

Truth or Tradition – Week 1 – Traditions – Bible Study Helps

Title: Traditions vs. Truth: Examining Religious Practices Through Scripture

Sermon Summary:

This sermon challenges believers to examine their religious traditions in light of biblical truth, particularly as Easter approaches. The sermon emphasizes that religious traditions can become heaven and hell issues when they contradict Scripture or replace genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Drawing from Mark 7 and Matthew 15, the message exposes how the Pharisees elevated human traditions above God's commandments, leading Jesus to call them hypocrites. The sermon warns against blindly following traditions simply because "we've always done it this way" and calls for believers to prove all traditions against Scripture. The core message emphasizes that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not through religious rituals or traditions, and that believers must be willing to change any belief or practice that contradicts the Bible.

Key Points:

- Religious traditions can become heaven and hell issues when they contradict the Holy Bible and replace trust in Jesus Christ
- There is an ongoing war on the Word of God, starting in the Garden of Eden with Satan's question, "Yea hath God said?"
- Jesus Christ called the Pharisees hypocrites for honoring God with their lips while their hearts were far from Him
- The progression of error: entertaining traditions, setting aside God's Word, then completely rejecting Scripture to maintain traditions
- Hypocrites exist in all religious circles, and believers must examine their own lives honestly
- The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, making self-examination difficult but necessary
- Many Protestant churches now follow Roman Catholic traditions despite historically rejecting tradition as authority
- Good biblical traditions exist, such as the Lord's Supper, which Jesus commanded believers to observe
- Believers should have a Bible verse for everything they do religiously
- People must always be ready to change what they believe when it contradicts Scripture
- Salvation is immediate upon trusting Christ—believers wake up in paradise, unbelievers in hell
- Religious motions without genuine heart transformation lead people to hell despite appearing sincere

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Scripture Reference:

- Mark 7:1-23 (primary passage)
- Matthew 15:1-20 (parallel passage)
- Isaiah's prophecy about hypocrites (referenced in Mark 7:6)
- Exodus 21:17 (cursing parents deserves death)
- Fifth Commandment: Honor thy father and mother
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 3:6 (positive references to apostolic traditions)
- Galatians 1:14 (Paul's zealousness for Jewish traditions before salvation)
- Colossians 2:6-10 (warning against philosophy and traditions of men)
- 1 Peter 1:13-19 (not redeemed by traditions but by Christ's blood)
- Psalm 119:165 (great peace for those who love God's law)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (prove all things)
- Acts 17:11 (Bereans searched the Scriptures daily)

Stories:

- The pastor's personal testimony of growing up in a religious church with sincere people but leaving unchanged, not caring about God despite religious attendance
- College roommate in Catholic church who got ashes on Ash Wednesday but continued partying and sinful behavior, trusting the ritual rather than genuine repentance
- The pastor's emotional moment praying with his son Luke before Luke's wedding, showing vulnerability and dependence on God's grace
- Illustration of children learning to brush teeth and the father checking by smelling their breath to ensure obedience
- Reference to the rich man and Lazarus parable (implied) regarding immediate destination after death
- The account of Jesus' crucifixion where He prayed "Father, forgive them" despite the torture and mockery

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- Pharisees stirring up crowds to cry "Crucify Him" through manipulation and whisper campaigns
- Example of the "Lord's Prayer" being recited as vain repetition when people don't think about what they're saying
- Challenge about marriage: someone should be able to look at how a Christian treats their spouse and want to be saved based on that example

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Discipleship Questions

How can we distinguish between traditions that honor God and those that have become substitutes for genuine faith in Jesus Christ?

In what ways might we be laying aside God's commandments to hold onto our own family or religious traditions, even without realizing it?

What does it mean to honor God with our lips while our hearts are far from Him, and how can we examine our own hearts for this hypocrisy?

Why do you think people become so offended when their religious traditions are challenged by Scripture, and how should we respond when this happens?

How can we ensure we are trusting in the finished work of Christ alone for salvation rather than in the keeping of religious traditions?

What practical steps can we take to inventory our religious practices and evaluate whether they align with what the Bible actually teaches?

Why is it significant that Jesus was not concerned with offending the Pharisees when speaking truth, and what does this teach us about sharing biblical truth today?

How does the progression of laying aside Scripture, holding traditions, and then rejecting God's Word completely happen in individual lives and religious institutions?

In what ways might our desire to avoid conflict or maintain family peace cause us to compromise on biblical truth regarding religious traditions?

If someone were to observe your life and faith practices, would they see a clear path to knowing Jesus Christ, or would they see confusing religious traditions?

Small Group Guide: Traditions vs. Truth

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: What's a family tradition you grew up with? How did you learn about it, and why was it important to your family?

Key Scripture

Mark 7:1-13 (Focus verses: 6-9, 13)

Sermon Summary

Pastor explored the difference between religious traditions and biblical truth, challenging us to examine whether our practices align with Scripture or are merely traditions passed down through generations. Jesus confronted the Pharisees who elevated their traditions above God's Word, calling them hypocrites who honored God with their lips while their hearts were far from Him.

Discussion Questions

Understanding Traditions

1. **What is a "tradition" according to the sermon?** How did Webster's 1828 Dictionary define it, and why is that significant?
2. **Read Mark 7:6-9.** Why did Jesus call the Pharisees hypocrites? What were they doing that was so offensive to God?
3. **Can you think of examples of "good" biblical traditions versus "bad" unbiblical traditions?** What makes the difference?

Personal Reflection

4. **Have you ever questioned a religious tradition you were taught?** What happened when you asked "why do we do this?"
5. **Read Colossians 2:8.** What does it mean to be "spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit"? How can our hearts deceive us into following traditions over Scripture?

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6. **"We are all, on some level, on any given day, hypocrites."** How does this statement make you feel? In what areas of your life might there be a gap between what you say you believe and how you live?

Applying Truth

7. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and Acts 17:11.** What do these verses teach us about how we should evaluate what we're taught, even in church?
8. **The sermon stated: "Always be ready to change whatever you have been taught or believed when it goes contrary to the Bible."** What makes this difficult? What helps make it possible?
9. **How can we speak truth in love to family members or friends who hold tightly to unbiblical traditions without being offensive or judgmental?**

Heaven and Hell Issues

10. **Some religious traditions can be "heaven and hell issues."** What does this mean? Can you give examples?
11. **If someone asked you right now, "If you died today, would you go to heaven?" what would you say?** How would you explain the basis of your salvation?

Key Takeaways

1. **Traditions must be tested by Scripture** - Not all traditions are bad, but we must prove everything by God's Word (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
2. **The heart issue matters most** - Jesus wasn't concerned with external rituals but with the condition of the heart (Mark 7:6).
3. **Don't set aside God's Word for traditions** - The progression is dangerous: entertain traditions → set aside Scripture → reject God's Word completely (Mark 7:8-9, 13).
4. **Salvation is through Christ alone** - Religious traditions cannot save us; only the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross can (1 Peter 1:18-19).
5. **Be willing to change** - When Scripture contradicts what we've been taught, we must be ready to align ourselves with the Bible, not make the Bible align with us.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Conduct a "Tradition Inventory"

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1. **List your religious practices** - Write down the religious things you do regularly (church attendance, prayer practices, holiday observances, etc.)
2. **Ask "Why?"** - For each tradition, ask yourself: "Why do I do this? What does the Bible say about it?"
3. **Search the Scriptures** - Look up biblical support for each practice. Can you find a verse that commands or encourages it?
4. **Evaluate honestly** - Are any of your traditions contrary to Scripture? Are you holding onto something because "we've always done it this way" rather than because God's Word teaches it?
5. **Be willing to change** - If you discover a tradition that contradicts Scripture, what will you do about it?

For Families:

- Have a family discussion about why you celebrate certain holidays or observe certain practices
- Read Scripture together about traditions (Mark 7, Colossians 2:8, 1 Peter 1:18-19)
- Teach your children to ask "What does the Bible say?" about everything

For Personal Growth:

- Memorize **Colossians 2:8** - "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."
- Start each day by "taking fast hold of instruction" (Proverbs 4:13) - read God's Word first
- Practice the Berean approach (Acts 17:11) - search the Scriptures daily to verify what you're taught

Closing Reflection

Read Psalm 119:165 - "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

Questions for meditation:

- Do I love God's Word enough to let it correct my traditions?
- Am I more concerned about offending people or honoring God?
- Is my life pointing others to Jesus Christ or to religious rituals?

Prayer Focus

- **Pray for wisdom** to discern between biblical truth and human tradition

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- **Pray for humility** to be willing to change when confronted with Scripture
- **Pray for boldness** to speak truth in love to those trapped in unbiblical traditions
- **Pray for salvation** for anyone in your group or family who may be trusting traditions rather than Christ alone
- **Pray for the upcoming Easter season** - that God would help you focus on the biblical truth of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection rather than cultural traditions

Looking Ahead

Next week's topic: **Putting Lent and Holy Week Traditions on Trial**

Come prepared to discuss:

- What is Lent, and where did it come from?
- Did Jesus die on Good Friday?
- What does the Bible actually say about observing religious holidays?

Homework: Research one Easter or Lenten tradition and find out its origins. Is it biblical?

"For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men." - Mark 7:8

5-Day Devotional: Traditions vs. Truth

Day 1: Examining Our Religious Foundations

Reading: Mark 7:1-13

Devotional: Jesus confronted religious leaders who elevated human traditions above God's Word. They appeared devout but had hearts far from God. Today, examine your own spiritual practices. Are you following Jesus because of genuine faith, or simply going through religious motions passed down through generations? God desires authentic relationship, not empty ritual. The Pharisees knew Scripture yet missed the Savior standing before them. Don't let familiarity with religious activity replace intimacy with Christ. Ask yourself: "Why do I do what I do?" If your answer isn't rooted in Scripture, it's time to realign your heart with God's truth.

Day 2: The Heart Issue

Reading: Matthew 15:1-20

Devotional: Jesus taught that defilement comes from within, not from external ceremonies. The religious leaders obsessed over hand-washing rituals while harboring wickedness in their hearts. Your outward appearance may impress people, but God sees your heart. He knows every thought, motive, and secret desire. A clean heart matters more than clean hands. Salvation isn't achieved through traditions, sacrifices, or good works—it comes through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. Stop trying to earn God's favor through religious performance. Instead, surrender your heart completely to Jesus. Let Him transform you from the inside out, producing genuine righteousness that flows from a redeemed soul.

Day 3: Testing Everything Against Scripture

Reading: Acts 17:10-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Devotional: The Bereans were commended for examining everything they heard against Scripture. They didn't blindly accept teaching, even from the apostle Paul himself. They searched the Word daily to verify truth. This should be your approach to all spiritual matters. Don't assume something is biblical just because it's traditional, popular, or emotionally satisfying. Test everything against God's Word. Be willing to abandon cherished beliefs if they contradict Scripture. This requires humility and courage—humility to admit you might be wrong, and courage to change despite opposition. Hold fast to the Bible, letting no tradition, no matter how meaningful, replace God's revealed truth.

Day 4: Salvation by Grace Alone

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:3-7

Devotional: You cannot earn salvation through religious traditions, good deeds, or family heritage. Salvation is God's gift, received through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He paid the complete price for your sins on the cross. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He meant exactly that—nothing needs to be added. Not your church attendance, not your sacrifices, not your rituals. Either Christ's blood is sufficient, or it isn't. There's no middle ground. If you're trusting anything besides Jesus for your eternal destiny, you're building on sand. Today, examine your heart honestly. Are you trusting Christ alone, or Christ plus your traditions? Eternal life depends on getting this right.

Day 5: Living as Authentic Witnesses

Reading: Colossians 2:6-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Devotional: Your life preaches louder than your words. People watch how Christians live, and they draw conclusions about God based on what they see. If your life contradicts your profession of faith, you're a stumbling block rather than a stepping stone to Christ. God desires authentic disciples who honor Him consistently—at home, at work, in private, and in public. Don't be satisfied with looking religious while harboring hypocrisy. Let Christ transform every area of your life. Hold fast to biblical traditions that honor God, and courageously abandon unbiblical ones, regardless of family pressure or cultural expectations. Live so differently that people want to know your Jesus.