



First, allow me to say that I am pleased to be able to tell you that, in response to the Editor's timely announcement in last month's issue, I now have enough questions in the 'Box' to keep me busy for several months. However, providing you are prepared to exercise a little patience, there is still room in the 'Box', if there are subjects you care to raise.

And let me add, that I appreciate the words of encouragement I have received from brothers and sisters who wish this feature to continue.

This month's question reminds us, firstly, that we should never assume that old controversies which we thought had been settled, cannot rise again. And secondly, that, as has so often been said, if we neglect constantly to reiterate and re-emphasise biblical doctrine, it takes only one generation for false teaching to creep in and the church to be led into error.

Here is the essence of the question, that has been send to me by a sister whose family-members have been faithful defenders and servants of the Truth for very many years.

"Is singing in our Lord's Day worship a divinely authorized practice or is it merely a 'tradition'?"



I do not think that it will be necessary for you to think about this question for more than a couple of minutes before you recognized that someone, somewhere, is trying to devise an argument to justify the introduction of instrumental music into the worship of the Church.

I hear, for instance, that there are certain institutions of Christian education in the United States from which graduates are emerging who are making this very claim, and experience has taught us that religious controversies originating in the U.S.A. very quickly find their way over here!

"*Singing in worship is only a tradition*", is the modern mantra, which, apparently some are repeating, and they continue to repeat it until they actually convince themselves that it is true. Then, by the use of this and similar statements, they seek to represent congregational singing as something that, at best, is relatively unimportant, and, at worst, non-essential. But, as is often the case with new arguments – (and, make no mistake, this *is* a new argument on this subject) – neither those who advance it nor those who are fooled by it, can have thought much about what they are claiming.

Now, I hope you will appreciate that this is not the place for an examination of the entire 'Instrumental Music' issue, and that I must limit myself to dealing with the question as it stands. But I have no hesitation in stating that I have no problem whatsoever in accepting that our singing *is* a 'tradition' – to use the word used at the end of the question. The issue is, however: - What is the meaning of the word '*tradition*'?

The definition in modern English.

I suspect that those who label congregational singing without the use of musical instruments as a 'tradition', would probably cite as their authority, one of the definitions given by a modern English Dictionary, which states that a tradition *is*: - "A

particular doctrine, etc, claimed to be of divine authority without documentary evidence. An opinion or custom handed down to posterity”.

But, remember! This is the *modern English* definition of the word and it reflects the way in which modern society views ‘tradition’. Indeed, it may well describe many of the practices and doctrines found in modern denominationalism - as those things that have grown and developed over the years, so that they have become accepted without question or argument, as ‘customary’ or ‘traditional’.

The New Testament definition of ‘tradition’

However, as people who, in our faith, accept the authority of the Word of God, we do not go to the ‘English Dictionary’ for our authority or guidance. We are guided by Scripture, and it is clear to me that those who advance this modern argument have not made the effort to learn what the New Testament scriptures have to say about the ‘*traditions*’ of the early Christians.

The *English* word ‘*tradition*’ comes to us from the Latin ‘*tradere*’, and simply means ‘*to hand down*’, and signifies that which is handed down orally; that is, by word of mouth. But, we must understand that the word merely describes the method of transmission; that is, *how* a matter is ‘handed down’. ‘*Tradere*’ does not tell us what *authority* lies behind what is ‘handed down’, or how authoritative that which is handed down may be. In fact, ‘*what is handed down*’ may be true or false, important or trivial. It may be something that once was a *fact*, but which, in the course of time, has, for one reason or another, become so greatly changed that it is *no longer* a fact!

In contrast, with this, the word ‘*tradition*’, as found in the Greek New Testament, *does* involve authority. The word is ‘*paradosis*’, and, according to Thayer’s lexicon, it means ‘*that which is delivered; the substance of the teaching*’. Therefore, the critical question we must ask is, ‘*from whom, and by whom, was the teaching delivered to the Church?* Does it come with an authority that is binding on the Church today?

I suggest, then, that you consider the following verses and then ask yourself these questions:

- **How authoritative were the ‘traditions’ of the early Church?**
- **And, whose authority stands behind them?**

2nd Thess. 2:15. ***“Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter”.***

2nd Thess. 3:6. ***“I command you, brothers, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness, and not in accordance with the tradition that they received from us”.***

1st Cor. 11:2. ***“I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you”.***

“Just Paul’s opinion.”

Now, those who wish to introduce instrumental music into the church’s worship, try to destroy the force of these verses by questioning the authority of the Lord’s apostle who wrote them, even though this is something they cannot do without undermining, and effectively denying, the authority of the entire New Testament. I do not doubt that some are prepared to do just that. For them, the scriptures have no binding authority, because they do not regard them as having been written under the

inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and this opens the door to allow in any modern innovation that takes their fancy. (As you know, one of the very latest has been the 'ordination' of 'women priests', some of whom will almost certainly be appointed 'Bishops', in defiance of what the scriptures teach about qualifications.)

What matters, then, when 'traditions' are under consideration, is the answer to the question, '*By whose authority?*' There are 'traditions' that should be rejected because they are of human *origin*; the authority behind them is merely human *authority*. Jesus described them as '*the doctrines and commandments of men*' (Matt.15: 9). In Matt.15:3 we read that He accused the Pharisees of breaking the commandment of God for the sake of their '*own tradition*'. In a similar vein, in Mark 7:9, He declared that they, '*abandoned*' the commandment of God '*to keep your own tradition*'. And, in Col.2: 8, Paul also pours scorn on '*human traditions*'.

But, if we examine the three passages quoted earlier this is what we find:

1. Certain '*traditions*' were delivered to the early Church by those men whom the Lord Jesus Himself had appointed for the purpose of guiding it into the Truth.
2. The early Church *received the traditions* as coming from God, when they were taught by Paul's words and letters.
3. The early Christians were urged to stand fast and *hold to the traditions* as they had been delivered to them.
4. They were commanded to '*keep away*' from those who refused to live according to the '*tradition*' delivered to them by Paul.

I urge, therefore, that we should not feel uncomfortable – much less be afraid - when those who use the word 'tradition' do so without understanding its use in the scriptures. Just bear in mind that:

- *Baptism is a 'tradition'*. Matt. 28: 18-20. It was appointed, delivered by Christ to the apostles. *We keep this tradition, because it is a divine command.*
- *The Lord's Supper is a 'tradition'*. In 1st Cor. 11:2, Paul commends the Corinthians because they '*maintained the traditions*' just as he had handed them on to them. In verse 23, he tells us from whom he had obtained the 'traditions'. "*I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you*". *We keep this tradition, because it is a divine command.*
- *Singing in Worship is a 'tradition'*. It was certainly observed by the Lord Jesus when He celebrated the Passover for the last time, because the singing of Psalms 113-118 was part of the Passover ritual. And He also sang after instituting 'the Lord's Supper', as Matt. 26: 30 proves.

Col: 3:16, also reveals that the singing of praise to God, is a 'tradition' commanded by the Holy Spirit. *And we keep this tradition also, because it is a divine command.*

Now let those who wish to introduce musical instruments into the Church's worship, produce the New Testament authority to show that this practice also, is an early Church '*tradition*'.

Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP.

Email. Frank@fworgan0.wanadoo.co.uk. If you contact me by email, please note that, it is fworgan. Not fworganO)