

Kingdom thoughts

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Hebrews 12:28

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Sola Scriptura and Tradition

Everyone knows the children's song which includes the lines 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'.

Christian parents reveal no sense of comprise in teaching this song to their children despite the fact that their child may be of an age where they can't read. It is not the Bible which informs the child. A more accurate rendering of the song might be:

*Jesus loves me, this is I believe
Because my parents urge me to receive
This truth of theirs, known as reliable
Because their faith is derived from the Bible*

Whilst the former version is easier to sing, it nonetheless indicates a blind spot in the thinking of so many of today's Bible reading Christians. All Christians are reliant on at least one previous Christian generation for their understanding of God as revealed in scripture. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, most people have the truth of scriptures told to them by a parent, a preacher or a friend. This is not just a matter of circumstance. It is God's ordained method for acquiring faith:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Rom 10:14-17 ESV

Secondly, every word in the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, except for those of its first page. There is no divinely inspired writer who was moved by the Holy Spirit to write the Bible's index. Rather, we find that acceptance of the 66 books which make up our Bible is the consequence of Church tradition, a tradition based not only on the apostles' ready acceptance of those oracles of God handed down to them by their Jewish ancestors, but also on agreement

amongst the fourth century Church fathers as to which documents from the Church's first generation were divinely inspired and could be received as the New Testament.

Since tradition has shaped our understanding of scripture, it is worth considering the nature of relationship between scripture and tradition.

Scripture seems to speak disparagingly of the role of tradition. When asked why His disciples did not clean their hands before eating as was required by Jewish tradition, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for having placed their tradition above Scripture:

Why do you break the commandment for the sake of your tradition? ... So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. Matt 15:3 & 6 ESV

And yet not all of scripture disdains tradition. Paul urges that we avoid the traditions of men (Col 2:8) but is pleased when the church adheres to the traditions which he has taught them:

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 1Cor 11:2 ESV

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. 2 Thess 2:15 ESV

In the latter verse Paul distinguishes between those traditions which have been written down and those that have been communicated orally. It would seem that Paul urges the church in Thessalonica to attend to those traditions which may be found in scripture in addition to those which are outside of scripture. However Paul is not here opening the door to the acceptance of tradition as an additional or alternate source of revelation for the Christian's life. Such error does not fully appear in church history until 1345.

The nature of that error and a correct understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition will be the focus of further Kingdom Thoughts.

Chris Whiting

