

### Is Tradition the Same as Truth?

People often confuse tradition, which is changeable, with truth, which is unchangeable.

Tradition reminds me of a church that I read of that changed the order of its music, which resulted in chaos. The pastor related the story in these words, “When our church changed the order of the worship service and put some music at the end, someone asked why we did that. He liked the music at the beginning of the service because we’d always had it at the beginning. He was bound by tradition with relatively little significance. He needed to understand that human tradition can never be equated with divine authorization.”

Jesus had a similar problem in Matthew 15:1-14. Matthew 15:1-2 says: “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.”

The scribes had established a rule that before they ate, they had to go through a ceremonial purifying – which included washing hands. The religious ceremony was meaningless. And Jesus’ disciples didn’t follow those ceremonies. Therefore, the scribes and Pharisees accused them of transgression of the tradition of the elders. It would appear that Jesus’ disciples were being accused of sinning by the scribes and Pharisees for not washing their hands before they ate.

The rules that were established by the scribes were not binding in God’s eyes; nor, were the rabbinical traditions inspired by God. One writer said, “they were legalistic rules that enables people to exalt themselves since they could keep them more easily than the true laws of God.”

Jesus, in defense of his disciples, asked a question in verse 3, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” In verse 6, Jesus said, “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.”

Jesus digs deeper into their hypocrisy by saying unto them, “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias [Isaiah] prophesy of you saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouths, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (vv.7-9).

After this brief discourse, the disciples came to Jesus in verse 12 and said, “the Pharisees were offended” by what you said.

Jesus answered the disciples and said, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (vv.13-14).

Tradition is deadly when it takes precedence over the Word of God. Tradition has so superseded the Word of God in many cases that people don’t know the difference between what God instituted and what the church instituted. They don’t know the difference between tradition, which is changeable, and the Word of God, which is unchangeable, and this is dangerous.