tradition

- Paradosis: instruction, tradition
 - Para: close beside
 - Didimi: give over
 - Give, hand over from one generation to the next
- Dictionary: transmission of beliefs handed down from generation to generation.
- EX: Gal 1:14: *and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.*

Is Tradition Good or Bad?

- Tradition is neither good or bad. The fact that something is handed down through generations doesn't make it good or bad.
- A tradition is good or bad depending on what is being handed down, and who is it handed down from.
- Rather than rejecting tradition as a whole, or accepting tradition as a whole, we need to evaluate each tradition and its source to determine whether it is a good or bad tradition.
- In this study, we will be considering traditions in the church.

Good Tradition

- What makes a tradition good?
 1. What: God's will
 2. Who: handed down by the apostles and prophets
- God expects His churches to be following certain traditions.
 - I Cor 11:2: *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*
 - Churches are expected to have some uniformity.
 - I Cor 11:16: *But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.*
 - I Cor 16:1: *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.*
- These traditions are handed down by the apostles and prophets
 - II Thes 2:15: *So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*
 - I Cor 11:2: *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*
 - Eph 2:20: *God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.*

- These traditions have been handed down to us by means of:
 1. Oral word: we read in Acts what the apostles said to people.
 - Acts 2:38: *Peter said to them, " Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
 - Acts 15:11: *But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.*
 2. Letter: we read the letters telling individuals and churches what to do
 - I Cor 16:2: *On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.*
 - I Tim 3:2: *An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.*
 - Jms 5:16: *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*
 3. Example:
 - Jn 13:15: *For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.*
 - Phi 3:17: *Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.*
 - We read Jesus' example in the gospels (washing feet).
 - We read the apostle's example in Acts (criteria for picking new apostles).
 - We read what the churches did:
 - Acts 2:42: *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*
 - Acts 20:7: *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.*
- What gives the apostles and prophets the authority to establish this tradition?
 - Jesus gave them authority:
 - Mat 16:19: *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*
 - They spoke God's word:
 - I Cor 14:36-38: *Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*
- There is a rejection of those who don't accept or follow these traditions.
 - II Thes 3:6: *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.*

Bad Tradition

- What makes a tradition bad?
 1. Who: human origin
 2. What: contradicts God's tradition and/or is regarded as equal to God's tradition.
- All bad traditions come from a human source.

- Col 2:8: *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.*
- Not all human tradition is bad, but all bad tradition is human.
- Bad human tradition (Mat 15:1-9)
 - 3: break God's commands for the sake of human tradition [contradicts]
 - 9: teach men's rules as doctrines of God [regarding human tradition as equal to God]
- Example of bad tradition
 - Catholic church: they don't just follow Bible as authority, but also "church tradition". These church traditions aren't limited to apostolic traditions revealed in scripture.
 - Their traditions are considered equal to God's traditions:
 - It is a "mortal sin" to eat meat on Friday. Determining something to be sinful is something only God has the authority to do.
 - Their traditions contradictory to God's traditions.
 - 1 Tim 4:3: *men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.*
 - Col 2:20-22: *If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) —in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men.*
 - If we treat our traditions as being equal to God's, they will eventually contradict God's traditions, and we will choose to follow our own traditions over God's.
- * We need to be very familiar with all the Bible's teaching so we can recognize the difference between God's good tradition and bad human tradition.

Okay Tradition

- We must follow all of the apostolic tradition.
 - We can't have any of our own traditions that are regarded as equal, or contradictory to any of God's traditions.
 - But we can, and will have our own traditions in the church.
 - God doesn't tell us how to do everything to the exact detail, so we will need to make decisions about how to follow God's commands. Those decisions end up being our own traditions.
 - EX: Paul says to collect on the first day of the week. Do we hand out baskets? Or have a box? We decide how to fulfill that apostolic tradition.
 - To say we can't have any of our own traditions means we can never do something the same way twice. That is not practical or helpful.
 - However, we need to make sure our own traditions are acceptable to God.
- * Our traditions = our way of accomplishing the apostolic traditions handed down.
 - * Our traditions ≠ making up our own additional traditions of things to do.

1. Can't contradict God's commands

- We have to make sure our traditions don't contradict the way God tells us to do something.
 - EX: if we tell people to be saved by raising hand, praying, and accepting Jesus into their hearts, when the Bible clearly says to be baptized for salvation.
- We have to make sure we aren't making additions that go beyond what God's tradition tells us to do (Rev 22:18-19).
 - EX: If you have a Bible that included the Book of Mormon, would you consider that a real Bible?
 - EX: adding additional commands that certain meats can't be eaten.
 - EX: commanding gentiles to be circumcised
 - There are only contradictory statements about those rules in scripture to refute those who began teaching them. If they never began teaching them, those contradictory statements would've never been written. That shows something is contradictory even if it doesn't have a statement specifically prohibiting it.
 - EX: We are told to sing, but we use instruments.
 - EX: We use churches time, money, and resources for secular work and projects like hospitals and schools.

* If it's not in the Bible, we don't do it.

* If it's not about fulfilling apostolic tradition, we don't need it.

- Our traditions need to fit within God's traditions
 - EX: God tells us to sing, so we can use song books, memory, projector.
 - EX: we are to partake in bread and fruit of the vine, so we can eat small pieces, larger pieces, one cup, many little cups, etc...
 - EX: we are to assemble together, we can do Wednesday, or another day, have pews, or sit in a circle, have one language, bilingual, or trilingual.

2. Can't be regarded as equal to God's tradition

- We can and will have to come up with some of our own specific traditions of how to best fulfill the apostolic traditions; however, although the apostolic traditions are mandatory, we can NOT treat our ways of accomplishing those traditions to be the ONLY right way because it's OUR tradition. We can't FORCE our own traditions on others.
- Consider all the previously mentioned traditions. We can pick what our tradition should be, but that doesn't mean we have to bind that on others as the only way.
- If it is not specifically bound by the apostle's, we can't treat it like it is.

• We need to be open minded (Mat 9:14-17)

- Fasting: there was only one commanded fast, the rest was voluntary.
- They had traditions about fasting that over time, seemed to be more obligated like God's commands.
- They were then confused why Jesus didn't follow their tradition. Jesus reminds them that their traditions aren't binding on others.
- He reminds them they need to fast for the right reasons. They need to decide for themselves, rather than just following predetermined tradition.

• Wine skins

- Old leather can't handle new wine. It will burst.
- Old minds stuck on their own tradition can't handle new teaching. They just burst.

- Our minds need to stay open and flexible to accept, conform, and change to the right teaching rather than being limited by our own sense of tradition.
- * We need to be openminded to reevaluate if we are properly discerning the difference between our tradition and apostolic tradition.
- * We need to be openminded to evaluate if we are too stuck on our own traditions as being the only way to accomplish the apostolic tradition.

Conclusion

- We need to properly understand apostolic tradition because:
 - If we don't do the apostolic tradition, we are making up our own religion and are in idolatry.
 - If we follow our own tradition as if it were God's traditions, we are making up our own religion and are in idolatry.