



"Everyone wishes to have truth on his side, but not everyone wishes to be on the side of truth."

—Richard Whately

22-Apr-05

Do You Believe—Really Believe?

The death of Pope John Paul II and the election of Pope Benedict XVI made the Catholic Church—and the Catholic faith—front-page news around the globe. At least three days of wall-to-wall airtime were devoted to the Pope's death, his funeral, and the new Pope's election, and during this exclusive coverage, talking heads discussed wide-ranging linking topics, such as priestly celibacy, contraception, abortion, ordination of women, the centrality of Mary, the church's opposition to the Iraq war, and various other tenets of Catholicism. The news reporting also showed [the world](#) a great deal of the traditional ritual, liturgy, and trappings of the Vatican.

This week was also the lead-up to the [Passover](#), so there have been a few articles, reports, and shows on Jewish beliefs and practices too. One public television show that I viewed briefly Thursday night employed an actor to recite and explain the whole traditional Pesach Seder. Each word and movement are carefully ordered (the meaning of the Hebrew word *seder*) so that nothing untoward creeps into the ritual. I was also reminded this week of how the Jews have combined the Passover—commanded by [God](#) to be kept on the fourteenth day of the first month—with the first day of Unleavened Bread—a holy day celebrated on the fifteenth day. By doing this, they have lost much of the meaning of *both* days.

We were also recently treated to the Anglican blessing of the marriage of Prince Charles to Camilla Parker-Bowles. Although the actual vows were spoken before a civil officer, the groom's mother, Queen Elizabeth II, who is also the head of the English church, permitted her son and new daughter-in-law this blessing if they confessed to their sinful premarital relationship. With the usual English pomp and circumstance, both priests and the royal couple read selections from the English Book of Prayer, sang a hymn or two, and looked contrite, and all was forgiven. For all this, the Prince of Wales gets to marry his longtime paramour, and Camilla receives a vaunted title, Duchess of Cornwall (she also can use "Princess of Wales," but for decorum's sake—at least for the time being—she has said she will refrain).

What is the common denominator in these three items? Each of the three religions claims the Bible, in whole or in part, as their source of belief and practice, but none of them seems to care that what

they espouse and observe does not square with biblical teaching! Where does the Bible command priestly celibacy, the use of the title "Holy Father" for a man, or even the office of "Vicar of Christ"? Where does the Old Testament ordain the rigid formula of the Seder or allow Passover and the [Night To Be Much Observed](#) to be combined? In what epistle does God give a monarch authority over the church or permit and reward wanton, extramarital behavior in its next leader?

All of these religions are highly traditional faiths—to the extent that tradition has gained dominance in their practices, particularly in their rituals and governance. [Jesus](#), of course, lambasted the Pharisees, the originators of the current rabbinical Judaism, on just this point:

. . . you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men." ([Matthew 15:6-9](#))

Tradition in religion is a wonderful thing when it has a firm basis in the truth of God, but it becomes a deceitful and corrupting influence when its foundations are in the shifting sands of human thought. It is especially diabolical when it masquerades as rich and sublime while actually directly contradicting God's Word! This, for instance, is the case with calling the Pope "Holy Father." What blasphemy! Jesus Himself instructs His disciples, "Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" ([Matthew 23:9](#)). No matter how saintly a man any Pope might seem, he can *never* even in the smallest way be comparable to God the Father!

Truly, "now we see in a mirror, dimly" when it comes to the revelation of God; none of us has God's Word down perfectly. Nevertheless, there is a wide gulf between sincere seeking of God's revealed truth and blatant disregard for the plain teachings of Scripture! Keeping tradition despite God's commandment to the contrary is nothing less than idolatry—exalting human ideas and desires above God's. It is what has become known as *humanism*, and it is an identifying mark of false religion.

God's [true church](#) has and follows the Bible, God's Instruction Book for Christian practice, which is what religion is. It resists outside intrusions of worldly philosophies and measures all new ideas against pure, confirmed, God-breathed Word ([II Peter 1:19-21](#)). On the other side, false religions have eaten of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil ([Genesis 2:9](#), 17; 3:1-11), mixing godly teaching with false, human self-righteousness. It is an extremely simple test but highly effective in exposing false or corrupted faiths.

Jesus says straightforwardly, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" ([John 6:29](#)). God's efforts are engaged in getting us to believe in Jesus, sure, but believing in Jesus is far more than accepting that He died for the forgiveness of our sins—it is believing what He said for our instruction and what He lived as an example to us. It is following Him, imitating Him, obeying Him, and becoming more and more like Him every day!

So, do we really believe Him? Or, are we just treading water, ignorantly or even willfully continuing in the traditions of our parents because we are too lazy, too content, or too fearful to follow the truth? God is seeking men and women to worship Him in spirit *and* truth ([John 4:23](#)), and these are the ones who really believe. Are we among them? Have we examined ourselves "as to whether [we] are in the [faith](#)" ([II Corinthians 13:5](#))? Do we really and truly believe?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Time for Self-Evaluation](#)

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

Prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread, we are told to examine ourselves. How can we do that? John Reid gives a few pointers on doing a thorough, honest once over.

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