

Chapter 8: The Traditions of Men

Only the Ten Commandments were directly written by “the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18) on the two stone tablets. In addition, God spoke directly to Moses who wrote down further commandments which were largely ceremonial, covering how to perform sacrifices, what foods to avoid, and sexual sins. However, most of the so-called Judaic “law” in the Old Testament represented literally thousands of rules and regulations developed by the priests themselves.

Jesus “fulfilled” the law (Matthew 5:17) as the perfect sacrificial Lamb for all of our sins, shedding His blood once and for all (Hebrews 7:27). Thus, “the handwritten requirements” of the law were “nailed to the cross” (Colossians 2:14) and are no longer active, leaving us with the Ten Commandments and the commandments of the New Testament:

- *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Colossians 2:16-17)*

Jesus further expounded about these “traditions of men” in Mark 7:5-8:

- *Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” He answered and said to them, “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. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ **For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men**—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.”*

Even without the Old Testament laws, the Christian world is still awash with the “traditions of men” that most Christians accept as being Biblical or at least reflect New Testament principles (i.e. “sacrosanct”). Not only are these traditions not Biblical, most actually come from pagan (non-Christian) sources. Nor are any denominations free from such commonly accepted traditions (see the book “Pagan Christianity” by asdfasdf and Barna for a more detailed discussion of where our traditions have actually come from).

- Nowhere in the New Testament does it tell us to hold church services in huge buildings with no participation from the congregants
- Nowhere in the New Testament does it tell us that there should be a liturgy (i.e. order of service), remaining the same week after week, year after year. Orthodox, Catholic and Mainstream denominational services are the most “traditionalized,” but even the so-called “Spirit-led” services of Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations follow the same pattern almost every time
- Nowhere in the New Testament does it tell us to only have services on one particular day. The Sunday “tradition” actually came from Roman Emperor Constantine in 325 A.D. when he combined pagan and Christian worship to mollify both groups. He also renamed the days of the week after pagan gods, with Sun-day being the day that pagans worshipped the sun.
- Nowhere in the New Testament does it tell us to change the day of the Sabbath to Sunday. The Sabbath remains defined as Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, the 24-hour period where we are to do no work and rest in the Lord
- Nowhere in the New Testament does it tell us that the Pastor is the only one to lead church services and to rule over the church. In fact, Ephesians 4:11-16 shows that the leadership is to be made up of five offices (the so-called Five-Fold Ministry):

- *And He Himself gave some to be **apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers**, for the **equipping of the saints for the work of ministry**, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working **by which every part does its share**, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

The reason the church has lost its power – power to save, power to heal, power to change the world – is because it has, for the most part, ignoring the principles of the Bible for the traditions of men. With the above verses from Ephesians as our foundation, let's consider how the Church (i.e. the Body of Christ) should function and how it should be organized according to Biblical principles:

- In the New Testament accounts, primarily from the book of Acts, churches were started by Apostles (literally emissaries of God) who were sent out by the Prophets with the laying on of hands (e.g. Paul and Barnabas in Acts 11:30). This was led by the Holy Spirit as ordained by God the Father, not of man.
- An Evangelist would then preach the gospel (literally the “good news”) to unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile. When some of them accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they began to meet together in houses or other places where it was safe to congregate.
 - Sometimes the Apostle and Evangelist are the same person, as personified by Paul
- As the congregation grew and matured, a Pastor (literally “shepherd”) was appointed to tend the flock. This was a minister who nurtured, corrected, disciplined, counseled and met the needs of the flock.
 - Note carefully, that the Pastor is not the Preacher. It is the Evangelist who is supposed to preach, and not inside the church to believers, but outside the church to unbelievers. There was no dilemma over “seeker-sensitive” services – there weren't any.
 - Today, as Pastors concentrate on being Preachers and leaders, there is precious little shepherding being performed on a daily basis. In fact, most of the pastors I have dealt with (and in my various roles there have been many) very few actually counsel with their sheep and spend any time with them outside of leadership situations.
- Nor was the Pastor necessarily the Teacher, although it was possible for one person to fulfill both roles. The Teacher was responsible for educating the recently saved congregants in Scripture and in how to live their lives as Christians

There is no principle or even indication in the Bible that the Pastor or Priest is supposed to be the sole head of the church. Instead, Ephesians shows us model of the collaboration of the Five-Fold offices working together to manage and grow the church.

- Ephesians goes on to say that the purpose of the Five-Fold ministers is to “edify” (i.e. grow, build up) the Body of Christ (i.e. the congregation) to **all** become equipped as **ministers** “by which every part does its share.”

- This is a picture of a group of leaders and congregants all working together under the leadership of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in which every one exercises their spiritual gifts (see Chapter 8).
- This is not a picture of a group of comatose congregants sitting once a week to listen to a Preacher tell them what to do. Nor is it a picture of a church being led by one person.

In addition, the church service, whether liturgical (i.e. following a standard order of events) or not, was never meant to be one or more people on a platform speaking down to the congregation in more of a show than a common experience. The Bible tells us that the early congregants:

- *... continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42, 46-47)*
- This was a lifestyle, not just a meeting or two a week.

Furthermore, we get a further idea of the type of “service” the early disciples conducted from the following two verses:

- *... speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:19-21)*
- *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)*
- These two Scriptures depict a group of people all participating in “speaking to one another” and singing, teaching, admonishing, praying – functional as a group and submitting themselves to God, not to a pastor or priest.

The church has become stifled by the “traditions of men” and strangled by the grip of the pastorate and priesthood who succumb to notions of leadership and power in defiance of the dictates of Scripture. For it was Jesus who said that those who seek to be first should become last, and that those who wish to be great should become servants, not masters (Matthew 20:16 and many other verses).

- Jesus also said that “*even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10:45)