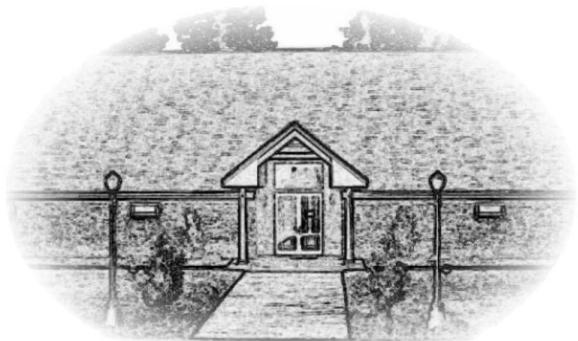


McRaven Road Church of Christ Bulletin

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The Unthinkable Commandment

With every advancing sentence in Matthew 5 (V21), Jesus has taken an ever larger bite out of the human ego. Every new contrast between the popular Pharisaic perversions and the real demand of kingdom righteousness has served to heighten the moral challenge. What the Lord at last commands in the sixth and last of these antitheses must have stunned His audience (Matthew 5:43-48). He has spoken the inconceivable when He said, “but I say to you, love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44). To many of His listeners, such counsel must have seemed not only unthinkable, but impossible - and contrary to the very concept of justice.

Now for the first time in the sermon, Jesus has spoken the word which best sums up the principle underlying the whole of His message. He has led His hearers up an ascending plane from what love prohibits in

the treatment of others (even those who abuse us) to what love demands of us positively. And who among His audience then or now could have anticipated that the journey would not be finished until He had demanded of them the hardest thing of all - to love the very ones we are most drawn to hate - our enemies. Finally, the Lord has left no room for “self” at all.

“Enemy” was hardly a foreign idea to first-century Jews. By Jesus’ time, there was a palpable enmity that had attached itself to the partitioning wall that was the law (Ephesians 2:14-15). The people of Israel had suffered much from a hostile world and often looked with disdain upon the ignorant paganism and egregious immorality of the Gentiles. The Gentiles were not slow to return the favor. The Pharisees, with their separatist fervor, were not ignorant of the law’s demand that

the sons of the covenant were to love their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18), but they understood that obligation to end at the borders of Israel. There were plenty to hate beyond the pale and many in the nation held that it was not only their privilege, but their obligation to do so. The fact that the Pharisees were aware of the command to love, but floundered on the definition of “neighbor” is evidenced by the conversation with a certain lawyer (Luke 10:25-29). The lawyer knew that formula but was yet to make a proper application.

But how and why did the teachers in Israel come to conclude that the law commanded hatred for the enemy? It might have been the “holy wars” of extermination which God commanded Israel to wage against the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 20:16-18), or the imprecatory psalms “Do not I hate them, O Lord, who hate You?... I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies,” Psalms 139:21-22. Note especially Psalm 109. Yet, however difficult and perplexing be the problems which these facts present, the law did not distinguish in the matter of neighbor love between the Israelite and the stranger (Leviticus 19:18 with 19:33-34), and it did not counsel hatred and vengeance for the enemy (Exodus 23:4-5). Even Job, whose times most likely antedate the law, understood the sin of rejoicing over the calamity of an enemy (Job 31:29-30). It has always impressed me that when Paul sought to instruct his brethren in their treatment of enemies, he felt no need for some new revelation, but drew easily upon the book of Proverbs: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him a drink” (Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21). There is no portion of the Old Testament which more directly addresses the problem of

Israel’s attitude toward her enemies than the book of Jonah. The Assyrians were a brutal people, enemies of God and men, but Jehovah loved them and He intended that His servant Jonah should do the same (Jonah 4:9-11).

Still, if after all this, we find ourselves hard pressed to believe that the law did not counsel enmity toward enemies, we are left to trust the Son of God who rebukes this idea as a misconception of the law and wholly inconsistent with the nature and purpose of God. It was just such teaching as this that made the nation so unprepared for the coming of the peaceable kingdom. Had Jesus told His followers to love their “neighbors,” they might well have continued in the old narrow ways, missing completely this love’s unique nature. But when He teaches them to love their enemies, they may be startled but they will certainly be instructed. As Kierkegaard has observed, the gospel has made it forever impossible for anyone to be mistaken about the identity of his neighbor. If we are to love our enemies, then there will certainly be no member of the human race, however different, however distant, however vile, to which we will not owe the best we can give him.

— Paul Earnhart

Tradition as Error, Truth, and Choice

There is a difference between traditions that are simply traditions, and tradition as truth. A tradition is something that is handed down as a teaching or a practice. To simplify, we can note that traditions may come in at least these forms:

1. Error. A tradition can be passed down that is erroneous. Jesus challenged this kind of tradition in Mark 7, where the Pharisees had made their tradition of “Corban” such that it violated God’s Law. Wrong-headed traditions need to be challenged and overthrown. This is not to be done, however, just based on mere preference or whim, but on the truth. If a practice or teaching is in error, then truth needs to prevail, lest we find ourselves under Jesus’ rebuke: “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matt 15:3)

2. Truth. God expected His truth to be passed down through time, and this, too, is tradition, as 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). If we are teaching new doctrines that cannot find actual biblical support for the sake of doing non-traditional things, then we have conflated

tradition as truth with tradition as error or tradition as choice. Tradition as truth should always be upheld and practiced, and failure to do so will put us out of line with God’s revealed will.

3. Choice. By “choice” in this context, I mean that the tradition is neither necessary nor wrong. Not all traditions are necessary in the sense of being required truth (#2). They might help facilitate the teaching of truth, and they might be reasonable expedients depending on the circumstances (e.g., meeting twice on Sundays or using song books), but they are not necessary. In this case, they are also not wrong, but the danger is that we get used to doing something by choice and then confuse these traditions with truth itself. That is, if the tradition by choice is changed, we fight like it is the truth that is being compromised, when it is, instead, just choices that are under scrutiny. On the other hand, some try to change tradition by choice and may take an approach that is offensive and disrespectful toward those who prefer the tradition to remain as is. There is no need to change such a tradition just for the sake of change, but neither is there a reason to hold on to it if the reason for changing it is warranted. People need to be reasonable, respectful, and open-minded in dealing with tradition as choice.

For the sake of clarity and unity, it is vital that we understand the differences between these types of tradition. So many divisions and problems can occur because we just label something “traditional” without further clarifying what we mean by it. Someone may fight against a “tradition as truth” while thinking it is “tradition as choice,” or vice-versa, and problems ensue. First, we should figure out where the tradition we are considering fits. Is it error? Is it truth? Or is it choice?

Then we can look at options: 1) reject it if it is error; 2) accept it and practice it if it is truth; or 3) consider our options and weigh the effects if it is choice. Divisive attitudes should never be allowed to prevail, especially over tradition as choice.

— Doy Moyer

News & Notes . . .

Leonard White came home Friday evening. He is doing well but is still not allowed to walk.

Work Group # will meet immediately after this morning’s service.

Let’s remember **Laura Vail** and others who are in poor health.

Our Gospel meeting with **Jim Stauffer** will be at the end of next month, **September 27 - October 2**. Cards or flyers to help spread the word should be available in a few weeks.

Scripture reading: Psalm 99:1-9

Elders: Jerry Farley.....601-825-5555
Ron Lanning.....901-496-2431
Leonard White.....601-924-2645

Deacons: Robert Boyd.....601-924-5100
Todd Bridges.....601-924-3810
Sam Everett.....601-707-3903
Greg McFarland.....601-540-0382

Preachers: Leonard White.....601-924-2645
Stefan Richardson...256-460-9280

Schedule of Services

Sunday: Bible classes 9:00 A.M.
Worship 10:00 A.M.
Worship 6:00 P.M.

Wednesday: Bible classes 7:00 P.M.