

Divine Precepts vs. Human Traditions

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INTRODUCTION

Let us compare the parallel accounts of Matthew 15 and Mark 7, which chronicle Jesus' conflict with the scribes and Pharisees regarding divine precepts verses human traditions

It is interesting to note the similarities and also the differences.

Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, while Mark was for the benefit of the Gentiles.

By adding to and subtracting from the requirements of Sacred Scripture, Jewish leaders of the first century violated a fundamental, unchanging Biblical principle.

Moses warned Israel against such presumptuousness (Deut. 4:1-2; 12:32; 18:20-22).

Deuteronomy 4:1-2 (NASB95) — 1 “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2 “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Deuteronomy 12:32 (NASB95) — 32 “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 (NASB95) — 20 ‘But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ 21 “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ 22 “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Before the conquest of Canaan, God stressed the necessity of being fully obedient to the Law, and not turning aside from it to the right or the left (Josh. 1:6-8).

Joshua 1:6-8 (NASB95) — 6 “Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant

commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 8 “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

This theme is echoed in the Wisdom Literature (Prov. 30:6), and also in the Prophets (Jer. 26:1-6).

Proverbs 30:6 (NASB95) — 6 Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NASB95) — 13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Jeremiah 26:1-6 (NASB95) — 1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord, saying, 2 “Thus says the Lord, ‘Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the Lord’s house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! 3 ‘Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.’ 4 “And you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, “If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, 5 to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth.” ‘ “

Jesus Christ affirms the principle in our present context, and it is later highlighted by the inspired apostles (1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 8-9; Rev. 22:18-19).

1 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB95) — 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

Galatians 1:6-9 (NASB95) — 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

2 John 8-9 (NASB95) — 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. 9 Anyone who goes too far and

does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

Revelation 22:18-19 (NASB95) — 18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

MATTHEW 15:1 & MARK 7:1-4

Matthew 15:1 (NASB95) — 1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,

Mark 7:1-4 (NASB95) — 1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

MATTHEW 15:2 & MARK 7:5

Matthew 15:2 (NASB95) — 2 “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

Mark 7:5 (NASB95) — 5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?”

MATTHEW 15:3 & MARK 7:8-9

Matthew 15:3 (NASB95) — 3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

Mark 7:8-9 (NASB95) — 8 “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” 9 He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

MATTHEW 15:4 & MARK 7:10

Matthew 15:4 (NASB95) — 4 “For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’

Mark 7:10 (NASB95) — 10 “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’;

MATTHEW 15:5 & MARK 7:11

Matthew 15:5 (NASB95) — 5 “But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,”

Mark 7:11 (NASB95) — 11 but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’

MATTHEW 15:6 & MARK 7:12-13

Matthew 15:6 (NASB95) — 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Mark 7:12-13 (NASB95) — 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

MATTHEW 15:7-8 & MARK 7:6

Matthew 15:7-8 (NASB95) — 7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.

Mark 7:6 (NASB95) — 6 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.

MATTHEW 15:9 & MARK 7:7

Matthew 15:9 (NASB95) — 9 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ “

Mark 7:7 (NASB95) — 7 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’

MATTHEW 15:10 & MARK 7:14

Matthew 15:10 (NASB95) — 10 After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand.

Mark 7:14 (NASB95) — 14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand:

MATTHEW 15:11 & MARK 7:15-16

Matthew 15:11 (NASB95) — 11 “It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”

Mark 7:15-16 (NASB95) — 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16 “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

MATTHEW 15:12-14

Matthew 15:12-14 (NASB95) — 12 Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” 13 But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. 14 “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

MATTHEW 15:15 & MARK 7:17

Matthew 15:15 (NASB95) — 15 Peter said to Him, “Explain the parable to us.”

Mark 7:17 (NASB95) — 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.

MATTHEW 15:16-17 & MARK 7:18-19

Matthew 15:16-17 (NASB95) — 16 Jesus said, “Are you still lacking in understanding also? 17 “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?

Mark 7:18-19 (NASB95) — 18 And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.)

MATTHEW 15:18-20 & MARK 7:20

Matthew 15:18-20 (NASB95) — 18 “But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 “These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

Mark 7:20 (NASB95) — 20 And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.