

Tradition, Taboos, and Superstition: Saying What the Apostles Said

Today I watched a powerful video, *When the Rabbi Says "Come,"* for the second time. It's one section of a video called *In the Dust of the Rabbi*.

Ray Vander Laan's excellent portrayal of life in Galilee and the background of the Gospels is so helpful that I purchased a copy for my family even though it's a bit pricey. I also got the study guide, so I could go over it carefully with the children.

But this blog is not about Vander Laan's convicting and important teaching. It's about the fact that even a man like Vander Laan, whose study of the geography and culture of the Bible has led him to strongly emphasize a life-changing discipleship, is confined by semantic taboos every bit as much as those less well-informed.

His study guide says:

Jesus and his disciples had a very different view of discipleship. They made no distinction between "being saved" and living in obedience to God. To be saved was to be totally committed to a life of obedience—to walk as the Rabbi walked, to become like him.

That's clear, and no one who's read First John—and believes that it's God's Word—could deny that what Vander Laan says is true.

Mark Twain once said, "Laws are sand; customs are rock. Laws can be evaded and punishment escaped, but an openly transgressed custom brings sure punishment."

What Twain says concerns society is no less true of modern Christianity. You can often say things that flatly contradict the Bible yet maintain an audience in the churches. Say something, however, that contradicts well-established tradition, and you will be quickly called to task.

To call Christians to discipleship is no violation of modern tradition, but to tie it to salvation ... that's another story. For Vander Laan to say "They made no distinction between 'being saved' and living in obedience to God" is to walk on thin ice despite the fact that he's practically quoting 1 John.

So Vander Laan adds a line in honor to modern tradition.

They did not do this in order to *be* saved, but rather because they *were* saved. (emphasis in original)

We hate to say that we obey to *be* saved. In fact, custom forbids it.

But does *the Bible* forbid it.

If so, the apostles didn't know about it. They had no qualms about tying obedience to salvation, nor about saying that we obey to *be* saved.

For example:

- ⤴ "Therefore, brothers, be diligent to make your calling and election sure because if you **do these things** you will never stumble, for **in this way an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:10-11)
- ⤴ "What benefit is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith and does not have works? Can faith save him? ... You see then that **a man is justified by works** and not by faith only" (James

2:14,24)

- ▲ God will repay everyone according to their deeds. To those who seek glory, honor, and immortality **by patiently continuing to do good**, [he will repay] eternal life. (Rom. 2:6-7)

Yes, yes, I know that modern Christians excel at rewording the apostles so that their words don't violate modern tradition. James, for example, really didn't mean "justified by works and not by faith only," they say. He meant "justified by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone."

Slick.

But clearly James wasn't guarding his words the way modern custom prescribes. Neither was Peter. Neither was Paul.

James didn't follow his statement with, "Oops, sorry. I'm not saying that we do works to *be* justified. Obviously we do them because we *are* justified."

Peter didn't follow his words with, "I didn't mean that we diligently *do* these things to enter the kingdom of Jesus Christ. I meant that we diligently do these things because we *already have* an entrance."

I highly recommend learning to quote the apostles, despite the fact that you will quickly be labeled a heretic. You may find that there's a reason that between 80 and 95% of people who make a profession of faith don't even attend church five years later. As you learn to say what the apostles said, I believe you will find that their words will change what you believe as well, slowly delivering you from the vise-like grip of unyielding custom.

By the way, the statistic I quoted in the last paragraph came originally from Ray Comfort's *Hell's Best Kept Secret*. I recommend the book because it describes the problem so well, though I strongly disagree with his solution. We have a Gospel that doesn't work for the large majority—at least 4 out of 5—of the people who hear it.