

Illusion of Permanence

"Tradition is the illusion of permanence" Woody Allen's character said in the movie "Deconstructing Harry". Here is the dynamic: from birth a person is taught certain religious traditions. The appearance is that these traditions are required by God and have always been done this way. Religious ceremonies reinforce this. The local religious leaders are often pleased to have one continue in ignorance of the truth that religious traditions evolve over the years and tend to move away from God. This is a natural process and unless a specific and constant effort is made to follow Gods instruction, it will happen. This is a very important theme in The Bible. Why did Israel have to go into exile? Who did Jesus reserve his sharpest criticism for? There are many other examples. Look it up. Tell me if you disagree. Do not misunderstand, traditions can be a good thing but extreme care must be taken to insure they do not conflict with Gods instructions. My study of The Bible began with the intent of better understanding God. The furthest thing from my mind was challenging the local church. The conflict came about when I attempted to bring to church the things I was learning. Tradition and doctrine in the Catholic Church was in conflict with what I was reading in The Bible. The priests attempted to discourage me from continuing this process. The Bible was teaching me that the traditions and teachings of men would eventually pass away along with the rest of the things of this world. The things of God would remain. Therefore I decided to follow God and not man and attempt to take hold of the reality of permanence.

Some Bible passages that apply

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, 'Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?' declares the LORD.

'Jonadab son of Recab ordered his sons not to drink wine and this command has been kept. To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather's command. But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me. Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you. They said, "Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions; do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your fathers." But you have not paid attention or listened to me. The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab have carried out the command their forefather gave them, but these people have not obeyed me.'

Jeremiah 35:13-16

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!

Mark 7:1-9

These passages may be difficult to understand. Some preparation and study may be necessary before you can agree or disagree with what I'm saying. It is important that you prove for yourself what the truth is. On the next page are some guidelines to help you study the scriptures and avoid some of the common pitfalls.

Study Guidelines

Four principles to aid in understanding the text and help avoid some of the common obstacles to understanding;

- **Context:** understand who is the writer, who is being written to, what are the circumstances at the time of writing including where, when and any special conditions present.
- **Definitions:** understand the meaning of any important terms. Be careful that you understand what the writer is saying. Definitions of many important terms have shifted dramatically over time. Understand how these terms apply to the culture at that time.
- **Inferences:** test any conclusions you come to against all other passages in The Bible and against other important sources. Be especially critical of your own necessary inferences.
- **Balance:** remember that many principles can only be properly understood as they relate to each other. Some instructions need to be balanced against other seemingly contradictory instructions. Also consider that the proper weight is given to the principle under consideration.

The meaning and importance of these principles will become clearer as you apply them to your reading. It is very important that you now do some reading and research and prove for yourself what the truth is.

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