



“Have churches fallen into the same trap as the Pharisees?”

This question came during a recent Men’s Study after we read this passage from the Gospel of Mark:

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”

The question came from one of the guys who grew up Roman Catholic, and he was referring primarily to some of their teachings like clergy celibacy and purgatory.

The short answer is a simple, “Yes.” None of those teachings have any basis in the Scripture, but are simply human rules or traditions.

The slightly longer answer is “Yes, and pretty much every church falls into that same trap of elevating human traditions above God’s teaching - to the point where everyone thinks the traditions are actually from God.”

The Church Year and the various seasons of it are a good example. The Church Year is a good thing, and it is designed to make sure we remember to celebrate things God has done for us. Like coming to Earth (the Christmas season), dying to take punishment for our sins (Lent), rising from the dead (Easter.)

But celebrating Christmas on December 25, for example, is a human tradition. The Bible is silent as to the actual day - or month - Jesus was born. But can you imagine the uproar (very mild word) that would happen if we were to go against that tradition and celebrate Jesus’ birth in March, for example!

Or what if we decided to make Lent 20 days long instead of 40? There’s no command in the Bible to have a 40-day time of reflection and fasting prior to celebrating Jesus’ resurrection. But Lent is a tradition that has been going on so long, I would guess that most people have the idea God commanded it. He didn’t.

Traditions can be helpful, but we can’t let them be elevated to the level of Scripture. They were created to help us, not to rule over us.

With all of that in mind, this Rally Sunday will be the day we retire the “Sunflower Sermon” tradition - a tradition that has been in place for at least the last 25 years. I’d invite you to come September 13 to hear, one final time, how God has used a unique crop of sunflowers to remind us how to grow closer to His Son.

Please don’t hesitate to keep asking questions whenever they come up.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net