**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

**1/17/2021**

**Errors of the Pharisees (Traditionalism)**

Last week we began a series of lessons entitled “Errors of the Pharisees.” Two of the leading Jewish sects while Jesus lived on earth were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the stricter of the two. In some ways they were more sound doctrinally than were the Sadducees. They believed in a resurrection of the dead, in the immortality of the soul, in angels and spirits, while the Sadducees did not. But there were some terrible errors among the Pharisees, and the Lord aimed some of His strongest denunciations at them. It is our aim in this series of lessons to observe some of these errors so that, 1) we might know exactly what it was about the Pharisees that displeased the Lord, and secondly 2) so that we might avoid these errors in our own lives.

Last week we considered their error of “Legalism.” Today we want to look at their error of “Traditionalism.”

Let us first define the word “tradition.” The word is a Bible word and it is translated from the Greek word paradosis. W. E. Vine defines the word as “a handing down or on.” Thayer in his “Greek-English Lexicon” defines the word as “a giving over, giving up.” He also says, “a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing….” He goes on to say, “objectively, what is delivered, the substance of the teaching.” And so, tradition is a teaching that is handed down or handed over. Now, whether a tradition is to be accepted or refused depends on the source from which it is handed down or given over. It can be a teaching that has been handed down or given over by God, or it can be a teaching that has been handed down or given over by man. The word is used in both senses in scripture. In 1 Cor. 11:2 Paul said, *“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.”* Also in 2 Thess. 2:15, *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”* The traditions that Paul had delivered to these brethren and that they were to keep were teachings that had been revealed by the Holy Spirit. The source from which these traditions were “handed down” was God, and therefore, they were to be accepted and observed. But this word “tradition” is also used in scripture to refer to teaching that had been “handed down” by man, not God. For example, in Matthew 15:2, the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus, *“Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”*  Jesus said to them, *“Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?”* (v. 3) Notice that the scribes and Pharisees called this practice of washing hands when they ate bread “the tradition of the elders.” Jesus called it “your tradition” in contrast with “commandment of God.” This was tradition that was “handed down” by men, not God. You see, the Jews had added to the written Law of God the “traditions of the elders.” The Pharisees claimed that these additions to the written law had been given by Moses to the elders and by them had been transmitted orally down through the ages. Their claim was that these oral traditions were to be obeyed with equal reverence as the written law of God itself. But these traditions of the elders were just teachings handed down by man. The Pharisees were in error because they accepted and bound on others “traditions” that had been handed down by men. They held that it was not sufficient for one to bow in submission only to what was written in the Law of God, but that he had to also bow to that body of tradition which they had added to the Law. This is traditionalism.

Look with me at some areas where the Pharisees were tradition bound.

One example is in the area of ceremonial washings. The Law of Moses had specified what contacts would render a person ceremoniously unclean and what washings were required for purification. But the Pharisees had added to that Law the tradition of the elders. Look at Mark 7:1-4, *“1 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. 2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.”* The Pharisees, evidently, assumed that any trip to a marketplace, which would subject them to rubbing shoulders with all types of people, would leave them unclean, and so there was a need for them to wash when they came home. If they did not ceremonially wash their hands, they were not to eat. This was a tradition that had been added to the Law. They also bound similar washings of cups, vessels, etc., doing so with religious significance. But these ordinances were from men, not from God. Jesus goes on to show here in Mark 7 that by keeping their traditions they ended up violating the Law of God.

They were also tradition bound in their Sabbath keeping. The Sabbath day was the seventh day of the week and it was a day of rest. According to the Law they were not to work on that day. But the Jews had added their traditions to the Sabbath Law. They made laws regarding the keeping of the Sabbath that God had not made. According to their traditions, a person could pick up grain from off a table and eat it on the Sabbath, but to pick grain off a stalk in a field and eat it was a violation of the Sabbath. (Read Matthew 12:1-8). It was alright to pull an ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath, but it was wrong to heal man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. (Read Matt. 12:9-14) Jesus refused to submit to their Sabbath traditions. Now, He was in submission to the Sabbath Law. He never violated the Sabbath Law. What He violated were the traditions that the Jews had added to the Law. This brought Him in conflict more than once with the Pharisees.

As traditionalism was a grave error among the Pharisees, so it is a grave error in religious circles today.

Let me first emphasize that God’s revelation to man has been completed. God’s will for man has been revealed, completed and preserved. It was completed in the first century AD. Jesus, while He lived here upon this earth, promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would come to them and guide them into *“all truth.”* (John 16:13). That promise was fulfilled. In Acts 2 we read of the apostles being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance. The Holy Spirit guided them into “all truth.” Peter said in 2 Peter 1:3 that *“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness…”* Jude says that *“the faith” “was once for all delivered to the saints.”* (Jude 3). Peter says in 1 Peter 1:23-25 that the word of God abides forever. God’s word that was revealed did not pass away. We have it now as they did. We have it preserved for us in the scriptures, the Bible. Paul said in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* The scriptures, the Bible is sufficient to guide us. It is the “all truth.”

But there are those today who have added their traditions to God’s revealed will. It is no secret that tradition is an accepted part of Roman Catholic teaching. It was declared in the Council of Trent in 1546 that the Roman Catholic traditions are to be held with the same pious affection and reverence as the scriptures. Also reading from *New Parish Catechism,* (and I quote) “We find God’s revelation in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition.” Therefore, a Roman Catholic holds to his Bible with one hand and to the Roman Catholic traditions with the other hand. Their view is that one would have to have both to have the whole truth. However, the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church are traditions of men and have brought them in direct conflict with the words of God, just as the traditions of the Jews brought them in conflict with the law of God. For example, Roman Catholic tradition allows their priests to be called “Father” to distinguish them from others within the church, but Jesus said in Matthew 23:9, *“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”*

Also in Protestant Denominationalism there are those who are tradition bound. There are those who claim the Bible to be the word of God, but they also have a body of doctrine in addition to the Bible that has been handed down by the authorities in their denomination. The Morman Church believes the Bible to be the word of God, but they have added to the Bible “The Book of Morman,” “The Doctrine and Covenants,” and “The Pearl of Great Price” as revelation from God. Also there are the publications of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of the “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” To be a Jehovah’s Witness one must submit not only to the Bible, but also to their publications. Also other denominations have their body of doctrine that has been handed down by their synods, conferences, or general assemblies. They have the Bible, but in addition to the Bible they have what they call their confession of faith, or their discipline, or their catechism, which helps to form their beliefs and practices.

The point we are making today is, if we are to be pleasing to God, we must hold on to the revealed will of God, the Bible, and to that alone. Doctrines in addition to that are traditions of men and must be rejected. And to continue to hold to these traditions is to practice traditionalism as the Pharisees did.

And just because the doctrine has been believed a long times doesn’t mean it is the truth.

There is a story of a young married woman who was fixing a ham dinner for her husband. As she was about to place the ham into the oven she took a knife and cut off the end of the ham. Her husband asked, “Why did you cut the end off the ham?” She said, “I don’t know; that’s the way mamma always did it.” Later at a family reunion the young couple asked mother why she always cut off the end of the ham. She answered, “That’s the way my mamma always did it.” They went to grandma and asked her why she always cut the ham’s end off, and she said, “I cut the end off because my pan was too small.” Likewise, in religion many follow the traditions of men without question or investigation and, friends, it is of far more serious consequences than loosing the end of hams. Jesus said, when denouncing the Pharisees, “And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” (Mark 7:7).

Three kinds of religious people can be found. First, there are those who are unconcerned doctrinally. To them, it really doesn’t matter what they believe. The second group are the traditionalists. They simply accept what has been handed down to them from their forefathers. They rarely question what they have been told. They believe it strongly, but they believe it just because that is what they have always believed. When they do study some issue from the Bible, it is to prove what they already believe. The third group are the thinkers. They demand a “thus saieth the Lord” for every conviction. They want book, chapter and verse for what they believe. They are genuinely seeking for truth, not just trying to prove and justify what they already believe. We need more thinkers.

The Bible is the complete revelation of God’s will to man. Let us not add to it or take from it. Let us seek God’s will with open and honest hearts.

Our time is gone for today. We thank you for listening.

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