

Cutting the Ends off Ham

A new husband watched curiously as his bride prepared to place a ham in the oven.

Before putting it in to cook, she took a knife and carefully trimmed off both ends of the ham.

The husband asked, “Why did you do that? I’m not an expert at cooking hams, but I don’t think I ever saw anyone cut off both ends of the ham before cooking it.”

The wife answered, “You know, I don’t really know. I never cooked a ham before, but that’s the way my mother always did it.”

Her curiosity aroused, she telephoned her mother and asked her why she always cut off both ends of a ham before she cooked it.

“Now that you mention it, I don’t know, dear,” her mother replied. “That’s just the way your grandmother always did it. Other than that, I honestly don’t have a clue.”

Determined now to unravel this mystery, the young bride then telephoned her grandmother and asked her why she always cut off both ends of the ham before she cooked it.



“Well, sweetheart,” her grandmother said, “the pan wasn’t big enough to put the whole ham in, so I had to cut the ends off to make it fit. After that, I guess it just became a habit.”

You see? That’s traditionalism – when we do whatever we do without really knowing why we do it, but we continue to do it anyway because that’s what we’ve always done. Does that make sense?

Maybe and maybe not. Some traditions are well founded – like standing in praise and adoration of Jesus Christ in a performance of the iconic *Hallelujah Chorus* from George Frederic Handel’s *Messiah* or placement of a hand on the Bible for a swearing-in ceremony, particularly that of a president. Or the custom (especially practiced in the South) of a gentleman showing respect for a lady by holding a door for her.

(more)

But traditions may also serve as roadblocks to progress. How many times have you and I heard – in church, politics, business or education, “Well, we’ve never done it that way before,” or “Here’s how we’ve always done it” (meaning let’s just keep on doing it) when continuation may not be the right course.

There is certainly nothing wrong with examining a tradition, how it got started (as in the case of that ham), and whether it should be kept, revised or rejected.

The Apostle Paul had a word of caution about tradition:

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter