**HONORING THE PAST**

Sunday School Lesson 16

*FORMER THINGS*

Proverbs 22:28

5/22/2022

**Introduction:** Last week, we continued our series on *Former Things* by looking at the topic of honoring the past. The first question that had to be answered was whether it is Biblical to honor the past. The answer to this is a definite yes. We are to not only consider the past decisions of others who have gone on before us, but we are to give honor where honor is due. One of the key takeaways from this lesson is that it is not unscriptural to publicly honor people who have faithfully served the Lord. We must just be careful not to cast a stumbling block of pride before them as we honor them, and if we are the person doing the work, we must never do the work for the glory of men. If we do, then that glory is the only reward that we will get. After this, we also noted that we should honor the past by keeping the Godly landmarks in place. The application for us was to keep Biblical boundaries in the place. The Bible does not change, so the boundaries should not change. We must be consistent in opposing things that are sinful. The last thing that we observed in the lesson was that we honor the past by creating memorials to Godly work. Memorials help us to remember an event or person. The Bible is a holy Book that is filled with memorials that honor the work of God in the lives of various saints of God. This morning, we will be looking at our approach to the traditions of the past.

1. **WE HONOR THE PAST BY CONTINUING IN GODLY TRADITIONS.**
2. **Notice that a tradition is a custom or ritual that is passed down from one generation to the next, and traditions are helpful to walk orderly (1 Cor. 11:16; 14:40; Acts 21:19-26; 28:17; Psalm 37:23).** Every generation has been given traditions from those who have gone before them. That is simply the natural order of things. There is nothing new under the sun. The things that we are doing are the things that someone else has done before us. As we observed last week, nobody is a self-made individual. We are the results of someone who has instructed us in the way that we ought to go. Parents hand down their traditions to their children. One generation in the church hands down their traditions to the next generation. Most people who visit our church would call it a traditional church. This just simply means that we are not trying to recreate or reinvent church practice. We are just continuing in the order that was previously established. Order is a good thing. We know that God desires for things to be done decently and in order. He is not the author of confusion. We can see this in the instructions given throughout both the Old and New Testament. God was very particular in His instructions to Noah and to Moses.
3. **Notice that we are commanded to not only hold to the traditions we have been taught but also to withdraw from those who don’t walk after them (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6).** The church at Thessalonica was commanded to follow the traditions that they had been taught, and Paul went so far as to also command them to stay away from anyone who refused to follow those traditions. Was Paul having a momentary backsliding back into his Pharisaical ways? Of course not. This is a command given from the Holy Spirit of God. We honor the past by holding on to the traditions that have been given to us. Traditions are not bad in and of themselves. In fact, they are helpful in showing us a standard method or practice. As mentioned in the prior point, traditions are the practices that have been passed down to us from a previous generation. It is indisputably true that we have the Holy Spirit to show us in the way that we ought to go, but it is also indisputably true that Paul directly challenged the church in Corinth to be followers of him as he followed Christ. We can also see that the early church struggled in the area of Christian practice since they had few traditions to draw from; hence, the epistles were given.
4. **WE OUGHT TO TEST EVERY TRADITION AGAINST THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE.**

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1. **Notice that Jesus shows us an example of rejecting traditions that are unbiblical (Matthew 15:1-11; Mark 7:8-9; 1 Peter 1:18; Col. 2:8).** In Matthew 15, the Lord is confronted about His disciples not following the tradition of washing of hands before eating. His response was to address the willful disobedience of the Pharisees against God as a result of some of their traditions. They had created so many extra traditions that some of their practices had gone away from the very intent of the command that God had given to them. It’s easy for us to see 2,000 years later how foolish many of their traditions were, but if you were a devout Jew living at that time, you would probably not feel that way. Many of those traditions had been in place for centuries and even longer in some cases. Jesus certainly shook up the order of that day by rejecting some of their traditions, but did He do this just because He had liberty to do so? No, He did it because their traditions were contrary to the Word of God. There were many traditions that the Lord practiced during His earthly ministry, but His obedience was first to the Word.
2. **Notice that it only takes one wicked generation to alter or create traditions that are against the Lord and His Word (1 Kings 12:26-33; 14:22-23; Psalm 78:8; Lev. 18:24-30; Deut. 32:5-7).** As we think about traditions, we understand how difficult it is to preserve good traditions throughout the generations that pass on this earth. If the average generation is thirty-five years, then that means that we have seen over fifty-six generations pass from the early church at Jerusalem. That’s fifty-six different times where new or changed traditions could have passed on. How many generations does it take to pass along bad traditions like we find during Christ’s earthly ministry? The truth is that it only takes one wicked generation. If the first generation passes on good, Godly traditions that are held constant by every generation after that, then we would still have the same God-honoring traditions today. Sadly, we know that there are generations that pervert the way of the Lord and the right way that they have been taught of their fathers. This is why the Word of God must be the final authority on all traditions.
3. **WE OUGHT TO TEST EVERY TRADITION AGAINST ITS PURPOSE.**
4. **Notice that every tradition that we hold ought to be accompanied with purpose that is consistent with the will of God (Matt. 12:50; Mark 7:13; Luke 11:2; Gal. 2:14; 1 Cor. 10:23; 11:1-5; Ecc. 3:1).** Our desire and purpose ought to be the will of the Lord. Thus, we ought to examine our traditions to see if they align with the purposes of the Lord. Obviously, if the tradition is clearly commanded in the Bible, then this is not needed, as we must only trust that the Lord knows what is best for us. For traditions that are not clear commands from Scripture, we should search to see what purpose that tradition serves. We might find that the tradition actually runs counter to God’s clear purpose and will for us. If that is the case, we have no choice but to reject such a tradition. I believe this is what is meant when the Lord told the Pharisees that their traditions were making the Word of God of none effect. Some of their traditions were clearly anti-Biblical, but other traditions went against the very purpose of the tradition. The Sabbath day was a good example of this. What was the purpose of Sabbath-day traditions? (Mark 2:27)
5. **Notice that the issue may not be the purpose of the tradition but our lack of understanding (Matthew 26:8-10; 15:16-17; John 1:25-28; 1 Corinthians 11:20-21; Galatians 1:6).** We should understand that sometimes the issue is not the reason of the tradition but our reasoning of the tradition. There are some folks who have cast aside good traditions because they lacked understanding. They could not see the purpose even though it was there. As mentioned above, the Pharisees had ultimately altered traditions because they lacked the understanding of the traditions that had been given to them. If we reject Godly traditions because of our lack of understanding, then we will ultimately pass down traditions to the next generation that truly will be without purpose and out of alignment with God’s will. The church at Corinth had been given the tradition of observing the Lord’s Supper. They took that tradition and began to observe the Lord’s Supper with every meal. If Paul had not corrected them, that’s a tradition that we would have gotten passed down to us. They needed to have an understanding of the tradition.
6. **WE OUGHT TO EXAMINE OUR OWN PURPOSE IN REJECTING TRADITIONS.**
7. **Notice that the keeping or rejecting of traditions speaks to our association with a previous generation (Galatians 1:14; Proverbs 30:11-14; 2 Kings 17:14; Deut. 21:18).** When Paul was a Pharisee, he was very zealous of the traditions of his fathers. The book of Proverbs talks about a generation that essentially rejects everything that has been passed on to them. These are showing us extremes from both ends of the spectrum. The point being that our relationship with traditions shows what we think about the generation or generations that went before us. If we reject all of the traditions, then we are saying that the previous generation was wrong. If we follow all of the traditions, then we are saying that we think the generation before us got it all right. We must be careful that the rejecting of traditions is not done out of pride or a sense of superiority compared to those who have gone on before us. The Bible warns us about rebellion and being a generation who thinks we have it all figured out.
8. **Notice that we should consider whether our rejection of traditions is an inappropriate use of our liberty (1 Peter 2:16; Romans 1:29; 3 John 1:10).** The Bible warns that we are not to use our liberty as a cloke of maliciousness. I believe that we see this occur often in today’s Christianity. There are those who truly hate the traditional church. They hate everything about it, and they intentionally change every tradition that they can for no other reason than maliciousness. They will never present it that way because it is a cloak, but if you listen closely to their reasoning for the rejection of the traditions, it often reflects mostly their disdain for the traditional way. As a counter point, we should not follow traditions just to be pleasers of men either. This can definitely happen with independent, fundamental Baptists. We find ourselves doing things and holding traditions that have no practical purpose to the work of God other than to please those who have gone before us or who currently hold to such traditions.