

Matthew 15:1-9

The Danger With Traditions

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,’ he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:

(Matthew 15:1-9)

*“This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.
‘But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”*

(Isaiah 29:13)

1. I want to begin today's study by telling you somethings about the different groups Jesus had a problem with
2. Groups which existed during Jesus ministry
 - A. History of the groups
 1. They developed during 400 years between Old and New Testaments
 2. Jews spent 70 years in captivity
 3. They returned with a strong desire to please God
 - B. Scribes
 1. Founded by Ezra
 2. Originally copied sections of the Torah
 3. Eventually wrote and debated interpretations of the Law
 4. Their comments became a law
 5. Soon they became more interested in the letter of the law than the spirit of the law
 - C. Pharisees
 1. Separated ones
 2. Started well
 3. Desired to be separate from the world, foreign influence, idolatry
 4. Sold out to God
 5. Became legalistic
 - D. Sadducees
 1. Liberal
 2. Did not believe in the Law, miracles or a literal physical resurrection
 3. Politically inclined
 4. Wealthy aristocrats
 5. Social conscience
 6. Wanted peace with Rome
 7. Not great enemies of Jesus in the gospels

8. Great enemies of the church in Acts
- E. Herodians
 1. Jewish nationalists
 2. Sided with the Herods, who had built the temple
3. Who were the hypocrites
 - A. Jesus not looking for trouble—trouble found Him
 - B. Jesus unafraid of confrontation
 - C. Hypocrite comes from Greek term for an actor on stage
 - D. One who lived behind a mask
 - E. Every area of life has hypocrites
 - F. Spiritual hypocrites are the worst
 - G. Jesus did not hold back against hypocrisy (see Matthew 23)
4. As Jesus went about preaching and teaching, He often ran afoul of the religious leaders over the matter of keeping traditions...
 - A. Plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath - Matthew 12:1-8
 - B. Healing on the Sabbath - Matthew 12:9-14
 - C. Eating with unwashed hands - Matthew 15:1-9
5. We see Jesus explaining the danger of men's traditions.
 - A. How keeping them can make void the very commands of God
 - B. How keeping them can make our worship vain before God
6. Traditions are very important in some religions...
 - A. In the Roman Catholic church, tradition is place on par with God's Word
 - B. Just about every Protestant church has its own traditions
 1. It is often the accepted traditions that distinguish between the denominations
 2. To be a member of a particular denomination, one must accept its traditions
7. Throughout the Gospels, we read of Jesus not conforming to what the Jewish religious leaders thought HE should. This is because they forgot what GOD truly wanted from men.
 - A. a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something that has been used by the people in a particular group, family, society, etc., for a long time
 1. Traditions are standards set by those who came before us
 - a) The way we dress
 - b) The way we eat
 - c) The way we sing
 - d) The way we get married
 - e) Etc. etc. etc.
8. The Meaning Of Tradition
 - A. The word comes from Greek
 1. "Paradosis", which means "giving over" or "handing down"
 2. It refers to teaching that is handed down either by word (orally) or in writing
 - B. As understood by the Jews
 1. It was often applied to the oral teachings of the elders (distinguished elders from Moses on down)
 2. These traditions were often divided into three classes...
 - a) Some oral laws supposedly given by Moses in addition to the written laws
 - b) Decisions of various judges which became precedents in judicial matters
 - c) Interpretations of highly respected rabbis which were held in reverence along with the OT scriptures
 3. Prior to his conversion, Paul was a staunch supporter of Jewish tradition - Galatians 1:13-14
 - C. As understood by Romans Catholics and Greek Catholics
 1. The views appear to be parallel to that of the Jews

2. What they consider "Tradition" is what they believe to be the teachings:
 - a) Of Jesus or the apostles, persevered orally rather than through writing
 - b) Of various councils which have left various decrees
 - c) Of various church leaders (such as the pope) considered to be inspired with later revelations from God
3. Of course, one is expected to take their word for it that these "traditions" were truly from God and have been faithfully transmitted

D. As found in the Scriptures

1. The word "tradition" as such is not found in the Old Testament
2. It is found thirteen times in New Testament
 - a) Three times it refers to "apostolic teaching"
 3. That which had been delivered by the apostles - 1 Colossians 11:2
 4. Whether by word (in person) or epistle - 2 Thessalonians 2:15
 5. Which Christians were expected to keep - 2 Thessalonians 3:6
 - a) Ten times it refers to "the tradition of the elders" or "the traditions of men"

E. As found in our text and parallel passages - Mt 15:2-6; Mark 7:3-13

1. Of which Paul warned the Colossians - Colossians 2:8
2. From which Jewish Christians had been delivered (including Paul) - 1 Peter 1:18; Galatians 1:14
3. Jesus did not feel bound to abide by "the traditions of the elders"
 - a) Some traditions He had no problem keeping
 - b) Such as going to a wedding feast - John 2:1-2
 - c) Or attending the Feast Of Dedication - John 10:22-23
4. But He just as easily had no problem with violating other traditions
 - a) Plucking grain or healing on the Sabbath
 - b) Eating with unwashed hands
 - c) Evidently Jesus did not subscribe to the view of "traditions" handed down orally
5. He never appealed to the traditions of the elders
6. He either appealed to the authority of the written Word (the Law of Moses), or to His own authority as the Son of God

It must be stated that not all "traditions" are wrong. When they are teachings inspired by God, given and "written" by men approved by God, they are to be followed. It is when they are doctrines or interpretations handed down by uninspired men, that they are dangerous. This is what we saw in the traditions of the Jews Jesus was talking about.

9. The danger of men's traditions.

A. Men's traditions make void the Word of GOD.

1. Jesus gave the example of honoring one's parents - Matthew 15:3-6
 - a) The tradition of the elders taught giving to the temple freed one from giving to his or her parents
 - b) Thus rendering the command of God of no effect
2. There are traditions of men today with similar effect
 - a) Such as the practice of sprinkling for baptism, a tradition of man
 - b) When one keeps the tradition of sprinkling, they make the command of God to be baptized (immersed) of no effect!
3. Through keeping such traditions, one is actually rejecting the command of God! - Mark 7:8-9

B. They can lead to vain worship

1. When traditions of men are taught on the same level as the commands of God, it leads to vain worship - Mt 15:9
2. Such worship may appear to be impressive, but it is actually "empty, worthless"
 - a) First, because God did not command it
 - b) Second, because it does not accomplish the good we really need - Colossians 2:20-23

C. They can lead to hypocritical worship

1. Traditions of men tend toward ritualism (just look at the rituals found in many religions that have no scriptural basis)
2. Such ritualism is often done repeatedly, with little thought as to its origin and purpose
3. It is easy to go through such rituals, with the heart and mind on other things
4. Worship without the heart (or mind) of man is hypocritical worship! - Matthew 15:7-8

10. What are traditions?

- A. They are simply teachings that have been handed down
- B. In the case of inspired men (like the apostles) given in person or through their writings, such traditions are good and to be followed

11. In the case of oral transmissions, given through a chain of uninspired men, traditions are at best suspect...

- A. Jesus did not hold the "traditions" orally transmitted through the Jews on par with God's written word
- B. Neither should we hold "traditions" orally transmitted through Christians on par with God's written word

12. At worst, traditions of men can be vain and deadly...

- A. When their observance leads one to not keep a command of God
- B. When they are taught as doctrine, on par with God's word
- C. When they lead to ritualism, done without engaging the heart and mind of man
- D. From Jesus' words, let us be aware of "The Danger With Traditions", and make sure that our faith and practice is based upon the written Word of God, not the interpretations and teachings of uninspired men!