

Hand-Me-Downs

When I was growing up “hand-me-downs” were a fact of life. Traditions handed down from generation to generation are also a fact of life. “*Paradosis*” is the Greek word translated “tradition” in the New Testament. It means to “hand down, give over; what has been transmitted by way of precept, doctrine.” Biblically, there are two classes of tradition to be considered. First is tradition handed down by man. Whenever this class of tradition came into conflict with the will of God, Jesus and His apostles rebuked it and those who held to it (Mat. 15:1-13; Mk. 7:1-13; Co. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:17-19). In each of case human tradition had come into conflict with God’s will. The two cannot coexist in conflict, so one will invariably neutralize the other. Does this mean that all human traditions are bad? No, only those which are incompatible with the word of God, or which are bound upon others as obligatory such as the effort made by the Scribes and Pharisees to bind the ceremonial washing of hands be fore eating, thus supplanting the will of God with their own law.

The other class of tradition is that which has been handed down by God though Jesus and His apostles. “therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thes. 2:15; also 3:6).” These traditions, delivered to us by inspired men of God and written in the Bible, are obligatory and must be accepted and obeyed as doctrine. It is concluded that human tradition which does not come into conflict with the will of God may be kept and enjoyed. This “neutral” tradition forms a bridge between generations, welds communities together and generates security and well-being among its adherents. Also, traditions which aid in carrying out Bible instruction, but which do not alter it, may be kept and practiced freely. These may be changed, but carefully, so as not to tear asunder that which they help to bond. Human traditions which alter, contradict, or otherwise violate God’s recorded word must be changed or abandoned. An example of such would be the addition of manmade instruments of music to the vocal singing tradition handed down to the church via the New Testament (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Such additions corrupt Christ’s revealed word and become unacceptable.

Those who cry against tradition in favor of change must prove that the changes they espouse are biblical and that their suggested traditions are superior to those in place. They must also respect what has been held dear by previous generations. To do otherwise divides between generations and robs the younger of a vital link to the older. Not all tradition is bad, but neither is all change good.

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