

Traditions In The Church and Life

A while back I wrote a blog on traditions. Today we are talking about Jesus' warning about empty traditions in the Church and life.

Introduction

Traditions are wonderful things. They bring comfort when times are tumultuous. They bring people together when nothing else will. We find joy in traditions with some ceremonies and rituals. We even find identity with some.

I like traditions. I think of all the places in my life where I have been surrounded by traditions; growing up in New England, scouting as a youth, the volunteer fire department, and the Navy. I think the place that is steeped in the most tradition though is the church.

Traditions are not bad. As we said they can bring comfort and familiarity to unsettling times and situations. I wonder what some holidays would be like without traditions. I wonder what some get-togethers would be like without traditions. I can't imagine Independence Day in America without some sort of barbecue or picnic and fireworks. I can't imagine a Thanksgiving without eating turkey and watching a football game.

What would a graduation ceremony be without seeing the graduates walk in wearing robes to Pomp & Circumstance, or a church wedding where the bride didn't walk in while everyone stands and has all eyes on her? Some traditions are great. They stir an emotional response in us. That's not a bad thing.

The Purpose Behind Traditions

Most traditions in the Church and life are started to signify or remember something.

The fireworks on Independence Day are so we remember what it was like when we fought for Independence as a new nation. The Jews have a Passover meal each year to remember their flight from Egypt thousands of years ago. The bride entering the wedding ceremony ready to be given to the groom with all eyes on her reminds us of the Church and how it will be presented to Christ as His bride.

These are all great traditions when we remember what they are for and why we have them. The problem is when the tradition becomes the reason you do something and the memory of why the tradition exists fades away.

It is interesting to ask people why they are doing something. Often the answer is, "I don't know. We've just always done that." In those cases, the tradition has become the reason for itself and that is sad.

What's even more sad is when people argue and fight over a tradition that no one seems to recall the reason for. Tradition for the sake of tradition is silly. Knowing the meaning behind a tradition is important.

The Church has Many Traditions

One of the places our society has become very traditional is the church. We're not talking about style of music or worship, though those are also steeped in tradition. We're talking about the methods that we employ when we are gathering for church. We have created liturgies and methods that in most cases



have become a tradition and no one knows why the tradition was started. However, people seem to get upset when we deviate from the traditions thinking we are deviating from God.

As pastors in a popular Pentecostal movement for many years it was very unorthodox to have a service order that deviated from:

- Upbeat song
- Welcome & opening prayer
- Three songs of praise
- Offering & announcements
- Three more slower worshipful songs
- Biblical three-point message
- Altar call
- Closing song and prayer
- Dismissal.

It's what we did. It's what we were supposed to do. It was tradition. I would hear about it if I strayed from that too far too many times in a row. People don't like it when the things they are comfortable with or used to are being changed.

Look at what Jesus had to say about traditions in the Church and life in Matthew 15:1-9:

Matthew 15:1-9

(1) Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, (2) "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" (3) Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? (4) For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' (5) But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' (6) they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (7) You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: (8) "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. (9) They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'"

We must ask ourselves why we are doing the things we do. We need to be ready to answer why we do things when people ask. The Church over the years has created many traditions to remember things or teach lessons, like Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent. Unfortunately, the reason behind the tradition has been lost and traditions like these have become religious traditions instead of an outpouring of our heart to God.

Why Do You

Why do you only attend a church that meets on Sunday mornings? Can't you come together and worship God and fellowship on Saturday morning or Thursday night?

Why do you insist on putting on your "Sunday best"? Isn't God with us all the time and aren't we encouraged by the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray continually?



God is always with us whether we are in a church setting in our nicest clothes on a Sunday morning or out in a field or on a beach wearing something else at another time. What matters to God is our heart condition and the time together with Him, not what we are wearing or when.

God is always there with us, so if our best clothes are necessary for meeting with God, we should always be in our best clothes. Think about that the next time you are working in the garden and you aren't wearing a suit or a nice dress.

As leaders in the Church one of the worst things we hear from people is, "That's the way we've always done it." If that is your reason for doing something and you are not open to a little change, you're being selfish. It has become about you, not God.

Confusing Traditions and God's Instructions

Don't confuse traditions in the church and life with instructions from God. There are some things people will try to pass off as traditions in order to get rid of them when they are actually instructions from God.

Taking care of the needy is something that needs to happen all year long, not just at the holidays. Worshipping God is something we do day in and day out, not just once a week when gathered together. Praying is something we do continually not just once a week when a preacher leads us in a prayer.

Conclusion

We launched Cell Life Church many years ago which has been a new style of church gathering, and we will undoubtedly form our own traditions. Some of these are gathering in cell sites and home churches often and online using video chat. Producing Cell Life Church TV weekly and ministering through social media.

Our team has pledged that we will evaluate all that we do constantly as a core value. This is in part so that we do not create traditions, intentioned or not, that the meaning and basis are forgotten. We want to hold true to scripture and what God has asked of each of us as His creation.

I encourage you to sit back and look at your life. Identify the traditions in your life. Try to recall the basis for those traditions. There is nothing wrong with keeping traditions in the Church and life that you don't recall the basis. However, don't be afraid to change or stop them either if they are not instructions from God.

