Traditions Of God And Of Men

Intro: When man thinks of traditions in the religious realm, it generally carries a negative connotation. As a result, it has given rise to “change agents” within the church. They wish to change the “traditions” within the Lord’s church. We must realize that some traditions are good and some are bad and some are neither.

I. Definition Of Tradition:
   A. English word: (Universal Dictionary Of The English Language p.1278).
      1. “(legal) Act of handing over to, of delivering into the hands of, another; delivery.
      2. Belief, habit, practice, principle, handed down verbally from one generation to another, or acquired by each successive generation from the example of that preceding it.
      3. a. Doctrine, based on divine revelation, statement of alleged occurrence &c., transmitted orally though not recorded in documents, concerning matters of religious belief, or great religious teachers; b; belief in occurrence of events in the remote past of the history of a race, tribe, family, based upon oral transmission from generation to generation.
      4. Group of principles in art or letters based on the accumulated practice and experience of a series of generations.”
   B. Greek word:
      1. Comes from the Greek word παράδοσις (paradosis).
         a. It comes from παρά (para) meaning up or over; and δοσις (dosis) meaning to give or the act of giving.
         b. Thus it means to give up or give over.
      2. It came to mean a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing or that which has been handed down.

II. Traditions.
   A. The Bible applies traditions in two ways; traditions of men and traditions of God.
   B. Traditions Of Men.
      1. Mat. 15:1-9 “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. 3But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? 4For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. 5But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsover thou mightest be profited by me; 6And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. 7Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”
2. Col. 2:8 “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.”

3. Some traditions of men are sinful of themselves.
   a. drunkenness, fornication, etc.
   b. When the tradition contradicts God’s law.

4. Some traditions of men are matters of option—they are neutral.
   a. These are not sinful of themselves (the washing of hands in Mat. 15).
   b. When we teach these optional matters as matters of obligation, doctrine of God (the washing of hands in Mat. 15) it is sinful.

C. Traditions Of God.
1. 1 Cor. 11:2 “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.”
2. 2 The. 2:15 “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”
3. 2 The. 3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”
4. These traditions are binding or obligatory.
   a. These things consist of the faith.
      (1) Jude 3 “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”
      (2) Rom. 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
      (3) 2 Cor. 5:7 “(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)”
      (4) Phi. 3:16 “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”
   b. If we alter these traditions in any way we sin.

D. Traditions: Of God Or Of Man?
1. Singing without mechanical instruments of music.
2. Lord’s Supper only on Sunday.
3. Wednesday evening service.
4. Only men in leadership roles.
5. Foot washing, a holy kiss.
6. Prayer before the contribution, an invitation song, etc.

III. HOW DO WE DETERMINE?
A. We must determine whether a doctrine comes from God or is from man.
1. Col. 3:17 “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”
2. If it is from God we must hold it without change; 1 The. 5:21 “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”
B. What Some Are Saying:

1. Some people reject any type of form or pattern of doctrine.
   a. Rom. 6:17 “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”
   b. Heb. 8:5 “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.”
   c. 2 Tim. 1:13 “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

2. They argue:
   a. People are different (some are rich some are poor, some are educated some are not, some are Republicans some are Democrats, etc.).
   b. Since people are different, they will understand the Bible differently; the Bible is not objective truth but subjective in nature.
   c. Thus, if one person comes to an understanding that is different from mine—both are all right, both must be accepted and are accepted by God.
   d. They make everything a matter of tradition.

C. What determines whether a tradition is of God or of men?

1. This is a question of how does God authorize?
   a. By direct statement.
   b. By implication.
   c. By example.

2. Acts 15:
   a. Implication; Acts 15:7-11 (especially vs. 9) “And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”
   b. Example: Acts 15:12 “Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”
   c. Direct Statement: Acts 15:15 “And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,”
   d. In Galatians 2 we see the acceptance of this by an inspired man.

3. We must respect the silence of the Scriptures.
   a. Acts 15:24 “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:”
b. Heb. 1:5 "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"

c. Heb. 7:12-14 "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. 13 For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood."

4. Recognize some important distinctions.

a. Between the Old and New Testaments.
   (1) Within these two testaments there are three dispensations.
      (a) Patriarchal
      (b) Mosaic
      (c) Christian
   (2) The Old (both Patriarchal and Mosaic) is no longer the law we are under.
      (a) The Old was a temporary system to bring us to Christ; Gal. 3:24-25 “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”
      (b) Eph. 2:15 “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;”
      (c) Col. 2:14 “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;”

b. Between Faith and Opinion.
   (1) Faith is that which God reveals in the Bible.
   (2) Opinion is that human judgments.
   (3) I believe Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, I have an opinion as to why he came by night; John 3:2 “The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

c. Between Temporary and Permanent.
   (1) Some things were designed to continue till the end of this age; others were intended to serve in a specific capacity, temporary in nature and when their purpose was realized they passed away.
   (2) Miracles were temporary in nature until God completed His revelation to man (1 Cor. 13:8-13).
   (3) Water baptism for the forgiveness of sins was permanent in nature, not just a Jewish ritual.
      (a) Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
      (b) Acts 10:48 “And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”
d. Between Circumstance And Condition.
   (1) Baptism: The place is an incidental circumstance (Jordan River for example); the action (immersion as opposed to sprinkling or pouring) is a condition.
      (a) Mat. 3:13 “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.”
      (b) Acts 8:38-39 “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.”
   (2) Partaking the Lord’s Supper: Whether it is observed in an upper room (where Jesus instituted the Supper), on the third floor (Acts 20) or on the ground floor is simply an incidental circumstance; while the elements (unleaven bread and fruit of the vine) are conditional as is the day of the week (first day, Sunday) which points to Christ resurrection day.
      (a) Matt. 26:26-27 “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. 27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;”
      (b) Acts 20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

e. Between Means And Principle
   (1) This is the means by which a principle is taught. The principle is binding, the means is not.
   (2) The principle of sincerity is taught by the holy kiss (Rom. 16:16 “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.”)
   (3) While the miraculous gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 are not binding, the principles within the chapter of unity, importance of every member, etc. are binding.

f. Between Custom And Law.
   (1) The washing of feet was a common practice among sandal-wearing Jews for centuries. Jesus uses a custom of the people to teach a lesson to His apostles concerning greatness (John 13).
   (2) Paul’s teaching on the woman’s role in 1 Timothy 2 was based upon creation and man and woman’s role in the original fall (timeless principles not temporary customs).
      (a) 1 Tim. 2:11-12 “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”
      (b) 1 Tim. 2:13-14 “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”
IV. **SPECIAL AREAS OF CONCERN:**

A. **Instrumental Music.**
B. **Women’s role in the church.**
C. **Baptism for the remission of sins.**

Conclusion: We must determine the distinction between traditions of men and traditions of God, and hold to those traditions coming from God.