

John the Baptist (2)

David Halbrook

These are just a few lessons we learn from the life of John.

God is seeking lives centered on His goals John sacrificed common luxuries and his life for God's goals. Whose goals most motivate you in job, home, and leisure decisions?

Hard times bring tough questions It is no coincidence that John became discouraged when in prison. Often, we begin to doubt truths we know when life is hard. Like John, learn that truth does not change just because our circumstances do.

What kingdom was he talking about? Jesus and John preached that the kingdom was near. This kingdom is here today--see Colossians 1:13-14. God moves us into this kingdom when sin is washed away through Jesus' blood. The kingdom John preached is the church that belongs to Christ. There is no future earthly kingdom—Christ is king today!

John's work I once asked someone why they were in the Baptist Church since there is no such church in the Bible. I was told that John started the Baptist Church. Does the Bible say so? John was a “preparer” not a founder. John's death ended his work, but the death of Jesus purchased the church of Jesus. What other church can you learn of in the Bible?

-- Our article appearing in *Arkansas Weekly*.

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for these among us: Ed & Janice White, John & Erlene Ledgerwood, Novela Puckett, Noleka Hopper, Joyce Ratliff, Ed Koettel, Maxine Epperson, others with ongoing trials, and new Christians. (Also, Ben Calderon with whom we fellowship [share] in Conway). [See the overhead charts for other prayer requests]

Check the lists on the bulletin board at the back from time to time (Lord's Supper preparation, roadside sign, men leading when we assemble).

Join us each Sunday at 10AM (classes), 10:45AM, & 5PM and Wednesday at 7PM.

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

church of Christ--Quail Valley

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Hold to the Traditions, but Know Why

Alan Jones

I have had a vegetable garden almost every year since I was 21 years old. I learned to garden from my Dad. Dad always planted squash, cucumbers, and melons in hills. So, I have always done the same. When our son Eric asked how to plant his garden, I told him to plant his squash, cucumbers, and melons in hills. Then he asked me why. I had never thought about it. I just did it that way because Dad did.

So, I did some internet research. The practice of planting squash, cucumbers and melons in hills goes back to the Native Americans. One person commented, “That is certainly not the first time that an old belief/method perpetuated itself through the ages”. But, is planting in hills a useless tradition or is there some value to it? My research found that squash, cucumbers, and melons are planted in hills in order to increase soil temperature, to allow for better drainage, and to provide more room for the development of roots. There seems to be a valid reason to support the tradition that I had been blindly following.

Christianity is a belief system that has perpetuated itself through the ages as was predicted and promised (1 Pet 1:22-25). We must follow traditions that are almost 2,000 years old. We must follow these traditions because Jesus told us to do so. Paul wrote, “So then brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (2 Thess 2:15).

So, we must determine if the traditions that we have been following as disciples of Christ and as local churches of Christ are the traditions written in the N.T. letters or if they are just the traditions of our fathers and grandfathers that we have blindly adopted without a Scriptural reason why. Why do we do certain things? Why don't we do other things? There must be a Divine reason as to why or why not for all of our actions. If there is not, then our service to God is based on the traditions of men and is in vain (Mt 15:9). We must question everything that we do as individual

Christians and as congregations. We must not be the “blind leading the blind”, as surely both we and they will fall into the ditch (Lk 6:39).

And, it is important to ask “why?”- not only to avoid practicing human tradition- but also in order to properly practice Divine tradition. In the Scripture cited above, Mt 15:9, Jesus quoted and applied Isa 29:13 to condemn the practice of human tradition. But, in the original context, the condemnation is of the mindlessly practicing Divine tradition. The lips were there, but not the heart. There was no true reverence for God being expressed in worship, but only the repeating of “tradition learned by rote” (NASV). “Rote” is defined as “the mechanical or habitual repetition of something to be learned”.

When God set up the worship of Israel, He expected that there would be questions from their children, questions of “why”, just as my son Eric asked me the “why” of planting in a hill. The Israelite children would ask why they observed the Passover (Ex 12:23-27) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex 13:6-10). They would want to know why the firstborn of animal and man was offered to the Lord or redeemed (Ex 13:11-16) and why they should keep God’s law (Dt 6:20-25). In each case the Israelite parent was expected to be able to give the child the answer and therefore provide him with a basis of reverent and purposeful worship and obedience.

We must know the “why” of the traditions of Jesus, first for ourselves and then for our children and others who ask. Why should I believe in Jesus and follow His gospel? Why should I be baptized? Why must I be immersed instead of sprinkled? Why should I not gamble, drink intoxicating beverages, smoke cigarettes and abuse drugs, engage in sex outside of marriage, use profanity, foul language and abusive speech, dress in a way that is shameless and provocative, or dance in a manner to entice the opposite sex? Why should I partake of the Lord’s Supper and why should I partake on Sunday? Why should I give of my earnings on Sunday? Why should the money that the church collects be used to support needy saints, the edification of the church, and the spread of the gospel and not for general benevolence to the poor, recreation, entertainment, and secular education? Why should Christians be governed by elders and not by men at regional, national, and world headquarters? Why should I sing in worship to Christ? Why should I not use instrumental music in worship? Why should I assemble with the church as often as possible? We must know the answer to these and many other questions that concern our individual discipleship and our participation with a local church and not act only by “rote” learning.

Let us not practice our religion as I planted my squash, cucumbers, and melons. Let us hold to the traditions, but know, from the New Testament of Jesus our Lord and Master, why we are doing something or refraining from it.

Bitterness (excerpt)

Heath Rogers

The Bible warns against developing a root of bitterness: "looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15; see also Deut. 29:18). Notice that a root of bitterness will spring up and cause many to be defiled. Harbored resentment and nursed wounds will not remain under the surface. Like a weed, they will eventually spring forth and spread.

We have been growing a garden for three years now. The problem with developing a new garden spot is ridding the soil of weeds. Every year we till the ground and plant the seeds. The freshly planted garden looks so clean, but beneath the surface are the root systems of the grass that used to be a part of the lawn. Soon the plants sprout, but so do the weeds. When weeds pop up, we can break them off at the surface, but they are not really gone. To truly get rid of the weeds, we have to pull them up by the roots. If we fail to do so, the weeds will take over the garden. Each year we eventually reach a point at which we give up on pulling the weeds and determine to do better next year.

Try to picture the soil of our heart containing a root system of bitterness. We may keep it looking nice on the surface (what we allow others to see in us) but we are fooling ourselves if we think it is harmless to harbor resentment and nurse grudges. Bitterness is a poison in our heart that eventually contaminates our entire life. Like weeds, bitterness attempts to spread itself to others.

Like other sinful attitudes, a feeling of bitterness (distress and resentment, despair and hopelessness) can spread to others. A person who has a sour attitude about the government, economy, local sports team, local church, etc., can easily find an audience and infect others with his negativity.

However, the destructive nature of bitterness is not only that the negative feelings are spread to others, but the harbored resentment and nursed grudges eventually lash out at others. The English word "bitter" comes from an Old English word that literally meant "to bite." This is a good description of the effect of bitterness, which often lashes out at others with "biting" words (Ps. 64:3; Rom. 3:14).

Let's keep bitterness out of our heart. [*Knollwood (OH) Messenger, February 2015*]