

## Tradition vs Faith & Love

1. Luke 19:41 – 48 Jesus wept over Jerusalem
  - a. History
    - 1) The Essenes (who had their own doctrinal difficulties) refused to participate in Temple activities because the leadership and practices of the Temple were corrupt. The vast majority of their complaints were accurate.
    - 2) Jesus, and later the apostles, participated in Temple activities and submitted to its leadership while being clear about the shortcomings of each.
    - 3) Jesus, in the “cleansing of the Temple” scenes here and in the other gospels, acted against common practice. Later, the apostles challenged an order from the leaders (Acts 4:19 – 20, 5:29 – 32) on the basis of logic and the ability to perform miracles, to which the leaders conceded (Acts 4:21 – 22, 5:38 – 39).
  - b. Application to the modern church
    - 1) We participate in church traditions that divert participants from the point.
    - 2) Many arbitrarily divide practices into “essential” and “expedient” which does not solve anything but does promote division.
    - 3) Challenging tradition just because it is tradition impedes learning.
    - 4) Christians have been granted the wisdom to know when to challenge harmful tradition and when to let it go. Transformation is promised (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:13, Hebrews 12:23, *et al*). Understanding is promised ((1 Corinthians 2:9 – 12, Ephesians 1:17 – 19, Colossians 1:9, *et al*).
    - 5) But, we need to leave room for growth (*e.g.*, 2 Peter 1:5 – 7) and remember cautions about our own conclusions (Romans 12:16, Philippians 2:1 – 7).
    - 6) God promised to fix differences in understanding (Romans 15:5, Philippians 3:15).
2. 1 Corinthians 13 Love is essential
  - a. In the context, exercising miraculous gifts, understanding, and faith are all worthless without love.
  - b. 2 Peter 1:5 – 7 describes a developmental path from faith to love
  - c. Therefore, we will exercise faith that lacks sufficient love.
  - d. Love is characterized by patience, kindness, selflessness, finding joy in truth, and hope.
  - e. Faith demands action. Love limits the options.
3. Romans 14:1 – 15:2 Receive the one who is weak in faith
  - a. The examples are not eating meat (not just avoiding meat sacrificed to idols, which is an example in 1 Corinthians 8), holidays, and drinking wine, each in the context of the proper exercise of faith.
  - b. Paul labels vegetarians and teetotalers (as a product of faith) as “weak,” rather than pointing out that both sides consider the other weak. But, both sides are enjoined to accept the other. Further, Paul specifies that both sides are acceptable to God. Neither side is declared “weak” concerning holidays.
  - c. However, the weak are not to be left to their choices, but are to be edified (15:2) by the more mature.
  - d. Many resort to the failed logic of “essential” versus “expedient” to justify rejecting the faith of another. The New Testament excludes only those who excuse their own bad behavior as acceptable (1 Corinthians 5), and those who are divisive (Jude 19, Titus 3:10, Romans 16:17).

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- e. How can both sides exercise their own faith when the mere presence of meat or wine or holidays would be offensive?
    - 1) The presence of a Christmas tree in the building would be offensive to the no-holiday crowd. But banning any positive mention of Christmas prevents the exercise of faith by the holiday group. Both should allow the other to have a different opinion, but our corporate mentality causes us to believe that an action in the group represents the group. And, once one side has its practices entrenched, the other side is forever marginalized.
    - 2) The presence of meat at a meal shared by a group of Christians would be offensive to vegetarians. Again, once one side has its practices entrenched, the other side is forever marginalized. The same situation exists for drinking wine.
  - f. Paul found it necessary to include this chapter, so these problems apparently existed. What might have been different between our church meetings and theirs that made Paul think that his admonition might work?
    - 1) They met in homes, we meet in corporate space.
    - 2) Although they had traditions either carried in from past beliefs or instituted in the early church, we have a lot more.
    - 3) For most, the purpose of gathering has changed. The traditions that have grown up around that change hinder development.
    - 4) Faith today is not as well developed as faith then.
  - g. 14:23 All that is not of faith is sin
4. 1 Corinthians 10:14 – 33 Flee idolatry
- a. Meat sacrificed to idols was a problem for the early Christians because pagan temples were common. Our culture does not have this problem, but others do.
  - b. Applications to our culture
    - 1) Singleness of purpose (10:21). Other religions are not acceptable paths (syncretism). Extending this to football is a stretch.
    - 2) The beliefs of the host (10:27 – 30) do not contaminate the food. But, if the host makes a point of connecting the food to other gods, do not eat in order to teach. Don't find meaning in what has not been stated at the moment.
  - c. 10:23 & 6:12 All things are lawful
    - 1) Paul's point is that our criteria for judgment have changed. Neither a thing nor a practice is evil of itself. Things are just things. Practices are products of the mind; the evil is in the mind not the practice. Therefore, focus on the principles:
      - a) Is it profitable?
      - b) Does it edify?
      - c) Does it control me or do I control it?
    - 2) Paul addresses many issues in this letter, all of which are best resolved by the three criteria above. Regulations of behavior do not achieve the desired goal of good behavior (Colossians 2:23, Hebrews 7:18), much less the goal of faith.
  - d. We are very talented at finding ways around rules. Re-assessing each practice as we grow in faith using the principles above will clear barriers to future growth. Justification of tradition must be by profitability rather than "command, example, and necessary inference."