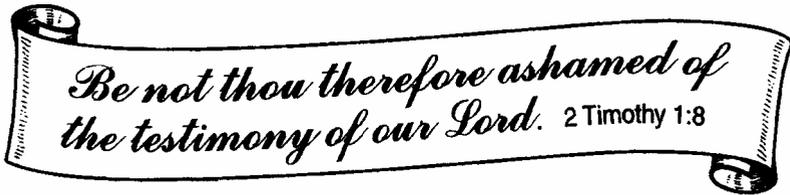


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Keeping Tradition a Blessing

We are identified as Plain People who respect tradition. Those who despise tradition cease to be plain.

Respect for tradition is important. The apostles urged the church to keep practices which were established and understood by the church. Paul admonished, "Hold the traditions" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Tradition promotes stability. It also communicates respect for past evaluations and decisions. A healthy respect for tradition combats the independence which is so prevalent today. It further shields us from experimentation with the unproven.

Not all traditions are equal. Some result from group efforts to carefully think through the principles of Scripture to form practices such as our regulated attire. At other times, a tradition, like the order of a worship service, becomes a practice simply through the repetition of actions.

Tradition should not become an end in itself. Jesus sternly denounced the Pharisees' abuse of tradition. The Pharisee said, "I am not as other men are," but Matthew 23 outlines a very troublesome state of affairs. The Pharisees did not practice their own teaching (verses 3, 4). "All their works they do for to be seen of men"(verse 5). The list of failures also includes the love of public praise, a spirit of greed, and a preoccupation with technicalities. Their tradition violated and superseded God's Law rather than reinforcing obedience to it.

Should we abandon the patterns of worship and living that we have been taught just because the Pharisees became inconsistent? God forbid. Rather than condemning their practical observance of the Law, Jesus reproved their hypocrisy and disobedience. "They say, and do not." Their practice was not the outgrowth of a surrendered life but an effort to appear righteous before men. They did not love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

For the Pharisees, tradition moved from a protection to a snare. Practicing tradition had become their major emphasis. They made many additions to the Law while overlooking the real condition of the heart.

Can I err like the Pharisee? Following are some possible indicators that I may be.

Do I take pride in a specific practice for men's approval at the expense of cultivating obedience to the Word? Am I truly surrendered to Christ?

Do I lose sight of the principle of the practice? This will contribute to a shift away from applying a principle to simply doing. Do I apply the principles of truth to similar issues?

Do I feel superior in my application and belittle the efforts of others to also apply the Scriptures? This reveals an attitude of pride. To take pride in one's heritage but largely lose its spirit is to be deceived. As we understand the Scriptural principles of our heritage and tradition, we will appreciate all those who endeavor to live the same.

Am I content to do just enough to get by? If so, I am doing it for its own merit rather than being fully surrendered. If I own and wear a plain suit because I must, but chafe at being separate, am I really plain? Beware!

Do I subconsciously think that doing certain good things will somehow balance my carnality in other less obvious areas of life? Such righteousness is parallel to that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Even church leaders can lose a proper focus. It is possible to require compliance with the standards, which is necessary, but overlook an unsubmitive spirit. It may be easier to make another rule than to administrate the spirit of the ones that we already have. Some individuals need to be led to seek the approval of God, which is found in willing submission to a Scriptural church.

In summary, some people find security in a multitude of detailed practices, while others do just enough to get by. In either case they are failing to heed the Spirit of God, who sanctifies the heart.

Let us value our heritage and protect our traditions by promoting a practice born from a heart of surrender to our Lord Jesus Christ. This keeps tradition as a protection rather than allowing it to become a snare.

—*Brother Wayne*



"BE NOT TERRIFIED"

A bolt of lightning flashes across the midnight sky, the crash of thunder resonates in the stillness, and slumbers are ended. Hurried feet patter down the hall and knocking persists. "Mother! Father! May we come in? We're scared!"

Just as a child finds comfort in his parent's presence, so the child of God should rest in his Father's promises. Can we rest secure in God and "be not terrified" (Luke 21:9) even in the midst of troubled times?

The eventful spring and summer of 2011 with its unusual weather patterns, the high record of tornadoes, "earthquakes, in divers places," tsunamis, and the continued political and economical distresses of the nations has been a means of disturbing the spiritual slumber of many. God in His mercy awakens man to the realities of time and eternity and desires that they would "awake to righteousness." Christians should look up for their "redemption draweth nigh." Apostle Paul admonishes, "It is high time to awake out of sleep" and "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:11,

These results, however, are not always readily forthcoming. People often respond according to their ingrained habits. Jesus warned of "fearful sights" and of "men's hearts failing them for fear." When lives are not anchored in the truth of God's Word, calamities often result in cursing against God and frantic terror instead of calling on God.

The increase of fearful events is part of the culmination of the great conflict of the ages. God is mercifully calling man to repent, but the forces of evil are desperately attempting to gain control of the universe and capture man's heart and soul.

Our enemy is not particular which tactic he uses to gain control of men's hearts, and we do know that his ways are very subtle. The Scriptures clearly warn us that the end times will be characterized by deception and falling away. As the concept of the authority of the entire Scripture is lost, well-meaning people find themselves on open water with no moorings on which to base their belief. They eventually violate the basic principles of Scripture. For example, recently some set the day and time for Christ's return. Jesus told us that He Himself knew not the day or the hour of His return but the Father only.

The deceived are terrified when their confidence in their own philosophies falters. This humanistic process of finding answers from within themselves becomes frustrating and terrifying as the realization dawns that they do not have the answers to life's issues.

Another group of individuals who are terrified are those whose hope is in this world's riches. With the fluctuating stock market, the rumors of the economic collapse of nations, and the increasing occurrence of natural disasters, investors begin to fear that their equity is worth no more than the piece of paper on which their assets are printed. Once more, worldly securities are another gospel that is not a gospel.

How can we be overcomers in troublesome times? First, and second to none, is the importance of a saving faith in the redemptive blood of Jesus that produces a lifestyle based on Biblical principles. This will bring peace

and hope in turmoil and uncertainty.

On various occasions Jesus warned of events being sudden and the danger of being unaware and overtaken, but He earnestly pleads with us to see, to hear, to look, and to watch. The Greek word for terrified is *ptoeo* which means "to fall or fly away, to scare, or to frighten." This definition conveys the idea of a surprise. Surprises generally capture the uninformed. "But [exhort] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

To clarify this connection between being observant but not terrified, Jesus says, "When ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh" (Mark 13:29). The angel Michael instructed Daniel, "Know therefore and understand" (Daniel 9:25).

God has given us a basic sketch along with some details of the great culmination. We can and must have soul rest and peace of mind as we see the future unfold before us. Although the pieces of the puzzle may not exactly fit as some first thought, yet every sincere child of God can see that God is on the throne and that things are not out of control. "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19). Jesus will enable us.

Further, in John 14 Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." These words were spoken as comfort to the disciples. Should not His disciples today hold forth to the terrified and distressed the same words of comfort through saving faith in Jesus Christ? The fields are "white already to harvest." The opportunity to turn a discussion of the news and current events into a spiritual challenge seems unparalleled. May we be His faithful witnesses and may our lives be an aide to God's call to trust in Him.

Brother Jason.



The Rule of Christ

Our Anabaptist forebears frequently referred to the teaching of Matthew 18:15-18 and Matthew 5:23, 24 as "the rule of Christ." In these Scriptures they saw a divine rule as a practical outline for brotherhood reconciliation, as well as a part of Christ's teaching on binding and loosing (church discipline). The council service reinforced the importance of this rule, where members were asked whether they were at peace not only with their own conscience but also with their neighbors and more importantly, with the

brothers and sisters in the household of faith.

In carefully carrying out this historic Anabaptist routine and emphasis, they felt a special spiritual identity and authenticity. For them, Matthew 18 was more than a procedure. It was a paradigm of the kingdom of God, an earmark of true self-denial and discipleship, and a rule with principles that applied to many areas of life.

This rule was understood to serve a number of purposes. It promoted a realistic view of human nature. These Scriptures assume that offenses will come and that influences may exist within the brotherhood that would be spiritually harmful to little ones (those innocent or new in the faith). Also, self-justification is a human tendency with which even God's children must reckon. This Biblical understanding led to a careful application of Scriptural reconciliation in contrast to a spiritual euphoria which denied that human differences or harmful influences could exist in a true brotherhood. The Anabaptists considered faith genuine only if it acknowledged the necessity of human reconciliation in the brotherhood.

This rule also served the purpose of teaching the relationship of personal reconciliation and brotherhood accountability. Christ taught personal forgiveness as unconditional (Matthew 6:14, 15). Within the covenant of the brotherhood, however, an erring member has accountability to the church. "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3).

This rule was finally and most importantly understood to teach that reconciliation and forgiveness are first of all personal responsibilities. Unlike discerning Bible doctrine or formulating church policy (Acts 15), where the broadest levels of counsel were sought, reconciliation begins at the most local level. It begins in private—face to face.

The value of local reconciliation can be illustrated by the marriage relationship. Ideally, a husband and his wife should be able to work out their problems, differences, or misunderstandings themselves. Brotherhood counsel and advice contribute to our homes; but worldly, professional counsel should rarely, if ever, be needed. Today, however, many married partners turn to trained counselors, the police, attorneys, judges, and the courts of the land to settle domestic disputes. Most of these issues begin at a point where they may have been solved by the persons involved, but each step of outside mediation adds to the growing mistrust and level of betrayal until their differences seem irreconcilable.

The same principle is true in the brotherhood. The persons directly involved in problems should solve them themselves. At least, the first at-

tempt should begin in this manner. Every church member, husband, wife, or family member should resolve to settle all personal grievances or offenses without any outside mediation. The greatest degree of trust is maintained this way. Problems are the easiest to solve before "everybody" finds out about them.

The plan outlined in "the rule of Christ" is simple. It begins with a visit with the one who has wronged us (Matthew 18:15) or with the one who has been offended by us (Matthew 5:24). The goal is to reach a satisfactory settlement and then consider the case closed. The second step only follows where the first engagement did not finalize an agreement. Ideally the two differing parties should agree who the "one or two more" should be. In some instances the deacon has served in the role of a mediator. If this step is unsatisfactory, the final step is to bring the matter to the church, where the ministry of the church ultimately makes a decision as to how the issue must be resolved.

The ministry have a unique role in this entire process. When members come to them with complaints about other members, they can encourage and direct them to take the first step, and they should verify that the second step was carried out before picking up the issue for the more official action of the third step.

This rule illustrates a number of principles. The first step of mediation done personally allows one to use a generous offer to effect reconciliation quickly. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him" (Matthew 5:25). If one recognizes his own fault in a matter, he is wise to offer a more-than fair settlement to deter the wronged party from seeking outside mediation to recover loss for damages. If this personal step fails, the case is no longer in his hands; it will be decided by others.

We are therefore taught as Christians to avoid mediation if possible, especially where we know we are at fault. In civil cases, the settlement will nearly always cost more financially if the legal system is employed. In the brotherhood, the settlement that will be reached by the involvement of others has an added risk of producing mistrust and feelings of betrayal. Also, final judgment in brotherhood disagreement is to be arbitrated by the church and church leaders. In other words, if one cannot agree with his brother how to settle an offense, he must finally submit to what others have determined is fair. One may not insist upon appeal after appeal. The ultimate transgression of Matthew 18 is not the original offense but a refusal to accept counsel.

Sometimes it is suggested that this rule should be applied to cases where a

brother has transgressed the rules and discipline of the church. If one would confront a brother who had gone to a worldly place of amusement, this would certainly be proper. The brother should be admonished to see his error and repent. But the full principle of Matthew 18 does not apply in this case because the person-to-person visit cannot resolve the issue. They cannot agree on terms of a settlement for the offense. The brother has violated his covenant with the church. An apology to one brother is not enough. The offending brother should therefore be admonished to acknowledge his transgression to the ministry.

The rule of Christ has been strongly emphasized in the Mennonite Church through the years. At some places within the past century, as part of the baptismal questions, applicants were asked to agree to "counsel and to be counseled with Matthew 18." The same was asked of those who were received upon confession of faith. The text of Scripture traditionally used at the council service was Matthew 18. It was viewed as a means of grace, an expression of faithfulness, and as part of the good news of the Gospel. This is the Scriptural way for the brotherhood to solve their problems, for how else might it offer redemption to the world? "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). *Brother Clair.*



PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

Thank God for His only begotten Son, whom He sent,
as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of [His] people Israel."

Thank God that He does "supply all your need
according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Pray for the Christians in China.

Pray for the healing and comfort of those
relating to traumatic injury and death.



Separation in Business (Part 2)

Business Seminars

Separation in business life is just as important as other areas of life. Evaluate an invitation to a business seminar to determine if it is spiritually safe or consistent with a Christian witness.

Analyze the emphasis. Business classes such as agricultural spray meetings, vendor-required product education, or new-equipment orientation may be beneficial. Information and education should be obtained otherwise when possible to avoid such intermingling with the world. Even "Christian" business seminars may teach worldly philosophy and pressure one to fit in with a casual crowd. Would I be caught off-guard if Christ returned or I was observed by a brother?

Sales pressures such as "Double your profits in a year," or "How to make a sale every time" should not captivate our attention. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts.... For the love of money is the root of all evil.... But thou, O man of God, flee these things" (1 Timothy 6:9-11). A business that is floundering financially should seek wise, spiritual counsel within the brotherhood.

Consider the social involvement. Food, fun, and humor should not appeal to the Christian. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1:1). Leave if unexpected entertainment begins or the instructor is foulmouthed. Business seminars that rob a family of its father for days present added temptations.

If the occasion arises to attend a needed, appropriate seminar, the Christian should use the opportunity to witness by, clearly identifying with Christ. One businessman related that when a plainly dressed brother entered a meeting, the rowdy spirit left. Put Christ and His kingdom foremost in your businesses. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

— *Brother Joel.*



Jesus Came for Me

Not as a sage did He send Him,
Not as a King with a crown,
But as a small, helpless baby
God sent Jesus down.

Not to the proud and the haughty,
Not to the prudent and wise,
Only the humble and lowly,
Saw with discerning eyes.

Born a babe in a manger,
Never a lowlier birth!
Born afar as a stranger
Jesus came down to earth.

Tho' He was King of Creation,
Lord of Eternity,
Stooping low as a man could stoop,
Jesus came for me!
—Margaret Penner Toews



"But I Say Unto You" (Part 6) "Love Your Enemies"

What makes Christianity different from all the other religions in the world? One powerful answer is that the true followers of Jesus Christ will have a fervent love for those who hate them. In contrast to a mere pacifistic refusal to hit back, they possess a genuine desire to do good to those who seek their hurt and an abiding happiness when those who have wronged them experience success in life.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Nonresistance is the perfect plan of

God to show Himself to the world by empowering born-again believers to not only "resist not evil" but also to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

When has a more heroic deed been done, a more powerful testimony been given, a greater soul-searching begun than when a man responds with unfeigned love for those who mistreat him?

The martyr first, whose eagle eye
Could pierce beyond the grave,
Who saw his Master in the sky,
And called on Him to save:
Like Him, with pardon on his tongue
In midst of mortal pain,
He prayed for them that did the wrong:
Who follows in his train?

Jesus makes it clear that the practice of loving our enemies will transcend normal human relations. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" (Matthew 5:46, 47). Jesus makes nonresistance extremely practical. Is there anyone whom I may meet that I would not offer a friendly wave? Is my first reaction when someone inconveniences me or offends me in any way to pray for them? "Pray for them which despitefully [spitefully] use you" (Matthew 5:44).

How hard is it for me to ask the Lord to bless my cantankerous neighbor whom few can get along with? What do I say about the commentator who routinely makes derogatory statements about Christianity? What do I think about the councilman who mocks our private schools? What is my attitude toward the success or failure of terrorists? What do I say about the liberal news media? Am I a normal man or does my heart beat with the unsearchable love of my Redeemer? Whose train am I really following?

Why does God ask us to exercise this superhuman love for our enemies? "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:45). We must allow the love of Calvary to flow through our being to all our fellow men. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Brother Ernest (end of series).