

“THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER” Hebrews 13:8 THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITION IN CHANGING TIMES

Times are changing – they always have been – and as a result, the Christian church is being influenced in many ways by extraneous forces that would have it change its ways and its beliefs. Therefore, all believers need to know what are the essential teachings of our faith and the everlasting principles of our moral behaviour. Every generation of true believers has had to wrestle with the changes of its time.

As an ancient introduction to this, we might look at the time when Israel had left Mount Sinai, travelled for forty years in the wilderness, had come to the River Jorden, and were about to enter into the Promised Land. They needed to know how they ought to live among tribes of pagan believers who had different philosophies and systems of morality.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT TRADITION Deuteronomy 6
 - 1.1. To keep God’s commandments. 6:1-3
 - 1.2. To love God. 6:4-5
 - 1.3. To comprehensively teach God’s word to their children. 6:6-9
 - 1.4. To remember God in times of prosperity. 6:10-12
 - 1.5. To avoid worshipping other gods at all costs. 6:13-15
 - 1.6. To refuse to put God to the test. 6:16-19. (Exodus 17 – failing to trust Him)
 - 1.7. To explain to following generations that God redeemed their nation. 6:20-15

These things were to provide a lasting tradition for Israel, stabilizing its community. The principles involved continue to be important for the church today because they are required by God who never changes,

2. THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITION
 - 2.1. A problem faced by Jesus Christ among the Jews. Matthew 15:2-3, Mark 7:8-9
The accepted traditions undermined the word of God, His commandments.
 - 2.2. A problem faced by Paul among the Gentiles. Colossians 2:8. The philosophies and “traditions of men” deterred people from following Christ. (cf. II Peter 3:1-4)
 - 2.3. A challenge faced by all Christians. II Thessalonians 2:15. To “stand fast” in the Christian traditions found in the apostolic teaching and writing.

It is inevitable that we will be affected by the traditions of the past – some good and wholesome, some bad and misleading, and we must distinguish between the two. But above all, we should embrace the apostolic, Christian tradition.

3. THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION
 - 3.1. Paul “delivered” the “traditions” (not ‘teachings’) to the church in Corinth. He praised the people for faithfully keeping them. I Corinthians 11:1
 - 3.2. Paul passed on – he uses the verb here which is a cognate of the word for “tradition” – to the Corinthians what he had himself received. I Corinthians 15:3
 - 3.3. This “tradition” was the Gospel message about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus “according to the scriptures”. I Corinthians 15:1-5

Paul uses two interesting words in I Corinthians 11 – “traditions” in verse 2, and “custom”/“practice” in verse 16. I suggest a simple distinction: “traditions” are the historically established beliefs and moral principles that should shape all our lives all the time; “customs” are transitory social practices characteristic of various groups at different times. See, I Corinthians 9:18-23.

