

Deciding Whether to Adopt a Tradition

by
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The communities in which we live, whether religious or secular, often urge and sometimes require that we conform to certain traditions. When deciding how we should personally respond, the first step should always be to pray and ask God for direction, wisdom, and understanding. Sometimes God speaks to us directly and the question is answered without further adieu. Other times, He directs us to the Scriptures where the process of our biblical analysis can sometimes be more spiritually important than our ultimate conclusion. When directed to the Scriptures, here are four common and valid approaches:

1. Embrace the tradition only if there is a direct and contextually relevant commandment, authorization, or example in Scripture. Here, the burden is on the tradition's proponent.
2. Embrace the tradition if there is no direct and contextually relevant prohibition against it in Scripture. Here, the burden is on the tradition's opponent.
3. Embrace the tradition if no persuasive Scriptural argument can be made against it, against its origin, or against its history. Here, the burden is on the tradition's opponent.
4. Embrace the tradition only if a fair and plausible Scriptural meaning or interpretation can be imputed to it. Here, the burden is on the tradition's proponent.

Since decisions of this kind are rarely based upon only a single test, perhaps all four of the above should be considered and weighed by asking the following expanded questions:

1. Is there a direct and contextually relevant commandment, authorization, or example in Scripture that supports the tradition? If so, how direct and how contextually relevant?
2. Is there a direct and contextually relevant prohibition in Scripture? If so, how direct and how contextually relevant?
3. Is there a Scriptural argument that can be made against the tradition? If so, how persuasive?
4. Does the tradition have an unbiblical origin or history? If so, is its history such that it cannot or should not be redeemed?
5. Considering the tradition's origin or historic meaning, is there a fair and plausible Scriptural meaning or interpretation that can be imputed to it?
6. Would practicing the tradition violate the letter or principle of Deuteronomy 12:29-31?
7. Is there any other factor that should be considered?

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