

Chapter Two

Mark Chapter 7

I have chosen this example regarding the Bible's instruction regarding traditions because it is the clearest example from the Messiah Himself and establishes the primary principle necessary for the accurate investigation of traditions. I have added some highlights to emphasize some important focus points. I have included Mark 7:1-13 in its entirety to facilitate careful examination.

Mark 7:1-13

“Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together to him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of his disciples eating bread with defiled, that is unwashed, hands, they found fault. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat unless they wash their hands and forearms, holding to **the tradition of the elders**. They don't eat when they come from the marketplace unless they bathe themselves, and there are

many other things which they have received to hold to: washings of cups, pitchers, bronze vessels, and couches.)

The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why don’t your disciples walk according to **the tradition of the elders**, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?” He answered them,

“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,
‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me.

They worship me in vain,

teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

“For you set aside the commandment of God and hold tightly to **the tradition of men**—the washing of pitchers and cups, and you do many other such things.” He said to them, “Full well do you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep **your tradition**. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother;’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban,” ’ ” that is to say, given to God, “then you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother, making void the word of God by **your tradition which you have handed down**. You do many things like this.”

Now let's examine this carefully and see what we can learn.

First of all, the context is clearly referring to a conflict between Yeshua's disciples and some of the Pharisees. An important second observation is to note that the issue is not about "what" the disciples were eating. This passage has nothing to do with the food laws of Leviticus 11. Had the disciples been eating anything prohibited by the standard of Leviticus 11, that would certainly have been the issue. It was not.

The issue was the fact that the disciples were not adhering to the "**Tradition of the Elders**" regarding ritual hand washing. What was this tradition? There exists a tradition, still extant today, that prior to touching food, the hands must be washed in a specific, ordered way to ensure the foods they touch do not become ritually contaminated, thus rendering them unfit for consumption. The actual process is described in the Talmud, a compendium of the Oral Torah, and is quite elaborate and extensive. The truth is, there is no such requirement in the written Torah¹ addressing such a concern or positing a need for such a remedy. Otherwise clean food, meaning acceptable according to Leviticus 11, does not become unclean merely by the absence of a man-made cleansing ritual. It is the Word of God in Lev 11 that sanctifies and sets apart what may be eaten as food, not the traditions of men!

Yeshua rightly takes them to task for their hypocrisy. He quotes Isaiah 29:13 to illustrate that “their worship of me is useless because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines”. Yeshua further states, “For you set aside the commandment of God, and hold tightly to **the tradition of men.**”

Yeshua goes on to share a parable to illustrate his point.

In Mark 7:17-23 he states the following: “When he had entered into a house away from the multitude, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, “Are you also without understanding? Don’t you perceive that whatever goes into the man from outside can’t defile him, because it doesn’t go into his heart, but into his stomach, then into the latrine, making all foods clean?” He said, “That which proceeds out of the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, sexual sins, murders, thefts, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man.”

Yeshua is demonstrating the error of the **Tradition of the Elders** regarding ritual hand washing. Biblically approved food, such as outlined in Leviticus 11, does not become unfit for

consumption by avoiding man-made ritual hand washing. It is eaten and purged into the latrine.

An important observation is warranted here. Verse 19 includes the words “making all foods clean”. First, notice that most honest Bible translators will put that phrase in parenthesis marks or at least have a footnote admitting the truth that those words are not in the original Greek text. They were most likely a side comment added by a scribe that was later added to the text. Even if it is possible that they were originally spoken by Yeshua, it would only further explain the idea that otherwise Biblical foods do not become “unclean” by avoiding the traditional hand-washing ritual.

In Mark Chapter 7, Yeshua contrasts two polar opposites, the authoritative Word of God and the man-made rules of human tradition. When there is a conflict between these two spheres, we must always follow His example and reject any teaching or tradition which does not agree with the Word of God. The principle is just that simple and absolute. I have read several conservative Evangelical commentators who agree with that statement, in principle, but then go on to violate it in their teachings. Unfortunately, many resources are not consistent in their approach to an honest and careful exegesis of Biblical texts.

Yeshua said, “Full well do you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep **your tradition.**” He gives an example

of how they circumvent the plain meaning of Scripture regarding the requirement to provide for parents to allow a “legal loophole” to avoid adherence to the command. He charges them as “making void the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down”.

Do you see the effect of such a harmful “tradition”? Yeshua states that these traditions were “man-made” and “handed down” to them. These traditions were in conflict with the written Word of God. He knew the danger of allowing people to be in bondage to man-made traditions that, in effect, “nullify the Word of God”. The question is, do we know that danger? Are we schooled and grounded enough in the written Word of God to be able to discern the errors of man? Or do we have a theology that simply dismisses the authority of the Word, at least the so-called Old Testament, in favor of a “newer, more relaxed version” of truth? Do we redefine God’s absolutes into different times or epochs and different people groups as the modern error of Dispensationalism seeks to do? More on that topic later.

The consequence of pastors and teachers not having examined and protected people from the errors of human traditions that are in conflict with the Bible is the spawn of so many cultic groups, schools of legalism, and serious levels of rebellion and apostasy. Yeshua’s words should ring through to today as a clarification call to all believers and especially to all pastors and teachers

to ensure you are able to identify and separate out any teaching, opinion, theology, subjective morality, favorite book, favorite tradition, favorite practice or favorite holiday that finds its roots in the false traditions of men, handed down to you that is in conflict with the written Word of God!

1. The word Torah is a complex Hebrew word that usually refers to instruction or teaching. It is from the root yareh which is an archery term for “hitting the mark”. It is frequently mistranslated as “law”. Although the Torah contains “laws” it also contains history, teachings, instructions, poetry, prophecy, and songs.