

The Blessing and Curse of Tradition

1. Last week
 - a. Some principles of biblical interpretation
 - i. Descriptive vs prescriptive
 - ii. Need to look behind the text to find principles and deeper understanding
 - iii. Need to compare with other scripture
 1. Is it in keeping with what we see generally
 - a. Nature of God and man
 - b. Nature of God's purpose and plan
 2. Is it in keeping with what we find specifically
 - a. No contradictions
 - b. Some of the challenges of biblical understanding
 - i. Different culture and historic setting
 - ii. Different authors
 - iii. Different styles
 - iv. Different language
 - v. Different idioms
 - c. While seeking deep understanding of God's word can be difficult at times, God provides us with the spiritual resources and wisdom to understand His word His ways, and His will as we seek them
 - d. We also took note that our understanding of, and submission to, God's word can be hindered by our traditions
2. This week we want to take a deeper dive into the benefits and dangers of tradition displayed in God's word
 - a. What is tradition?
 - i. Oxford dictionary "the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way."
 - b. Positive examples of tradition (the blessing of tradition)
 - i. Deut 6:1ff *"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, 2 so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised*

you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.(and how will that happen?) 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."(tradition)

ii. Ex 12:23ff *"the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. 24 And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25 When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite.(tradition) 26 And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' 27 you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'"*

iii. 1 Cor 11:23ff *"the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."*(tradition)

iv. We see the same thought in the NT 2 Thes 2:16 *"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us."*

1. We see that God is in favor of traditions... He commands them. He institutes them. They are to be a delight to Him... and us.
2. They are designed to bring his people to remembrance...a remembrance of what God has done and what he commanded us to do in order for us to love Him and walk in a godly and worthy manner. They call us back to that which is easily forgotten.

c. But there are also negative examples of tradition (the curse of tradition)

i. Is 1:11ff *"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I*

take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. 12 “When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? 13 “Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.14 “I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you”

1. How can this happen? How did the very traditions that God established for our benefit, His glory, and our mutual delight, become an offense before Him?

a. We see the answer later in Isaiah 29:13, “Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,”

i. Meaningless; no content or reality; simply lip service

1. Beloved, this is a frightening reality. Jesus said that the Pharisees should find it so...

ii. Matt 15:1ff *“Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 9 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.”*

1. “Oh, I would, but it has been promised to God” What hypocrisy!

2. Empty, “heartless” tradition inevitably becomes twisted or replaced by the traditions of men. And in Matt 23:13ff we can find a picture of what we are talking about...

iii. *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation. 15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ 17 You fool and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’ 19 You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. 23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.”*

iv. What is the result of cold and worldly religion and tradition ?

1. It perverts the true way of salvation; the true gospel
 - a. “because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in... you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”
2. It perverts a right view of God and man

- a. “Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ 17 You fool and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?”
 - i. Focus on the material... the worldly... not recognizing or acknowledging the God who sustains and sanctifies it
 - 3. It perverts the substance and reason for God’s law and commands
 - a. “For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness”
 - 4. It perverts our understanding of true righteousness
 - a. “For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.”
 - v. We see a modern example of empty tradition in 1 Cor 11:18ff *“For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you... For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep”*
 - 1. It is injurious to our spiritual and physical health
 - a. “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep”
- d. Beloved, tradition, at its best, reminds us of who God is and what He has done on our behalf, and what He requires of us in return. But when perverted... or replaced by the traditions of men... it is destructive to our faith, destructive of our understanding and love of God, makes us unfit for God’s work and His kingdom, and is destructive of our very lives and souls. How and why we establish... and live out... our traditions is supremely important!

e. I close with Paul's words to the Colossians, in 2:8ff *"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. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete."*

Let us pray...