



ADULT

for use as
STEP 1



Lesson 3

Focus:

Don't let human traditions substitute for honoring God.

Lesson 3

Bible Basis:

Matthew 15:1-9

Lesson 3

Memory Verse:

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
—Matthew 15:8

Students will discuss how our traditions at times can keep us from honoring God.

OPENING ACTIVITY: *Tradition Is a Guide*

Write this quote on a board or sheet of newsprint: “Tradition is a guide and not a jailer.” Ask students to describe what this quote means in terms of any traditions they may have. For example, do they have to follow certain traditions whether anyone wants to follow that tradition any more or not? If so, why?

OPENING STORY: [Make copies of this story or read it aloud to the class]

THE TOP TEN MOST FIERCELY DEFENDED TRADITIONS IN CHURCHES

By Thom Rainer [from his website]

I recently embarked on a major research project for a new resource I will soon be offering. Part of my research included a long review of thousands of comments made on my website over the past few years. Though my research had another purpose, I became intrigued by the comments related to church traditions.

Of course, by “traditions,” I am referring to those extra-biblical customs that become a way of life for many congregations. A tradition is neither inherently good nor bad. Its value or its distraction in a given church really depends on how members treat the traditions.

With that in mind, I began noting the most frequently defended traditions in churches. As a corollary, these traditions can also be a potential source of divisiveness. They are ranked here according to the frequency of the comments.

1. Worship and music style. Though I have noted elsewhere that this issue is not as pervasive as it once was, it is still number one.

2. Order of worship service. Thou shalt not change any items in the order of worship.

3. Times of worship service(s). The first three most frequently defended traditions are related to worship services.

4. Role of the pastor. The pastor is to be omnipresent and omniscient. Many church members have clear expectations of what “their” pastor should do.

5. Committee structure. Many congregations continue committee structures long after their usefulness has waned.

6. Specific ministries and programs. The healthy church constantly evaluates the effectiveness of its ministries and programs. That’s good stewardship. Other churches continue their ministries and programs because that’s the way they’ve always done it.

7. Location of the church facility. A church relocation can be an issue of fierce debate, even contention, in many congregations.

8. Use of specific rooms. Some of the more frequently named rooms are the worship center, the parlor, the gym, and the kitchen/fellowship hall.

9. Business meetings. Traditions include the frequency of business meetings, the scope of authority of business meetings, and the items covered in business meetings.

10. Staff ministry descriptions. Some churches insist on having the same staff positions with the same titles with the same ministry descriptions even though the needs in the congregations may have changed dramatically.

My purpose in writing this article is twofold. First, I thought it might be of interest to church leaders. Second, I hope it can provide a cautionary note for those who are leading change.

Ask your students to form small groups to discuss their answers to these questions.

- **What traditions such as the ones above has your church argued about?**
- **Fill in the blank: “Human traditions can be good if they _____.”**
- **How can traditions interfere with what a church needs to do for Christ?**

(When you are finished with the questions, go on to Step 2 in your *Adult Teacher’s Guide*.)

News Source:

<https://thomrainer.com/2015/02/top-ten-fiercely-defended-traditions-churches/>



ADULT

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STEP 4



Lesson 3

Focus:

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Bible Basis:

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Lesson 3

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—Matthew 15:8

EXAMINING TRADITIONS

Jesus warned the Pharisees that by keeping their human traditions they were actually breaking the commands of God. We may not break any of God's commands with our traditions, but sometimes we can certainly stifle the work of the Lord by paying more attention to our own ideas of what “church” should be instead of focusing on what He wants us to do.

Ask your students to return to the groups they had in Step 1 and discuss these questions.

- **What traditions in your church are helpful in spreading the Gospel? Which ones need to be dropped or changed?**

End the class in prayer, asking the Lord to help us see where we may be impeding His work with human traditions that do not further the work of His kingdom.

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THE BIBLE IN THE NEWS

Christians say that Bible reading in the morning is more important to them than their morning coffee or eating sweets, though Americans in general put their coffee first:
<https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/survey-christians-say-bible-is-better-than-coffee-to-kick-start-the-day.html>