

3. If there was a need to apply the Law of God to the life of the people (and there was), and if the lawyers and rabbis of Jesus' day attempted to do this very thing (and they did, as may be seen in the Mishnah), then why did our Lord denounce the tradition of the elders in such strong terms?

Was it because, in practice, the rabbis had elevated the authority of the tradition to that of Torah?

Was it because the authority of the tradition had gradually supplanted that of the Torah?

Was it because, at times, the tradition conflicted with or even contradicted the substance or the intent of the Torah?

Was it because our Lord's teaching was intended to supercede both the Torah and the tradition of the elders?

Was it because our Lord's teaching was intended to free the true meaning of the Torah from the accretions of traditional interpretation that had gradually concealed and eventually falsified the truth? Could this be what Jesus meant in Luke 11:52 when He said, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."

4. Are there implications or applications for the life of the church today that can be made from the abovementioned concerns and cautions? Can New Testament believers benefit from the experience of Israel?

a. Do churches sometimes add articles of belief and practice to their (biblical) creeds and codes of conduct and make these additions equal in authority to those articles clearly revealed in Scripture, thereby binding the consciences of the people of God? Are those who do this in danger of falling into the same errors and under the same denunciations as the teachers and lawyers of Christ's day?

b. How can we keep from committing the same mistakes? Are there safeguards that can be built into the creeds and codes we adopt and use?

For example, if we have a church "covenant" in addition to a church doctrinal statement of both basic and distinctive beliefs, what should we include in it and what should we exclude from it? How general should it be? How specific should we get? If the covenant is general explicitly (i.e., what it says is kept general) but specific implicitly (i.e., what we understand it to include is very specific), is this right? Is it wise? Should it be "set in concrete" or made to be flexible? Should it be reviewed at regular intervals and, if necessary, revised? Should a mechanism (study committee, timetable, locus and conditions of decision-making, etc.) be established to accomplish this purpose?

c. If we have decided to do certain things in the church in certain ways, or have become accustomed to doing them in particular ways, how can we keep from elevating those ways into laws that must not be violated? How can we on the one hand avoid making customs into laws, and on the other hand maintain in