

## **Ancestral Traditions**

**Request:** “I read about Paul’s involvement with the Ancestral Traditions prior to his conversion to Christianity in Gal.1:14. Would you please do a study on them?”

Paul had been blazing a trail (prokopto / imp/a/ind.) as a religious unbeliever in Judaism. He was able to blaze a trail or advance in Judaism because it offered an **elaborate work system**. This elaborate work system was called the ancestral traditions or the traditions of the elders. It was a work system that encouraged self-achievement, self-promotion, and plenty of opportunities to advance up the religious status ladder.

This is why we hear Paul describe his experiences in Judaism as: “advancing above many of my contemporaries, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions (Gal.1:14), confidence in the flesh, gains and losses, and a righteousness of my own derived from the law (Phil.3:3-9), and achievement by hard work (Rom.4:4-5).”

“The Jewish religion in which Paul had been pushing his way forward was that in which God’s holy law was being buried under a load of human traditions of my fathers: the entire HALACHAH, a body of Jewish oral law that supplemented the written law.” (Galatian by Wm. Hendriksen, pg.57)

“These included many interpretations and additions to the law which had developed through the years, taken together; they were a tremendous set of regulations covering every aspect of human life.” (Galatians: Freedom through Christ, pg.22)

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**This lesson will study five aspects of the Ancestral Traditions and why Paul, and the grace church opposed it.**

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**NOTE:** The Greek words for the **Ancestral Traditions** (ton patrikos paradosis) refer to the passing down from generation to generation a system of ideas, customs, stories, and beliefs.

### **1. It depends on who is using the term, ancestral tradition as to what it means.**

For example, when the Pharisees or Judaizers use it, they equate the ancestral traditions with the Mosaic Law (Acts 6:12-15; 15:1, 5; 21:21).

However whenever, Jesus and Paul, or the Sadducees used the term, they were referring to the Rabbinical interpretations and additions to the Mosaic Law which they didn’t accept as equal to the Mosaic Law (Matt.15:1-12) (Rom.3-4; Gal.2).

**Pharisees:** “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? (Matt.15:2)

**Jesus:** “And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (Matt.15:4) “You nullify the word of God for the sake of your traditions.” (Matt.15:6)

## 2. The Pharisees regarded the ancestral traditions as binding as the canon of scripture.

“It is significant that the HALACHAH, the body of legal decisions which interpreted the law, was reckoned to be equally as binding as the biblical traditions.” (Dict. of New Testament Theology, pg.811)

“Josephus reports that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason the Sadducees rejected them, and say, that we are to esteem those observances and be obligatory which are in the written word, but not to observe what are derived from the traditions of our forefathers. (Dict. of N.T. Theology, pg.811)

Therefore, the ancestral traditions went beyond the word of God.

The ancestral traditions were considered by Jesus, Paul, and the Church as non-biblical and not binding. Fearing the party of the circumcision (Judaizers). And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. (Gal.2:12a-13).

Equating of the ancestral traditions with the Mosaic Law led to serious divergences with the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and the Church (Acts 15; Gal.2-3).

## 3. The ancestral traditions were a religious system of legalism based on misinterpretation of the canon of scriptures.

The legalistic teachings of the ancestral traditions were in constant conflict with the grace teaching of Jesus and His grace Church (Matt.15; 23; Rom.3-4; Gal.2-3) (Rom.3:27-28; 4:1-5, 16-18).

Jesus: “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” (Matt.15:14) “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.” (Matt.23:24)

Jesus described the apostasy of the ancestral traditions as rules taught by men. He quoted Isa.29:13 in Matt.15:6-9 and Mark 7:6-8 to make this point.

Jesus clearly contrasted the “The commandments of God, as defined in The Word of God, verses the traditions of men. Both Jesus and Paul argued that God’s commands, found in Scriptures are binding and that the traditions of the elders are not biblical and therefore are not authoritative or binding. (NIV on Mark 7:8)

## 4. The Pharisees were placing the ancestral traditions above the inspired Word of God.

They used their traditions as the way to ‘gain’ salvation and spirituality: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1, 10)

- The ancestral traditions added legalistic burdens to the life of God’s people (Matt.23) [the 7 woes]

“The Pharisaic experts in the Scriptures, the Scribes, gave a binding interpretation to the laws by way of casuistic exegesis. This casuistry led in part to highly ratify controversial debates and decisions between scholars.” (Dict. of N.T. Theology)

“Casuistry is the misapplication of general ethical principles to particular cases of conscience or conduct.” (American College Dict.)

Take for example food preparation on the Sabbath. The school of Shammai permitted only water to be set on a stove previously heated. But the school of Hillel permitted both hot water and cooked food to be placed on it.

“Practically every area of human life came to be included and regulated by an abundance of individual prescription.” (Dict. of N.T. Theology, pg, 811)

- The ancestral traditions formed a legalistic belief system that attacked the grace of God by substituting human merit.

“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the necks of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10)

## 5. Let’s examine the teaching on forgiveness of sin as recorded in Luke 5:17-26.

- Jesus and the Pharisees agreed that only God forgives sin.
- They both agreed that forgiveness (aphemi) means that the one holding the debt-note has the power to cancel the debt and thus release both the debt and debtor from the obligation.
- They both agreed that only God miraculously heals the sick.
- They both agreed the Messiah would have the power to do all these things.

Then you ask, “Where does their theology disagree?” Let’s examine Luke 5:17-26 for this answer by the following six homiletical points.

- Bedridden (Luke 17-19) paralytic on a mat carried by friends
- Bold (Luke 20) your sins are forgiven
- Blasphemy (Luke 21) who can forgive sins but God alone?
- Better (Luke 22-23) which is easier to say – your sins are forgiven or get up and walk?
- Believe (Luke 24) But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin.
- Blessing (Luke 24-26) get up and take your mat and go home!

“But in order that you might know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home.’” (Luke 5:24)

## 6. How then is the sin problem of man resolved in this world?

“To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”(Acts 26:18)(Gal.2:16, 21)