

What Is Your Custom?

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In Luke chapter four, we are told about an event surrounding Jesus on the Sabbath Day. Jesus would read from Isaiah regarding a prophecy of the Messiah. After reading, Jesus declared to the audience that the prophecy had been fulfilled in their hearing. Sadly, this angered the people and they tried to kill Jesus.

For our purposes, notice how Luke introduces this scene: *“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read”* (Luke 4:16). Going to a synagogue on the Sabbath was Jesus’ custom.

A custom is a tradition or widely accepted behavior. We all have customs, traditions, and or rituals for all kinds of activities. For example, there are cultural customs we practice within our families.

As Christians, there are certain customs we are to practice. These traditions have been instituted by Jesus, the apostles, and prophets (Eph. 2:19-22). Paul urged the church at Thessalonica to, *“...stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter”* (2 Thess. 2:15). Therefore, certain customs must become part of our lives.

What’s Your Custom Regarding...

1. Worship? As Christians, do we feel compelled to worship? Worship is how we express praise and gratitude for what God has done for us through Jesus. Worship encourages the faith we profess and declares the power of God to the surrounding community.

Since the Gospel was first obeyed, believers assembled to worship. In Acts chapter four, the church celebrated the release of Peter and John through worship. They praised God by praying the second Psalm: they were living its fulfillment (Acts 4:24-31). Also, the church at Troas gathered to worship on the first day of the week. As was Paul’s custom, he delayed his travels to worship with this church (Acts 20:1-14).

Regrettably, some Christians do not practice the custom of gathering with the church to worship. They have other customs: bad habits. In the letter to the Hebrews, some Christians had developed the bad habit of forsaking the assembly of the saints. They were rebuked and warned against this unacceptable behavior: *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near”* (Heb. 10:24-25).

2. Bible study? What regular habits do we have to read and discuss the Bible? Paul told Timothy to, *“give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”* (1 Tim. 4:13). Reading the Bible is how we learn about God and what He has done for us through Jesus. Paul wrote, *“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”* (Eph. 3:3-5). Understanding comes by reading. There is no substitute for regular Bible Study.

Bible study is an important habit to develop early in life. Parents must teach their children good Bible study practices. Like other practices parents work to instill in their children, Bible study is a custom that can carry into adulthood.

Bible study is more than an academic exercise. We are to study the Bible to put its precepts into practice in our lives. Paul told Timothy, *“Study to show yourself approved to God...”* (2 Tim. 2:15). Good Bible study habits are essential to our spiritual development. After all, Jesus intended His message to be lived: *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock...And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand”* (Matt. 7:24, 26).

3. Teaching? Teaching is a central activity of Christians. Jesus expected His message to spread throughout the world by teaching. He told the apostles to teach all nations (Matt. 28:19). When Christians were expelled from Jerusalem by the Jewish leaders, Luke records, *“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4).

Too often, Christians do not see themselves as teachers. They never develop the skill of teaching. This must change.

One aspect of teaching is that all Christians can teach in some capacity. If you are a mother, you are a teacher. If you are a father, you are a teacher. If you are an older woman, you are a teacher. If you are an older man, you are a teacher. If you have friends and neighbors, you are a teacher.

Christians are supposed to be looking for opportunities to teach the Gospel. When an opportunity arises to offer Biblical insight for someone, what do we do? Sadly, some have a custom of silence. They quietly let the opportunity pass by.

Peter wrote, *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame”* (1 Pet. 3:15-16). With the right attitude and proper Bible study, we can be prepared to teach others about the foundation of our hope: the Gospel.

4. Prayer? Jesus once told a parable about a determined widow who sought justice from a corrupt judge. Jesus used the persistence of this widow to teach that we are to pray relentlessly (Luke 18:1-8). In Jesus' parable, prayer was and is effectual. Prayer enables us to express gratitude to God and cultivate dependency on Him. Prayer is an exercise in humility.

As Christians, prayer is to be the natural response to all of life's experiences. Do we pray to give thanks to God? Do we pray to seek His guidance in our decision making processes? Do we pray on behalf of other people? Do we pray when we have success? Do we pray when we are in trouble? Or, are we too self-absorbed and egotistical to pray? Are we too busy to pray?

Prayer must be more than an afterthought. Prayer must become a regular custom of Christians. The more we pray, the closer we will get to God. The more we pray, the more sensitive and aware we will become to the needs of others. The more we pray, the better equipped we will become to serve the needs of others.

Conclusion

We all have customs. We are creatures of habit. But, what are our habits? What are our customs? If we are not careful, we can slip into bad habits. Bad habits will produce bad character.

Therefore, we need to develop customs of godliness. We need to be like Jesus. We need to be guided by His word to properly order our lives. This requires thought and sacrifice. Developing the right customs requires discipline.