

**THE
TROUBLE WITH
TRADITION OF MEN**

Getting Our Focus Back Upon Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified

written by
Jon Cardwell
Riverside, California
PUBLISHED April 2008

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UNWASHENED HANDS

“Then came together unto Him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And He said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the Word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.”

— **Mark 7:1-13**

When the scribes and Pharisees attempted to rebuke Jesus with regard to the tradition of washings, the washing had nothing to do with what you and I today know as cleaning ourselves before a meal using soap and water. The “washing of hands” was a religious ritual developed by one of the 1st

Century B.C. Mishnah rabbis from his interpretation of **Genesis 18:4**; when Abraham fetched water for the Lord in order that the Lord and His two angels could wash their feet and be refreshed.

In the Lord's day, the scribes and Pharisees would practice the tradition passed down to them by the rabbis of "washing" before a meal, ceremonially cleansing the pots, pans, utensils, and their hands by reciting a prayer and pouring water over the vessels, hands, etc. Each one is done separately. Depending upon the rabbinical school, the prayer would go something like this:

ברוך אתה אדוני אלהינו מלך עולם אשר נתה לנו המצוה ורחץ
*Baruch Atah Adonay Eloheynu, Melek Olam, Asher Natah
L'nu HaM'tzvah U'rachatz*

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe,
who has given us the commandment of washing."

This religious observance is still observed by many orthodox and ultra-orthodox rabbinical Jews today. It is called *Rachatz* or *Urchatz* from the Hebrew word רחץ, which means "wash."

TRADITION OF MEN

The Holy Spirit moved Mark to use the Greek words, παραδοσιν των ανθρωπων (*paradosin toon anthroopoon*), meaning, "tradition of men." These are the very same words that the Holy Spirit moved Paul to use when writing the believers in Colosse:

"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)
παραδοσιν

Παραδοσιν (*paradosin*), from the Greek root, παραδισις (*paradisis*), means “surrender” or “give up.” The word was typically used as a military term, in reference to the surrender of city under siege. As a military term, it was also used as a term for passing instructions down from superiors to subordinates.

Biblically, the term has been used in both a positive and negative context. As the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul use the tradition in the negative sense in Mark 7 and Colossians 2 respectively, the apostle Paul also uses the same Greek word, *paradises*, in a positive context:

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

“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)

In the early years of the Christian church there was a tremendous expectation of Christ’s return.¹ In one real sense, they weren’t going about writing the New Testament. They had the Old Testament Scriptures, in Hebrew and in Greek. The foundation laid by the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone² was passed down orally by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Tradition, in the positive sense, meant passing down the gospel, as *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

Within the first two decades since Christ sent the Holy Spirit, the vain deceit and philosophies of men’s tradition had infiltrated the tradition of gospel truth. Nearly 2000 years later, we our Christian faith faces both positive and negative traditions.

Since Adam’s fall we have all had trouble with our traditions. Presumptions, prejudices, and pre-conceived

¹ Sadly, the imminent return of Christ is a Biblical truth that seems to be lost on much of what is called Christianity today.

² **Ephesians 2:20**

notions have presented problems with regard to our Christian perspectives. Even Samuel, the prophet of God, had to learn that the LORD looks at things quite differently; from an absolutely holy perspective:³

“...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We often post pictures in Children’s Sunday School that may be somewhat misleading. Here are some examples of how traditions have trapped our thinking.

TRADITION: Adam and Eve ate an apple.

TRUTH: It may or may not have been an apple. The Bible calls it פֵּרִי (*Priy*), the Hebrew word for “fruit”, or more precisely, a product or produce. *“...she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6).*

TRADITION: Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was a very old woman with wrinkles.

TRUTH: Although she was old, and had reached menopause (**Genesis 18:11**), she was still an incredibly beautiful woman; so much so that the Pharaoh of Egypt wanted her for a wife (**Genesis 12:14-15**), and so did Abimelech of Gerar (**Genesis 20:1-13**).

TRADITION: Samson was a muscle-bound, bodybuilder type.

TRUTH: Samson was more than likely an average guy, no different than any other man. If he was large and muscular, the Philistines would not have been trying so desperately to

³ See also **Romans 11:33**

find the source of his strength: *“And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver”* (**Judges 16:5**).

TRADITION: Three kings went to worship Jesus at the manger.

TRUTH: First, they were μάγοι (*magoi*, meaning “soothsayers” or “magicians”), not kings. It is translated as “wise men” in KJV (**Matthew 2:1**). Second, there were probably more than three people; perhaps a large, armed contingent— enough people to frighten Herod and Jerusalem (**Matthew 2:3**). The group was large enough that they had to take a different route home (**Matthew 2:12**, three men could have easily slipped through Jerusalem unnoticed). Third, the magi did not find Jesus as a baby in the manger, but as a young child in a house (**Matthew 2:11**). Jesus was probably, nearly two years old (**Matthew 2:16**).

TRADITION: Jesus was handsome and charismatic.

TRUTH: Jesus was neither. *“...he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not”* (**Isaiah 53:2-3**).

TRADITION: Jesus had long hair.

TRUTH: The Holy Spirit moved Paul to write, *“Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”* (**1 Corinthians 11:14**). Some may object and argue that Jesus had long hair because He had the Nazarite vow upon Him, citing **Matthew 2:23** and **Numbers 6:5**. My answer is that this is a complete misunderstanding of the Nazarite vow and Christ’s fulfillment of Scripture as the Nazarene.

The Nazarite, or Nazir, is the Hebrew word נזיר. He took a vow before the LORD (**Numbers 6:2**), kept himself separated from wine, vinegar, strong drink, or grapes and

grape products (**Numbers 6:3-4**), did not get a haircut (**Numbers 6:5**), and could not touch or come near anything unclean, particularly the dead, even if it was a member of the family that died (**Numbers 6:6-8**).

While Jesus drank grape juice every time He observed Passover (**Matthew 26:26-27**) and drank so much wine and grape juice that He was accused of being a glutton and winebibber (**Luke 7:34**). Jesus touched an unclean bier when raising the widow's son from the dead (**Luke 7:11-15**) and touched unclean lepers (**Luke 5:12-13**), both, which would have violated the vow of the Nazarite.

While on earth, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the Nazarene; that is, that He would grow up in Nazareth. The Hebrew word for Nazareth is נצרת and one who comes from Nazareth is נצרי. In this, Jesus fulfills **Isaiah 11:1**,

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:”

“Branch” is the Hebrew word נצר, meaning “sprout” or figuratively, “descendent.”⁴ Notice that נור and נצר are two different words.

Jesus does fulfill the Nazarite vow; however, this is done through His priestly office in heaven. Jesus announced to His disciples that He would soon observe the Nazarite vow:

“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (**Matthew 26:29**).

When Jesus received the vinegar and said, “*It is finished*,” and then bowed His head, giving up the ghost (**John 19:30**), His Nazarite vow had begun. After His resurrection, Jesus ate fish, bread, and honeycomb (**Luke 24:42; John 21:9-13**), yet no record of His eating grapes or drinking wine or grape juice. Why? Because He was on His Nazarite vow. Even ascended, as our High Priest in the Holiest of Holy Places, Jesus does not have to get a haircut because He has a glorified

⁴ **Jeremiah 23:5** uses the Hebrew word צמח (*Tzemach*) to refer to Jesus, “*the righteous Branch*.”

body. Is there any dead thing in heaven? Is there anything unclean in heaven? Of course not...

Just as the high priest in the days of the tabernacle and the temple must come forth after sprinkling the blood of the offering on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement, Jesus, after having sprinkled His own blood as the propitiation in heaven, will one day emerge from heaven to keep His promise that He would drink of the fruit of the vine with us in His Father's Kingdom. And in that day, Jesus will say:⁵

יברכך יהוה וישמרך
Yvarekka YHVH V'yishmareka
The LORD bless thee and keep thee

יאר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנך
Ya'er YHVH Panayv Eleyka Vay'chineka
The LORD make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee

ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום
Y'sa YHVH Panayv Eleyka V'ysem L'ka Shalom
The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace

Why do I even bring these things up? Do they really make that much difference? Most of the people that look at my teaching on this see it as “splitting hairs” and have told me words to this effect: “What does all that matter as long as they are saved?”

What an absolutely horrid condition our thoughts have become to express such a thing. As those conversations grew, the bottom line for my objectors was that many of them have the perspective that the salvation of men is the primary concern of God. That, however, is a sermon for another time.

What it comes down to is that we use these pictures, images, visual aids—that is, cling to these traditions—because we don't recognize that we are so totally depraved and utterly wretched apart from the Holy Spirit of God that we

⁵ **Numbers 6:24-26**

don't act as if we actually believe the Word of God; that we don't act as if we believe that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh; that we don't act as if we believe that the Cross of Christ is the all-sufficient, absolutely holy and awesome work of God; that we don't act as if we believe that the power of the Holy Spirit is sufficient enough to save lives and transforms souls through the preaching of the Cross and the teaching of God's Word.

In short, we think the preaching of the Cross needs help. Come on, admit it. Most of you think that since you are the arms and legs of the body of Christ, that unless you bring the gospel to the nations, it won't get done. Well, that's just blasphemy. God doesn't need you and He doesn't need me. He will accomplish His most holy will even if He gives voice to rocks that cry out the gospel of Christ and Him crucified.⁶

The Cross of Jesus Christ is the holiest work of God in the entire universe for all ages. The Cross of Jesus Christ is the holiest message of God in the entire universe for all ages.

God doesn't need our tricks, methods, or gimmicks to adorn, enhance, or beautify the message of the Cross of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).

In writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul said, *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).* This ex-Pharisee may have been the foremost theologian of his day. He was the thinker's thinker. Yet, in confronting the divisiveness within the church that he spent 1-1/2 years planting and nurturing, he stated that the most important issue an individual is faced with is the Cross of

⁶ See **Luke 19:40**

Jesus Christ. The Corinthians disputed over whether one was a follower of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas (Simon Peter), or Christ. Paul reminded them of the central issue of the faith: the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The Cross of Christ is the center of all human history and the central theme of the entire Bible...

The Cross of Christ was God's plan from the beginning. *"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).*

The Cross of Christ was preached by Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry. *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).*

The Cross of Christ was prophesied in Scripture. *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3).*

The Cross of Christ was proved to be true by the resurrection. *"And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4); and again, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).*

The Cross of Christ is the only way to God. *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:5-6); and again, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6).*

The Cross of Christ is the work of God. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the*

gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”
(Ephesians 2:8-9).

One of the worst traditions of men that has been passed down and believed within local congregations today is the lie that the sins of fallen man were paid for by the cruel physical torture suffered by Jesus of Nazareth at the hands of the Jews and the Romans.

I certainly do not want to diminish the horror that was inflicted upon our Lord physically during His three Jewish trials and His three Roman trials. Scripture tells us that He was beaten beyond human recognition:⁷

“As many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men” **(Isaiah 52:14).**

“He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” **(Isaiah 53:3).**

More than the physical sufferings that the righteous Lamb of God suffered at the hands of sinful men, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, drank down the furious wrath of almighty God against sin when He hung upon that Cross:

“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed”
(Isaiah 53:4-5).

The Lord Jesus was “*smitten of God.*” “Smitten” is the from the Hebrew root word נכּה, *nakah*. This same root was used of God when He spoke through the prophet in **Zechariah 13:7.**

⁷ כאשר שממו עליך רבים כן משחת מאיש מראהו ותאריו מבני אדם

“Bruised” (**Isaiah 53:5**) is the Hebrew word **דָּכָא** (*daka*), which means “crushed,” “broken to pieces,” more accurately, “pulverized,” or “turned to powder” beneath or between millstones. Well, how do we know that it was God that “bruised” Him? Because we are told a few verses later:

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

It pleased Jehovah God, *YHVH*, the LORD, “to bruise Him.” “Bruise” is the same Hebrew word, **דָּכָא**. That’s not all. That verse also says that God makes the soul of Jesus “an offering for sin.”

The sin of mankind is so utterly wicked that God had to become a man and take the punishment of His own holy wrath, pouring it out upon His one and only Son so that His holy, righteous justice could be reconciled with His holy and compassionate mercy.

Jesus became the curse when He hung upon the Cross:

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

How could one man hanging upon a Cross for only a few hours pay for the sins of fallen man? That one Man was not only holy as the only righteous Man who ever lived, the only Prophet who ever spoke the perfect truth of God, the only Jew who ever kept the whole Law, and the only Son who ever wholly obeyed His Father, He certainly was God in human flesh. His uniqueness as God and Man made His atoning sacrifice and His redeeming substitution of infinite value and worth.

In the person of the Son, and in His human nature thus united to the divine, the Lord Jesus was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It pleased the Father that all the fullness of God should dwell in Him, so that being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of Mediator and Surety; a position and duty that He did not take upon Himself, but was called to perform by His Father, who also put all power and judgment in His hand, and gave Him commandment to carry out the same.⁸

By His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which the Lord Jesus offered up unto God through the eternal Spirit, has fully satisfied the justice of God, obtain reconciliation, and has purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father has given unto Him.⁹

THE LOVE OF GOD

“We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

No one can say that he loves God unless it is a response to the revelation of God’s love toward us through the Cross of Jesus Christ:

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.... But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death

⁸ Psalm 45:7; Matthew 28:18; John 1:14; 3:34; 5:22, 27; Acts 2:36; 10:38; Colossians 1:9; 2:3; Hebrews 5:5; 7:22, 26

⁹ John 17:2; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:14, 15; 10:14

of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:6, 8-10).

When the Holy Spirit reveals to us the gravity of our sin next to Christ’s righteousness (**John 16:8-11**), we are awakened to the truth of God’s love (**John 3:16**). The more I realize the magnitude of God’s forgiveness through the Cross, the greater love I have for Him (**Luke 7:37-47**, “...to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little...”).

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

“He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD” (Proverbs 17:15).

The Cross of Jesus Christ is where the wrath of God meets the grace of God. The Cross of Jesus Christ is where the justice of God meets the mercy of God.

God is a holy God, as it is written,

“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

Because God is a holy God, because He is a just God, He required the life of a sinless, righteous sacrifice, a sacrifice without spot or blemish. That sinless, perfect sacrifice came by the blood of Jesus Christ:

“For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:11-12).

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls:

for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul”
(Leviticus 17:11).

To belittle the Cross of Christ would slander the character of God for it would imply that God is not holy. It would imply that His justice is not good. In other words, to preach that God forgives sins by any other method than through the Cross of Christ is actually preaching “*another gospel*” (**2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:8**). To give the Cross of Christ a lesser place in our hearts or our theology would slander the character of God. It would imply that the grace of God demonstrated upon the Cross is insufficient and needs our help.

The Cross of Christ not only redeems the relationship between fallen man and his holy Creator, but it reconciles the truths of God that seem to us to be at odds with one another.

Only in the Cross of Christ do we find...

- The God of love who hates sinners
- The God of mercy that punishes the guilty
- The God of grace who remains just
- The God of creation that destroys evil
- The God of patience that casts out the wicked
- The God of peace that wages war upon iniquity
- The God of humility who manifests His glory
- The God of compassion who perfects men through tribulation
- The God of sovereign power who works through means
- The God of eternal joy who becomes the Man of sorrows

CONCLUSION

If we would only cling to submission to God’s Holy Spirit as much as we did our erroneous traditions, we might find ourselves walking in the Spirit, moment by moment, in the Spirit’s power with the reality of the truth that the Cross of Jesus Christ, according to His holy Word, is all that matters in

the universe. Therefore, when we preach the Cross, express God's truth, read God's Word, teach our children, and etc., we don't need to draw pictures, paint portraits, show videos, graphically illustrate, creatively demonstrate, or use ingenious and appealing tricks, methods, or gimmicks for it to be understood by those that hear. When we operate in such a way, by the power of God's Spirit, it's called... yeah, that's right— faith.

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

And on a final note, as far as our children our concerned, when we teach the truth of Christ crucified to them in diligence and godly fear, when we talk with them, sit with them at home, walk with them in the way, when they go to bed, and when they rise; if we bind the truth as signs upon their hands and keep the truth as frontlets for their eyes; if we write it upon our doorposts and gates; when the truth is preached and our children see the reality of that truth expressed daily in their parents lives, they will not depart from the truth when they are old.¹⁰

¹⁰ See **Deuteronomy 6:6-8; Proverbs 22:6**

