

# Traditions and Customs

Colossians 2:18-23

Introduction: This is the time of year when the world is wrapped up in traditions. Since we are in the world, but not of the world (1 Cor. 5:10), it seems inevitable that the question will arise, “Is it wrong to participate in a worldly custom or tradition?” (i.e. Would it be wrong to put a tree up at Christmas; go Easter egg hunting; go trick-or-treating at Halloween; send a valentine card or even dress in green on St. Patrick’s Day?)

I. The Bible warns us not to adopt worldly traditions into our worship to God.

A. Man’s traditions can cheat us out of heaven (Col. 2:8). Paul rebukes the practice of man-made traditions in religion (Col. 2:18-23). He asks, “Why do you subject yourselves to regulations... according to the commandments and doctrines of men?”

B. We are not redeemed by our traditions (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

1. Worldly traditions equate to aimless conduct.

2. Peter infers Christians were participating in these traditions.

C. If we add any traditions to God’s word, we stand condemned (Rev. 22:18-19). Therefore, we cannot incorporate any unauthorized tradition or custom into our religious practice (i.e. Christmas trees, easter decorations, etc.).

II. Are all traditions wrong?

A. You might think so after reading Mark 7:5-9, 13. There is nothing wrong with washing your hands but to place a tradition ahead of God’s law is wrong.

B. There are traditions we must keep (2 Thes. 2:15; 1 Cor. 11:2). The distinction is whether the tradition was man made or God given in observance of God’s will.

III. Can Christians participate in worldly traditions?

A. We have evidence of Paul keeping old traditions (Acts 18:18). In fact, we find the Elders in Jerusalem advising Paul and others to cut their hair in observance of tradition while telling the Gentiles not to keep the same custom (Acts 21:20-26).

B. Paul made it his custom to go to the synagogue **EVERY Sabbath** (Acts 18:4; 13:13-14). Paul converted many people by observing this tradition (Acts 13:42-49).

C. Paul said he did nothing against the Jewish traditions (Acts 28:17).  
[*Infer the washing of hands and plates.*]

D. Paul taught that worldly customs (circumcision) mean nothing but what is important is keeping the Lord's commandments (1 Cor. 7:18-19). In fact, Paul had Timothy circumcised in observance of Jewish tradition so that Timothy might reach the lost (Acts 16:3).

E. It comes down to authority! Are we authorized to observe a custom or tradition in worship to God?

IV. Can a Christian participate in a designated holiday (Holy day) by the world?

A. The observance of a day is an individual decision (Rom. 14:5-13).

B. As pointed out earlier, Paul kept old traditions regarding days while living under the New Law (Acts 18:4; 13:13-14, 42-49; 28:17).

C. Does it matter where the observance of a day originated? Most all holidays originated in pagan or religious error.

- Valentine – the celebration of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian martyr.
- St. Patrick's Day – the celebration of a Catholic Cardinal who converted most of Ireland to Catholicism.
- Christmas – the celebration of Christ's birth through Catholic and pagan traditions.
- New Years – the date was established by Pope Gregory as January 1 in 1582. American colonies didn't accept this date until 1752.
- Easter – the celebration of Christ's resurrection through pagan traditions.
- Thanksgiving – pilgrim's celebration to thank God for a bountiful harvest.
- Halloween – "all hallows day" or "all saints day" established in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and promoted through pagan tradition.
- Even our days of the week once had religious significance (Sun Day, Moon Day, Thor's Day, Saetern's Day).
  1. If we can't observe one holiday because of its origins, then we should not observe any of them.
  2. Observance of any holiday as a religious event would be wrong because it lacks authority (Col. 2:18-23).
  3. If the observance of a holiday is placed ahead of God's laws it would also be wrong (Col. 2:8; like missing church to go trick or treating – Heb. 10:25).

Conclusion: Is it wrong to participate in a worldly custom or tradition? If you observe any tradition or day to the neglect of God's will, it would be wrong. Otherwise, it is an individual decision.