

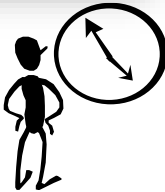
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Bible Study | 9:00 a.m. |
| Worship | 10:00 a.m. |
| Worship | 5:00 p.m. |
| (every other week) | |

Wednesday:

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| Bible Study | 6:30 p. m. |
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"It Doesn't Say Not To"

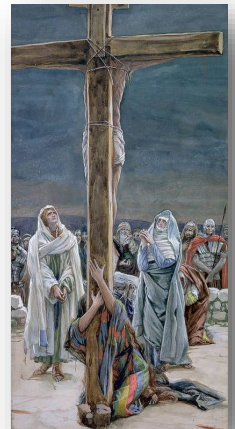
By Greg Gwin

Imagine this: you walk into a fast-food restaurant and order a hamburger, fries, and a coke - the all-American meal! But then, you notice that it seems to take an unusually long time to get your food. Finally, the gal at the counter brings up your order - piles of food on three separate trays! "What's all of this?" you ask. "Well," answers the waitress, "it's one of every item on our menu. Your bill comes to \$85.68." You protest: "I didn't tell you to bring me all of that food!" "But" she replies, "you didn't tell me not to."

Could this happen? Of course not! We all know that when you specify what you want, you automatically eliminate other options. We operate with this understanding every day. In fact, this logic is so standard, that we don't even think about it. When you order something from a catalog, or call in a pizza, or write a grocery list, you naturally assume that it is understood that you want only what is specified, and nothing else.

What's the point of all this? Simply that in religious matters we ought to employ the same logic. God has perfectly revealed through His word what He wants us to do in His service. We should naturally assume that since He has told us what He wants, other things ought to be left out.

For instance: What about music in worship? The New Testament specifies singing - there is no mention of instrumental music in New Testament worship. Since God has told us to sing, and nothing else, we ought to do just that. Someone answers, "But it doesn't say not to play instruments." The Scriptures don't have to say not to - that's the whole point!



On the Open Sea

By Jefferson David Tant

It is midnight as I begin writing — midnight on the open sea. Most of the ship's passengers are asleep as we move quietly through the water. I just stepped outside in the brisk night air and scanned the star-studded heavens. What a clear view of God's creation — the myriad of stars, each having been named by its Creator (Psalms 147:4). Each star has a purpose and is guided in its course through the heavens by the will of God. What a majestic universe in which we live. *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Psalms 8:3-4).

Various thoughts flooded my mind as I gazed at the heavens and across the sea. In the distance, I could make out four points of light — other ships making their way to their destinations. Each is guided by the sure hand of its pilot. This leviathan of the sea on which I am sailing carries over 3,500 souls who have entrusted their safety to the pilot. He has a sure guide on which he can rely. Ancient mariners used the sextant, plotting their course by the position of the heavenly bodies. Modern mariners rely on more sophisticated instruments, but they all take their cue from the things God has made — whether the compass that relies on the earth's magnetic poles or the global positioning systems that rely on the laws of physics that God set in place at creation. On occasion, we have passed through rough seas, but our pilot kept us securely on the course, and there was no reason to fear. He has been this way before and therefore is a reliable guide in whom we can have the utmost confidence.

In the passage of life, we also have a sure pilot. Our Lord has been this way before and thus can direct us through calm and stormy seas. Peter said that Christ had left us an example to follow (I Peter 2:21), and if we will put our trust in him, the writer of Hebrews said we would have no reason to be afraid. *"Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: What shall man do unto me?"* (Hebrews 13:5-6). If I were to guide our ship to its destination, we would all be in big trouble, and so it is in life. "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Therefore, we are admonished to *"Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, And lean not upon thine own understanding"* (Proverbs 3:5). He will safely pilot us. The old song pleads "Jesus, Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea..."

At this moment we are passing through the Mediterranean Sea. What a majestic sight we witnessed on the island of Santorini. Words are inadequate to describe the scene, and even photographs cannot fully capture the magnificence of the deep blue sea,

the white buildings clinging to the cliffs of the island, and the charm of the people who inhabit this part of the world. Truly, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork”* (Psalms 19:1).

The sea is teeming with fish and the birds of the air number in the thousands. The mountains have an abundance of all manner of living things, both great and small. And God knows each one of them. *“I know all the birds of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine”* (Psalms 50:11).

We have a saying about something (or someone) that is old, that it is “as old as the hills.” Some might think that these islands and mountains have been here forever. But we know there was an existence even before they were born. *“Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God”* (Psalms 90:2).

Our great vessel has turned towards its next destination, and in a few days, we will be home. Home is a special place in every language and nation, and reminds us of that eternal home that our Savior has gone to prepare for us. *“Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go, ye know the way”* (John 14:1-3). If we will all follow the pilot, we'll all be there one day.

Tradition, Feeling, and Scripture

By Doy Moyer

Tradition is basically what has been handed down for the next generation to believe and practice. There is nothing wrong with that. Teachings and practices are meant to be passed down. Indeed, tradition is necessary and unavoidable, and no one is without traditions of some kind (including any who claim to dislike tradition). Since we need to be careful in our thinking about it, let's distinguish three types of tradition. Any tradition can fall into these basic categories:

Truth. This is a tradition that is to be accepted as truth, and truth is to be passed down through the generations. This is one reason why the Lord wanted His people to teach their children diligently *“when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up”* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). The purpose of teaching is to pass along the truth to others. Paul wrote, *“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter”* (II Thessalonians 2:15; cf. 3:6). We are not at liberty to set aside apostolic tradition because we prefer something else. Tradition as truth should be upheld and practiced, for failure to do so will put us out of line with God's revealed will.

Error. Erroneous traditions can also be passed down, but the standard for judging this is not subjectively determined. A tradition is not right or wrong based on whether I personally like or dislike it. If a tradition runs counter to God's expressed will, it needs to be abandoned. Jesus chastised the Pharisees for setting aside the word of God "*for the sake of your tradition*" (Matthew 15:6). Not all traditions are biblically defensible and if what we accept as traditions neglect, alter, or deny the Spirit's word, they need to go away.

Choice. Many, if not most, traditions are neither necessary on the one hand nor wrong on the other, and we must allow for variance. These traditions do not violate God's word and fall within what is authorized generally, though they are not to be seen as required either. When we require what is not necessary on the one hand or deny choice on the other, we divide God's people and elevate ourselves to the status of the Lord. The choice must be recognized while, at the same time, respecting the consciences of others. There are limits, but, again, these limits are not defined by personal likes and dislikes.

Let's stress this point. We must be careful to make sure that traditions fall under the authority umbrella of God's revealed will as given by the Holy Spirit. No matter how old or new the traditions are, they are not autonomous and free from critique. The recognition of the word of God as the sword of the Spirit is important here (Ephesians 6:17), for people often conflate personal feelings with the Holy Spirit. Once that door is opened, anyone can claim any feelings as coming from the Spirit. Yet the word of the Spirit does not indicate that personal feelings are the test of whether something comes from Him. Even if the feelings did come from Him (and how would we prove that?), they would not be in violation of His written revelation, for God does not lie or contradict Himself. There is a reason God gave a standard that can be evaluated without the personal feelings and desires of one or a few being the final standard for all. Think of Paul's point here: "*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!*" (Galatians 1:9) Any tradition, teaching, or feeling ought to be evaluated by what is consistent with the revealed word. Not quenching the Spirit or despising prophetic utterance is tempered by examining everything carefully and holding fast to that which is good while abstaining from every form of evil (I Thessalonians 5:19-21). Feelings are not the proper judge of what is good and evil, for they are often fickle and selfish.

Jesus' rebuke to the Pharisees shows that Scripture and tradition are not to be equated. No tradition, no matter its age, has the power to set aside the Holy Spirit's given revelation. If the Pharisees could make "void the word of God" for the sake of tradition, so might we if we elevate tradition to the same status as the Holy Spirit's word. When tradition is elevated to the same status as Scripture, it probably will not be long

before the tradition is elevated over Scripture — tradition swallows Scripture if it operates autonomously. However, tradition does not limit Scripture, but Scripture limits tradition.

Scripture is primary as a revelation of God's mind (1 Cor 2:9-16). We cannot say that a tradition is given by the Spirit if that tradition negates what the Spirit Himself has revealed. Let us never "leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8), for unbound tradition, free from the restraints of God's word, reflects our will, not God's.

How is Your Faith?

By Marvin Noble

Is your faith as strong as it used to be? Do you pray as often and with as much fervor as you once did? Do you enjoy the peace that passes understanding? When making choices for the use of your time, energy, or money are you able to put the Lord first? Are you courageous in declaring your faith?

These are important questions because faith is an absolute essential to our spiritual survival. "We walk by faith." We "live by faith!" The Hebrews writer warns that unbelief can cause us to depart from God (Heb. 3:12). If you see within you signs of a weakening faith, you would do well to identify the danger.

Here are some threats to our faith: It is a sign of possible danger when a Christian becomes lax in studying the Word.

(Remember, "faith comes by hearing the word of God" (Rom. 10:17.) Have you placed yourself in faith situations? Hebrews 3:13 tells us we can become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. The company we keep, the material we read, the television we watch can gradually change our appetites, aspirations, and convictions. We may have even deceived ourselves into thinking that we have not weakened, but when in reality we have become blind to our great danger.

If you see that your faith is threatened, meet the danger. "Abstain from every form of evil." Schedule some time for daily study and meditation of the Word. Seek out companions who encourage growth in faith. Exercise and perfect your faith by use--with all your might practice what you believe. Eternity hangs in the balance. What will you do about it?

