

Lecture 12: Traditions

“We are approaching the end of the semester,” Professor Grimes announced. “Our next class will be our last one. After that will be finals week, and then this university will cease to exist. I can say with some assurance that at least *one* of you just might pass this course. That is something to be proud of. Considering where all of you started, getting a passing grade means that you have actually learned something. Your knowledge of theology has increased substantially.”

Iris spoke up. “What are you going to do once the semester is over? Are you going to retire?”

“Definitely not,” Professor Grimes replied. “As long as there is ignorance in the world, and as long as I am alive and able, I will continue to battle that ignorance. However, after this class has ended I think I might take a sabbatical from teaching. I might even do a little bit of writing. We’ll just have to see.”

“Today, though, we’re not going to talk about my future career plans. Instead we are going to talk about traditions.”

Wally spoke up. “Like Christmas trees and stockings? I’ve never understood why people hang stockings over their fireplace. Who, exactly, thought that hanging socks in their living room was a good idea?”

“That is an excellent question – and it’s one of the things I discuss in my Holiday Trivia class. We also discuss the physics of flying reindeer and the time challenges involved with delivering presents all over the world in a single night. The math is actually quite fascinating.”

“Seriously?” Brad asked. “You teach a Holiday Trivia class?”

Professor Grimes laughed. “Goodness, no! That would be a complete waste of time. I would hate to have to explain to your parents why they are paying this university large sums of money to have me talk about socks and sock-related activities. Anyway, as I was saying, we are going to talk about traditions – specifically, church traditions.

“One of the many problems with the

modern church is that it has abandoned the Word of God. The number of heresies that are out there is almost endless. Some churches teach that there is no Hell and everyone goes to Heaven. Others teach that God's primary goal in life is for you to be happy, and that if you give your life to Jesus then God will make you healthy, wealthy, and famous. Pastors deny the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, original sin, and a whole list of other critical doctrines. In other words, apostasy is everywhere. In fact, apostasy is so prevalent that the truth is hard to find.

"I also find it irritating that people can't even get the little things right. For example, despite what most people think, all angels are *men*, not women, and angels rarely sing. There is a famous hymn called 'Hark, the Herald Angel Sings', and yet the Bible says that the angels which heralded the birth of Christ *did no singing whatsoever*. Also, the forbidden fruit was *not* an apple and the wise men were *not* present with the shepherds at the birth of Christ. They actually arrived years later."

"They did what?" Iris asked.

Professor Grimes nodded. “The wise men saw Christ’s star in the East, and then they packed their bags and went on a long journey to visit Him. They arrived long after He was born; in fact, He was probably a toddler when they finally got there. That’s why Herod killed all the children in that area who were 2 years old or younger. The wise men didn’t have private jets, you know. It was a long journey to Jerusalem.”

“But nativity scenes always have the wise men,” Wally protested.

“And some of them also have Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. But that doesn’t mean Rudolph was actually there.”

The professor glanced back at his notes. “The point is that Christians don’t have a lot of discernment and aren’t very careful about what they believe or how they behave. They just believe whatever they’re told. They don’t bother to check the Bible to see if their beliefs are even vaguely related to the truth. Calling them ‘sheep’ is a very accurate metaphor, because they just go wherever you lead them. Errors can last for generations because people don’t bother to do their homework.”

“That’s kind of insulting,” Brad said.

“Insulting? It’s richly deserved! How do you think *God* feels about all this? Do you think it pleases Him when His own people can’t even bother to *read* the Bible, much less study it? Do you think He is glad when Christians can’t even get the basic doctrines *of their own religion* correct? Do you have any idea how ashamed Christians are going to be when they stand before God and realize that they wasted their entire lives?”

“But Heaven is a place of happiness,” Wally said. “Everyone is happy there all the time.”

“No, the New Heaven and Earth are a place of happiness,” Professor Grimes replied. “There is a difference. Revelation 6:9-10 tells us of some martyrs in Heaven who are crying out to God for vengeance. Even though these martyrs are in Heaven, they are *not* happy little balls of fuzzy contentment. Instead they are begging God to punish those who ruthlessly murdered them. They are not crying out ‘Man, life is good’. Instead they are saying ‘God, please avenge our blood’. You need to read your Bible.

“There are two traditions that I want to talk about, because they are so prevalent and because they illustrate the point I am trying to make. The first one has to do with the Sabbath.”

Iris spoke up. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” she quoted.

“Right. That’s what I want to discuss. When God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel He commanded them to set aside the seventh day of the week as a day of rest. You can find this in Exodus 20:9-11 and Exodus 30:13-17. On that day people were not allowed to work, under pain of death. Anyone who violated that command was dragged out of the camp and had rocks thrown at them until they died.”

“Wow,” Wally said. “Harsh.”

“Oh yes! The commandment was very strict. You could *not* work on that day. You could not buy or sell on that day. Exodus 35:3 even said that you could not kindle a fire on that day. It was a day of rest, and you were either going to rest or you were going to be executed for not resting.

“God said in Exodus 30:13 that He gave that commandment to the Jews as a sign that

the Jews were God's special people – that they were set apart and holy. Resting on the seventh day signified that they were different from everyone else. However – and I want to emphasize this – there is more to the story. God also gave the Jewish people a calendar full of holy days. The Sabbath is one of these, *but it is not the only one*. There were actually *seven* other Jewish festivals that the Jews were required to keep, and those festivals also involved days of rest. Leviticus 23 gives a complete list of them.”

Iris spoke up. “What were those festivals?”

Professor Grimes sighed. “Unfortunately, we don’t have time to get into the details. I do cover them in my Levitical Studies class, but since I won’t be teaching next semester you won’t have a chance to take it. My point is that God gave the Jewish people an entire calendar of Sabbaths and Holy Days that He required them to keep. The Sabbath was just one in a long list.”

Brad spoke up. “So what?”

“Don’t you see what I’m getting at?” the professor asked. “Don’t you find it a bit

strange that Christians are so adamant about keeping *one* of the Jewish holy days, but have no interest in enforcing any of the other holy days that God required the Jews to keep? Doesn't that raise a red flag that something, somewhere is terribly wrong?"

Brad shrugged. "Not really. Who cares?"

"*God* cares! Christians have completely disregarded the details surrounding the command – and the details matter. Today if you talk to Christians, pretty much everyone believes that Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest. Working on Sunday is a sin. Mowing your lawn on Sunday is a sin. You have to keep Sunday holy because that's what the Ten Commandments say.

"Except that's *not* what the Ten Commandments say. Exodus 20:10 says that the Sabbath was the *seventh* day of the week, not the first. What Christians have done is taken one of the Jewish Holy Days out of an entire calendar that is full of them, changed the day that it's supposed to fall on, and then claimed that keeping that one day is binding to all Christians – even though none of the other Jewish holy days matter. This is in spite

of the fact that Colossians 2:16-17 and Romans 14:5-10 explicitly teaches that Christians are *not* bound to keep *any* of the Jewish Holy Days. They can keep them if they wish but it's not required. They have liberty to do as they please."

Wally spoke up. "The Sabbath was moved to Sunday after Christ rose from the dead. That's why we go to Church on Sunday."

Professor Grimes shook his head. "The Sabbath has *not* been moved. The only person who could possibly move it is God, and He has not done so. It is true that Christians do gather together to worship God on Sunday in order to celebrate the day that Christ rose from the dead. But that has nothing to do with Sabbath keeping! The Sabbath was a day of *rest*, not a day of worship. The commandment does not say 'Six days you will labor and do all your work, but on the Sabbath you will go to Church and listen to your pastor'."

Brad interrupted. "But surely it's not a sin to rest on Sunday, right?"

"Of course not! The apostle Paul made the point that you are free to keep any of the

holy days – or none of them at all. If you want to esteem one day above another then you are allowed to do that. But what you *cannot* do – what the Bible *expressly forbids* – is judging someone else on the basis of keeping holy days. And that is precisely what many people do. They condemn others for not resting on Sunday, and they believe that they are superior because they refrain from performing certain activities on that day. This is despite the fact that had they lived back in the days of the Old Testament, they would have been stoned to death for keeping the wrong day – and even if they *had* kept the right day, their idea of ‘keeping’ the Sabbath falls woefully short of the Biblical standard. Remember, you weren’t even allowed to kindle a fire on the Sabbath *even in wintertime*. How many people have *you* seen keep the Sabbath by not heating their homes in January?

“My point here is that the Church has two problems: it fails to condemn things that are very blatant sins, like adultery and homosexuality, and it *does* condemn things that are not sins at all – like not keeping the

first day of the week holy. It strains at gnats and swallows camels.”

Brad spoke up. “But does it really matter? I mean, in the grand scheme of things, who cares?”

“Does reality matter?” Professor Grimes echoed. “Well, let’s stop and think about that. Does what God said make any difference? Can’t we just ignore God’s commands and do as we please? Can we just pretend like God isn’t there? That’s what you’re really getting at, isn’t it? Can’t we just overthrow God and appoint ourselves as gods instead?

“You know, I happen to think that being held accountable by God is a *very serious matter*, and one we ought not take lightly. Erasing God’s words and replacing them with our own is a horrifying sin. Christ had a lot of very bad things to say about the Pharisees’ habit of ignoring what God actually said and instead enforcing their own ludicrous traditions. God does *not* take it lightly when His words are overruled and we do our own thing instead.

“This all goes back to a much bigger

problem: modern man simply does not take God very seriously. We don't really believe that anything we ever do will come back to haunt us. We think that since God didn't strike us dead the first time we sinned, that means He either isn't real at all or He's some kind of cosmic pushover. We overlook what 2 Peter 3:9 says – that the *reason* God hasn't judged us yet is because He is giving us a chance to repent of our sins and be saved. Those who do not take the opportunity He is giving them are going to find themselves in a great deal of trouble – trouble they will not be able to escape.”

Wally spoke up. “You know, prof, you're kind of a downer, you know that? It's always doom and gloom with you. All you do is hand out clouds of doom to people.”

Professor Grimes sighed. “If you saw someone mistakenly pick up a glass of poison and start to drink it, the right thing to do is *not* say ‘Hey there! Love your new shoes. So what did you think of the game last night?’ The right thing to do is tell them that *they are about to drink poison and they need to stop*. When you see people on the road to Hell, the

right thing to do is *try to stop them*. When you see people making terrible mistakes that will torment them for the rest of time, the proper course of action is to *tell them that what they are doing is wrong*. That is exactly what Christ did – as I said earlier, He spoke far more of Hell than He did about Heaven. People need to be told about the grave danger they are in – not that they have nice fingernails.”

The professor looked through his notes. “Getting back to the topic at hand – speaking of church traditions, one particular tradition that bothers me tremendously is tithing.”

“Let me guess,” Brad interrupted. “You think that more people should tithe.”

Professor Grimes shook his head. “It’s actually quite the opposite. I wish that churches would stop teaching tithing altogether. Giving 10% of your gross income to your local church is *not* tithing. Calling it tithing does not make it tithing any more than calling this building an elephant would cause it to start asking for peanuts. The modern church has completely butchered the Bible’s teachings on giving beyond all recognition.”

Iris spoke up. “But shouldn’t people give

money to their churches?”

The professor paused. “What I want is for churches to teach what the Bible actually says about giving, and that is precisely what they are *not* doing. In order to understand what I mean I’m going to have to give you a brief lecture from my levitical studies class. You need to know a little bit of history in order to understand how badly the Church has gone astray.

“After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, he brought them to Mount Sinai. At that mountain God gave Moses the levitical system. Under that system the people could only interact with God by going through the priests. The common person was simply not holy enough to approach God without being killed on the spot. So they would instead bring their sacrifices to the priests, who were specially trained and sanctified, and the priests would offer the sacrifices on their behalf. It is important to note that *only* the priests could do this, and in order to be a priest you had to be of the tribe of Levi. If you were not a Levite then you could not be a priest. It was not allowed.”

“So it was a genetic thing?” Iris asked.

“That’s right. In Numbers 8:19 God singled out one tribe to act as a go-between between God and man, and that was the tribe of Levi. Numbers 18:22-23 said no one else was allowed to do it on pain of death. Now, since this tribe was responsible for the Temple, the sacrifices, the judicial system, and educating the people, they couldn’t spend their time farming land and raising sheep. It simply wasn’t possible for them to do everything else and still be full-time farmers. So in Numbers 18:21 and 24 God instituted another way to support them, and that was the tithe.”

“Hold on,” Isaac said. “The Levites ran the judicial system too?”

“That’s right. Deuteronomy 17:9-12 says they would actually hear cases and render judgments. I don’t have the time to get into that, though. The point is that the Levites were essentially specialists, not farmers. Because of this God commanded that at the end of every year, the Israelites were to bring a tenth of their increase to the Levites. This means that they looked at how much they

had at the beginning of the year, compared it to how much they had now, and then gave God one tenth of the difference. Deuteronomy 14:22 says that the tithe was not a tax on their *income*, but on their *increase*.

“As I said, this tithe was given to the Levites. Now, all of the Levites worked with the Temple in some way, but only some of them were actually priests. The rest of the Levites maintained the Temple and did other tasks. Numbers 18:25-28 says that the Levites were to give one tenth of what *they* received to the priests who actually offered the sacrifices. This means that of the 10% that the Israelites gave, the priests themselves only got a tenth of that. On top of that, Deuteronomy 26:12 says that every third year the entire tithe was given to the poor – which reduced their income even further.

“Now, Deuteronomy 14:26 says that if you happened to live too far away to bring your tithe of crops and livestock to the Temple (because the tithe was paid in food, not in money), God said that you could sell your offering, buy whatever you wanted, and

enjoy it before the Lord.”

Brad spoke up. “Are you serious?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what it says. So, to recap: once a year the Israelites would figure out the net increase of their wealth and give the Levites a tenth of that. The Levites, in turn, would give one tenth of *that* to the priests who actually ran the Temple – except every third year, when the entire offering was given to the poor. Only the Levites were allowed to receive the tithe, and the tithe had to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. If you couldn’t make to the Temple then you were supposed to use the tithe to buy whatever you wanted and then eat it before God.”

“Really?” Brad said. “That’s what the tithe is?”

“Yes, that’s what the tithe is. The truth is that no one has tithed in two thousand years, because the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD and all of the Levites are now gone. This means it is actually *impossible* to tithe. First of all, there are no Levites anymore, and only the Levites could receive the tithe. Second, there is no Temple, and the tithe had to be brought to the Temple. So even if you were

bound and determined to obey the Mosaic Law of tithing, you could not do it. It is physically impossible.

“And let’s not pretend that what’s going on today is even remotely related to tithing. The Biblical tithe was of your net increase, not of your gross income. The priests only received one tenth of the tithe, or 1% of Israel’s increase. *Nobody* is giving away the entire tithe every third year to the poor. What we are doing today bears no relation to what the Bible says at all.”

Wally spoke up. “But pastors are basically priests, right?”

“Not in the slightest!” Professor Grimes replied. “Israel needed priests to act as a mediator between God and man. Today, however, Jesus is our mediator and high priest. If you want to talk to God then just *talk to God* – you don’t need to ask your pastor to talk to God for you! If you want to confess your sins and get forgiveness then just go to God and do it yourself – you don’t have to ask your pastor to kill a sheep outside the sanctuary. Your pastor is *not* your mediator and he does *not* forgive your sins. Pastors are

not priests. They have a completely different function.”

Iris spoke up. “So if we can’t tithe then what *are* we supposed to be doing?”

“We are supposed to be following the system of giving that God established in the New Testament – instead of trying to keep an Old Testament law that is physically impossible to keep. The new system is very simple: you belong wholly to God, and therefore you are required to serve Him with all of your abilities and possessions.

“Imagine that you are an investment banker and a client has given you a set of assets that he wants you to invest. That is how God sees you. Everything that God gave to you was given for the express purpose of glorifying God and building up His kingdom. In other words, your possessions actually belong to God, and He expects a good return on His investment.”

Iris spoke up. “Does that mean I need sell all my possessions and give all the money to God? Are Christians supposed to take vows of poverty?”

“Not at all. God gave King David and King

Solomon incredible wealth, and He never criticized them for having it. God blessed Abraham with tremendous riches and never condemned him for daring to have money. Being wealthy is not a sin.

“2 Corinthians 9:7 says that God loves a cheerful giver, and that each person should give what they have purposed in their heart to give. The point is that we need a change of attitude. For too long churches have told people ‘You need to give God His 10% cut, and then you can keep the rest for yourself.’ But the truth is that God owns you and everything about you. We need to instead ask ourselves: how can I serve God? How can I wisely use what He has given me for the advancement of His kingdom? Am I living my life and spending my money for God’s glory, or for my own? Who am I *really* living for? *That* is what churches should be teaching, instead of this 10% nonsense. God wants 100% of us, not a tenth.”

Wally spoke up. “That sounds really expensive.”

“It’s only expensive if your heart is set on the things of this world. If you don’t really

care about money or fame or power, but you *do* care about God and the gospel, then using your money to save the souls of men will seem like a fantastic bargain. You're trading something that has no real value for something that is of eternal significance! It's an amazing deal."

Professor Grimes looked at his watch. "And once again I see that we are out of time. Class dismissed! Next week will be our final class, where – fittingly – we will discuss the end of things."

"The end of what things?" Wally asked.

"Why, the end of all things, of course," the professor answered.

