

“Tradition” and “Custom” Mean the Same Thing

Text

Matt. 15:1-9 ¹And then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ² “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

³ He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, saying, ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God” - ⁶ then he need not honour his father or mother.’

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

⁷ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸ ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. ⁹ And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

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Memory Verse

Matt. 15:8-9 (NIV) ⁸ *‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’*

Introduction

“Tradition” and “custom” are two words for the same thing: the way in which a group of people normally does things.

The Bible uses both words. Jesus was not mad at traditions themselves. He was mad when man’s tradition gets in the way of God’s commands.

For this reason, we are starting this book by looking at what these words mean, how they show up in Scripture, and why it matters that we do not let cultural habits replace God’s truth.

Presentation

1. “Tradition” Has Other Words That Mean the Same Thing

If you check a thesaurus, you will find the following words given as synonyms for “tradition”:

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- *custom, ritual, habit, convention, belief, folklore, practice, institution*

The opposite of tradition is “innovation” or “something new”.

When Jesus talked to the Pharisees, He called their tradition “commandments of men” and “rules taught by men” (Matt. 15:9). Notice those words: *commandments, rules, beliefs, customs, conventions, practices* - they all point to the same idea: “this is how we have always done it”.

2. “Custom” Means the Same Thing Too

Thesaurus synonyms for “custom” include:

- *tradition, convention, routine, practice, habit, ritual, institution, norm, pattern*

It is just the normal way in which a group of people does something.

For example, in John 2:6, the water jars were there “for the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing.” That is tradition or custom in action.

Jesus attended a wedding in Cana that followed Galilean custom. It was traditional, but it was also God-ordained and legal for that culture.

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The point? We do not have to fight over cultural practices that do not contradict Scripture. Let people's traditions stand if they do not break God's law. That is how to avoid unnecessary friction.

3. Traditions Can Become Doctrine If We Are Not Careful

(1) Beliefs and practices unite a group.

People's beliefs and traditions shape how they live day to day. The Pharisees said, "We are disciples of Moses" (John 9:28). That was their identity.

(2) Traditions mark a people's origin and heritage. Traditions tell you where you come from. But here is the line: traditions are fine for culture and identity. They become a problem when we call them "doctrine" and force everyone to follow them to be right with God.

Conclusion

A people's traditions and customs are their way of life. They are best explained by the people who live them, and if they do not contradict God's commands, it is fine to keep them alive for future generations. Traditions are all-inclusive for the

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group that holds them. But they should never override what God said.

Honour culture. Honour God more.

Evaluation Questions & Answers

1. Why should the words “tradition” and “custom” be used interchangeably?
 - * Because they have the same meaning. Both refer to the normal, repeated way in which a group of people does things. The Bible and dictionaries treat them as synonyms.
2. Give three words which are synonymous with “custom” and “tradition”.
 - * Ritual, practice, and convention are all synonyms that show up in dictionaries and Scripture.
3. Why should the traditions and / or customs of a people be jealously observed?
 - * Because traditions are how a people preserve their identity, heritage, and way of life. They bring unity and explain who that group is. As long as they do not contradict God’s word, they should be respected.

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Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Help everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord to have sincere faith, and to know the difference between Your commands and human tradition. In Jesus's name, Amen.