

TRADITIONS

Matthew 15:2-6 ... “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’ He [Jesus] answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded saying, honor your father and your mother, and he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say, whoever says to his father or mother, whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God – then he need not honor his father or mother. Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.’”

Today’s scripture passage may be somewhat confusing if you do not understand Jewish law and the tension between Jesus and Jewish leaders. Jewish law was separate from the explicit commands of God. Not long after God provided Moses with the ten commandments, Jewish leaders began to add-on to those commandments. By the time of Jesus, Jewish law was so extensive that most Jews could not possibly live without violating some of those laws. Today there are tens of thousands of laws in the Philippines which few citizens know about. But while the Philippines generally lacks enforcers who go around ensuring we obey all of those thousands of laws, the Jewish community had rabbis and other leaders who did exactly that. They constantly monitored society to make sure people were not breaking Jewish law. Those leaders followed Jesus closely and criticized him and his disciples when they broke Jewish laws.

Today’s passage is not about washing hands and eating bread. It is about Jesus exposing hypocritical Jewish leaders. Jesus points out to them that their expanded Jewish laws were in violation of God’s commands which state we are to honor our parents. Under Jewish law, a Jew could justify not supporting his aged parents by claiming that the money he had to support them, belonged to God (or the synagogue). In that day, rabbis and synagogues made a lot of money from the offerings of poor Jewish people. Jesus says, “Thus you have made the commandment of God [about honoring parents] of no effect by your tradition [Jewish law].”

Do traditions stand in conflict with your faith and obedience to Christ? Perhaps they do and you are not even aware of them because you were raised with certain traditions and customs that you have never questioned. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has been putting doubt into your heart or triggering questions in your mind about certain family, tribal, community or religious practices that you have observed since birth, but you are not sure what to do about it. If you read your Bible, you will certainly see such conflicts. If you are an ethnic Filipino (or Malay), you come from a tribal heritage that practiced certain beliefs that are in conflict with the teachings of Christ.

I try to avoid criticizing Filipino traditions and cultural practices unless they are in direct conflict with the Bible. My own culture also has popular practices that I must avoid when they are in conflict with the Bible. Many of the societal laws of man, the religious laws of man, and the traditions of man are in direct opposition to the teachings of Christ and the commands of God. What is your personal decision? Adhere to traditions and cultural practices that offend God, or adhere to the teachings of Christ? It is a decision we must all make.

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