

001: Have You Been Duped by Traditions?
(based on Ch. 1 from *The End of the Pilgrimage*)

Have you been duped by traditions?

- You may not think so, but you may be surprised
- I didn't think I had been duped, until I came to realize several years ago that I had been embracing some traditional teachings rather than truth from the Word of God
- That is why I am launching this new series entitled, Truth Over Traditions
- perhaps a good subtitle would be:
- "What You Won't Learn at Church"
- My name is Pastor James Hollandsworth
- And I have to admit that ...
- after 12 years of Christian schooling and 4 years of Christian university and several years of seminary, I feel as if I have been short-changed!
- I think I should get a refund! (Haha)

I am launching this new series because many of the things I learned in church and Christian school and in seminary were traditional, but not Scriptural

- and there is a BIG difference!
- to my shame, I perpetuated some of those errors for many years in my own pastoral ministry
- but the Lord has graciously and gradually opened my eyes to truth over the past several years, for which I am truly grateful
- It's not that I have all the answers, because I certainly don't
- but I have learned some things through in-depth Bible study – and in collaboration with other Bible scholars

who feel the same way – that I would like to share with you, if you are spiritually hungry and willing to listen

- I want to help others understand God's Word, as I have been helped

Ironically, the erroneous views of which I speak are, in some cases, widely-held, traditional views

- they may even date back several centuries in the orthodox teachings of the church, but they are NOT, biblical doctrines
- now that I have been studying the Bible in-depth for many years, with an open, seeking mind, I have had to question my beliefs
- I don't believe my teachers and pastors and professors deliberately deceived me
- I really think they believed what they taught
- but could they have been duped by traditions?
- Is some of our Christian teaching and preaching based on erroneous interpretations of Scripture that have been perpetually taught, generation after generation?
- yes, tragically, I believe so

our authority must be the Word of God, not the word of man

- thus, we are all responsible, as individuals before God, to be diligent in our study of the Word, so we can stand approved before God
- one day, we will all give an account
- we need to be prepared
- to that end, I will do my best in these studies to help you learn what God says about the importance of meeting Him and how you can get prepared

but first, let me tell you about myself briefly, so you know to whom you are listening

- I am a believer – that means I have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life
- Have you? Jesus offers eternal life to those who believe Him for it
- I trust you have believed
- I am also a disciple of Jesus – one who has chosen to follow Jesus and obey Him, striving to grow in His grace
- by the way, all disciples are believers, but not all believers are disciples – there is a difference
- I will talk about that more in future studies
- I am also a husband – I have been married to my lovely wife Leslie for 35 years
- we met at Liberty University back in the early eighties, and thanks be to the Lord, have enjoyed a wonderful marriage
- furthermore, I am a father – Leslie and I have 7 children (two sons and five daughters who are all adults) – and we thank the Lord that all of our children are also believers and serving the Lord with their own respective families
- and I am a grandfather – we have 6 grandchildren at the present time, who bring great joy to us

You may wonder what I do in life?

- after spending 10 years in corporate financial positions – (I have an undergraduate degree in Finance) – I surrendered to the ministry, got a Master’s degree in Biblical Studies ...
- and I have spent the last 24 years of my life as a pastor
- the congregation the Lord has presently entrusted to my care is Tri-City Baptist Church in Forest City, NC – I have been here almost 10 years and have thoroughly enjoyed the wonderful people that God has brought together in this assembly

- I have written three books – you can find them on Amazon – just type in my full name – James S. Hollandsworth (“S” as in Scott)
- by the way, my last name is not spelled Hollingsworth, it’s Hollandsworth (like the country of Holland, followed by s-worth)
- if you leave out the middle initial S on an Amazon search, you may get some other authors named Hollandsworth to whom I am not related
- all right, that’s enough of the introductions
- now let’s get to our first study

Are you aware that God describes the Christian life as a pilgrimage?

- We are on a spiritual journey from one place to the next, from an earthly realm to a heavenly.
- Unfortunately, many children of God LIVE as if they were permanent residents of this world, not merely pilgrims passing through
- they think and behave like they’re here to stay
- they have come to love the world and their focus is on the things of here and now, not the things of the age to come
- does that describe YOU?
- that attitude has to go if you want to graduate from pilgrim to bride and co-ruler
- by the way, one of the traditional teachings of evangelical Christianity is that all children of God are part of Christ’s bride and all will be co-rulers with Him
- nothing could be further from the truth, as we shall see in a future study
- how we live NOW affects our verdict at the Judgment Seat and our place in His kingdom

I will never forget the rude awakening the Lord gave me when I was in my mid-twenties

- I had recently graduated from Liberty Univ. with a Finance degree, was newly married, and getting settled in my business career in Chicago
- enjoying that early stage of life
- Driving to work one morning, I heard a verse of Scripture quoted on Moody radio that startled me
- **2 Cor. 4:18** while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.
- I was deeply convicted in my soul by the Word of God
- though I was not a bad guy and had been attending church faithfully and teaching a SS class, I knew something was missing in my life

I was not focused on the things which are not seen, the things of the eternal realm

- I was focused on the here and now, the stuff I could see, the things of this present world ...
- climbing the corporate ladder, as the cliché goes
- desiring to succeed IN THIS LIFE
- I was merely a cosmopolitan man in religious clothes
- it was as if the Holy Spirit was saying to me, “Your values are not my values; you are living for today; I want you to live for eternity; that’s what really matters”
- I shook it off and dismissed it as not applicable to me, because I was a good guy, going to church, loving my wife, and not doing bad things
- but it came around again

that same verse coincidentally (or so I thought) showed up in my morning Bible reading

- **2 Cor. 4:18** while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.
- I couldn’t believe it; I was shaken once again by the power of the Word of God
- and the Holy Spirit was essentially saying, “This is for YOU; YOU need this!”
- and, to my shame, I once again dismissed the verse as not pertinent to me or my situation
- I was not willing to yield to the Spirit of God

believe it or not, it wasn’t long before that verse came back around at me again

- my pastor preached a message in church, using that very same verse as his text
- **2 Cor. 4:18** while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.
- it was like a neon light flashing in front of me
- the Hound of Heaven was after me
- I felt haunted by that verse; I could not get it out of my mind
- a few days later, I got on my knees and said, “Lord, that verse seems to have my name on it.”
- “I now realize what you are telling me
- “I have not been living as a pilgrim, but as a permanent resident
- “by your grace, that is going to change, going forward
- “for the rest of my life, I ask you to help me to focus on the things of the coming age, not the things of this present age

after that decision to yield to the Word of God in my life, I could not believe the transformation in thinking

- life truly became a pilgrimage, a journey from one place to the next
- and along the journey God began to show me things I needed to know, step by step
- he eventually called me to pastoral ministry and prepared me to take on the frightening task of shepherding people – how humbling!
- where are you on life's pilgrimage?
- do you have an eternal focus and a heart that seeks after God?
- listen to these verses:
- **Heb. 11:13** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.
- that's the mentality and attitude God wants
- **Phil. 3:20** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- **2 Cor. 5:7** For we walk by faith, not by sight.

The starting point of the pilgrimage is salvation, in the sense of regeneration – believing on Jesus for eternal life

- The journey, ideally, is progressive sanctification (being set apart) from sin and this present age unto righteousness and the age to come, otherwise known as the kingdom of Christ.
- but this does not happen automatically, as we shall see in future studies; it is a choice that we must make and continue to make each day, indeed, every moment of every day
- and that prompted the apostle Peter to write:

- **1 Pet. 2:11** Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,
- why is this admonition so important?
- Because life's pilgrimage ends at the Judgment Seat of Christ, known in Greek as the *Bema*, the tribunal of Jesus.
- There He will judge every saint to determine whether we have been sanctified unto *perfection* (not sinlessness, but maturity and completion).

The verdict could potentially be: *Well done, good and faithful servant, or you wicked and lazy servant, (Matt. 25:23,26), depending on how we journey throughout life's pilgrimage.*

- In other words, the reward could be positive or negative.
- Consequently, the verdict will determine our place in Christ's coming kingdom.
- that is not traditionally taught in most Christian churches and Bible colleges
- the assumption is that we will all be on level playing field
- but that is not correct
- it's important to understand that the personal, individual verdict we receive from Jesus at His Bema seat will be determined, based on how we live as pilgrims on Earth
- I should also add that the pilgrimage is not a mere stroll through life;
- we have an enemy who does not want us to succeed and who works very hard to run us off the path, to get us focused on the temporal rather than the eternal

thus, pilgrim life is often more like warfare, or a soldier's life

- indeed, that metaphor is also used in the Scriptures to describe our journey – the apostle Paul said we must endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ
- not to mention, the enemy is real and powerful and has many resources in his spiritual arsenal.

- Nevertheless, we have been given the necessary armor and weaponry for defeating him.
- **Eph. 6:12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.
- **2 Cor. 10:3-4** For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,
- We are all, by default, part of a cosmic conflict, whether we realize it or not.
- As citizens of Christ's coming kingdom, we battle every day against the kingdom of Satan, from which we have been saved
- **Col. 1:13** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Thankfully, we can be victorious, for our King defeated the enemy, through His death and resurrection

- **Heb. 2:14** says that through His death, Jesus destroyed the devil
- Our foe was rendered powerless through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, but Satan's ultimate demise will come when our King returns to set up His kingdom.
- In the interim, while we wait, our Lord wants us to draw faithfully upon His power and authority — in other words, His provision — for spiritual victory. To that end, we must walk by faith, not by sight.
- This series will be focused, in large part, on the future consequences for victorious saints (i.e., *overcomers*) vs. defeated saints
- You may be surprised to discover that only *overcomers* will rule with Jesus in His coming kingdom.

- What will happen to all the other saints?
- We will answer that question as we go along, and the answer may be shocking.
- In order to lay a proper foundation, we must first take a bird's-eye tour of the two kingdoms in conflict.

The First Kingdom Was Forfeited

- Adam was the first king of this world.
- His consort queen Eve ruled at his side.
- God gave them a realm, the entire earth.
- God intended for Adam initially, and all mankind subsequently, to rule over the entire created order, as God's representatives on Earth.
- Man was to replenish (literally, fill up) the earth and subdue it and have dominion over every living thing.
- The three essential aspects of a kingdom were in place: a ruler, a realm, and actual rulership.
- Everything was perfect, just as God had intended.

If Adam had proceeded to follow God's perfect will, the entire human race would have continued ruling all of nature

- But God gave Adam a choice, as God does with all of His created beings — we all have free will, and so does the supernatural realm
- Despite his ideal surroundings, Adam chose to sin and thereby forfeited his dominion over creation.
- Because of sin, the image of God in Adam was marred. His spirit became dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), his soul became wicked and degenerate (Jer. 17:9; Ezek. 18:20), and his body became corrupted and eventually died (Rom. 6:23).
- The curse of sin affected the entire human race (Rom. 5:12) and separated man from God (Isa. 59:1-2).

- Satan the tempter, who had provoked man's fall, consequently usurped man's authority.

The kingdom of Earth became His domain

- we see that in his temptation of Christ in Luke 4
- Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would bow down and worship Satan
- Jesus never questioned Satan's rulership over Earth's kingdoms
- It's not that God lost control of His kingdom because of Adam.
- On the contrary, God's kingdom is everlasting, and He is sovereign over all.
- But when man forfeited the earthly kingdom, God allowed Satan to take control for a time until One would come to "crush the serpent's head" (Gen. 3:15).

Indeed, the Usurper Was Crushed

- Thankfully, God had a plan to redeem lost mankind and to restore the theocracy.
- Indeed, in the fullness of time the Son of God left Heaven's glories; laid aside His divine prerogatives; was born of a virgin; took on human flesh — of the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and Judah — and lived a sinless life as the second Adam.
- He preached a message of repentance to His people, but was rejected by them and put to death, willingly enduring the horrors of crucifixion and shedding His precious blood on the cross of Calvary so that He might pay the price for sin as the perfect Lamb of God.
- Following His death and burial, the Messiah arose from the grave on the third day and thereby defeated sin and death and Satan.

- The serpent's head was crushed, rendering him powerless.
- The devil is a defeated foe, even though he continues to rule temporarily.
- Jesus ascended into Heaven forty days after His resurrection, and He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, a place of exaltation.
- All powers have been placed under the feet of Jesus, including Satan's domain

Those who believe Him for eternal life are reconciled with God, forgiven of sin, and given the indwelling presence of Jesus as the provision for living victoriously

- At salvation the spirit of man is made alive, passing from death unto life.
- Old things pass away; all things become new
- The Holy Spirit of God takes up permanent residence in regenerated saints.
- It is also accurate to say Christ lives within believers (Gal. 2:20 – Paul said "Christ lives in me!").
- He becomes our provision when we, by faith, appropriate His grace, letting Him live His life through us.
- To the extent the believer lives in this way, fully dependent on Christ, he will be abiding in the vine.
- Whoever abides in Him does not sin (1 John 3:6), as long as he continues abiding.
- Unfortunately, our problem is that we do not consistently abide in Christ.

Thus, the image of God is partly restored in man at the point of salvation, when his spirit is made alive.

- Throughout the Christian life, more of God's image is restored, to the extent the believer progresses in

discipleship and his soul becomes sanctified by conformity to the image of Jesus.

- Those who submit to God's image-restoring plan in their lives (called progressive sanctification) enter into a kingdom way of living in this life, which then qualifies them to rule with Jesus in His coming kingdom.

The Good News Is: The Kingdom Will Be Restored

- One day soon Jesus will gather up all of God's children into the heavenlies, those whom He has redeemed by His blood.
- The saints will give an account of their lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- Following a seven-year period of tribulation on Earth, the primary purpose of which is to bring national Israel to repentance ...
- Jesus will return to Earth, defeat the Gentile kingdoms of the world as controlled by Satan, and save the nation of Israel

Paul the apostle said, "all Israel will be saved"

- Then Jesus will commence His Messianic kingdom on Earth, during which time Satan and his host will be bound and imprisoned in the bottomless pit
- Christ will demonstrate that a kingdom of God on Earth — a kingdom from Heaven — is possible, as He rules in righteousness and peace for a thousand years.
- At the end of His millennial reign, Satan will be loosed to stir up a rebellion among men, but God will destroy them all from Heaven with fire, and will cast Satan into the lake of fire, along with death and Hades
- death will be no more
- The redeemed will live in the new Heaven and new Earth and the condemned will suffer in the lake of fire

During the interim period between Christ's first coming and His second, Satan functions as the prince of this world, the prince of the power of the air who now works in the children of disobedience

- Along with his fallen echelon, he rules the world, both terrestrial and celestial by controlling the Gentile kingdoms of the world.
- Notwithstanding, God intends to take back the kingdom through Jesus Christ, the second Adam.
- As mentioned earlier, He has already won the victory and inherited the right to rule.
- Thus, Jesus is the rightful King, and He has been given a realm, His Church — those who have been translated from Satan's kingdom, the power of darkness, to the kingdom of Christ
- Nevertheless, Jesus is not presently ruling as a King.
- Rather, He is presently functioning in His role as Priest, interceding for the saints
- When He comes again, He will deal a death-blow to the enemies of God, take the kingdom from Satan, and become crowned as millennial king.

The purpose of the millennial kingdom is for Jesus, the second Adam, to rule in righteousness along with qualified, redeemed saints ...

- and thereby demonstrate what could have happened under the first Adam, had he not sinned.
- It is very important for children of God to recognize that our primary purpose for existence is to glorify God by living in a way that pleases Him now so that we can qualify to rule with Him then, over the world and over angels

- Co-ruling with Christ in His kingdom is the reward we should desire to attain
- Not to win that prize is to fall short of our reason for living and will result in shame and regret
- I will illustrate this in detail as we go along in the series

The kingdom was foremost in our Lord's earthly ministry.

- In His final forty days on Earth before ascending to Heaven, Jesus spoke to His disciples *of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*, Acts 1:3.
- His future Messianic kingdom on Earth was the burden of His heart from the very start of His public ministry
- He preached: *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, Matt. 4:17
- we will see exactly what that message means in a future study
- the kingdom of heaven was also on our Lord's heart to the very end.
- Yet, His focus was not merely on the fact of the millennial kingdom or the nature of it.

The Old Testament prophets had already said much concerning the coming Messianic kingdom.

- Repeatedly, through the Synoptic Gospels, we find Jesus honing in on the requirements for living the kingdom way of life here and now, which then qualifies one to inherit the coming millennial kingdom.
- If Jesus cared so much about getting His disciples ready for the kingdom, how much more should we?
- Is the church of Jesus Christ really focused on the kingdom?
- If so, then why are more Christians not being motivated to prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ and what follows?

- Could it be that many do not take the Judgment Seat seriously?

The apostle Paul's warning should be sobering to us all:

- **2 Cor. 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.
- All children of God will appear (i.e., be made manifest) at the tribunal of Jesus.
- Everyone will be recompensed according to how he lives on Earth.
- The verdict will be either good (*Well done, good and faithful servant*) or bad (*you wicked and lazy servant*) and will determine the extent of every man's reward or loss as he enters the Messianic kingdom of Christ on Earth.
- the apostle Paul said:
- **1 Cor. 3:13** each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.
- **1 Cor. 3:14** If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.
- **1 Cor. 3:15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Work of an inferior nature (i.e., temporal and self-dependent) will be consumed in Christ's "testing" fire, and be considered a loss in the kingdom.

- That saint of God, though eternally secure, will be ashamed at the Judgment Seat, and will consciously regret his/her verdict throughout the millennial kingdom, having no opportunity to rule and reign with Christ (the very purpose of our millennial existence).

- Only work of an abiding nature (eternal and Christ-dependent) will survive and be rewarded in the kingdom.
- Because we fear our God who is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), we should passionately convince fellow believers of their coming appointment.
- **2 Cor. 5:11** Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

In other words, we should be actively engaged in warning saints of the awfulness of the Judgment Seat of Christ and helping them prepare to give a good account.

- This verse is most commonly used to emphasize the urgency of persuading lost folks to be saved from hell, and that is certainly a valid application.
- But the most immediate context (2 Cor. 5:10, which I quoted earlier) emphasizes that we should be persuading saved people to be ready to meet Jesus at the Judgment Seat.
- Unfortunately, I believe an error has crept into the church in modern times.
- Many assume, because they are eternally secure, that the Judgment Seat of Christ will be merely an awards ceremony of sorts.
- They imagine shuddering momentarily at the Bema, perhaps receiving a mild rebuke, then continuing on into the millennial kingdom with all the honors and privileges supposedly conferred upon children of God.
- They expect a “happily-ever-after” millennial existence, with no tears or sorrow.
- Nothing could be further from the truth!

There are at least two problems with this mentality.

- First, it assumes all children of God are, by nature of their standing, automatically qualified to rule and reign as firstborn sons.
- But that is not what the Bible teaches, as we shall see.
- Second, it assumes the Judgment Seat of Christ will be a mere formality, no big deal.
- But this way of thinking is flippant and misinformed and will certainly be regretted in the future.
- Out of a passion to help saints prepare for the coming kingdom, I am offering this series to provide Biblical teaching on the coming Judgment Seat of Christ and the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ to follow.
- May we all, as saints of God, prepare to hear “well done” so that we might glorify Christ by reigning together with Him in His coming kingdom.
- I challenge you to think on these things.