

ONLY THE BIBLE

—AND OTHER FALSE DOCTRINES—

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

Have you heard the one about Mama Mouse, who decided to teach her children how to steal cheese? Well, one dark night, Mama Mouse led her children into the kitchen so that she could show them how to steal cheese. The children were tippy-toeing silently in single file behind their mom as they approached the kitchen table, on top of which a large plateful of cheese rested.

The trouble was, right under the table where the cheese was, a cat was snoozing on the floor.

At this point, Mama Mouse turned to her children, and whispered, “Okay kids, watch this!”

Then she turned toward the cat, cleared her throat quietly, cupped her little front paws in front of her mouth to form a small bull-horn, as it were, and then she ROARED, barking like an angry dog: “AARF!, AARF!, GRRR!, AARF!”

Alarmed on hearing the ferocious barking, the cat woke with a start, and raced out of the room with a terrified screech.

Then, very calmly, Mama Mouse turned to her children again, and said, “You see children? It’s always useful to know another language!”

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Recently, one of our faithful was talking with a Protestant pastor. The pastor said to our Orthodox Christian, “When we are talking about the Christian Faith, I don’t want to hear anything about your traditions. *Only* the Bible. That’s the *only* source on which we can base our discussion. I don’t want to hear, nor will I accept anything else.”

How many times has each of us heard this argument?

There is only one problem with this doctrine; it is *un-Biblical!* In fact, the Bible tells us the exact opposite.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul writes:

Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the *traditions* as I delivered them to you.

(1 Cor: 11:1-2)

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, he writes:

Brethren, we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother who walketh disorderly and not according to the *tradition* which he received from us. For ye yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us.

(II Thess 3:6)

And, again, in the same letter, he writes:

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold the *traditions* that you have learned, *whether by word or by letter of ours*.

(II Thess. 2:15)

It is true that some English translations of these passages use the words, “teachings,” or “precepts,” or “ordinances,” instead of “traditions.” In itself, this is fine: would that everyone kept the teachings and the precepts that Saint Paul taught us. But this is not what the Greek text of the New Testament says. The Greek words for “teaching” or “precept” are *didaskalía* or *didaché*. These are *not* the words Saint Paul uses. In the above-mentioned texts, Saint Paul *always* uses the word *parádosis* (pl. *paradóseis*), which in the Greek language has always, and still does, and probably forever will mean “tradition” – “something handed over,” “a heritage,” something “bequeathed.”

There is only one place where Saint Paul warns us *against* tradition. In his letter to the Colossians, he writes:

Brethren, beware lest any man spoil you through *philosophy* and vain deceit, *according to the tradition of men*, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ.

(Col. 2:8)

Here is the great irony! The Protestants, who are always preaching to others about *not* keeping the traditions of men, are – together with *all* of Western “theology” – condemned here by Saint Paul for following after the traditions of men, with their false doctrines of “*Sola Scriptura*” (“only the Scriptures”). That, and the pagan Greek philosophy of the Latin Scholastics, have been two blights on Western theology.

According to the Holy Scriptures, there are God-inspired traditions that we must keep, and there are the philosophies and traditions of men that we must avoid.

Mama Mouse had it right: “It’s always useful to know another language.”