

church of Christ at Greenwood

371 West Main Street
Greenwood, Indiana 46142
317.888.8288
churchofchristatgreenwood.org

April 16, 2023

The Danger of Tradition

It is said that, years ago in Russia, a czar came upon a lonely sentry standing at attention in a secluded corner of the palace garden. "What are you guarding?" asked the czar. "I do not know. The captain ordered me to this post," the sentry replied.

The czar called the captain. His answer: "Written regulations specify a guard was to be assigned to that area." The czar ordered a search to find out why. The archives finally yielded the reason. Years before, Catherine the Great had planted a rose bush in that corner. She ordered a sentry to protect it for that evening.

One hundred years later, sentries were still guarding the now barren spot.

Much of what we do is done merely because it is what we have always done. It's what our parents have always done, and it's what our grandparents did before them. Who knows, maybe the tradition began three or four generations ago.

There is really nothing wrong with tradition itself. Most families have long-standing traditions for the holiday season. For instance, maybe the patriarch of the family carves the Thanksgiving turkey or the youngest family member opens the first Christmas present. These traditions are perfectly innocent and actually add to our culture.

We also have traditions in our congregations. We meet at certain times on Sundays for Bible classes and worship services. Perhaps we have a certain time to meet on Wednesday evenings as well. When the congregation assembles, there is probably a certain order in which things happen (prayers, songs, preaching, etc.). And chances are good that things have been done just that way for quite a long time. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with that. In fact, such traditions help us abide by the command, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

However, tradition can be very dangerous. Like the sentry and captain in the above story, we may do something out of tradition or habit without any idea **why** we do them. Do you

Cont'd, inside →

know *why* the church assembles on the first day of every week? Do you know *why* we partake of the Lord's Supper? Do you know *why* we have preaching? Or do you just do it out of tradition? Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Corinthians 14.15). Here Paul emphasized engaging one's mind in matters of worship.

Second, there is the danger that we elevate our traditions to the same level as God's Word, thus we begin asserting those traditions as doctrine. The Lord has not told us what time to assemble on Sundays or the order in which we ought to conduct our services, so to teach our traditional practices as doctrine is to speak where God has not spoken.

There is also the danger of accepting traditional teaching without evaluating it in light of God's Word. Traditional practices and doctrines need to be studied and compared to Scripture before being accepted or further taught.

These were the problems for which the Pharisees stood condemned. Jesus said of 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... All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition." (Mark 7.6-9)

How well do your traditions stand up in the light of God's Word? If not based in Scripture or if contradicting the Will of God, those traditions must be rejected as "the commandments of men," lest we will suffer the same condemnation as the Pharisees. **Let us make devotion to Scripture our most important tradition!**