

Considering Traditions 10-04-15 AM

In Mark 7:1-9 Jesus exposed the error of the Pharisees regarding traditions. He told them that they fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah by teaching as commandments the traditions of men. When Jesus saw traditions (the word tradition (GR *paradosis*) refers to a transmission of authority), he saw something that was being mistaken for a commandment (Gr *didaskalia*, a (Divine) instruction); His words could be rephrased as “teaching as (God’s authority) (man’s authority)”. We should understand that when Jesus condemned making traditions commandments, it means He condemned “unauthorized” traditions.

Let us be clear: the difference between commandments and tradition is that commandments don’t change (Deuteronomy 4:2/Revelation 22:18-19), but traditions do. In fact, the great problem with churches today is that they treat commandments like traditions, changing the commandments of God to suit social norms. Many people believe that doctrine ought to change with the times. At the same time, many have no problem saying that church traditions are equal to Scriptural doctrine. Here is a quote from a Catholic writer: “It is an article of faith from a decree of the Vatican Council that Tradition is a source of theological teaching distinct from Scripture, and that it is infallible. It is therefore to be received with the same internal assent as Scripture, for it is the word of God¹”. Paul’s words in Colossian 3:8 come to mind when seeing something like this.

Traditions are not bad of themselves if we can discern that they are authorized traditions. There are many authorized traditions mentioned in the Bible. Consider the head coverings of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 or the foot washings of 1 Timothy 5:10. Today we have many authorized traditions; we call such things “expedience”, the means by which we accomplish a commandment of God. We might say that expedience (authorized tradition) are approaches to authority. We use expedients (like songbooks, buildings, water fountains) to accomplish commandments (like singing, gathering together).

Two Great Dangers in Expedients and Commandments: Danger #1: Changing Law to Tradition. Many now claim that LAWS are TRADITIONS. For example, people speak about churches have a “tradition of baptizing” or a “tradition of acapella”, two things which are most certainly not traditions, as they are commandments from God. When it comes to issues such as worship (Communion, Songs, Days) or lifestyles (Marriage, Home, Modesty), there are some who mistakenly take the commandments of God (such as a woman’s role in the church, the oversight of the home, the day of the week we meet) and attempt to remove the authority by suggesting that they are merely an authorized tradition (expedient) and can be removed. As Jesus said, by teaching as TRADITION the COMMANDMENTS of God, one can invalidate the Word of God.

Danger #2: Changing Tradition to Law. Many now claim that TRADITIONS are LAWS. Within the same examples (Worship (Communion, Songs, Days) and Lifestyles (Marriage, Home, Modesty)) many have suggested that expedients (songbooks, times of services, two services, order of worship) are commandments not to be changed. By teaching as TRADITION the COMMANDMENTS of God, one can invalidate the Word of God

Making Applications: To be successful as Christians with expedients and commandments we need to know what we believe and practice. We need to know what is a commandment (and that these are unalterable) and we need to know what is an authorized tradition (and that these can change)

¹ Attwater, Donald, Ed., *A Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).PP 41