

The Traditions

"Now I praise you that ye remember me in all things and stand fast in the traditions even as I delivered them unto you" (1 Cor. 11:2).

With these words the apostle now turns to a new subject, leaving the matter of liberty which, in deference to the conscience of weak brethren, one must be willing to forfeit in order to save that weak one. This principle he applied to the eating of meats offered to idols, for, all meats will neither commend nor condemn us to God, and, save for the explicit prohibition of eating such in an idol's temple, could be purchased in the market place or else eaten at a feast in a pagan's home. However, were one to say, "This hath been offered in sacrifice" the Christian should refrain from eating. Thus Paul commanded, *"Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1)*. Paul surrendered his liberties to avoid offending brethren. *"Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of the many that they might be saved" (1 Cor. 10:23)*. To this same end he urged brethren, *"Be ye imitators of me."* But that subject of meats sacrificed to idols has been explored and dispensed with. Now the apostle takes up another matter brethren needed instructions about.

The way Paul writes sounds much as if he were responding to a comment from the Corinthians saying, "Paul, we remember and keep the traditions you delivered us." Such may not be the case, but the way the sentence is structured, is seems as though it were.

The word *"tradition"* is one of those words which leaves a bad taste in one's mouth. We think of Jesus' words to His nation, *"Ye leave the commandment of God and hold fast the traditions of men."* When the Pharisees asked Jesus, *"Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (Mt. 15:2)*, Jesus' response to them was, *"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?" (Mt. 15:3)*. He concluded the exchange by stating, *"In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:9)*.

The word *"tradition"* literally means "that which is handed down." Not all traditions of men are wrong. It was not wrong to wash one's hands before one eats; it is wrong to make such a practice a condition of salvation or condemnation. But when one's traditions leads him to set aside the law of God, his traditions are wrong.

The way our passage (*"Now I praise you that ye remember me in all things and hold fast the traditions, even as I delivered them unto you"*) is postured leaves a little uncertainty as to whether his commendation was in relationship to something he had already discussed or is a reference to things which is about to follow. We rather believe that the commendation had reference to the topics he was about to discuss. In this chapter he speaks of two different traditions or teachings he had given them. The first he first mentions was the head covering; the second related to the Lord's Supper. In the first of these traditions they followed his instructions; the second they deviated from, earning from him a severe rebuke.

The two topics dealt with in chapter 11 illustrate the fact that in some cases tradition is to be observed in order not to offend a prevailing custom; in some cases such as the Lord's Supper, the tradition comes from God and we must follow what is handed down or bring judgment upon ourselves. In this same light Paul wrote the Thessalonians, *"So then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word or by epistle of ours."* *"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 traditions which they received of us"* (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6).

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