
Words of Truth

Following The Traditions Of Men Makes Our Good Works Useless

By: Brian A. Yeager

Tradition is not always bad. The source of those traditions is what makes the difference. If the traditions we follow are founded through the Scriptures, they are pleasing to God. Notice: *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle”* (II Thessalonians 2:15). On the other hand, if we are following traditions that originated with man, we are in trouble. Notice: *“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. 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... Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh”* (Colossians 2:4-8; 18-23).

It is easy to become traditionally minded. We can get comfortable with what we are used to. Once comfortable with something, we are less likely to consider any other way to do that particular thing. As an example, I recall talking to brethren before moving to El Paso about meeting in a hotel conference room rather than a “church building” (stated as such for a lack of better terms). The location we assembled in was not very expedient for the saints or the work that needed done for the Lord. The brethren in that discussion understood that the church/body of Christ is not a physical building (I Corinthians 12:27). They also understood that the saints could assemble together in homes (Romans 16:3-5, I Corinthians 16:19, and Philemon 1:2), public places other than homes (Acts 2:46 and I Corinthians 11:18-34), rooms (Acts 20:7-11), etc. However, they were stuck in that building for some reason. That reason seemed to be that such was what everyone was accustomed to. The idea of anything else was too foreign for comfort, even though it was Scriptural and more expedient. We don’t learn about building “church buildings” in the Scriptures. It is a human tradition. How can that impact us?

If We Are Stuck In Traditions Of Men, Our Relationship With God IS Affected

If we are doing things for God based upon traditions of men, that certainly impacts our relationship with God. We have already read that we will perish by using such traditionalism. It is against the Lord's will to hold to the traditions of men. That means it is sinful (I John 3:4). That means we are spiritually lost (Romans 6:23). Sin causes a separation between God and man. Such a separation that the Lord rejects sinners and does not even hear their prayers (Psalms 66:18, Proverbs 15:29, Proverbs 28:9, Isaiah 1:10-18, Isaiah 59:1-2, John 9:31, and I Peter 3:12). Isn't that reason enough for us to make sure we are examining whether or not what we do is rooted in the Scriptures or the traditions of men?

To further state the case, consider what Jesus taught the scribes and Pharisees: *"Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matthew 15:1-9).

When we are talking about our worship being made vain, that means it is, "folly, that is, (adverbially) to no purpose" (Strong's # 3155). If we are ever going to hold to our traditions we need to understand that such an action makes all we do for God pointless. That means, if we are holding to human traditions, we are wasting our time serving God. We'd do just as well to stay home and fulfill any and all sinful desires we might have. Fixing this isn't easy.

To fix being a traditionalist, you'd have to be humble enough to recognize the problem, through honest self-examination (II Corinthians 13:5), and repent of it (II Chronicles 7:14 and James 4:6-10). Honest humility has to come from within you.

Conclusion

Traditionalism caused many Jews to be lost (Romans 10:1-3). Their ways were more important to them than the Lord was (John 12:36-43). Amongst so-called "churches of Christ" today we see that human traditions have greatly trumped the word of God. Their ways are more important to them than the Lord is. We cannot allow that to happen here in El Paso. Let's keep our minds focused on the truth so that our relationship with God is not ruined.