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Keeping Tradition

Text: Hebrews 11:28

Lutheran pastor/scholar/Yale professor Jaroslav Pelikan, in The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, delivered the great quotable observation:

“Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.”

In the scriptures, tradition is seen both positively and negatively. I offer two examples of each.

Positive: 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2

Negative: Matthew 15:3,6 and Mark 7:8-9

Tradition is not a bad thing. It refers to that which is handed down to another or transmitted to another. Some traditions which we observe are good.

From [iroquoissprings.com](http://iroquoissprings.com):

On traditions and rituals:

*“These rituals can be annual; like holiday gatherings and family reunions, or destination specific; like vacationing in the same place each year. Traditions can be any activity you repeat to mark an occasion or event. Family traditions create closeness between people...a sense of belonging and identity. They link us to the bigger picture and connect us to people who have come before us. Traditions bring a sense of security. We come to rely on certain rituals and events that unify us and bring back memories of the past. The players of the event may change, but the tradition remains the same and keeps us connected to the past, in addition to building memories of the present.”*

By faith, Moses kept the tradition of the Passover.

Exodus 12:21-24

**21** Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families and kill the Passover *lamb*.

**22** And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. **23** For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you*. **24** “And you shall observe this

thing as an ordinance for you and for your sons forever.

Many people hear or read of traditions they are to keep but fail in the execution thereof.

In Exodus 12, note verse 28 which addresses what Israel did after hearing about the rituals God wanted them to observe:

*Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.*

This text in Hebrews 11 does not say that Moses agreed that the tradition was rich or logical or culturally relevant or meaningful or helpful or that the tradition was worthy of examination and reflection. No, this text says that by faith Moses *kept* the tradition, the Passover.

Keeping the tradition is an act of faith. It says volumes about what Moses believed about God. The One who delivered Israel from the plagues, through the Passover event, was credible. If God delivered Israel in that one event, this God could be trusted for Moses' future. When we keep a tradition or a ritual, we are saying that the thing to which the ritual points is helpful not only for our present but for our future.

**Illus.**

Every first Sunday of the month we celebrate the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist or the ordinance of Communion. Every time we observe that tradition, that ritual, we are making a statement of faith. This Christ who died in our places on the cross is credible. What Christ taught, what Christ said, what Christ did was so meaningful that we will keep this tradition. We will *remember* Jesus. That very act of remembering Christ, of keeping the feast, is an act of faith. Our monthly communion service says volumes about what we believe about God, about the importance of memory, about rehearsing the deeds of God in Christ.

By faith Moses kept the Passover tradition. You and I have the privilege of identifying those markers, those traditions, those rituals, those practices which will help us track the movements of a credible God. We keep the tradition not because we are traditional or stuck or unwilling to think outside the box or unwilling to do the hard work of reimagining. No, we keep some traditions because they stabilize us and connect us with a vibrant past and a credible history.

What are the benefits of keeping a tradition?

1. Traditions stabilize us in a world that is ever-changing and unstable.

2. Traditions connect the generation in our families and give us need continuity between those generations.
3. Traditions give us a sense of and appreciation of history. British statesman Edmund Burke said, “Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it.”. Through the keeping of tradition, we retain the best parts of history and possibly avoid the repeating of the worst parts.

I urge us all to identify and keep traditions that will give meaning and stability to our lives.

When this text says Moses *kept* the Passover it means he instituted it. He started practicing it from day one. For us, on the other side of Calvary, the Passover is a pointer, a marker, a reminder of Jesus and His sacrifice for us. The blood of a lamb applied to a doorpost delivered *Israel* and the blood of the Lamb of God applied to our receptive hearts delivered *us*. Oh, the blood of Jesus!!

## **Closing**

JR Thorpe on [bustle.com](http://bustle.com) (Christmas, 2015):

*So why do we love traditions so much? What is it about repeating the same rituals year after year that gives us that warm and fuzzy feeling? Psychology has a few very interesting answers. One of them, of course, is that humans love predictability and stability; we love it so much that up to 93 percent of all our actions can be predicted ahead of time, according to a 2010 study from Northwestern. The like-clockwork stability of certain bits of life are, according to psychology, really necessary for our development and feelings of wellbeing; a little bit of routine can be a good thing, particularly when we're children and teens. Instability can really upend a kid's future life.*

Amen