

July 19, 2009

**TRADITION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH: PART 2**  
**PROBLEMATIC TRADITIONS**  
**MATTHEW 15.1-9**

**2. WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WITH TRADITION BEING EQUAL TO SCRIPTURE IN AUTHORITY OR TRADITION HAVING NO AUTHORITY?**

Misuse of tradition = when it explicitly or functionally rises to equal or greater authority than the Scriptures in beliefs or practices and when tradition is used to avoid responsibility to obey the commandments of God.

*a. Jesus' critique of the Scribes and Pharisees*

Scribes and Pharisees were using a tradition to avoid obeying the commandment of God.

Tradition itself was not the problem. It was the *place afforded to tradition in relationship to the Scriptures* that was the problem Jesus was addressing. Jesus was not condemning all tradition outright.

Note: Scriptures would have been confessed to be held in high regard and authoritative.

There is nothing wrong with the Church in the person of her leaders interpreting Scripture. We must do that. We are commanded to do that. It is vital to the life of the Church that the Word of God be proclaimed through the teachers of the Church. But our interpretations must always be subject to critique from the Scriptures themselves.

1. *Jesus, YHWH in the flesh, appeals to the written Word of God to rebuke the error of the Scribes and Pharisees.*

He does not appeal to his own authority as YHWH in the flesh, but to the written Word to rebuke them.

2. *Jesus presupposes that God has spoken definitively and authoritatively in the Scriptures.*

God's voice/command/words are = to Scripture. "God said" = "It is written." The voice of God and Scripture are one.

All Christian communions are generally agreed on this basic point. The RCC & EOC are saturated with Scripture in liturgies.

3. *Jesus presupposes that the Scriptures are more authoritative than the tradition of the elders.*

"Hypocrites" - they were putting on the face of obeisance to God, acting as if they were completely devoted to his authority. But by the fact of their placing their traditions as a greater authority than Scripture—indicated by vacating the commandment through their traditions—they were actually opposed to God and his worship.

4. *Jesus presupposes that the Scriptures are clear enough to be understood so that tradition may be judged by them.*

The *perspicuity of Scripture*. That is, the Scriptures are sufficiently clear so that they can be understood. They can be understood to the point that clear violations of them through tradition can be pointed out.

Traditions must always come under the scrutiny of the Scriptures as the ultimate authority. They must always be ministers to the Scriptures and not assume a place of mastery over the Scriptures.

5. *Jesus presupposes the fallibility of the people of God and their teachers in the interpretation of Scripture.*

The people of God have always had teachers who were ordained to give instruction from God's Word.

Each one in particular and even when they met in large groups, they had the possibility of error. That error can begin in one generation and be codified for generations to come until it is challenged by the Scriptures.

*b. Tradition in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Eastern Orthodox Church (EOC)*

Easy to be overwhelmed with the claim of 2,000 years of unified Church Tradition as giving us *the* interpretation of Scripture.

1. *The positions of the RCC and the EOC assume the impossibility of sin corrupting the majority of the leadership in the Church*

*contrary to the warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles concerning the Church.*

One objection: “Jesus was addressing the Church before his resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Church that he would lead us into all truth, and he gave us the Spirit to do so. Things have changed since the giving of the Spirit, and, therefore, we are no longer capable of these kinds of errors.”

Things have radically changed since the resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Spirit, the Scriptures teach us the nature of that change; and the nature of that change *does not* include the Church being infallible in any particular teacher or any group of teachers. In fact, the Scriptures teach us just the opposite.

If it is objected that the Church now cannot fall into the same error as the Church in the past, one must ask the question, Why then do the Apostolic writings—the NT itself—give warnings to the Church not to fall into the same error as the people of God of old (i.e. in the OC)? What about warnings of false apostles and Christs from within the church? Warnings of apostasy?

Cf. Heb 3–4, 6, 10; Rom 11; Rev 2–3

It is not only possible for large segments of the church to become corrupt, it is probable. And this corruption will affect the way the Church handles Scripture at any given point in history.

One would have to ignore the parallels made between the people of God before and after the resurrection in the very words of Jesus and the Apostles to believe that the Church is not capable of even the most serious errors and even apostasy.

*2. There is no definitive list of all of the infallible traditions of the Church in either communion.*

If the faithful don't have some sort of record of the infallible traditions, how will we ever know what we are to obey and what we are not to obey? If the Church cannot decide what is infallible and what is not (and these communions cannot), how do we know if we are in the infallible Tradition or not?

Keith Mathison: “The point is simply this: a standard that is not always and everywhere infallible is not an infallible standard and cannot function as an infallible standard.” (263)

*3. There are many conflicts within the ecumenical councils themselves.*

“Well the ecumenical councils are infallible. We know what they are. They are those seven councils that met and decided on matters concerning many issues of doctrine and practice of the church. These are undisputed.”

Simply not true. Every ecumenical council has had its problems at many points. For example, how many bishops does it take and from what regional churches must they come for a council to be truly ecumenical? No one really knows.

Now, if you believe the Church is infallible, how could there ever be any disagreement? Or is just the majority that is infallible? The Church has made decisions and reversed on the same issues a number of times in the past.

“Eventually the truth will be victorious.” True, but when will this be? When do we know it is all worked out if the Church changes its collective mind this many times?

*4. There are direct conflicts with the Scriptures themselves.*

E.g., Papal infallibility (Vatican I 1870); also 7<sup>th</sup> “ecumenical council” in 787 and the issue of icons.

### ***c. The Solo Scriptura position of many Evangelicals***

Problems:

1. No list of books of Scripture within the Scriptures. Must depend on church tradition at points.
2. The Bible tells us that the Church, while a lesser authority, is an authority. It is not unquestionable. But it is an authority.