

In today's world, believers in Christ sometimes disagree about the standard of authority for the church. Throughout the years, many ideas and innovations of men have become a part of our thinking, and even a part of our customs. Whenever these traditions and doctrines of men have differed from those in the Bible, religious division has followed. There will always be some who will stay with the written word as their only standard of authority. However, others have come to consider human traditions, accumulated through the years, to be of equal authority with the Holy Scriptures. Even if human traditions can be shown to be directly opposed to Scriptural doctrine, many still maintain its authority -- holding human traditions in greater regard than the Sacred Writings. Let us examine the scriptures to see what God has said about this issue.

In the Old Testament story, the "Written Word" played an important part in the plans of God. When Jehovah gave directives to Moses which He wanted the people to remember, how did He have them preserved? He would say, "Write this in a book as a memorial" (Exodus 17:14); or, "I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction" (Exodus 24:12; 34:1). It was important to God that His covenant with Israel be preserved exactly as He had given it. He was looking to the future, to a day when Israel would have a king. Jehovah desired that each king would "read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes" (Deuteronomy 17:19). Jehovah intended the Sacred Writings to be a "witness" against Israel (Deuteronomy 31:26), and that Israel would "Meditate on it day and night," so that they would "be careful to do according to all that is written in it" (Joshua 1:8). Whenever Israel forgot about God's ways and drifted into disobedience, King Josiah discovered the "book," and used it to turn the nation back to truth (II Chronicles 34:31). The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Habakkuk needed to be remembered, so Jehovah commanded them to record their inspired words in written form, "that it may serve in the time to come as a witness forever" (Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 25:13; 30:2; 36:2,17-18, 28; Habakkuk 2:2). The words of inspired messengers of the Old Testament were preserved in writing so people could REMEMBER the will of God and how He dealt with His people. Countless times the expression "it is written" was used to recall the instructions of Jehovah. Paul said, "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). And even our Lord Jesus continually referred to Scripture in His daily teaching and refuting of the errors of His day.

In fact, Jesus provides our clearest teaching about God's view toward man's traditions. For 1500 years, the children of Israel had toiled over the Scriptures. They had studied them, debated them, and written volumes of commentaries about them. As the centuries rolled by, they seemed to regard the writings of their rabbis and scholars with equal respect as the original inspired writings. Some of God's teachings had been diluted and many, many additions and innovations had been added to the "Sacred Writings." Jesus and His disciples did not regard these traditions of men and Jesus taught against them (as in Matthew 12:1-12). The gospel writer, Mark, explained some of these customs in Mark 7:3-4. He said, "For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders ... and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots." Jesus was confronted by these religious leaders. They would say, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ...?" To this Jesus replied, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God," Jesus said, "you hold to the tradition of men ... you nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition ... invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down" (Mark 7:1-13).

Did Jesus believe that traditions of men were of equal authority with the "Sacred Writings"? Did God desire the Jews in Jesus' day to be governed by the writings of the prophets or to be governed

by their traditional interpretation of those writings? Jesus said that God will not accept our worship if we observe the traditions of men. He said our worship would be “in vain”; that is, useless, for nothing, as though it were never done. Do you think it is possible today for creedal doctrines and denominational traditions to be different from the teachings of the apostles? If so, should we continue in those things? Paul said, “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught ... from us” (II Thessalonians 2:15). He said, “... keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us” (II Thessalonians 3:6). He said, “... learn not to exceed what is written ...” (I Corinthians 4:6). If our goal is to be disciples of Jesus, then we must abide in His Word (John 8:31). God has gone to great lengths to confirm and preserve the words of His New Covenant with mankind. Every generation must be turned back to “The Book” which defines its terms. If our traditional doctrines and practices are different from the Scriptures, then they must be abandoned.



Bible Probe

INSPIRED WRITINGS VERSES HUMAN TRADITION

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1. Throughout the history of the church, whenever traditions and doctrines of men have differed from those in the Bible, _____ has followed.
2. What was Paul’s prescription to keep this from happening? (I Corinthians 4:6)
3. Did God preserve the laws and writings of Moses through oral tradition or written words? (Exodus 17:14; Exodus 24:12; 34:1)
4. How would a written record of Moses’ laws benefit future kings of Israel? (Deut 17:19)
5. What did King Josiah use to turn the nation back to God’s truth? (II Chronicles 34:31)
6. Why were the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk preserved in written form? (Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 25:13; 30:2; 36:2,17-18,28; Habakkuk 2:2)
7. What did Jesus say about the traditions of men in Mark 7, verses 8, 9, & 13?
8. Whose traditions did Paul say we should “hold to”? (II Thessalonians 2:15)
9. What should be our reaction to any “brother” who does not? (II Thessalonians 3:6)
10. Is it possible today for creedal doctrines and denominational traditions to differ from those in the inspired writings? If so, what should we do about it?