

## How Does The New Testament Use The Word “Tradition”?

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by Bill Crews

How careful are you in your reading of the Bible? Do you pay close attention to every word? There is a Greek word translated “tradition” or “traditions” in the New Testament. It is used thirteen times. The **King James Version** renders it “ordinances” one time. What does the word mean? Does it refer to things old, or new? Things that are from God, or from men? Things that are oral, or written?

Many are going to insist that “traditions” are religious things, ideas, or practices that have originated with men, that have been handed down orally, until they have become firmly fixed in the minds of men — therefore, usually very old. The first definition of our present-day English word “tradition” found in *The American College Dictionary* says, “1. the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, etc. . . from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary* gives five definitions, the last of which, under “theology,” is divided into three parts: “tradition” as used by (a) Jews, (b) Christians, and (c) Moslems. None of these definitions fits the New Testament word “tradition.”

The New Testament word is **PARADOSIS**, and it simply means “a giving over, a handing down, a delivering.” It may be of God, or of man, oral or written, new or old, all of which can be determined by the context. The word is used of the “traditions” of men ten times, but it is also used of the “traditions” of God three times. The New Testament does not condemn all “traditions.” It condemns the religious “traditions” of men, but commends and enjoins the “traditions” of God. Matthew 15:2 speaks of “the traditions of the elders” (members of the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin). Verse 3 speaks of “your tradition.” Verse 6 of the same. Mark 7:3 speaks of “the tradition of the elders.” Verse 5 of the same. Verse 8 of “the tradition of men.” Verse 9 of “your own tradition.” Verse 13 of “your tradition.” In Galatians 1:14 Paul refers to “the traditions of my

fathers.” Colossians 2:8 warns against “the traditions of men.” These all, of course, refer to religious traditions, not social or political or family traditions.

The three times where the Greek word is used of the “traditions” of God are:

**1 Corinthians 11:2** — “Now I praise you that you remember me in all things, and hold fast the **traditions** (KJV — “ordinances”), even as I delivered them to you.”

**2 Thessalonians 2:15** — “So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the **traditions** which you were taught, whether by word (orally — **BC**), or by **epistle** (in writing — **BC**) of ours.”

**2 Thessalonians 3:6** — “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the **tradition** which they received of us.”

**The traditions of God** (the things that God has delivered, given over, handed down) would be all of that inspired teaching which was done by men chosen by God and guided by the Holy Spirit — all of which is now embodied and preserved in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. (The verb form of the word translated “tradition” is **PARADIDOMI**. It is used 121 times in the New Testament. In the **KJV** it is translated “deliver” 54 times and “delivered up” 9 times. It is found in such familiar verses as 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23; 15:3; 2 Peter 2:21 and Jude 3 of things delivered to men from God. More often it is used of “delivering up” or “betraying” someone (such as what Judas did to Jesus).

The Jewish traditions that are condemned in the New Testament were originated by men and passed on orally (until finally written down by “Rabbi Jehuda the Holy” in the second century A.D. in the Mishna of the Talmud.) They were falsely attributed by some Jewish leaders to Moses. In no way had they come from God, and the New Testament ...

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