

## Traditions VS Doctrines -- #2

By Bill Denton

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Last week we began a brief look at the problem created when we confuse tradition and Doctrine

1. We looked at two basic ideas
  - a. that the fundamental approach of the New Testament to traditions is that they must be handled with great care, for there is tremendous danger in traditions
  - b. secondly, as all other generations of man, we are in danger from our traditions today
2. What I urged you to consider last week is the following:
  - a. that we must learn the difference between tradition and doctrine
  - b. that we must distinguish between the relative importance the two
  - c. that unity is based on common doctrine, but it is almost always expressed through our traditions – thus traditions are not necessarily good or bad, but they are the forms through which we seek to practice our faith

#### B. We can certainly use traditions to enrich our life experiences as Christians, but we must Avoid becoming traditionalists, whose only focus is on external forms and who have lost The heart of our relationship with God

#### C. Among our brethren across the U.S., we are keenly aware of this conflict between tradition And doctrine

1. For at least 25 years, this has been part of an ever deepening rumble among churches
2. It has caused churches to fall apart
3. It has caused some Christians to abandon the church, thinking that all they needed was a change of traditions to resolve their spiritual problems and meet their needs
4. It has resulted in a polarization that pits individual Christians against one another, and one congregation against another
5. Much of this is unnecessary, but sometimes the problems become severe, and when tradition becomes so confused with doctrine that people don't seem able to sort one from the other, then doctrine, which is supposed to be that actually taught in the Bible, may be rejected or viewed as unimportant

#### D. Today, I want to address just a few of the more significant doctrinal issues that sometimes Come to be viewed as nothing but traditions and therefore open to change or rejection

1. I believe the Bible presents these as doctrinal issues, not merely traditions
2. As such, they are indispensable to our faith

## I. THE VIEW THAT THE CHURCH IS NOTHING BUT DENOMINATION

### A. This is becoming popular for several reasons, but I'll give you my idea on the matter

1. Because we are becoming too close to being traditionalists, we find it harder and harder to deny that people not associated with our brotherhood are actually believers
2. Because of our rigid, uncompromising stand in earlier years on doctrinal issues, we became marginalized and then isolated from the general 'Christian' world, and then when we tried to re-engage those people, we were confused that they actually had a tremendous faith in God, and in Jesus Christ
3. Because we began a wiser and more accurate study of the scriptures, we discovered that some, if not many, of our previously held beliefs were actually flawed, and the views held by other religious groups may have been closer to the truth
4. Because we forgot our Restoration Movement roots that began, not with the assumption that we were the only Christians, but that we were only Christians

### B. So to find a better "fit" in the modern world, some decided that the Church of Christ was Really just one among the denominations, and therefore neither better or worse, necessarily Than any of the rest

1. What we may have to come to grips with is the fact that in practice we may have become little more than a denomination
2. That happens when we become sectarian in nature – and that's a real problem for us
3. And, we neglect the sociological aspects of religious life, which often puts us in the category of just another church – a denomination among many, with our unique theology and practices like all the rest

### C. But is that what the Bible says about the church

1. Matt 16:18 -- "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. NASU
  - a. it's worth noting that Jesus didn't promise to build 'churches' but a 'church'
  - b. it is more accurate to say that Jesus was intent on creating an assembly of people
2. Eph 2:14-22 -- For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. NASU

- a. Paul draws a picture of God's bringing both Jew and Gentile to him in one body of people
  - b. the picture is that God using people as building blocks, the corner stone being Christ, the foundation being the apostles and prophets, but every Christian Serving as a building block of God's holy temple
3. Acts 2:40-47 -- And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. NASU
- a. when the gospel was preached, people were saved
  - b. when they were saved, they were added to the number of those who were saved before them
4. This is reflected in other passages as well
- a. Rom 12:4-5 – one body, many members
  - b. 1 Cor 12:12 – many members, one body
  - c. Eph 4:4-6 -- There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. NASU

**D. Here is the issue boiled down as simply as I can make it**

1. The issue is salvation: saved people make up Christ's church; Christ's church is made up of saved people
2. If you're saved, your part of his church; if you're not saved, you're not part of his church
3. The church isn't what man has made it to be over the past 2,000 years
  - a. it isn't just an organized (or unorganized) administrative creation
  - b. it was never intended to be fractured, divided, and at odds with itself
  - c. it was not God's will that people create for themselves, or shop the Bible cafeteria style, for those doctrines that suited them
  - d. there may be plenty of room for a variety of traditional forms by which a local congregation operates, but not at the expense of being something different from what Jesus built

## II. THE IDEA THAT BAPTISM IS MERELY A TRADITION

A. The same reasons apply to the development of this idea as with the first point about the Church

B. Here's what people are confused about

1. There are multiple ways various churches practice baptism – immersion, pouring water on one's head, sprinkling water onto the person (the most common)
2. There is one single idea that seems pervasive among professing Christians today – that baptism is merely a church ritual, but has nothing to do with salvation.
  - a. most people believe and teach that baptism is not necessary or essential for salvation
  - b. our historical approach has been just the opposite – we've seen baptism as the "point" of salvation, the dividing line between the old life of sin and the new life in the Spirit
  - c. our conflict with our religious neighbors and friends have convinced some that baptism is overplayed and that it's really just our tradition, but not doctrinal

C. The fact is that the Bible directly connects baptism to salvation

1. 1 Peter 3:21 -- Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, NASU
2. Mark 16:16 -- "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. NASU
3. Acts 2:38 -- Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. NASU
4. Acts 2:41 -- So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. NASU
5. Acts 22:16 -- "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' NASU
6. Rom 6:3-4 -- Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. NASU

D. We are not talking about a tradition that is simply associated with our group of believers as opposed to the traditions having grown up around others – we're talking about doctrine, that which the Bible actually teaches us to believe and practice

## CONCLUSION

### A. There are other issues we could talk about, but we'll have to save them for another time.

1. Be careful of the traditions we develop – they might prove harmful
2. Be careful of doctrine, that we might be able to recognize it from tradition and not treat it as something dispensable
3. Pay particular attention to the two issues I talked about today, for regardless of whatever else we might not understand well, the issue of the nature of the church, and the importance of baptism cannot be overemphasized
4. These two concern the very issue of salvation itself and our identity as people with a true faith in Jesus Christ

### B. Invitation