

Lesson 4: The Bible is the Authoritative Source of Our Theology

KEY POINT: For Seventh-day Adventists, the Bible has a higher authority than human tradition, experience, reason, or culture. The Bible alone is the standard by which everything else needs to be tested. (SSQ, 35).

- To which source do we grant the ultimate and highest authority in matters of faith and practice?

TRADITION

(Mark 7:1–13) The Pharisees were upset that one of the disciples ate without observing purity rituals setup by Jewish Elders to “protect” the law from being accidentally broken. Jesus responded with the words of Isaiah, “Because these people approach me with empty words, and the honor they bestow on me is mere lip-service; while in fact they have distanced their hearts from me, their worship of Me is based on merely human rules they have been taught”, i.e. the commandments of men. (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus goes on to give an example of how one of these rules of tradition is used to break God’s law (v10-12).

Tradition starts as a method to remind us and keep us connected to important things and lessons of the past. However, then become dishonorable and dangerous when they go against or valued more highly than God’s law.

- How do we distinguish between the Word of God and human tradition?
- Why is it important to distinguish between biblical teaching and tradition?
- Why is it easier to uphold details of some human traditions than to live the spirit of God’s law? (Matthew 22:37-40).
- How can we make sure that tradition, no matter how good it may be, does not supersede the Written Word of God as our final norm and authority?
- What role should tradition play in our church?
- Where do you see blessings and challenges in religious traditions?

EXPERIENCE

- Experiencing God’s goodness and patience lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).
- The kindness, goodness and mercy of God saves us and renews us (Titus 3:4-7).
 - How do we experience God’s goodness?
 - Why is it important that our faith be more than intellectual knowledge?
 - In what ways can our experiences conflict with the Bible or mislead us in our faith?
- Paul is worried that they will be deceived (2 Corinthians 11: 1-4). “I fear that somehow your minds may be seduced away from simple and pure devotion to the Messiah, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent and his craftiness” (v3).
 - To what limit should we trust our own experiences?
 - Why is it crucial that we always test our experience through the Word of God?

CULTURE

(1 John 2:15–17) Be careful what you love. The things of this world are “the desires of the old nature, the desires of the eyes, and the pretensions of life” (v16). These things are not from God. The world and its desires will pass away. But the things of God remain forever (v17).

- What does it mean that we should not love the things of the world?
 - How can we live in the world and yet not have a worldly mind-set?
 - What aspects of your culture are in complete opposition to biblical faith?
 - How do we stand firm against those aspects attempting to corrupt our faith?
- In class, talk about the culture in which your church finds itself immersed. How does that culture impact your faith? What examples can we find from history in which culture greatly impacted the actions of church members in a way that, looking back now, we see as negative? What lessons can we take from this for ourselves today so that we don't make similar mistakes?

REASON

“For although we do live in the world, we do not wage war in a worldly way; because the weapons we use to wage war are not worldly. On the contrary, they have God's power for demolishing strongholds. We demolish arguments and every arrogance that raises itself up against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah. And when you have become completely obedient, then we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

- Respect for God is the starting place of knowledge. Those who are deceived by sin reject God's wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).
- Reverencing God is the first stage of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy God is understandings (Proverbs 9:10).
 - Why is obedience to Christ in our thoughts so important?
 - Why is the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom?

“We should remember the fact that even our reasoning power is affected by sin and needs to be brought under the reign of Christ. Human beings are darkened in their understanding and alienated from God (Eph. 4:18).” (SSQ, 34)

THE BIBLE

Jesus is the Messiah (John 5:31-47). John the Baptist testified to Jesus as Messiah (v33). The works Jesus does through empowerment from His Father (v36). God the Father has declared it (v37-38; Matthew 3:10; Mark 1:11; Luke 1:35). And scripture testifies of Jesus (v39). Jesus states that Moses wrote about Him (v46).

- The Bible is the ultimate source for understanding spiritual matters (1 Timothy 4:1-7).
 - What are the consequences when we do not accept the Bible as the standard by which we test all teachings and even our spiritual experience?