

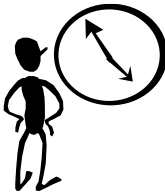
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.

Every other Sunday night:

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Traditions and Doctrine

By Al Diestelkamp

A recent visit with a young gospel preacher brought about a discussion regarding his concerns for the direction he's witnessing among some preachers of his generation—those about the age of my grandchildren. He specifically mentioned the inclination to change any practice among brethren that falls in the category of “our traditions.”

Brethren young and old understand that human traditions are not to be considered on a par with doctrine, and are subject to change. Hopefully, we also understand that such traditions are not inherently wrong, nor are they necessarily beneficial.

I realize that the desire for change is especially appealing to the young. After all, like the psalmist, “I have been young, and now am old” (Psa. 37:25), and I remember that youthful urge. Hopefully the young will live long enough to realize that with age comes comfort in familiarity.

It is usually young people who will advocate “change for the sake of change,” while the older generation often embraces the “don't fix what isn't broken” approach. Both have some merit. It may be that some long-standing traditions if left in place indefinitely, could become viewed as “binding.” On the other hand, if a traditional practice has proven itself to be edifying, to insist on change may actually prove to be unprofitable.

Of course, if a tradition is found to be unscriptural, or detrimental to the work of the Lord, both young and old must be prepared to embrace change. When change is neither right nor wrong scripturally, it ought to be handled with care and concern for one another. The apostle Peter said it well: “Likewise you younger people be submissive to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed

with humility...” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Our discussion led to other matters of concern. I wondered if some of our unique doctrinal stances—those unlike the larger religious community—are being neglected. For instance, when was the last time you heard a sermon about why our worship in song is not accompanied by mechanical instruments? I wonder if we are raising a generation that views acapella singing as merely one of “our cherished traditions.” If so, a future generation will likely want to scrap that “tradition” and will resist any scriptural teaching on the subject.

Another doctrinal issue that seems to be getting less attention in our pulpits is the part baptism plays in salvation. I am not saying that every sermon should focus on the necessity of baptism, but it should be emphasized frequently. False teachers are out there convincing people they can be saved by just believing in Jesus and saying a “sinner’s prayer.” We must not fail to refute this lie! If we don’t, who will?

There also appears to be a trend among some brethren to blur the distinction between churches with people who have been “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) and other churches filled with zealously upright people who have embraced the doctrines of “faith only,” “once-saved, always-saved,” and other errors of Calvinism. Admiration for their religious leaders and theologians who believe and actively promote doctrinal error leave an impression of endorsement and implies they are worthy of our fellowship.

Some among us who become infatuated with the evangelical movement eventually leave us and join such churches. Too often when this happens some brethren are unwilling to “note” and “avoid” them as “those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine” (Rom. 16:17). If along with us in Christ’s kingdom there are also “faith-only Christians,” that makes us just one denomination among many. If “we’re ok, they’re ok” there’s no need to even try to refute their doctrinal inaccuracies.

It has become quite popular in recent years for churches formerly affiliated with mainline denominations to break away from those organizations and claim to be “non-denominational.” This is a step in the right direction, but they have not actually abandoned the denominational concept. In fact, some of them have since formed affiliations not unlike the organizations they left. Others remain independent but maintain fellowship with other evangelical groups.

Most of our readers worship with other Christians in congregations that have long claimed to be non-denominational. Given the popularity and misuse of this term, our claim to be “non-denominational” may not be as accurate as we intend. Perhaps one tradition worthy of change would be to scrap the “non-denominational” designation in favor of “undenominational.”

Preaching truth and opposing error does not have to be harsh or unkind in order

for it to be effective. Given the fact that it is becoming increasingly rare for people in religious error to even visit our assemblies, some might suggest that such preaching in our assemblies is like “preaching to the choir” (even though choirs are not part of our “tradition”). Agreed, there is a time to move beyond “the elementary principles” (Heb. 6:1-2) to other matters. However, this didn’t deter the apostle Peter from reminding Christians of truth that they already knew—truth in which the disciples were established (2 Pet. 1:12).

Just as our “often” observance of the Lord’s supper reminds us of the death of Christ while at the same time serving as a proclamation to unbelievers (1 Cor. 11:26), frequent reminders of how we were “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27) serve to teach unbelievers how to be saved.

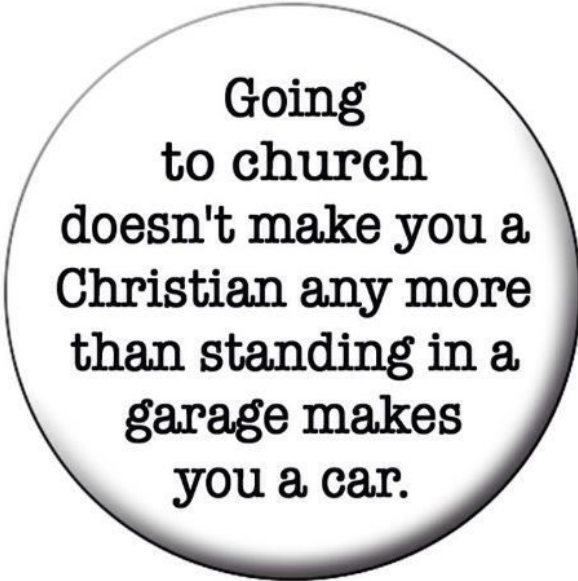
The Fight is On

By Al Diestelkamp

Edmund Burke is quoted as saying, “All that is required for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing.” We know that in the end God will triumph over evil despite what men do or do not do, but in the meantime, here on this earth, evil will triumph if we don’t do anything.

That evil will increase if good men fail to stand against it has been proven time and again. Much of the increase of evil in our nation can be attributed to this failure. God warned through Solomon that “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11).

The same is true in the increase in religious error. Apostasy comes when good men fail to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12) and do not “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3). Indeed, the battle against evil in every form is the Lord’s battle—and make no mistake about it—He will win! The question is, which side will we be on when the final victory is celebrated?



**Going
to church
doesn't make you a
Christian any more
than standing in a
garage makes
you a car.**

Learning from Overlooked Details

By Steve Wolfgang

As part of my morning devotional, a recent reading was "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*" (I Peter 1:1 ESV).

I am fascinated by the geography of the opening verse. It prevents me from blitzing through in order to get to “more important” things.

Find a map. Nearly every print Bible has them, and with good reason. Digital versions offer even greater possibilities.

Have you ever wondered why the Spirit would forbid Paul to preach the word in these regions, as we saw in Acts 16:6-10? Why send him on to Europe when souls much closer needed saving in Asia Minor?

Paying attention to often-overlooked details, we can also recall from reading through Romans (Romans 15:18-21 in particular) that Paul’s defense of his role as an “*apostle to Gentiles*” was that he was called to preach where Christ had not been named, “*lest I should build on another’s foundation.*” Here’s our clue: Since Peter evidently already had a relationship with those in Bithynia and neighboring provinces, Paul was instructed to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Peter attends to those in these regions, reminding them, and us today, to “*set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’*” (I Peter 1:13-16).

What opportunities will God provide for me, and you, to speak a good word for the Lord today? Tomorrow? Are we prepared to share the hope and grace given us by revelation which dispels our former ignorance? And is our conduct holy, reflecting the One who called us?

“*This word is the good news that was preached to you*” (I Peter 1:25).

