

Chapter One

The Traditions of Men

It is important to recognize the value of traditions to our culture and to individuals within that culture. Perhaps I should say cultures as we are a rather homogeneous collective of cultures that provide a variety of richness to our overall experience as people. I have been blessed to have been able to travel to and live in many countries. I have been exposed to a variety of cultures, languages, and people groups. The adventure of discovery has always been exciting and illuminating to me personally. That is not to say that all cultural expressions are in line with the Word of God, far from it, but interesting and illuminating, nonetheless.

It is also important to know that my views on traditions are not entirely negative. I have worked in the field of clinical counseling for 30 years and over that time I have seen how long-held traditions can be a source of strength for people, especially in times of crisis. When in fear or pain or a host of challenges, people tend to retreat into their long-held traditions to give them a sense of familiarity and safety. The mere act of “doing”

something familiar can bring a sense of normalcy, comfort, and belonging that is especially appreciated during personal challenges.

We actually have some examples of how traditions are viewed positively in the Apostolic Writings, the New Testament.

- In 1 Corinthians 11:2, the Apostle Paul (Rav Shaul) says, “Now I praise you, brothers, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm the **traditions**, even as I delivered them to you.”
- He also said in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold the **traditions** which you were taught by us, whether by word or by letter.”

It is important to recognize, therefore, that the Bible is not hostile to traditions, per se, but as we will see, it does pose some qualifications for traditions to be accepted and practiced.

Perhaps the most grievous error in the history of Israel is that of the incident of the golden calf. It is the recalling of that incident that gave birth to the title of this book, Sacred Cows.

Deuteronomy 9:11- 16 relates the experience of Moshe (Moses) as it states, “It came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights that the LORD gave me the two stone tablets,

even the tablets of the covenant. The LORD said to me, “Arise, get down quickly from here; for your people whom you have brought out of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned away from the way which I commanded them. They have made a molten image for themselves!” Furthermore, the LORD spoke to me, saying, “I have seen these people, and behold, they are a stiff-necked people. Leave me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under the sky; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.” So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire. The two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the LORD your God. You had made yourselves a molded calf. You had quickly turned away from the way which the LORD had commanded you.”

Many rabbinical commentaries tend to the idea that, in the making of the sacred calf, the children of Israel did not think they were directly embracing paganism. Many believed that they were using this image as a representative of the true God who did indeed deliver and lead them out of Egypt. As we shall see, however, God does not accept syncretism in worship of Him.

The incident of the golden calf and the subsequent judgments from God should stand as an eternal warning to any who think their embracing of other “sacred cows” could be acceptable

to God. Let us not become “stiff-necked” and resistant to the counsel of God. Let us humble ourselves to receive instruction from Him through His Word, the Bible.

Let us now look at some clear examples where the “sacred cow” traditions of men stand opposed and condemned by the eternal, unchanging, and inspired Word of God.