

# In the Fulness of Time – Part 100

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## **Touching His Garment in Gennesaret. Matthew 14:34-36**

14:34-36 “And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased, And brought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.”

Gennesaret was located on the northwest border of the Sea of Galilee, only a few miles south of Capernaum. It was natural for the news of His miracles to spread to this area. The picture is one of great excitement at the news of His arrival. Mark 6:53-56 gives another “*straightway*” (*eutheos*) and adds that the men actually “*ran through the whole region*” and began to line the streets of the villages with the sick in their “*beds*,” or *krabbatois*, which were nothing more than pallets or folding cots. They asked only for a touch of His garment, just as the woman in Matthew 9:20 had done and was healed. Their faith produced the same results, “*and as many as touched were made perfectly well.*”

## **Tradition versus the Truth. Matthew 15:1-20**

### **Opposition from the Jewish Officials. Matthew 15:1-9**

#### **Transgression of the Disciples: Breaking the Tradition of the Elders. 15:1-2**

15:1-2 “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, who were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.”

The very fact that this group of scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem indicates the determined opposition of official Judaism against Christ. No doubt they wanted to make an impressive show of authority, for they used a transgression of a “*tradition*” (*paradosin*, something given over) of the elders as their point of accusation. Such traditions came to be known as the Oral Law, handed down from Moses, then to succeeding generations. The Jews said that Moses received both the Written Law and the Oral Law on Mt. Sinai, but the Oral Law was not put into writing until later by the Massoretes. Their word *masor* originally meant “*to bind or fetter*” and came to mean “*to transmit, or give over.*” Thus, in the Greek Old Testament it became *paradosis*, or that which is given over. Since *masoreth* is a fetter, it

was a hedge about the Law, to establish proper practices. Tradition, therefore, came to have equal authority with the Law, if not superior authority over the Law.

The many traditions included this one concerning the washing of hands before eating. That it had nothing to do with the sanitary condition of the hands is shown by Mark 7:3: “*For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.*” It had everything to do with the ritual, to the extent that the amount of water used for each hand, the specific positions of the hands and fingers as they performed the numerous washings, were all prescribed to insure proper “*cleanness.*” There was even one superstition that the demon Shibta sat on their hands while they slept, so, to eat with unwashed hands was to defile the entire person.

### **The Transgression of the Pharisees: Breaking the Commandment of God. 15:3-9**

#### ***General Accusation: Breaking the Law by their Tradition. 15:3***

15:3 “But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?”

At the outset Jesus does give an answer in this verse, though some commentators seem to think His answer does not come until verse 11. His immediate and authoritative reply is that the Written Law supersedes any so-called oral Law dreamed up by the elders! Nothing of the revealed Torah includes such a ritual; therefore, to assume that Moses received it orally is a blatant humanistic addition to the divine Word of God! Mark’s account is much more severe: “*Laying aside the commandments of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups; and many other such things ye do. . . . Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition*” (Mark 7:8-9). This was never God’s Oral Law; it was man’s tradition! His answer could not have been more powerful and explicit.

#### ***Specific Illustration: The Fifth Commandment. 15:4-6***

15:4-6 “For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother; and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or mother, it is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honor not his father or mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.”

Two Old Testament passages are cited by Christ as pertinent to the question; Exodus 20:12 and 21:17. Not only did the Law specify “*honor*” (*kabodh*) to father and mother, but also “*fear*” (*ya-re*) or reverence (Leviticus 19:3). The second passage, Exodus 21:17, gives the opposite side of the Fifth Commandment: “*And he that curseth (kalal) father or mother shall surely be put to death.*” *Kalal* is one of a number of words for “*curse*” and has as its root meaning, “*to be light.*” Thus, in usage, it means to speak lightly of a person or revile him. Interestingly enough, the word for *honor (kabodh)* has the opposite meaning, “*to be heavy*” and is often used of the glory of God, emphasizing the weight of glory ascribed to Him. It is easy to comprehend, therefore, the importance of the Fifth Commandments: Parents are considered as the representations of God; the children are to give them fear (rever-

ence) and honor. Conversely, if they speak lightly of or revile their parents, such actions are punishable by death.

In light of such a solemn command, how ungodly and impertinent for the Pharisees to support a tradition which says that a man may rid himself of responsibility to his parents simply by saying “*corban*” (*given to God*) over his money which should have been used to support his parents. The son is “*made free*” of giving help to his parents, and the Word of God is effectually ignored.

***Prophetic Declaration: Lip service is not heart worship. 15:7-9***

15:7-9 “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth near unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Each time Jesus used Scripture to answer His opponents it was exactly what was needed to devastate their arguments and actions. Here He calls them “hypocrites” (*hupokrites*, or play-actors who put masks on their faces to portray their roles), a foreshadowing of the severe language He will use with them in Matthew 23. They were hypocritical because they put up a front of outward conformity to ritual, but underneath there was no reality of worship in their hearts. In addition to that which Jesus quoted from Isaiah 29:13, in that same paragraph Jehovah accuses Israel of “*turning of things upside down*” (28:16) so that the potter was thought of to be the clay! It was so bad that the thing formed (Israel) was saying of Him Who formed them that He had no understanding! Jews in the day of Christ were doing exactly the same thing; they were saying that their elders had given them more accurate teachings in their traditions than God had given in His Word. Thus, they were rejecting the warning of their own Scriptures to follow man’s traditions.

This is not to say that the word “*tradition*” (*paradosis*) is always used in a negative way. Even though the Apostle Paul faithfully warned the Colossians: “*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*” (Colossians 2:8), he also said: “*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle*” (2 Thessalonians 2:15), and, “*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us*” (2 Thessalonians 3:6) .

Good tradition is the divine revelation which Paul and the other New Testament writers received by inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it was not received as the philosophy and vain deceit of men. It did not make the commandment of God of no effect; indeed, it was the commandment of God! *In the fulness of time*, God will judge those who reject His Word for the vain traditions of men!