

Session 7 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

Guard What Has Been Entrusted

Scripture, Tradition, and faithful development

How can the faith be handed on for two thousand years without turning into a different faith?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Jesus condemns one kind of tradition and Paul commands another, that the difference is the source and not the medium, and that growth in understanding is fidelity to the same gift rather than permission to contradict it.

Catholic Touchstone. Scripture and Tradition flow from the same source and together transmit the one apostolic deposit. The Magisterium serves that deposit and is not above it. Revelation is complete in Christ; the Church's understanding of it grows without any new public revelation. (CCC 80-86; 94; Dei Verbum, 4, 8, 10.)

What You Need to Know

Mark 7 and 2 Thessalonians 2 must be read together or the group will leave with half a Bible. In Mark 7 Jesus condemns "the tradition of men" that let a son declare his property Corban and so escape the duty to support his parents. The problem is not that the practice was old or unwritten. The problem is that it voided a command of God. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul commands the Church to "hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Same word, opposite verdict. The difference is the source.

Sacred Tradition is not a name for every custom Catholics have inherited. The Catechism distinguishes the apostolic Tradition, which comes from the Apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus and the Spirit, from theological, disciplinary, liturgical, and devotional traditions that arose in local churches over time and can be kept, changed, or dropped under the Church's authority (CCC 83). If the group learns one paragraph number tonight, make it that one.

Development is the other half. The Church's understanding of what she received grows: through the contemplation and study of believers, through their experience of spiritual things, and through the preaching of those who hold the teaching office (Dei Verbum 8). A later word like "Trinity" or "transubstantiation" is not a new revelation. It is the same faith understood more precisely. And the word "development" never licenses contradiction. Vincent of Lerins put it in one line: progress, yes; alteration, no.

Finally, the teaching office is a servant. Dei Verbum 10 says the Magisterium "is not above the word of God, but serves it," teaching only what has been handed on. That is the safeguard against the fear behind tonight's objection. The Church cannot protect an innovation by calling it ancient, because the Church is bound to the deposit she did not write. Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium are so connected that none stands without the others.

Terms, in plain words

- **Tradition (capital T):** the apostolic Tradition: what the Apostles received from Christ and the Spirit and handed on to the whole Church, in word and in writing.
- **traditions (small t):** customs, disciplines, and devotions that grew up in the Church over time and can change (CCC 83).
- **Development of doctrine:** the Church's growth in understanding the one deposit, never a change in what was revealed.
- **Corban:** Hebrew for "an offering." In Mark 7 it names property declared as dedicated to God and so withheld from one's parents.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The Shema. Israel is to keep these words on the heart, teach them to the children, talk of them at home and on the road, and write them on the doorposts. Faithful transmission is not the storage of a document. The words are remembered, practiced, spoken, and taught inside ordinary life. That is what a living Tradition looks like from the inside.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Do not imply that the Apostles performed every later Catholic practice in its current form. They did not, and the Catechism does not say they did. Keep three things apart all night: the apostolic faith, changeable practices, and permissible theological opinions. (CCC 83; Dei Verbum, 8.)

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: Against teachers who claimed a secret tradition handed to a few, Irenaeus argues that the Apostles held nothing back and hid no mysteries. If they had known secret things, they would have entrusted them above all to the men to whom they were entrusting the churches themselves. The apostolic teaching is public, and anyone can check it in the churches the Apostles founded.

Against Heresies, III.3.1

St. Vincent of Lerins

Summary: Writing in 434, Vincent asks whether there is progress in the Church of Christ and answers: certainly, and a great deal. But it must be real progress of the faith, not alteration of it. Understanding, knowledge, and wisdom should grow, in each person and in the whole Church, as a body grows from infancy to age while remaining the same body.

Commonitorium, 23

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The Tradition that comes from the Apostles makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. Understanding of what has been handed down grows in three ways. It grows through the contemplation and study of believers who treasure these things in their hearts, and through their experience of spiritual realities. It grows too through the preaching of those who received the sure charism of truth with episcopal succession.

Dei Verbum, 8

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 80-82.** Scripture and Tradition flow from one source and together form one deposit.
- **CCC 83.** Apostolic Tradition distinguished from changeable traditions.
- **CCC 85-86.** The Magisterium is the servant of the word of God.
- **CCC 94.** Growth in understanding of the faith.
- **CCC 66-67.** No new public revelation; private revelations cannot correct or complete it.

Session Goals

1. Distinguish the tradition Jesus condemns in Mark 7 from the Tradition Paul commands in 2 Thessalonians 2.
2. Explain the roles of Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium and why none stands alone.
3. Distinguish growth in understanding from contradiction, and say what "development" does not permit.

Thread Watch | leader only

Thread B, "received and handed on," resolves tonight. Point back to 2 Timothy 2:2 (Session 2) and 1 Corinthians 11:23 (Session 6) when Paul uses the same words in 1 Corinthians 11:2. The Church hands on neither bare information nor an open license to innovate. Keep the guesses closed until Session 8.

Timed Plan | 75 to 90 minutes

Clock	Segment	If you only have 60
0 to 8	Opening prayer and Win	One Win question
8 to 28	Build, Questions 1 and 2	Keep
28 to 48	Build, Questions 3 to 5, with the live discovery	Drop Question 5. Assign 2 Timothy 3:14-17 for home
48 to 60	The objection, built then pressed	Keep
60 to 70	Send and Live It This Week	One Send question
70 to 75	Memory verse and closing prayer	Keep

For 90 minutes, let the Build discussion breathe and add the Dig Deeper passage at the end.

OBJECTION BENCH | leader only. Answers for questions that may come up. Do not read aloud.

If someone says: *2 Thessalonians 2:15 is about what Paul had already taught them. It is not a license for whatever the Church says later.*

You can answer: Correct, and the Church agrees. Tradition is what the Apostles handed on, not whatever comes later. The Magisterium is bound to that deposit (Dei Verbum 10). The verse does establish that apostolic teaching came by mouth as well as by letter and that both bind.

If someone says: *Everything the Apostles taught orally ended up in the New Testament, so Scripture is enough.*

You can answer: Where does Scripture say that? It is a claim about Scripture that is not in Scripture. What Scripture does say is to hold the traditions given by word or by letter, and that the Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church also had to decide which books were Scripture, which took a living Tradition to do.

If someone says: *Jesus condemned tradition. Catholics are the Pharisees.*

You can answer: Jesus condemned a tradition that voided a command of God, and he said so (Mark 7:13). Paul, in the same Bible, praised the Corinthians for keeping the traditions he delivered (1 Corinthians 11:2). The word is the same. The source is the test. Any Catholic custom that voided God's command would fall under Mark 7, and the Church says so.

If someone says: *Development of doctrine is just a way to say the Church changed its mind and kept the old name.*

You can answer: It would be, if development meant contradiction. It does not. Vincent's test is that the faith grows the way a body grows, the same body at every age. The Church can say more precisely what she always believed. She cannot say the opposite. If someone can show a real contradiction, that is a serious objection; a change in vocabulary is not one.

Answers at a Glance

One line per question, for the leader who needs to check quickly during the night. Full answers are in Part Two.

1. Mark 7: the Corban rule voided God's command. Condemned for its source, not for being oral.
2. 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Timothy 1: hold the traditions taught by mouth or letter; guard the deposit. Received, not invented.
3. 1 Corinthians 11:2: Paul praises them for keeping the traditions he delivered. Same word as Mark 7, opposite verdict.
4. CCC 83 and 86: Tradition versus traditions; the Magisterium under the word, not over it.
5. 2 Timothy 3: from whom you learned it, and the Scriptures. Teachers and text together, not against each other.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Read aloud everything marked SAY, ASK, and READ. Keep everything marked LEADER to yourself. Share each parchment box only after the group has talked.

Opening Prayer

SAY God of truth, teach us to love what you have revealed. Protect us from confusing our preferences with your word. Give us a faithful mind, a humble heart, and a willingness to learn. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

LEADER Invite brief responses. Anyone may pass. Take one question if time is short.

ASK 1. When have you understood something more deeply without discovering that what you first believed was false?

ASK 2. How do you tell a meaningful inheritance from a habit that just needs to change?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Mark 7:6-13.

ASK 1. What exactly is wrong with the practice Jesus condemns? Does he object because it is old, because it is unwritten, or for some other reason?

LEADER Push past "tradition is bad." Verse 13 gives the reason.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The Corban rule let a man declare his property dedicated to God and so refuse to support his parents. Jesus says this makes "void the word of God through your tradition." The problem is not that the practice was inherited or oral. The problem is that it canceled a command of God. So the test of any tradition is not its age or its popularity but whether it is faithful to God's word.

READ Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 2 Timothy 1:13-14.

ASK 2. How did these churches receive apostolic teaching? What attitude is Timothy told to take toward what he was given?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Paul tells the Thessalonians to "hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Timothy is to "follow the pattern of the sound words" he heard and "guard the truth that has been entrusted." Apostolic teaching came both by speech and by writing, and both bind. The inheritance is received and guarded, not constructed. And this keeps us from treating all unwritten teaching as the kind Jesus condemned. Paul commands it.

Live Discovery

SAY Go back to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Find the place where he praises them for holding to the traditions he delivered to them.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply 1 Corinthians 11:2 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 3. What does Paul call what he handed on, and how does he feel about their keeping it? What is the contrast with Mark 7?

LEADER Have someone reread 1 Corinthians 11:23 aloud right after. Same verbs, three weeks ago.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you." The very word Jesus used in condemnation, Paul uses in praise. Mark 7 is about a custom that undermined God's command. Paul is about apostolic teaching the Church must keep. The word "tradition" does not tell you by itself whether something is faithful. You have to ask what is being handed on and where it came from. Notice the verbs: this is the same "delivered" of 1 Corinthians 11:23 and the same chain as 2 Timothy 2:2.

READ Read CCC 83 and CCC 86.

SAY Two short Catechism paragraphs. Read them aloud in full.

ASK 4. What distinction does the Catechism make between kinds of tradition? What limit does it put on the Church's teaching office?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

CCC 83 separates the apostolic Tradition, which comes from the Apostles, from theological, disciplinary, liturgical, and devotional traditions that grew up later and can be kept, changed, or dropped. CCC 86 says the Magisterium "is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant," teaching only what has been handed on. So the Church can explain the faith more precisely and regulate her own life. She cannot replace Christ's revelation with something else. Growth is fidelity to the same gift.

READ Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

SAY This is the passage most often quoted to prove Scripture alone. Read all four verses.

ASK 5. What two things is Timothy told to continue in? What is Scripture said to be good for, and does the passage set it against his teachers?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Timothy is to continue in what he learned, "knowing from whom you learned it," and in "the sacred writings" he has known from childhood. Scripture is inspired and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training, so that the man of God may be "complete, equipped for every good work." Catholics affirm every word. The passage never says Scripture is the only authority; it names Timothy's teachers in the same sentence. Text and teachers together, which is what the Church has always said.

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Now the objection, at full strength. It is the one that makes Catholics nervous, and it should not.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Apostolic oral teaching was binding while the Apostles were alive and could be checked. That proves nothing about claims made centuries later. Once the Apostles were dead, anything could be called 'apostolic tradition,' and no one could check it. A church that appeals to unwritten tradition has given itself a blank check. It can protect any innovation just by calling it ancient."

"Scripture is different. It is written down, it is inspired, and 2 Timothy 3 says it makes the man of God complete and equipped for every good work. Complete. Why would you need anything else?"

ASK Does Catholic teaching treat every inherited practice as Sacred Tradition? What safeguards have we already met in this study? And does 2 Timothy 3 say what the objection needs it to say?

LEADER Let the group try to answer from the passages read tonight before you share the response. Do not rescue the discussion too early.

CATHOLIC RESPONSE | share after the discussion

The warning is right, and the Church agrees with it. Not every custom is apostolic, and calling something ancient proves nothing. That is why the Catechism draws the line in CCC 83 between the apostolic Tradition and traditions that can change. It is why Dei Verbum puts the Magisterium under the word of God, not over it. The check the objection wants does exist. Irenaeus named it in 180: the apostolic teaching is public, in the churches the Apostles founded, with the bishops they appointed. Scripture, the Church's received faith, apostolic succession, and the teaching office hold each other accountable. None is a blank check because none stands alone.

On 2 Timothy 3, Catholics affirm every word: inspired, profitable, equipping for every good work. What the verse does not say is "only." Paul names Timothy's teachers in the same breath as the sacred writings, and two verses earlier he tells him to hold what he learned "from whom you learned it." Scripture equipped Timothy inside a living community that handed it to him. That is the Catholic claim in one verse. And the Bible itself never lists its own contents. The canon was received and discerned within the apostolic Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 83-86; 120; Dei Verbum, 8, 10.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. Which Catholic practice or teaching do you need to understand more accurately before you try to explain it to someone?

ASK 2. How can you stay open to learning without treating the faith as something you get to redesign?

Live It This Week

Read. Read CCC 80-86 in one sitting. Write the difference between Tradition and traditions in your own words.

Sort. Pick one thing you do as a Catholic and decide whether it is apostolic Tradition, a changeable practice, or a devotion.

Explain. Explain the Mark 7 and 1 Corinthians 11:2 contrast to someone this week, in plain words, and admit what you still need to look up.

Scripture Memory

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.”

2 Thessalonians 2:15 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, make us faithful to the Gospel we received. Give us humility to correct our mistakes and courage to hold fast to your truth. Let our words and our lives lead others toward you. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in the order it appears. Materials: RSV2CE Bibles for everyone, this guide, the Take-Home sheets, and a printed copy of CCC 83 and 86 for Question 4.

When	Passage	Purpose
1	Mark 7:6-13	A tradition that voids God's command
2	2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13-14	Hold the traditions; guard the deposit
3	1 Corinthians 11:2	Live discovery: traditions praised
4	CCC 83; 86	Tradition versus traditions; the servant Magisterium
5	2 Timothy 3:14-17	Scripture and teachers together
Memory	2 Thessalonians 2:15	Holding fast

Dig Deeper | 1 Timothy 3:15

Paul calls "the church of the living God" the "pillar and bulwark of the truth." Read it beside 2 Timothy 3:16. In the same letters, Scripture is inspired and the Church is the pillar of truth. Ask the group why Paul never seems to feel a tension between those two sentences.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 7. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.