Biblical Patterns For The Local Church



Is tradition important? If so, which traditions?

How do we know which traditions God wants the local church to follow? Because of verses like the following, many believers think that tradition is something to be avoided:

> **Mark 7:9 –** "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep **your own tradition**."
>
> **Mark 7:13 –** "Making the word of God of none effect through **your tradition**, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

As you can see above, the traditions being condemned are **the people's own traditions** and not ordinances prescribed by God.

Are there any biblically mandated traditions?

There are many traditions or patterns of living that Paul and other writers of the NT ***encouraged*** and even commanded people to practice as we see here:

> **2Thes 2:15 –** "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and **hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle**."
>
> **2Thes 3:6 –** "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after **the tradition which he received of us**."
>
> **1Cor 11:16 –** "But if any man seem to be contentious, **we have no such custom, neither the churches of God**."

1Cor 1:1-2 – "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. 2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and **keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you**."

Php 4:9 – "**Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do**: and the God of peace shall be with you."

So which traditions are Christians supposed to practice?

Answer: The biblical traditions – the ones mentioned in the Word of God. In fact, as we read above, we are commanded to follow the traditions, customs and ordinances delivered to us by God through the writers of the New Testament.

Scriptural traditions infrequently adhered to:

There were many **scriptural** ordinances, customs, and traditions in the early church that are no longer followed by most local churches today. For example:
1. Meeting in fairly small groups, in houses primarily (Rom 16:5, 1Cor 16:19, Col 4:15, Phm 1:2).
2. Celebrating communion **each** Lord's Day (Acts 20:7).
3. Eating a fellowship meal with communion (1Cor 11:33).
4. Meetings where everyone participates and contributes somehow – in a way that relates to their own spiritual gifts. (1Cor 11 through 1Cor 14).
5. Leadership coming from within the local body – not hired from outside (Acts 6:2-3, Titus 1:5-9, 1Tim 3:1-13).
6. Leaders who lead by facilitating others and by encouraging others, to participate and use their gifts in the group setting in an orderly fashion (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Scriptural traditions commonly adhered to:

There are some **scriptural** ordinances, customs, and traditions in the early church that are still adhered to by most local churches today. For example:
1. Meeting weekly, usually on Sundays (Acts 20:7, 1Cor 16:2).
2. Meetings conducted decently and in order – except for many charismatic churches! (1Cor 14:40).
3. Celebrating the ordinance of baptism, though not always by immersion (Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 1:16, Galatians 3:27).
4. Celebrating the ordinance of communion, though almost never as part of a fellowship meal (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

Unscriptural traditions commonly adhered to:

There are many **unscriptural** ordinances, customs and traditions being

practiced in modern churches. Some do not go directly against any scriptural commands – they are just not mentioned in scripture. Here are some practices of modern churches, not mentioned in scripture:
1. Meeting in *large purchased buildings* that are usually vacant most of the time.
2. *Hiring* church leaders when very competent self-sustaining leaders are available in the local congregation, free of charge.
3. Obtaining leaders from *outside* the local body – from other churches or recent seminary graduates.
4. *Paying* people (instructors at seminaries and Bible colleges) *to train church leaders.*
5. Having *outsiders* train leaders (people in seminaries & Bible colleges whose lifestyle and doctrinal standings are nowhere near as well known as members in the local church).
6. Celebrating communion *only once a month, or even less frequently* and rarely as part of a fellowship meal.
7. *Forbidding or discouraging* most people in a church gathering *from participating* in the service or restricting them to very limited and structured types of participation.
8. *Forbidding* the congregation from *questioning the teachers* unless they make appointments with them or approach them apart from the rest of the congregation.
9. Selecting leaders based primarily on *scholastic ability rather than on moral criteria* of Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3.
10. Setting up church *programs and committees* to address the needs of the body.
11. *Segregating people* by age, marital status or other criteria (i.e. youth groups, singles groups, etc.).
12. Choirs (Is this "segregation by singing ability?").
13. Plays/skits/puppet-shows and other methods of teaching by 'pretending'.
14. "Christian" comedians, "Christian" magicians, "Christian" psychologists, "Christian" rock – the practice of attaching the word "Christian" to something to legitimize it within the Church.
15. Expecting the church leadership to be responsible for most of the spiritual training of children.
16. *Church bulletins* to tell you who does what and when you are allowed to do something during the weekly church meetings.
17. *Specialized* church *furniture*: altars, pews, hymn number charts.
18. Baptism certificates, church membership certificates, church membership programs, church constitutions.
19. Specialized denomination-based creeds and confessions.
20. Churches *structured as corporations* rather than as families (households).
21. Leaders being given *special titles* (such as Pastor, Reverend, Doctor) instead of being referred to by their first name like everybody else.
22. *Teaching from the latest books* and study guides (which allows teachers to let someone else – outside the local body – do the preparation and studying for them).
23. *Women church leaders*: preachers/pastors/deacons. Women teaching men in Sunday school, etc.

24. *Copyrighting Christian literature* (Bibles, Gospel tracts, hymns, books, tapes, etc.).
25. Reconstructionism – "reclaiming" this sin-cursed world for Christ, trying to force the world to act Christian rather than just preaching the gospel and letting God change the hearts of men.
26. Para-church ministries – ministries that are often ecumenical and often not accountable to any particular biblically-based local church.
27. Sectarianism – separation of believers into denominations.
28. Teaching and upbringing of Christian children by people other than their parents. Public schooling for Christian children, day-care (Christian or otherwise), Christian schools (grammar school, high school, college).
29. Fundraising drives (sponsoring events to obtain money from people – including unbelievers – outside of the local church body).
30. The social gospel (cooperating in ministries – usually social causes – with those who preach another gospel).
31. Using church meetings for evangelism where the pastor preaches the gospel to the congregation, rather than teaching them how to share the gospel with the lost world that is OUTSIDE the walls of the church meeting place.
32. Paying outsiders (far away missionaries) to preach the gospel instead of focusing on preaching the gospel yourselves in your own community.

Food for thought:

1. Which, if any, of the above 32 practices are necessary for the health of the local church?
2. Which have you been involved in, in the past?
3. Which are you still involved in that perhaps you should not be involved in?
4. Of the unbiblical practices you are still involved in, are you making any plans to abandon those practices?
5. If you are planning to get away from unbiblical practices and move towards more biblical practices regarding the local church, have you consulted with others as to how you might do so?
