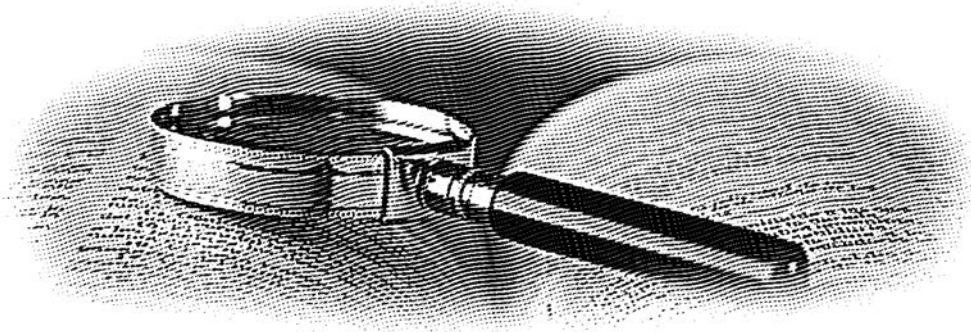


The Bible Is the Support for All Our Beliefs



SABBATH—APRIL 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 7:1–13; Romans 2:4; 1 John 2:15–17; 2 Corinthians 10:5, 6; John 5:46, 47.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Tell them to put their faith in the teaching and the Law [of Moses]. If they [other people] do not speak what this word says, it is because they have no light [truth] in them’ ” (Isaiah 8:20, NLV).

EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH uses the Bible to support its teachings. But each church may not believe the same things about the Bible. Each church's beliefs about the Bible and its power to guide our lives may be different. This topic is important and deep. This week, we will explore this idea by studying five different things that churches use to decide what the Bible means. These five things are: (1) tradition, or the ways things were done in the past; (2) personal experience; (3) culture, or the way of life around us; (4) reason, or our ability to think; (5) and the Bible itself.

Yes, churches use these five things to decide what the Bible means. Churches also use these five things to decide how much power the Bible has in their lives. We all read the Bible. We use it to understand God and His plan for us. We are part of the traditions and culture around us. So, the way things were done in the past and the ways of life around us have a part in the way we understand the Bible.

Which of these five things is the most important to help us to understand the Bible? What happens when a church makes one of the five things more important than the rest? A church's answers to these questions can make its beliefs very different from other Christian churches.



We all read the Bible. We use it to understand God and His plan for us.

THE WAY THINGS WERE DONE IN THE PAST (Mark 7:1–13)

Tradition is the way our people have done things for a long time. Tradition itself is not bad. It helps us to remember our past. So, we should not be surprised that tradition also has an important part in religion. But there also are some dangers with tradition.

How does Jesus feel about some human traditions in His day? For the answer, read Mark 7:1–13.



Traditions that grow out of our experience with God and the Bible are good. But we need to make sure that they always agree with the Bible.

The tradition in Mark 7:1–13 has been around for a long time. In Jesus' day, this tradition was made equal to the Bible. Traditions often grow over time. Soon, they may include parts that are not part of the Bible or God's plan. In Jesus' day, the religious leaders in the Jewish community support and teach many human traditions. (Read Mark 7:3, 5.) But human traditions are not equal to God's commandments (read Mark 7:8, 9). " 'You make the word of God useless by putting your own teachings in its place' " (Mark 7:13, NIV).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. How do we know what is Bible truth and what is human tradition? Why is it so important for us to know how they are different?

The Bible fills us with love and respect for God's truth. This love and respect can become part of a tradition. It is important that our traditions stay true to the living God. He shows His plan for us in the Bible. So, the Bible is more important than human traditions, even good ones. Traditions that grow out of our experience with God and the Bible are good. But we need to make sure that they always match what the Bible says.

EXPERIENCE (Romans 2:4)

Read Romans 2:4 and Titus 3:4, 5. The Bible says that God is love. How do we get to know this love? God also is good, patient, forgiving, and kind. How do we learn these things about Him too? Why is it important that our faith be more than an idea? Why must our faith be a real experience? At the same time, in what ways can our experience disagree with the Bible and even lead us away from God?

Experience is part of life. Experience can change our feelings and thoughts in a powerful way. Our experiences in life can change how we feel about God and other people. God made us special in that way.

God wants us to feel close to the people that He brings into our lives. God also wants us to see the beauty in art, music, and nature. God wants us to feel the joy that comes from knowing Him as our Savior. He wants us to trust in the power of His Bible promises to us. Our religion and faith are more than just teachings and decisions. Our faith also is experience. Experience can change the way we think about God and how we understand the Bible. But we also need to see that our experience has limits. Experience cannot help us fully to know or understand God's plan for our lives.

What warning do you see in 2 Corinthians 11:1–3? What does this warning tell us about why we cannot always trust our experiences to show us the truth?

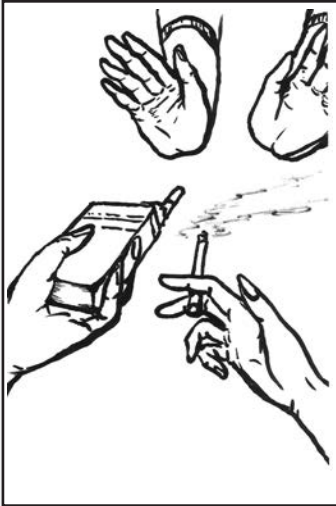
Experience can trick us. Our feelings can lie. So, we need to check our experience with the Bible. Sometimes we may want to do something that the Bible says is wrong. That is when we need to trust the Bible more than our experience and what we want to do. We should always be careful. We must make sure that our experience agrees with the Bible. What we want must never go against Bible teachings.

Our faith includes love for God and love for other people (read Mark 12:28–31). These commandments show us that our experience in life is important. But why must our experience always agree with Bible truth?



God wants us to feel the joy that comes from knowing Him as our Savior.

THE WAYS OF LIFE AROUND US (1 John 2:15–17)



Our faith should cause us to question wrong practices and beliefs in our culture.

We all belong to a culture or way of life. Culture is a part of our everyday life. We cannot escape from culture. Look at how much of the Old Testament is the story about God's people becoming spoiled or sinning because of the culture around them. What makes us think that things are different with us today?

The Bible comes to us from the Jewish culture. That does not mean that Bible truth or its meaning is limited only to the Jews or Jewish culture. We also need to know that our culture can change the way we understand the Bible. But we must remember, too, that the Bible has power over race groups, where we were born, and who we are in life. The Bible is above any human culture. The Bible even can be used to correct the sins in **every** culture.

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What does John mean when he says that we should not love the things on this earth? How can we live here and, at the same time, stay loyal to God?

Culture is ruined by sin. So, culture often does not agree with Bible truth. Yes, some parts of our culture might agree with our faith. But we always must be careful to know when culture and faith disagree. Our faith should cause us and other people to question wrong practices and beliefs in our cultures. If necessary, our faith should cause us to make a new culture, or way of life, that is loyal to the Bible. So, we need to stay strong in the Lord. If not, we will give in to the culture around us.

Ellen G. White writes: "Jesus' followers must be separate from this earth's practices and ways of life. At the same time, God's people must not separate from the people on this earth. Jesus always spent time with people. Jesus did not encourage them to do anything that went against God's plan. No, Jesus spent time with people to improve them and lead them to God."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education*, page 323, adapted.

What parts of your culture go fully against Bible truth and your faith? How do you stand firm against these wrong practices and ways of life?

REASON (2 Corinthians 10:5, 6)

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5, 6; Proverbs 1:7; and Proverbs 9:10. Why is it so important to obey Jesus in our thoughts? Why does wisdom start with obeying the Lord?

God gave us the skill to think and to understand. Everything we do and all our Bible teachings show that we have the power to think. After the 1700s, people gave the human brain more power than God meant for it to have. The human brain has limits. It cannot help us to understand everything. Our powers of reason also cannot answer all our questions or solve all our problems.

Some people believe that human reason is the foundation for all knowledge. They believe that only human reason can help us to understand all truth. They also believe that only human reason has the power to decide what is right and wrong. They give human reason more power than the Bible. During the 1700s, people threw out anything that they could not explain by reason. They doubted anything they could not explain. So, they changed how they felt and thought about the Bible. They stopped believing in the Bible's miracles. They did not believe Jesus woke up from the dead in a real body. They stopped believing that the Holy Spirit put Jesus as a baby inside of Mary's body. These thinkers also stopped believing that God made the earth in six days. They no longer trusted Bible truth.

Remember, sin has weakened our reason. So, we need to let Jesus control our minds. We do not understand things the way we should. Our hearts have turned away from God (Ephesians 4:18). So, we need the Bible to heal our minds and give us understanding. God made us. He gave us the power to reason and to think. So, that should tell us that our understanding is not something that works apart from God. "If you want to become wise, you must begin by respecting the LORD" (Proverbs 9:10, NIV; read also Proverbs 1:7). When we accept and obey the Bible, we can reason correctly.

A few hundred years ago, American President Thomas Jefferson made his own copy of the New Testament. He cut out everything that he thought was false. He got rid of Jesus' miracles and the truth about His waking up from the dead. What does President Jefferson's "Bible" teach us about the limits of human thinking? Why can it not help us to understand all truth?



We need the Bible to heal our minds and give us understanding.

THE BIBLE (John 5:46, 47)



The Bible is our spiritual shield.

The Holy Spirit led humans to write God’s Word, the Bible. So, we can trust the Bible as a guide for our lives. The Holy Spirit will never lead us to believe anything that goes against God’s Word. The Spirit also will never lead us away from God’s Word. For Seventh-day Adventists, the Bible has more power than human tradition, or the way things have been done for a long time. For us, the Bible also has more power than experience, reason, and culture, or the ways of life around us. Only the Bible is the test for everything in life. It helps us decide what is good and right.

Read John 5:46, 47 and John 7:38. For Jesus, where do the answers to all spiritual questions come from? How does the Bible show that Jesus is the true Savior?

Some people say that the Holy Spirit has given them special messages and truth. But their messages go against Bible truth. These people give the “Holy Spirit” more power than the Bible. When we go against God’s Word, the Bible, and clear teachings, we are in danger. The Holy Spirit will never lead us away from Bible truth. The Bible is our spiritual shield. Only it can be trusted to show us what to believe and to do.

“The Holy Spirit uses the Bible to show us truth. In this way, the Holy Spirit shows us what is wrong and helps us to remove it from our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Christ works in us by His Spirit to help His chosen people to give their lives to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 671, adapted.

We should not think that the Holy Spirit replaces the Bible. No, the Holy Spirit works with the Bible to bring us to Jesus. The Bible teaches us truth (read 1 Timothy 4:6). So, we can trust God’s Word and accept it fully. It is not our job to judge the Bible. But God’s Word has the power to judge us and our thinking. The Bible has this power because it is the Written Word of God.

Why is the Bible a safe guide? How can it help us to answer spiritual questions better than our own thoughts and feelings can? What danger will we be in if we do not accept the Bible as the rule and test for all teachings and experience?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pages 593–602, in *The Great Controversy*.

Tradition is the way things have been done for a long time. Tradition often has a big part in how we think about and understand the Bible. So do experience, reason, and culture, or the ways of life around us. The important question we must ask ourselves is: Which of these things has final say in what we believe? It is one thing to say that the Bible has value. We need to do that. But we also must allow the Bible to change our lives with the Holy Spirit’s help.

Culture, experience, reason, and tradition are not bad. But they become problems when they go against the clear teachings of the Bible. What is worse is when we make these things more important than the Bible. When we look at Old Testament and New Testament history, we see that bad things happened to God’s people when they made human ideas more important than God’s teachings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 God commands us to love Him with all our heart, spirit, and mind (Matthew 22:37–40). We also must love our neighbors. Why is it easier, at times, to follow some human traditions than to follow God’s law?
- 2 How much power should tradition have in our church? What are the blessings that come from our following tradition? What are the problems?
- 3 How can we, as a church, make sure that tradition does not become more important than the Bible? Also, how can we make sure that tradition does not have the final say in our decisions as Christians?
- 4 What if someone said that God talked to him or her in a dream and said that Sunday was the true day of rest. How will you answer this person? What does this story teach us about experience? Why does experience need to agree with the Bible?
- 5 Talk about the culture you live in. How does culture make your faith better? How does culture make your faith worse? What examples can we see from history of how culture hurt the church? What can we learn from our mistakes in the past so that we do not make the same mistakes today?



We must allow the Bible to change our lives with the Holy Spirit’s help.