

Did Jesus Condemn Tradition?

by Sebastian R Fama

Did Jesus really condemn tradition as some of our critics claim? Well, yes and no. There are different kinds of tradition. And Jesus was very specific in explaining what He was opposed to. The go-to passage of Scripture used to discredit Christian tradition is Mark 7:8-13:

“You leave the commandment of God and hold fast **the tradition of men.**” And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep **your tradition!** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’... but you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “what you would have gained from me is corban” (that is, given to God), then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through **your tradition.**”

Clearly Jesus is condemning the traditions of men that specifically contradict the Word of God. But the Bible also talks about another kind of tradition. The apostle Paul tells us to: “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Notice how Paul puts oral tradition on the same level as written tradition. He tells us why in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God **which you heard from us,** you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God....”

The oral and written teachings of the Apostles were both considered to be the word of God. And of course, that is perfectly natural as they were the appointed leaders of Christ’s Church. Paul continues the theme in his first letter to the Corinthians: “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2). And that is how the early Church saw it. In the year 225 Origen wrote: “That alone is to be believed as the truth which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition” (*Fundamental Doctrines* 1, preface: 2).

In these passages, Paul and the Early Church Fathers speak not of the traditions of men, but of the Sacred Traditions that are handed down by the Church. The Church that the word of God calls, the “Pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church that was established by Jesus Himself and that has existed from that moment to the present. And will exist until the Second Coming (Matthew 28:20).