

# Matthew 15:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

## Analysis

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The Pharisees' accusation focuses on ceremonial hand-washing, part of the 'tradition of the elders'—oral interpretations and expansions of Mosaic Law. The Greek 'paradosis' (tradition) here refers to human additions to divine revelation. Reformed theology recognizes this as the perennial temptation to elevate human interpretations to the level of Scripture itself. The disciples' failure to observe this ritual becomes the occasion for Jesus to distinguish between God's commandments and human traditions.

## Historical Context

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The hand-washing tradition wasn't biblical law but developed during the intertestamental period. Originally applied to priests, it was extended to all Jews by Pharisaic interpretation. This ritualistic washing aimed to remove ceremonial, not physical, contamination. Mark's gospel explains this custom for Gentile readers (Mark 7:3-4).

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

## Study Questions

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1. What religious practices do you observe from tradition rather than biblical command?
2. How can you distinguish between helpful traditions and burdensome additions to faith?
3. When does adherence to tradition become spiritual pride?

## Interlinear Text

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Διατί οἱ μαθηταί σου παραβαίνουσιν τὴν παράδοσιν

Why G3588 disciples do thy transgress the tradition  
G1302 G3101 G4675 G3845 G3862

τῶν πρεσβυτέρων οὐ γὰρ νίπτονται τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν

G3588 of the elders not for they wash hands G846  
G4245 G3756 G1063 G3538 G5495

ὅταν ἄρτον ἐσθίωσιν

when bread they eat  
G3752 G740 G2068

## Additional Cross-References

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**Mark 7:2** (Parallel theme): And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault.

**Luke 11:38** (Parallel theme): And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

**Colossians 2:8** (Parallel theme): 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.

**1 Peter 1:18** (Parallel theme): Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

