

# TRADITION



The Twelve Apostles

The Webster's dictionary defines tradition as "the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction".

Protestants reject the Catholic teaching that Apostolic Tradition is the Word of God handed down. For them the "Bible" alone is their only source for the Word of God.

While it is true that the Bible forms a basic framework of the nature of God and salvation, it is clear that there was still valuable instruction from Christ and the Apostles that was not recorded in written form.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them of this; "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter." (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

And in his letter to the Corinthians "I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you." [1 Corinthians 11:2]

There is no doubt that Tradition is both Biblical and historical. Did Jesus condemn all tradition or a certain type of tradition?



“Some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.” Matthew 15:1-6

**Protestant Objection:** In the above scripture Jesus condemns the traditions of men.

**Catholic Answer:** Jesus was not condemning all traditions. He condemned only those that made God’s word void. In this case, it was a matter of the Pharisees withholding financial help to a needy parent by declaring that they had “devoted to God” their money to the Temple. This was known as the Corban tradition. By doing this, they dodged the commandment to "Honor your father and your mother"

**Protestant Objection:** All we need is the bible.

**Catholic Answer:** For that to be true, the bible must teach that. But that is not found in scripture. What is found is that oral tradition and scripture is the Word of God.

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.**”

2 Thessalonians 3:6 “We instruct you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to shun any brother who conducts himself in a disorderly way and not according to the tradition they received from us”

1 Corinthians 11: 2 “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you.”

2 Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours”

**Protestant Objection:** All tradition ended in the first century when everything was written down.

**Catholic Answer:** The bible never says that Apostolic Tradition ended in the first century and was not passed down through oral tradition. The first teachers of the faith taught many things that were not written down. For example in Acts 20:17-32 we are told that Paul went to the city of Ephesus and he declared “the whole counsel of God” (verse 27). Paul said he was in Ephesus for three years (verse 31). Yet we can read his letter to the Ephesians in less than thirty minutes! This means that Paul’s teaching on the “whole counsel of God” was through oral teaching and never written down.

We know from the early Church Fathers that Apostolic Tradition was observed:

Writing in the year 96 Clement of Rome wrote:

“We are in writing this in vein, dear friend, not only to admonish you but also to remind ourselves. For we are in the same arena and involved in the same struggle. Hence, we should give up empty and futile concerns and turn to the glorious and holy rule of **our tradition**.” *1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Corinthians 7.2*

Writing in the year 195 Clement of Alexandria wrote:

“Well, they preserving **the tradition** of the blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy apostles, Peter, James, John, and Paul, the sons receiving it from the father (but few were like the fathers), came by God's will to us also to deposit those ancestral and apostolic seeds.” *Stromata Book I CHAPTER I*

Writing around the year 200 Tertullian wrote:

“If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. **Tradition** will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer. That reason will support tradition, and custom, and faith, you will either yourself perceive, or learn from someone who has.” *De Corona (The Chaplet) Chapter 4*

**Protestant Objection:** We do not observe any traditions.

**Catholic Answer:** The books of the Bible come from Tradition. The Bible does not say how many books are inspired or what books are inspired. Most of the authors of scripture are anonymous. The Bible came from the Catholic Church. Guided by the Holy Spirit and using tradition that was handed down, the Church was able to recognize which books were divinely inspired and which books were not.

**Recommended book:** *The Biblical Basis for Tradition* by John Salza

*Why is that in Tradition?* by Patrick Madrid

**Next topic**----- Are Catholic prayers vain repetitions?