

“Do Our Traditions Line Up With Scripture?”
Committee: Bro. Zach Goodwin; Bro. Randy Thompson

Our first decision with this question was to take a position on the word “traditions.”

Are we talking about the “traditions” of our society and families...or are we talking about the “traditions” of our churches; of our faith as Missionary Baptists. We decided on the latter of the two...

Next we needed to better understand what these traditions are.

Traditions are defined by Merriam-Webster as: a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something that has been done by people in a particular group, family, society, etc., for a long time.

The definition is broadened to mean:

- an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom)
- the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another with or without written instruction.

That prompted the question, is there a difference between Tradition and Doctrine?

Doctrine is defined by Merriam-Webster as: a set of ideas or beliefs that are taught or believed to be true. They are a position or the body of principles in a system of belief:

Our 18 Articles of Faith for example, we would consider to be our “Doctrines.” It is an extraction of Biblical principles or Doctrines in a concise format that define our beliefs. They are taught and believed to be true and provable by the Holy Bible.

There is in our opinion, a major difference between Tradition and Doctrine, in that: Doctrine should never be compromised, watered down, changed or eliminated from our teaching and preaching in our churches. Tradition on the other hand can from time to time be altered, changed, even discontinued or even added “IF” there is a determined benefit to the objectives and goals of a given church.

For our topic, we tried to draw a distinction between those Doctrinal issues (Salvation, Baptism, Security of the Believers and so on) and focus on what we believe to be “Traditions” by definition.

With that being said, our challenge was to determine some of our “Traditions” and decide if they “line up” or align with Scripture.

Some Examples of “TRADITION” (and keep in mind that not all of our churches practice all of these, but many do), could be such things as:

1. The tradition of an Easter egg hunt at the church for the children at Easter time.
2. The tradition to give thanks before we start eating.
3. The tradition of holding a Vacation Bible School each year.
4. The tradition of a Christmas Program annually.
5. The tradition of Sunday school before worship service.
- 6) The tradition of our service times and their frequencies.
- 7) The tradition of our “Southern Gospel” music in our services.
- 8) The tradition of our ministers performing marriage ceremonies in our churches, and with whom they are performed.

I am sure while I have been reading this list you have thought of others in your own minds. Perhaps our tradition of Homecoming or the way people dress for worship...

So the question to be answered is, “Do Our Traditions Line Up with Scripture?”

Based on the ones I just mentioned, I’d have to say, No, yes, yes, yes, no, no, and lastly, no and yes...well, maybe we need to dig a little deeper...

We believe a key question in the things we do at our churches should always be, “What is the value of this activity or this function, to our services, to our church? Does it, or how does it, promote Christ?” Does it produce a “Spiritual” or “Secular” result?

Jesus said in (**Matthew 15:9 (KJV)**) “⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.”

The Pharisees were teaching the traditions of men as doctrine. The Pharisees knew a lot about God, but they didn’t know God. This is the same trouble we can get into if we take the attitude of “That’s how it has always been done, or everyone else does it that way.” We must be careful to not teach “tradition” as doctrine. The washing of hands and laws that pertained to the Sabbath were often twisted and taken out of context from the scriptures.

Jesus again speaking in (**Mark 7:8 (KJV) records,** “⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.”

The Pharisees added hundreds of their own rules and regulations to God’s holy laws and tried to force people to follow them. Jesus condemned this as hypocrisy. It is dangerous to set up non-biblical standards for others to follow. **We are to look to Christ for our standards...** We do not believe God is against having traditional elements in the church, but do believe He is against His church teaching the traditions of “Man” as doctrine. This kind of hypocrisy will turn people away from the real truth.

We don't have time to address all of the traditions we mentioned in great detail, but let's take a look starting with:

1. The tradition of an Easter egg hunt at the church for the children at Easter time.

Should Churches and Christians Participate in Easter Egg Hunts? That will be for each church to decide...but the truth is, the Easter Bunny and (by extension) the Easter egg hunt tradition stem from pagan origins acknowledging the Goddess of fertility (you can research that for yourselves) and find out how such a pagan symbol come to be associated with a religious holiday.

From a biblical perspective, it's clearly wrong for anyone to worship false gods or goddesses — or to encourage the worshiping of false deities. Anyone who participates in an Easter egg hunt (a tradition that began sometime in the 1500s, we believe) with the intent of worshipping a false deity is guilty of idolatry. **However, this is not what happens in most Easter Egg Hunts in the United States today – and certainly not in those egg hunts sponsored by our churches.** No false deity is worshiped. In fact, in the case of church-sponsored Easter Egg Hunts, the kids who participate are taught that Easter is about Jesus Christ and His resurrection. **Christ is exalted.**

The Apostle Paul used false religions to point people to the Truth, namely Christ. At his Mars Hill sermon (see Acts 17), Paul tells the people of Athens that he perceives they are a “religious people” in light of their many idols, and then he points to one with an inscription to “THE UNKNOWN GOD,” and says he wants to tell them about that One! Paul used their idolatry as a frame of reference to help him connect with them, so he might more effectively share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In (1 Corinthians 8), Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to ease off battles they were having over whether it was proper for Christians to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. In that passage, Paul says that there's nothing inherently sinful with a Christian eating meat that's been offered to an idol because the “idol is nothing.” In other words, the whole religion and belief system surrounding the idols to which the meats were being offered was, in reality, meaningless. Christians are at liberty then, Paul teaches, to eat meat offered to idols, but they must be careful not to cause their brothers or sisters in Christ to stumble into sin. While the issue of eating meat offered to first century idols is different from churches holding Easter egg hunts today, many of their respective aspects are the same, the principles of Paul's teachings are very much applicable.

The bottom line in all this is that God looks at the heart. “If” a Christian participates in an Easter Egg Hunt with the intention of worshiping or honoring pagan goddesses, an obvious sin has occurred. “If” a church sponsors an Easter Egg Hunt without using it as a tool to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, an opportunity has been missed. **Although there is no scriptural support for the act of egg hunting,** each church must decide if it is harmful or sinful for a child collect plastic eggs to get candy or for a church using an egg hunt as an outreach tool for evangelism. God looks at the heart. We should do the same.

2. Next, the tradition to give thanks before we start eating.

We wondered how many today are carrying out this practice, this “Tradition” today in their homes, restaurants and other places they eat... We do believe this is a practice that “ALL” Christians should be practicing and teaching in their homes.

(Deuteronomy 8:10) say: “¹⁰ When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.” The Israelites were to bless (give thanks) to the Lord for providing for their needs to and in the Promised Land. This was a time of prayer, but it was also a warning not to forget God when their / our needs and wants were / are satisfied. We are to let our table prayers serve as constant reminders of the Lord’s goodness to us and our duty to those less fortunate.

(Ephesians 5:20) “²⁰ Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;” **(1 Thessalonians 5:18)** “¹⁸ In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

We believe this tradition lines up with Scripture and we should all strive to better fulfill it in our lives.

For the sake of time and space in the Association book, we are going to combine the following “traditions:”

- 3. The tradition of holding a Vacation Bible School each year.**
- 4. The tradition of a Christmas Program annually.**
- 5. The tradition of Sunday school before or after worship service.**

Although two of these are annual events and the other a weekly event, although each year they have different themes or lessons...there is a commonality between them. A purpose and a goal that is trying to be achieved. **What is it? It is a means to communicate the Gospel Message to children and adults alike.**

(Proverbs 22:6 (KJV) say:

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

This is probably the best-known proverb on the rearing of children; however, it is often misunderstood. It states a simple truth that parents must remember as they teach and discipline their children: it is the duty of parents to start their children on the right path of life.

There are only two possible paths mentioned in the Bible: **the path of righteousness and wisdom that leads to life** and **the path of wickedness and foolishness that leads to death.** The right way, or the way *[a child] should go*, is obviously the way of righteousness.

We realize that only parents can start a child in the right way—the path of righteousness. And that parents are to begin their training in the earliest years of a child’s life. **It begins at home first**, then continues on in and through the church and the programs mentioned.

Of course, each child must choose whether or not to take the right path. People may depart or get off of the right path in life, but children who are taught the right way by godly parents can never completely depart from that *training*. They may choose not to live by it, but they cannot get away from it entirely.

The training they received is permanently inscribed on their hearts and minds. Even in old age they will remember what their parents taught them. **When parents teach their children to live righteously, they instill in them something that will stay with them their entire lives.**

(Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (KJV) express how important it is to teach our children the things of God.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:

⁵ And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

⁶ And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

⁷ And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

We believe these traditions line up with Scripture, but each church must decide if they are the right tools, programs for them to share and instill the gospel message.

6) How about the tradition of our service times and frequencies.
(Hebrews 10:25) instructed...

²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The meaning of this exhortation is that Christians are to assemble together...for worship, for prayer, for the study of God's Word, for ministry and witnessing. Christians need each other—we need the presence, fellowship, strength, encouragement, care, and love of each other. **The frequency and starting times should be left to the individual church.** See (Luke 4:16; Luke 24:52-53; Acts 2:46; Acts 3:1; Acts 13:14 and others) where men of faith made a point to be in the Lord's house at all different times.

The important thing is to have a genuine desire to be in church with the right attitude of heart. Scripture uses words like gladness, loved, seek after, chooseth, blessed...

The Psalmist said, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Palm 84:10).

Whatever times services start, on whatever days a church chooses to meet, especially the Sabbath, **may we be found saying**, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1).

We believe Scripture supports our need to be in service when the doors are open.

-

7) The tradition of our “Southern Gospel” music in our services.

For this tradition, we will encourage everyone to reread the topic in last year’s meeting that addressed “The positive and negative influences of different genres on Christian Music” by Bro. Trey Crews.

Music has a definite scriptural basis as a part of our heritage and tradition inside and outside of our churches (consider the many Psalms)...(Psa. 95:1) says, “O come, let us sing unto Lord: let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation,” but it does not “label” our singing to be exclusively, “Southern Gospel.” Again, each church must decide what best fits their mode of worship.

-

8) Lastly, the tradition of our ministers performing marriage ceremonies in our churches, and with whom they are performed.

We believe this is an example where we are called upon to do things that Christ never did to our knowledge. We know he attended a wedding...but have no record that he officiated one (I suppose that is because His number one priority was the preaching of the Gospel...perhaps a lesson for us in that). Although marriage ceremonies today are very different than the old Jewish traditions...**we do believe that God established proper relations to be between “a Man and a Woman.”** He ordained that they leave father and mother and the two become one. Again, this issue of “whom” is to be married is well documented in previous association questions.

Since God established marriage, and brought the man and woman together, we believe that the tradition of performing marriages in the church does align with scripture.

Titus warning against false teachers said, **(Titus 1:13 (KJV)** “¹³ This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;”

How do we know if a person or a church truly loves the Lord? If they love the Lord, they will keep the commandments of Jesus and will teach and practice that which is clearly backed / supported by scriptural demands. If they do not love the Lord (or maybe we should say, truly know the Lord, like the Pharisees) they will teach traditions, man’s commandments, and make them appear as God’s Will. Traditions and commandments of men are what hung the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. The religion of that day is what drove the nails through the hands of the Son of God (although in doing so, it also fulfilled the divine plan of God). If the Bible teaches that we should do something a certain way, then that is the way we should do it, regardless of the tradition or the way the majority does it. When men disagree with the Bible, **(Romans 3:4 (KJV) says,** “⁴ God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.”

We suppose the Conclusion of this matter is going to be.....that each church will have to draw their own conclusion about “Traditions” practiced. Each church will have to decide; “Are traditions in the church a good thing or a bad thing? Should they be continued or discontinued?”

As our Sister churches consider their “Traditions,” as do we in our own churches; we should be respectful that they have gone through the same **prayerful process** concerning their traditions that we have, and not allow our churches to make differences in the practice of traditions a point that would hinder our fellowship together.

(Colossians 2:8 (KJV) tells us, “^s Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

Prayerfully Submitted,

Elder Zach Goodwin

Elder Randy Thompson