

# A Time to Break Tradition

John Buttrey II

The request is heard from time to time in the church, "Let's break tradition." This is a desire by some to do things differently. The desired change in tradition may be as simple as changing the times or order of worship services on the first day of the week. Instead of meeting at 9:00, a group decides to meet at 9:30. If truly needed, such a change in tradition would be perfectly acceptable.

On other occasions, the desire to change tradition may involve some aspect of changing New Testament doctrine. A popular request for changing "tradition" is the desire of some to add instruments of music to the worship service. However, this is only one of a host of changes in "tradition" that are desired. Another type of change, along this line, would be changing the day of the week when the Lord's Supper is observed. Some religious groups have "changed tradition" in these and other areas. At the same time, they have changed inspired doctrine. Neither we, nor they, have the authority to make such changes to the inspired Scriptures (cf. 1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Jude 3). Since we have no authority to change, or add to, the Word of God, these types of changes in "tradition" would not be acceptable. Sadly, those who would refuse to allow such changes to inspired doctrine are labeled as "Traditionalists."

Traditions (whether those that do not involve doctrine, or even those which do) are often viewed in a negative light. However, Scripture reveals a positive and negative aspect to "traditions." For example, the apostle Paul praised the Corinthians because they had held firmly to the traditions Paul had delivered to them.

*Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you (1 Corinthians 11:2)*

In particular this case, "traditions" would represent God-given instruction (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). However, in Scripture, traditions do not always represent inspired doctrine. In the following example, tradition would represent man-made (as opposed to God-given) "doctrines."

*1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,*

*2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."*

*3 And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"*

*4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'he who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.'*

*5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,"*

*6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition (Matthew 15:1-6).*

Here is an example of the danger of man-made traditions (doctrines). They can cause the followers of the tradition (man-made law) to violate God's law. This is why it is essential for us to hold firmly to the inspired Word of God, and do not seek to change or add to it. We must avoid writing man-made creeds and books of doctrine.

Having talked about the danger of changing traditions (at least those which would be considered

inspired doctrine), I readily admit that there are some changes in tradition that need to be made in the local church. While some may be cheering at this point, there are others who are concerned about such a statement. I encourage all to read on. Please allow me to share some of the “traditions” that I believe need to be changed.

I believe it would be good to change our traditional habit of arriving late to worship services. Honestly, don't you think that would be a good change in tradition?

What is your tradition of daily Bible reading? If it is lacking, you would greatly benefit from such a change in tradition. Think about the value of daily involving yourself in the reading and/or study of the Word of God.

What is your tradition of daily time spent in prayer? Perhaps a change in personal tradition is needed with your attitude. Think how a change in tradition relating to your attitude would find you more positive, more trusting in God. Once again, a change here could be greatly beneficial to you.

While we might look to elders and evangelists to bring about changes in traditions in the church, we would all do well to examine our own personal traditions. We all have areas where improvement can be made. And just so we are clear, such personal examination is perfectly in keeping with the inspired traditions outlined in the Scriptures (Ps. 139:23-24; 2 Cor. 13:5; James 1:23-25). Yes indeed, it may be a time to break tradition.