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SUCH DEDICATION

The Temple lay desecrated. There seemed to be no defense against the enemy; no hope. It seemed for a while like God had deserted his people. Never mind that Daniel had predicted this in precise detail. Never mind that he had promised this would not be the end. When one feels so utterly defeated it is hard to listen even to the prophet of God.

Then something strange, even miraculous, happened. A blow was struck against the enemy. Then more blows, until he was reeling. Out of the despair of ruin and desecration, victory became a possibility, then a certainty. The enemy was pushed back. Jerusalem was once again free. The Temple could be cleaned out, a new altar built. Beginning on the 25th day of the month of Kislev, and for seven days thereafter, the Temple was rededicated. God was worshipped openly again. The dedication was to become an annual celebration, for the next 300 years commonly called the Feast of Dedication. After that time it also became known as the Feast of Lights.

Chanukah can be seen as a parallel to human existence. God's people are under attack. Those attacks from outside are minor compared to the assault by the real enemy. The devil may use external political or social forces to attack God's people, but more often he realizes that those forces tend to strengthen the resolve of the believers. The real attacks come from his use of *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination. It is this inclination that Rabbi Saul so aptly describes.

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in

my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

The devil uses our own inclinations in his greatest attacks. He doesn't need external forces; he uses ourselves against ourselves. We become that desecrated Temple, our altars fouled by unclean sacrifices.

Nevertheless, there is hope. There is also the *yetzer tov*, the inclination toward good (or God) within us. We can choose to turn to God rather than the abuse of our own inclinations. We can turn to God for cleansing of our temple. As someone fittingly observed, sometimes our disappointment is His appointment. Our failures bring us to the feet of God. Our disappointment is God's appointment to meet in prayer. David knew this full well. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. ... When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." (Ps 73:2, 16-17) He ends that psalm, "it is good for me to draw near to God."

The gloom and despair that God's people felt before that first Chanukah turned into a celebration of dedication. It would be easy to give in to the gloom of seeming defeat in our lives. Many people do. But God wants better for us. We can become a light to the world, a dedicated temple in service to the God we serve. Chanukah reminds us not to give up; not to give in. We can, with God's help, clean out the filth and rededicate our lives. It has happened before.

Chanukah is December 9-16 in 2012.

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A TRADITION OF TRADITION

“How do we keep our balance. That I can tell you in one word: Tradition.” Tevye, in “Fiddler on the Roof,” understood that tradition is a vital part of human existence. If “three times is a tradition,” then much of our lives consist of traditions. We may have a traditional route to work, a traditional meal on one or more days, or even a tradition of what clothes to wear. We cannot escape our traditions.

Throughout this series of articles on traditions in the churches, of which this is intended to be the last, the thought has been repeated that traditions are neither bad nor good, unless one places tradition over the word of God. When we make the commands of men equal to the commands of God, then we overstep our bounds.

And yet, as has also been mentioned, the churches of the Restoration Movement that began in America in the middle 1800s have often expressed a three-fold standard for doctrine. It is usually worded as “direct command, necessary inference, or apostolic example.” Direct command is often pretty simple; it is not tradition, it is law. Necessary inference is a little more nebulous. What is a necessary inference, and what is one inference among many or none? Still, one should be able to prove that an

Some like to say all traditions are wrong. Jesus reserved his disapprobation for specific traditions.

inference necessarily follows the facts in question. Apostolic example, however, can be expressed as “tradition, but only if the tradition goes back to the first century.” This view says we can follow Paul when he says, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” (2 Thes 2:15)

Even the phrase “apostolic example” is sometimes inaccurate. We pick and choose which examples we want to consider authoritative, and which traditions we want to reject. Is Sunday assembly truly an apostolic example, a practice of the church which an apostle adapted to his own purpose, or simply an assumption on our part based on more recent tradition? Which traditions of the first-century church are apostolic examples and which are mere congregational examples? Thus the difficulty in determining whether a tradition is doctrine or not.

An older tradition of tradition

While the Restoration churches insist on the validity of certain traditions, they often look down upon those who follow older traditions. The rabbis speak of the written Law and the oral Law. The written *Torah* is found in the Books of Moses (the Pentateuch). But, they say, when Moses was on the mountain, God gave him much more than the written law. He also gave him interpretations of the law, some of which we even see in Deuteronomy, beyond what was written. These interpretations, the Oral Law, were handed down from priest to priest until it was eventually written down as Talmud about 200 years after Jesus.

Actually, this is not a bad way of doing things. When I was in high school my one and only foray into political action was as part of a group called “Students for a Constitutional Convention.” The constitution of the State of New Mexico had grown cumbersome and needed simplified. Unlike the United States constitution, which still fits in a small pamphlet even after its several amendments, the New Mexico constitution had grown very specific. On many issues the constitution had been amended rather than a law simply being passed. Laws that should have been part of the New Mexico Code were incorporated as amendments to the constitution such that the document consisted of a thick volume rather than a small pamphlet. Our argument was that a constitution should be the basic law of the land, and that the details of how that constitution was administered made up the various laws. Not only was a simpler constitution less cumbersome to read, the laws were less difficult to modify. It is sometimes easier to get the legislature to change a law than it is to get the populace of the state to approve an amendment.

Similar arguments are proposed for the Oral Law. One could read the law of sabbath in general. Most people could understand and follow that. But if finer points of the law needed to be enforced they could rely on the oral law. Some may argue that subsequent rabbis legislated where Moses had no idea of the need for legislation. Examples cited often include not turning on an electric light or not starting a car on sabbath, or whether an electric razor is a razor or a scissors. Nevertheless, God did not include all the fine points of law in the Bible.

Where Jesus balked on the matter was when traditions were obviously developed or used to transgress clear commandments. Some like to say all traditions are wrong. Jesus, however, reserved his disapprobation for specific traditions. There were two times (actually one incident) the gospel writers quoted him as saying, “In vain

do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” Matthew and Mark quote that in relation to the practice of not supporting parents by dedicating what would have gone to their support to the Temple. (Matthew 15, Mark 7) The underlying discussion in both gospels was the tradition of washing before eating even the smallest morsel. Jesus was not objecting to many traditions, but to those that countermanded the teachings of God. In fact, he regularly participated in the tradition of the synagogue.

The danger in advocating for doctrine based on the Restoration triumvirate is that someone might call it hypocrisy. To accept specific traditions of one time period but to reject older or younger traditions leaves one open to question. Why, for instance, are the Amish ridiculed for traditions of dress dating to the 1800s, but we expect not to be ridiculed for traditions much older? Why do some ridicule Mosaic example but insist on following apostolic example?

Example or instance?

Which apostolic examples are we to accept and which reject? If the apostles could be shown to have practiced foot washing as part of their worship, would we accept that as a required tradition? (Although we have direct command from Jesus to the apostles to wash each other’s feet, any example of it being practiced in the church would come from outside the Bible.) Do direct commands from the apostles bear the weight of command, or of example? (Since Jesus gave them the power of binding and loosing, it appears that they bear the weight of command.)

The real difficulty, though, lies in determining what is a binding example and what is a singular instance. Paul regularly travelled by boat. Is that a binding example? Or is it simply an instance based on the available modes of transportation of the time? If there had been air travel at the time and Paul insisted on going by boat, that might be a binding example or it might be a case of aviophobia. So it is with a number of things we read in the New Testament. Does Acts 2:47 serve as a binding example that Christians should meet in the Temple (if the Temple were still standing) and eat together (or possibly take the Lord’s Supper) in each other’s houses every day? Or is it simply a statement of what the Jerusalem church did at the first? When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, was that binding on us or is it merely an example in the specific of a hospitality we are to practice in a more generic form? How much of what we read in the New Testament is based on the culture of the day, and how much is binding across cultures? How much is binding on us as a whole, and how much was based on a single congregational practice.

Throw them all out

This might lead one to say that we should throw out all traditions outright; nothing for which we do not have direct command or necessary inference should be part of the church. Such an idea is practically impossible. Traditions are such a natural part of life it might be difficult to even separate tradition from command.

Furthermore, it is such an emotional issue. As soon as you try to establish that Sunday assembly is purely a tradition, someone will dig in and present (traditional) arguments that it is an absolute requirement. If a church of Christ failed to offer the Lord’s Supper once a week, or attempted to offer it more often in a week, how many people would change congregations? If we said that a sermon was a tradition we could dispense with, how many (other than the preachers) would jump on that bandwagon? We like our traditions, and defend them, while denigrating those traditions we don’t like. Perhaps the emotional aspect is what kept Jehu from fully following God. “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law

If a command, to whom?
If an inference, is it
necessary? If an
example, is it universal?

of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.” (2 Kings 10:31) He successfully rid Israel of one group of idol worshippers, but continued to allow people to worship at the golden calves Jeroboam had set up. After all, that was the representative of God with which he was familiar; destroy another tradition, but don’t mess with mine.

As previously stated, we cannot eliminate all traditions. The triune formula for evaluating doctrine is still valid. It just needs some practical application. If it is a direct command, to whom was it given? Was it expected to be universal? (Not everyone needs to make an ark of gopher wood, whatever that is.) If it is an inference, is it necessary? Is it the only logical conclusion to draw from the entirety of scripture, or is it one possibility among many? If it is an apostolic or first-century church example, is it universal or only practiced by a small number of congregations? Can that even be determined through scripture or ecclesiastical history?

“Tradition. Tradition. Without our traditions our lives would be as shaky as...as a fiddler on a roof.” But sometimes our traditions are just as shaky.

PAVLOVA

3 egg whites at room temperature
1/8 tsp cream of tartar
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/2 cup sugar
2 kiwifruit, sliced
1 or 2 bananas, sliced
Several strawberries, sliced
Whipped cream or non-dairy whipped topping

Preheat oven to 300°

1. Line a springform pan with brown paper or parchment paper.
2. In a medium bowl beat egg whites, cream of tartar, and vanilla with an electric mixer on medium speed until soft peaks form (tips curl).
3. Add sugar, one tablespoon at a time, while beating on high speed until stiff peaks form (tips stand straight). This takes about 5-7 minutes.
4. With silicone spatula, scoop meringue into pan. Bake in oven 35 minutes. Turn off oven and leave meringue in oven for one hour.
5. Remove from pan carefully. Store in airtight container until ready to use.
6. To serve, top with whipped topping. Lay strawberries, bananas, and kiwifruit in a pleasing design on top. Add more whipped topping if desired. Serve immediately.
7. If any remains, store in refrigerator in airtight container no more than two days. Meringue will turn soft.

Note: When topping with fruit, use kiwifruit not kiwi. A kiwi is either a bird or a native of New Zealand. The bird tends to be too tough for a Pavlova, and eating the person would be cannibalism.

Pavlova was invented in New Zealand, but quickly appropriated as a national dessert of Australia. Some people use other fruits, such as peaches, but these are the ones I learned to use in Australia, and so I continue to use them. Besides, they are my favorite fruits.

The hard part about making a Pavlova, or any meringue, is that you cannot rush the process. Egg whites are sensitive; they require just the right amount of beating and will fall apart with anything less.

The same can be said about spiritual matters. Some people are like egg whites when it comes to learning to follow God. They require patient care. If you beat (teach) too hard at first, they will not rise to the occasion, but will fall away. If you don't teach long enough they will never reach heavenly perfection. You may have to add sugar slowly; they need to be aware of their sin before they can accept that they need salvation. But they also need to know the sweetness of a life in Christ. And once they begin a life in Christ, they still need to be handled with care.

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)