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JESUS CORRECTS



What are some social customs or traditions you were taught to follow?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLJesus

Jesus calls us to a higher standard.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Oil plays an important part in our lives and our economy. In fact, 92 percent of our transportation is fueled by petroleum.¹ While oil serves us well, it can also be the source of great problems.

The worst accidental oil spill in the world occurred in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico at Deepwater Horizon. Over 200 million gallons of oil coated 572 miles of beaches and wildlife. Marine life was killed, and hundreds of birds became coated with the thick oil and died.²

Traditions are like oil. Both are good, but we don't want them coating things they have no business coating. Sometimes we can let traditions and social customs coat and choke out other areas of life. Many religious traditions have value, but when they cover up and hide the commands and the grace of God, it's like an oil spill in our hearts.

Just as clean up crews work swiftly to clean up an environmental disaster, Jesus stepped in with the gospel to solve a sticky situation. He rebuked and corrected the thinking of religious leaders whose traditions had created a spiritual disaster.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Mark 7:5-8

⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands?” ⁶ He answered them, “Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands. ⁸ Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition.”

What we know as the Old Testament was originally divided into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. It’s all God’s Word, but the first portion—the Law (also called the *Torah*)—held a special place in the hearts of the Jewish people. As rabbis taught the *Torah*, they sometimes added more laws around the ones God gave to make sure they didn’t violate one of His commands.

For example, God’s command about the Sabbath says, “You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates” (Ex. 20:10). The purpose for this command was to set aside time for worship, spiritual reflection, and physical rest in order to be rejuvenated for the work week ahead. To ensure they obeyed this beneficial command, the rabbis went into detail trying to determine what constituted “work.” They identified actions like drawing water from a well, slaughtering animals to feed the family, or picking barley from a field as “work.” Over time, the original intent of the Sabbath—resting and re-focusing on the Creator—was replaced with a legalistic set of rules that went far beyond the purpose of the command.

In Jesus’ day, there were no stricter enforcers of these added rules and regulations than the Pharisees. So when they saw Jesus’ disciples “eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands,” they were quick to pounce. Their intent was not to correct an error, but to discredit Jesus.

What are some factors that cause modern Christians to neglect God’s commands?

QUESTION #2

Of course, Jesus saw the motivation of their hearts and responded with ultimate wisdom. He quoted Isaiah 29:13 and then punctuated the truth from God's Word by calling them "hypocrites." In their prideful zeal to keep their own oral traditions, the Pharisees neglected the true purpose and intent of God's commands.

Traditions aren't necessarily bad, but they cannot and must not transcend God's Word. As Christians, it's crucial that we examine not just *what* we do, but *why* we do it. To forsake the commands of God in order to keep the law of man is dangerous and in direct opposition to what God truly wants: sincere, humble obedience that is motivated by love.

Mark 7:9-13

⁹ He also said to them, "You have a fine way of invalidating God's command in order to set up your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said: Honor your father and your mother; and Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death. ¹¹ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or mother: Whatever benefit you might have received from me is *corban*'" (that is, an offering devoted to God), ¹² "you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things."

The Pharisees had hoped to discredit Jesus, but Jesus turned the tables on them. He'd shown in verses 5-8 how they neglected God's commands in favor of their own traditions; in verses 9-13, He showed how they also twisted God's Word.

To understand what the Pharisees were doing, let's look at the rabbinical practice of *corban*, which referred to a gift dedicated to God. This was a serious vow in which a person devoted property or money to God. It was a good practice that was supposed to honor God.

Why are we often tempted to twist God's commands?

QUESTION #3

TRADITION!

Use the lines below to record specific traditions you have encountered in the church or in other areas of the Christian life. (An example has been provided.) In the box to the left of each line, add a ✓ for each tradition that is helpful or life-giving. Add an X for each tradition that is unhelpful or life-draining.

Don't wear hats in the church sanctuary.

What's a tradition or practice in your current church that helps promote the gospel?

"No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good."

—C. S. LEWIS

The Pharisees created a loophole, though. In order to appear righteous, a Pharisee might declare everything he had as *corban*—designated for use by God. But he might not give it to God at that very moment. He could essentially put those resources on reserve for future use in the temple. In a modern context, it would be like a person who has \$10,000 in a savings account. He declares that he’s devoting the money to God, but only later, so that he can still use it for the present time. One day his parents admit they are struggling financially and need some help. Their son responds: “I’m sorry, but I have no money to give you. It’s all dedicated to God!”

Sadly, the kind of hypocrisy that stems from twisting God’s Word is still rampant today. Some religious people obey all of the rules and traditions of their local church (or denomination), but it’s only an outward show. They perform “righteous” acts but have no love for others. They treat church members with great respect but mistreat their family members at home.

We need to know the Word of God. We need to weigh the opinions or preferences of others—whether they are pastors or commentary writers—against what God’s Word says. Luke commended the people in Berea because they did this: “The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Our goal is not simply to have the right knowledge. We want to draw nearer to the heart of God who created us.



Mark 7:14-15

¹⁴ Summoning the crowd again, he told them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ Nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

Jesus had been speaking directly to the Pharisees and scribes, exposing the corruption and defilement in their religious system. Jesus now turned to the larger crowd gathered to help them see the greater principle that applies to all of us.

This whole conversation began when the religious leaders confronted Jesus because His disciples had dirty hands. But Jesus turned it around and showed that these same Pharisees and scribes had dirty hearts. Because the Pharisees wanted to talk about defilement, Jesus would talk about defilement. Anything defiled was considered common, impure, desecrated, or unclean. It turned out the Pharisees’ accusation—that not washing hands made a person unclean—was not defilement at all. Jesus made this clear: “Nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

I know about trying to clean up messes on the outside and inside. In an effort to get clean from drug addiction, I went to rehab—twice. Neither of those stints cured my addiction because I was doing it without Christ. I was simply using man’s practices to cover up an issue that was deeply rooted in my heart and mind. Seeking purity without Christ is a dead end street.

Jesus calls us to a higher standard than mere human or religious practices. We can do things that look good or religious, but nothing good inherently lives in us. We become clean on the inside only when we let Christ transform us.

God alone makes us righteous, through Christ: “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

What are the implications of Jesus’ declaration in verse 15 for those who follow Him?

QUESTION #4

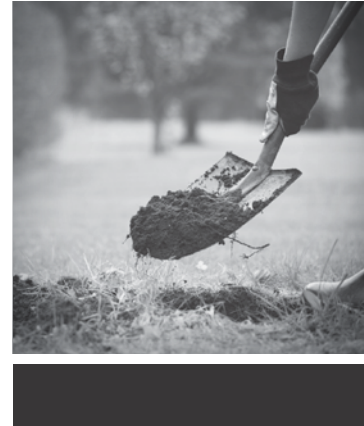
When have you felt the weight of God’s call to a higher standard?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you reach for God's higher standard in the days to come? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Dig.** Identify some of the "church traditions" you grew up with or currently practice. Divide them into three groups: rituals, preferences, and Bible-centered practices.
- ▶ **Bury.** Stand strong for Christ-centered practices, but let go of those things that are only tied to your preferences. Determine not to expect others to live according to your preferences.
- ▶ **Plant.** Take someone out for coffee this week who struggles with Christianity because of the practices or customs they experienced in a particular church. Share your story. Help them see that a relationship with God is not tied to these practices, but only to faith in Christ.



I hope you'll never have to clean up after an oil spill. But I hope very much that you'll identify and expel any human traditions or rituals getting between you and Christ.

My thoughts

1. instituteeforenergyresearch.org/topics/encyclopedia/petroleum.
2. mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/stories/the-13-largest-oil-spills-in-history

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLJesus**



BECAUSE I KNOW THE ONE

BY BETH MOORE

“But I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

“Entrusted” and “entrusting.” Those two words sum up the daily—sometimes hourly—life of a servant of Christ like few others.

The whole interchange between God and child continually comes back to the issue of trust: trusting ourselves entirely to God—our loves, lacks, longings, and our very lives—again and again. Then



proving trustworthy by the power of His Spirit again and again with what He entrusts to us.

Being faithful to a trust we can't define is woefully difficult: God has entrusted us with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—gifting to share it. The gospel and the gifting.

You have been appointed to eternal life. You, like those first Jesus-followers, have been appointed to go out and produce fruit. In John 15:5, Jesus specifically stated, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (ESV).

You are not only called to bear fruit. You are called to bear much fruit. I love the words of Jesus in John 15:8 and believe they extend with fresh life of the Spirit to every generation of Jesus-followers: “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”

Those first disciples did their jobs. They cannot do ours. They produced their own fruit. They cannot produce ours. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded and commissioned His first followers to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” We are among those disciples. We have been appointed by God to the globe at this juncture in history. “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20).

We will also suffer at times because of our appointment.

If we have a throw-down fit and refuse to partake in the sufferings of Christ, we will miss partaking in the explosive joy of that measure of His glory.

Suffering is an inescapable part of inhaling oxygen in the atmosphere of this fallen planet. But, under this point, we’re not talking about the suffering that is common to all humans. Paul’s paradigm suggests that servants of Jesus suffer some things in direct correlation to the positions God called them to fill. A measure of your pain and hardship really is in connection to your calling. Some of it is spiritual warfare. Some of it is sociological resistance because the world hates us as it hated Christ. (See John 15:18-19.) Some of it is ordained by God for our growth, our humility, our compassion, our obedience, our completion, our faith, and, read this carefully, our future commendation, joy, and fellowship in His glory. If we have a throw-down fit and refuse to partake in the sufferings of Christ, we will miss partaking in the explosive joy of that measure of His glory.

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name” (1 Peter 4:12-16).

When we run into great difficulty or pain in the journey of our calling, we’re prone to either cast blame or jump to the conclusion that we

must have done something wrong or landed somewhere wrong in our attempt to discern God's will. But sometimes hardship will come because you got it right. As hard as this is to grasp, sometimes suffering bubbles up from the well of God's immeasurable affection and devotion to us. He is not unfeeling. He is all-knowing. Something down the road depends on our present stretch of pavement. This He promises us: the suffering will be brief and the fruit of it as long as eternity. (See 2 Cor. 4:17.)

Until we see Jesus face-to-face, our journeys won't be straight lines nearly as often as they will be a series of loops rolling us forward by circling us back to faith. Entrusted and entrusting. Will we trust Him with the suffering He's entrusted to us? Will we believe He has purpose? Do we have vision enough to believe He's planning one of the biggest harvests of our lives through the seed of the Word we're sowing through this hard season? Desperation can fertilize our soil and tears can water our seed like no ease could ever hope to. Are we willing to believe that right on the other side of this life is a party of epic proportions where we'll ecstatically rejoice and share in His unfathomable inheritance?

Are you presently on a path that has circled you back to faith? What did Paul tell Timothy to do? The CSB translates the wording [of 2 Timothy 1:13], "Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching." Other translations use the phrase of sound words. The lexical Greek translated "sound" is *hugiaínō* meaning: "To be healthy, sound, physically well (Eng.: hygiene)... Metaphorically of persons, to be sound in the faith, meaning firm, pure in respect to Christian doctrine and life. Of doctrine, meaning sound doctrine, i.e., true, pure, uncorrupted (1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1)."¹

One Greek scholar translates the phrase, "Hold to the pattern of healthy words."²

The adjective "healthy" nearly brings me to tears. God's words have been health to me. God used His words to heal my tormented mind and to piece back together my broken heart. He still uses them every day of my life to bring health to my soul. Does the concept of healthy words speak relevantly to you right now?

What is true individually has even greater ramifications corporately.



The church cannot be healthy without holding tightly to God's Word and to sound doctrine. Methods may change but the Bible must remain. And not just opened but pored over. Studied. The Bride of Christ will grow sick and weak without it.

Faith endures the furious tests by knowing the One in whom it rests.

Each generation is meant to train the next but not into its mirror image. Even when Paul instructed the Corinthians to imitate him, he didn't mean they were to take on his personality. Rather, he exhorted them to model his character and godliness, as he modeled Christ. The goal is Christlikeness, not us-likeness. Spiritual daughters are not meant to look and sound just like their spiritual mothers. Neither are spiritual sons to replicate their spiritual fathers. Each generation needs time and space to grow and find its personality and place in the world. But each generation must hold onto the Scriptures for dear life or the Bride of Christ will suffer with poor circulation, heart disease, poor lung capacity, and a dull mind.

This was Paul's unbroken concrete under his feet when life quaked: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day" (2 Tim.1:12).

The Greek verb for "am persuaded" also translates "I am fully convinced."³ Nothing will substitute for knowing the One you believe in. No one can know Him for you. And no one He knows supplants His knowing you. Faith endures the furious tests by knowing the One in whom it rests.



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1. Spiros Zodhiates, S, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers: 2000), 1402.

2. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 46* (Dallas, TX: Word Inc., 2000), 488.

3. Ibid.