

Jesus Over Traditions

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[0 : 00] We will continue looking at Paul's letter to the Colossians. See if we can't derive some application from the truth of the gospel that Paul has proclaimed to us.

! Paul has spoken of his love and his concern for the church in Colossae.

And he therefore says, because of which, because of my concern and love for you, I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf.

On behalf of those in Laodicea and of everyone who have not personally met me, so that their hearts may be comforted. They are being linked together by love and leading to all the riches of a full assurance of understanding, leading in turn to a full knowledge of God's mystery, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I say this so no one will mislead you with persuasive talk, because if I'm actually bodily absent still, in the spirit I am with you and am rejoicing, seeing the orderliness and the steadiness of your faith in Christ.

[1 : 39] Because of that, as you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, in him conduct yourselves, having been rooted and being constructed in him, and confirmed in the flesh as you were taught, overflowing in giving thanks.

Be alert so that there is no one who is robbing you by way of philosophy and empty deceit that is compatible with human traditions, with the basic elements of the world, and incompatible with Christ.

Because in him, bodily, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells. And you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority, in whom you were also circumcised with the circumcision not performed by hands, by the removal of the fleshly body, by this circumcision Christ performs. Co-buried with him in baptism, in whom you were also co-raised through faith in the work of God, the raising of him, that is Jesus, from the dead.

Connecting words are always important, as the doctor liked to say, the doctor being Dr. Lloyd-Jones for you young ones. The therefore is there for a reason.

[3 : 05] And I often take this opportunity to recommend, and I will take it again, to recommend to you that when you read your Bibles, ignore chapter divisions.

They're helpful to find where you left off, but it's best not to leave off, but to read through. By way of illustration, I spent three and a half years overseas, where my wife pined for me.

She wasn't my wife then, but she still loved me, and very much wanted to be my wife. She's learned to regret that, but there we are. And I would write to her every day.

Imagine if she opened my letter, and she read three or four lines, or maybe a paragraph, and put it aside, and next day, maybe, if she wasn't too busy, and didn't get up late, read another line or two, or paragraph, would she have gotten the sense of what I'm trying to tell her by way of the letter?

Of course not. She would have lost connection. She would have practically forgotten what she read yesterday, certainly the day before. Well, that's true of us. God's word was given to us in book form.

[4 : 25] Sometimes it's just one chapter, Philemon or Jude. Sometimes it's a little bit more, like, say, 66 chapters of Isaiah. But actually, you can read through 66 pages, 66 chapters, which aren't even 66 pages of Isaiah, in about as much time as it will take you to leaf through homes and gardens.

And I suspect you would find more profit in reading Isaiah than in homes and gardens, however valuable homes and gardens is, particularly if you're relocating to Chattanooga, Tennessee.

So connecting words serve an important purpose, and we should take note of them. And if you have a translation which doesn't, you might want to look at another translation.

In chapter 1, verse 28, Paul spoke of the content of his preaching and of the nature of his efforts on behalf of the Colossians. And that is why he says, because of these, he wants them to be aware of his efforts and his concern for them, and to be both encouraged by them and challenged by them so that they would strive with the same goals in mind.

In other words, he's seeking to enlist their cooperation. And to that end, he says, I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf.

[5 : 58] Now, he described that struggle in verses 28 and 29 of the previous chapter, when he said that his struggle was to present every single one of them mature in Christ.

And that is the theme which carries on in chapter 2. His struggle was conducted not only on behalf of the Colossians, but he says also on behalf of those in Laodicea and of everyone who has not personally met me.

Laodicea was one of those cities which was very close to Colossae, as was Hierapolis. Paul had not preached the gospel there. Apparently, Epaphras had done so.

He had never visited those churches, never met the people. And yet, he struggles on their behalf, not in general, like we pray often for the congregations that missionaries serve.

But in particular, he took interest in individuals. He says, I struggle on behalf of every single individual to present every single one of them mature in Christ.

[7 : 16] God, so, Paul took personal interest in individuals and he struggled on their behalf. The only way he could struggle in far away Rome was, of course, particularly through prayer.

And now, he makes it clear the purpose to which he has exerted himself so strenuously. To the end he says that their hearts may be comforted.

How? They're being linked together by love and leading to all the riches that belong to a full assurance of understanding. Leading in turn to a full knowledge of God's mystery, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Now we will want to unpack this rich statement. But let's look at it first of all as a unit, as a whole.

Having looked at Paul's letter, we're not surprised, and if we know anything about Paul we're certainly not surprised to discover, that his concern is for the unity and the cohesion of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Nor should we be surprised that such cohesion, such unity, leads, he says, to spiritual growth and particularly to spiritual understanding, or as he puts it, spiritual perception.

[8 : 47] Here Paul, once again, enlists terminology that was really characteristic of the false teachers there in Colossae. They promised their adherents a kind of a close bond of comradeship and a fuller understanding of things that will reach perfection in mysteries that others would not even be able to access.

But Paul insists that all of that, once again, is to be found in Christ nowhere else. And therefore, that to be found in the company of all of God's consecrated ones.

That is, in the context of faithful church life. Not among a select few. When Paul talks about church life, he talks about the one body of Christ.

Paul never thought in other terms. Now, if you remember, for example, his conflict with Peter and Antioch, which he describes in Galatians chapter 2, what he says about Peter's conduct was such that in our terms would justify separation.

He talks about Peter's hypocrisy. He says that his behavior was blamable, that it was not according to the truth of the gospel, that it, in fact, nullified the grace of God, that it impacted others, even Barnabas was carried away, he says, by his hypocrisy, and that it actually implied that Christ died in vain.

[10 : 37] Those are horrific charges. I cannot imagine any more horrific charges. But it never occurred to Paul to unchurch Peter.

They were committed to one another because they were purchased together by the blood of Christ and dwelt mutually by the spirit of Christ.

And therefore, they belonged to the one body of Christ, regardless of their stark differences. The sweetness of it all is, of course, that later on in chapter 15 of Acts, we find Peter in Jerusalem supporting the very stance that Paul cast in his face earlier in Antioch.

In other words, Peter was open to rebuke. He was open to challenge. And the reason Paul could speak to him so firmly was because they were confident of their relationships, because Christ was more important to them than their own honor, that the truth of Christ was more important to them

than their being proven right.

Paul wants the Colossians' hearts to be comforted, he says. It's possible that Paul was referring to some kind of personal circumstances or specific circumstances which the Colossians were facing, but we don't know anything of that.

[12 : 24] And if we don't, then we're not supposed to know. Paul would not hide from us, and certainly the Spirit of God would not hide anything from us that was profitable. It's also possible that Paul was simply referring to the difficulties of human beings living together in community.

Now, you might not know anything of that, in which case you're probably, first of all, not married. And secondly, you probably just visit the church. You don't really belong to it.

But when we read the Scriptures, and if we look around us, we will know that there are real difficulties. And there were certainly difficulties in those days.

I mean, for a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles to live together, for slaves and freemen to live together, for people from various social strata to live together, in a highly stratified Roman society, that would inevitably create the kind of tensions that are always involved with imperfect people living together.

On the other hand, Paul might have been speaking of the sweet comfort that comes from being united in the kind of affectionate, supportive fellowship that a church ought to be, that a family ought to be, indeed that human society ought to be.

[13 : 56] Because man was made for community. And he's never healthy when lacking the give and take and the embrace and the challenge involved in living in the company of others.

It was even in the Garden of Eden, with the company of God, that God says of Adam, it's not good for man to live alone. He was alone in one sense, although he had God and God had him.

And so, modern day individualism, with its virtual communities, that are so amenable to manipulation, and so unlike real human camaraderie, has lost sight of the value of community.

Our nuclear families, and our single parent homes, and our TV children, and our smartphone and tablet kids, are in danger of losing the art of real interpersonal communication, because these are a far cry from real human community, the kind of community God intended us to have.

And churches and families must recapture this vision, and call society back to its original moorings. They, we need to cultivate a biblical understanding and a biblical practice of community, in spite of the difficulties, and difficulties are there.

[15 : 24] That's why Paul was engaged in a struggle for the Colossians' comfort and encouragement. He wanted them to experience the richness of church life, rather than withdrawing to a purportedly elite ghetto, such as the heretics we're trying to establish by their doctrines.

Their comfort had to do, says Paul, with their being linked together by love. That word linked is a precious one.

The King James Version uses the word knit together, which is also a beautiful expression of how everything is all interconnected. You know, you pull the thread anywhere, and the whole sweater or the whole sock comes apart.

Love is the means by which we are knit together.

Not agreement. I mean, it'd be great if Bracha always agreed with me, because I'm always right. But if that doesn't work, at least love can keep us together.

[16 : 34] Because love, as Paul reminded us, doesn't vaunt itself over others. It doesn't compete with others. It labors for their welfare. It draws people together.

And Christians are to love all men, especially those who belong to the household of faith, regardless of any other factor, any other factor.

The concept of linkage or of knitting is really appropriate. There's no merging. Man doesn't become woman. Woman doesn't become man.

Jew doesn't become Gentile. Gentile doesn't become Jewish. A slave is not freed by virtue of his Christian faith, nor is a freeman suddenly become a slave.

Every link maintains its distinct identity and its distinct role in society, while each is very firmly connected or knit with one another.

[17 : 31] And again, love is the connection. Brethren, if we loved more, we'd argue less. We'd criticize less.

We'd give far more of ourselves. And if we loved more sincerely, and this sermon was prepared years ago, so however relevant it is, it's not the product of anything that happened recently.

But I must not avoid saying this because anything has happened recently. If we loved more sincerely, churches and fellowships would not split. And pastors would not be run off their turf, and individual congregants would not be neglected. But we would all grow together in grace and in knowledge of the Lord, not only in spite of our difficulties, but precisely as the product of them as we coped with one with another because we are knit together.

And such loving linkage serves some very important purposes. First, it leads to what Paul calls all the riches that belong to a full assurance of understanding.

[18 : 48] You see, brethren, there are many important truths that can only be understood properly rather than theoretically in the context of loving linkage.

In this case of church life. Simply because church life has to do, no, church life is all about, no, church life is first and foremost about loving God in Christ. And loving God in Christ is about church life, which involves our loving one another. we can simply cannot be Christian without belonging to a congregation, without really belonging. That is to say, sharing in its life and contributing to its welfare and partnering in its worship and growing in its context and coming under its discipline. And when this kind of knowledge is tried and proven, then it's transformed from intellectual knowledge that the kind of living, vivid knowledge that is the product of experience.

[19 : 59] And it congeals into the kind of mature, humble, and gracious confidence that Paul here describes as the full assurance of understanding.

You know, we're aggressive, particularly where we're insecure. pure. We know that the power of the gospel is real because we've experienced it. We know the sweetness of grace because we have been the object of it. We know the truth of scripture because we've tried it out and found it to be true. And we know that God is gracious because we experience from one another and to one another. Yes, when we show grace, we experience grace, every day of our lives. And so, we understand as never before and as we cannot understand any other way. Secondly, such assurance leads to further understanding what Paul describes here as full knowledge of God's mystery, that is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[21 : 15] Now, Paul has described the mystery earlier in terms of Christ in you, that is among the nations, the hope of glory. We discussed the issue of glory at Sunday school, those of you who are with us.

Christ among us evokes, confirms, clarifies the hope of the glory we will have because, you know, in heaven, we're not going to be isolated. There will be no ghettos. I hate to tell you, but there are absolutely no reformed Christians in heaven. there will just be all those without exception but by the blood of Christ. And the distinctions in which we foolishly glory now will be no more. And that will be true glory. And frankly, at that time, we're not going to have time for one another. We'll be taken up with him. so taken up with him that we will enjoy fellowship one with another because it will all be focused on Christ.

[22 : 31] And then we get to know him in the context of church life because we experience his presence in one another and with one another as we reach across those barriers which normally divide people.

And we experience the transforming power of grace, God's grace in Christ. And if there's any doubt that Paul was here responding to the false teaching that was being promulgated in Colossae, he makes it clear.

I say this so that no one will mislead you with persuasive talk. Obviously, some were seeking to mislead them. Whether or not they succeeded and to what extent is open to question. But surely Paul discerned a danger inherent in the verbal abilities of these proposed teachers. Now it's true, people tend to be impressed with talent and we're far more easily swayed by oratory than we are by content.

[23 : 43] especially in these days of soundbites and superficial thinking. When culture is more influenced by what it sees on television than what it hears, today it's not even that, it's YouTube, isn't it?

In such a time, the danger is all the greater. and we should tune our hearts to our minds and our minds to testing words, sentences, and whole messages if we want to protect ourselves from bad influences.

It's not without reason that Jesus' primary activity like that of the prophets was teaching rather than miracle working. And for the same reason, God gave us his revelation in words, not in pictures. The faith of the Bible is a faith that both demands, encourages, and I would say even further enhances thinking. It motivates and it guides believers to seek the internal logic of the universe. What does this world mean? And that's again where science, art, and history, and all areas of legitimate human endeavor take on eternal meaning and become an act of worship.

[25 : 09] Where language and culture are not viewed as the fruit of some kind of coincidence, but in some way either the work of God or the corruption of that work.

And so the inner meanings of all of these themselves have meaning. understanding them is part of knowing God.

Let me quote Calvin to you. Since many content with a slight taste, have nothing but a confused and fitful knowledge, Paul here mentions expressly the riches of understanding.

By this phrase he means a full and clear perception. At the same time he admonishes them that according to the measure of understanding they must also make progress in love.

He said everything I've said in the last 20 minutes in just one sentence. And he's so right. now Paul says that although he was bodily absent because he was in Rome, he was in his spirit with him and of course he's not talking about some kind of out of the body experience.

[26 : 34] He's using picturesque language. We must learn to recognize when language is picturesque. But he says that he observes an absentee their ordeliness and the steadiness of their faith in Christ.

Now these words ordeliness and steadiness are military terms. Ordeliness refers to soldiers establishing camp or maintaining ranks as they march.

Steadiness refers to soldiers maintaining a solid front in the face of an attack like a phalanx. The Colossian Christians were engaged in spiritual battle as we are or ought to be.

But they maintained good order. They refused to retreat before the persuasive speech of the heretics. At least some of them did. Instead they maintained resistance and held a common front. And of course by saying this Paul was really encouraging them to keep on keeping on to continue to do everything they were doing right and to be all that he said that they were.

[27 : 56] Paul knew how to encourage people. He writes to the Galatians trembling with fear and he says I trust that you will do nothing else. And of course that was an expression of his longing and his hope.

if he was so confident he wouldn't have had to write the letter. There are times when it is necessary to criticize and to rebuke and Paul recognized that and however much he did not enjoy it he didn't shirk the duty when there was no other way.

But he always preferred to address individuals and churches positively. His letter to Philemon written incidentally just at the same time he composed this letter to the Colossians is a beautiful example of such gracious wisdom and I encourage you to study it.

And because of their ordiness and steadiness in the faith he says as you have received the Christ Jesus the Lord in him conduct yourself. Paul says you've carried yourself well up to this point. Continue. you. At the same time he calls them back as you have received the Christ Jesus the Lord in him conduct yourself. Now he's again running exactly contrary to the teachings of these false prophets or these false apostles.

[29 : 28] He was saying don't take up the new doctrine. Don't run after this new fad. Don't look for this new way of doing things that will be more effective whereby you will become more spiritual.

Paul is saying and he will make it clearer as he proceeds time allowing we'll see that the best step that the Colossians could take on their way to spirituality is to focus on Christ and to return to him as they had originally received him.

It's rather disappointing to remind ourselves how relevant such a call is for the church today.

All kinds of gimmicks, all kinds of doctrines, all kinds of methods are adopted instead of the simple but by no means simplistic faith in the power of God and in the work of the spirit on the grounds of the work of Christ.

There are so many of these fads now days. We are actually allowing the world to shape us and to determine our emphases. Somehow we have lost confidence in Christ.

[30 : 47] We're not persuaded that he is sufficient. We are inclined to think that his work needs to be supplemented in some way, rendered more appealing, as if anything or anyone could be more appealing than Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul had no such thoughts. He was Christ orientated, fully persuaded that Christ is all we need and he believed that Jesus is fully relevant, gloriously attractive.

And so he calls the Colossians back to Christ with no additions. And they were to conduct their private and familial and congregational life in him and in him alone.

And so he says that you should continue to be rooted in the past tense, having been rooted, and you are now in the ongoing present continuous tense being constructed in him.

Because what you have had is what you are now having. You have been rooted in him, and of course he's contrary to what our English teachers taught us to do.

[31 : 55] He's mixing metaphors here. You have been rooted. your roots are in the soil of Christ. Now you're being built up, you're being constructed in Christ. It's an ongoing process in which he is involved.

Epaphras apparently had rooted them in Christ like trees in the ground. And recognizing the value of Christ, they were receiving Christ now through their teachers, and they should continue to persist forward in him.

to that end he says, be alert. He's talking about the kind of spiritually motivated and biblically guided intellectual alertness that will actually test what is said, so that it is able to identify doctrines, whether they're clear or they're hidden, because it's equipped with knowledge and with an understanding that is necessary, for proper evaluation.

Now, he's not talking to pastors, brethren. He's talking about the congregation, to the Colossians, and he's basically saying that we should all be intelligently informed theologians.

Yep. It's not just Pastor John and Pastor Jason's duty. It's all of our duties, all of us. we must all carry this.

[33 : 28] The faith of the Bible is a faith that demands, encourages, and enhances thinking. We've said it, we've said it again. You can't be a Christian without thinking.

Growing in Christ means growth and understanding. What we believe, how we think, the doctrines we embrace, these will impact our spiritual life for good or for ill.

and so we should be alert so that no empty philosophy or empty deceit could sway us.

Now he's not saying that all philosophy is wrong or that deceit could be full of content because ultimately deceit is vacuous.

It's a vacuum. What he's telling us is that there's such a thing as the kind of philosophy that can deceive us.

[34 : 28] And again Paul uses this term philosophy because those so-called lovers of wisdom who were in Colossae promoted a philosophy, a love of knowledge, which is what philosophy means, that they believed was the true kind.

And so Paul was calling us not only to be theologians but if you wish to be philosophers. Now we are all theologians and we're all philosophers whether we like it or not and whether we recognize it or not.

We all have certain views. Why do we have views? And we all have a certain perspective on life. Well if we have views we're theologians.

And if we have a perspective on life we're nothing less than philosophers. The question is, is our philosophy and is our theology the product of responsible thought based on the word of God or have we just somehow imbibed it by osmosis, you know, the way you suck something in without even noticing that it's happening.

And that's the point. The point is that we should be alert, conscious, careful. And then Paul goes on to say that this philosophy masquerades itself in the form of spiritual traditions, valuable spiritual traditions, so they say it was.

[35 : 57] But Paul says, however rich those traditions, and yes, Jewish tradition is rich. I mean, you guys have been around for 200 years. We guys, that's Bracha and I, although we don't look at it, we've been around for thousands of years.

So, of course, we'll have a rich tradition. But rich in what? Paul says that all these traditions are compatible with everything but Christ.

They're compatible, he says, with the basic elements of the world. But they're incompatible with Christ. And the term basic elements of the world is really the term that we will often use to describe, for example, the ABC of life, the fundamentals of life.

So that rather than bringing the Colossians into contact with a heightened spirituality, they were actually driving them down. They were not elevating them, they were sapping their true spiritual strengths and therefore they were not serving them well.

They were taken up with matters of food, drink, and ceremonial purity rather than what constitutes true holiness. They were taken up with everything but a love for God that drives individuals to hunger for him and obey him.

[37 : 37] A morality that has God's person and his law at his core and God's pleasure as its goal. But the spirituality that Christ teaches is the only kind of true spirituality and that is the spirituality that is compatible with him because in him, says Paul, dwells the fullness of the Godhood.

He said that earlier in chapter one. Now he adds another important phrase, bodily. Christianity has to a large extent become platonic.

Plato believed that there were two levels of reality. A lower level which wasn't really real, a higher level which was the real, real.

The lower level is the physical. But for everything physical, there was a higher spiritual reality reflected in the lower. We think that.

I remember when I was just converted, I thought it was unspiritual to eat ice cream. and so I made an unbelievable sacrifice and forwent ice cream for a day or two until I learned that I could lick my ice cream comb to the glory of God and give him thanks because God gives us all things richly to enjoy.

[39 : 15] And because this world, again as we saw this morning, this physical, tangible world is subject to redemption. redemption. That this body is subject to redemption.

And that is why Paul is telling us that the fullness of the Godhood dwelt in Christ bodily because the Colossian false teachers were saying the very thing that I've described to you as an element of modern Christianity.

They believed that the physical was unspiritual. They didn't have in those days monastity. but they sure knew how to teach Christians to avoid enjoying the world that God made.

But Christ, God through Christ created this world. And therefore there's no reason to deny this world or to look beyond Christ.

And because all the fullness of the Godhood dwells in him bodily, he is sufficient. All sufficient. and we err when we look for significant ways to achieve more than he has achieved for us.

[40 : 31] Rather, so long as he remains the focus of our attention, the goal of our aspirations, and the measure of everything else that we are invited to believe by whoever may come to invite us, we will grow in grace and the knowledge of God, we will grow in our love for one another, and we will know more and more of him as we experience more and more of him in the fellowship of the saints.

And you, says Paul, have been filled in him. Past tense, filled, some translations put it complete. Well, that's not exactly the meaning of the word, but the idea is there, and that's a faithful rendering of the idea.

We have been filled, filled with him, filled in him, filled by him. There really is no room for anything more unless we take away something of what we have received from Christ to make room for something else, whatever it may be.

That is why a poor view of Christ will lead to a poor view of his achievements and then we'll try to supplement them.

I ask you, who needs more than Christ? I ask you, what more than Christ can really be had from God? He is the head of all authority, and you, he says, you were circumcised in him.

[42 : 12] In other words, you now have, not the fleshly circumcision, but you have a circumcision which is remove the power of the flesh over you. You are no longer subject to the body, you are no longer subject to its lusts.

You have a circumcision which is performed by the hand of God himself. you are filled in him, you are circumcised in him, and you need not seek to rely on these external symbolisms.

Yes, Jews and Gentiles circumcised together in Christ. In fact, Paul uses the word there, the definite article, the circumcision, because it is the ultimate circumcision which did not happen automatically by virtue of some kind of a ceremony.

It's not baptism that circumcises us. It is something that takes place, he says, through faith in the work of God.

And so, therefore, baptism has effect through faith. And that surely should mean that faith is necessary for baptism.

[43 : 34] Now, we might legitimately ask, whose faith? But since the only persons in view here who had been baptized were the Colossians, then surely it's obvious that it is their faith in view.

Candidates for baptism must have faith before being admitted to the sacrament, because it is their faith combined with the God-giving ceremony, conducted in accordance with the word of God, and accompanied by the secret workings of the Spirit that make baptism to be what it is.

Again, let me quote Lightfoot, and this is rather surprising because Lightfoot believed in pedo-baptism. And yet he recognizes the true meaning of baptism.

He says, Baptism is the grave of the old man and the birth of the new. As man sinks beneath the baptismal waters, the believer buries there all his corrupt affections and past sins.

And as he emerges thence, he rises regenerate, quickened to new hopes and a new life. This it is because it is not only the crowning act of his own faith, but also the seal of God's adoption and the earnest of God's Spirit.

[45 : 01] Thus, baptism is an image of his participation both in the death and in the resurrection of Christ. And I wish that Bishop Lightfoot heard his own words.

But let me summarize. It is, as I see in my watch, time to summarize. We must beware of persuasive words.

And the way to do so is to develop an understanding of the faith through serious, systematic, biblical, and doctrinal studies. We need to be doctrinally alert, because error robs us.

Doctrines have great practical consequences. things. There's nothing more practical than that. Second, I'll tell you something you don't know.

It's not easy to live in a church where people differ. But, and I'm sure you know this, that is our calling.

[46 : 09] God will be way. We will find comfort in loving others on the grounds of what Christ has done, and the hope that we share for the future, because that kind of love unites.

living in the church as we ought, will lead to further spiritual growth, because we will experience and in this way understand more of the truth than we can merely by theoretical knowledge.

And such learning will cultivate humble confidence in the truth, leading on the one hand to greater love, and on the other to further understanding.

There's nothing beyond Jesus. There should be no other focus in our church life, and if there are any such, we have become overly like the world by focusing on our differences instead of on Christ. Our trust should be wholly in him, not in our efforts. We are complete in him, circumcised in him, dead in him, raised in him. He is above all, above the angels, above Moses, above Abraham, above any.

[47 : 35] There is no room for traditions apart from God's word, should we say no room for the authority of traditions. Traditions are helpful.

people come into church and rather than thinking where am I going to sit today, you go automatically to your seat, it's useful.

It's tradition. It's okay. But what happens when someone is sitting in your seat? Do you get unhinged?

Now that's a minor example. And I don't have enough courage, nor do I believe I have the right to apply it more broadly, but there is room for broader application.

What we are used to is not necessarily always the only right way to do things. So there is no place for traditions beyond God's word, not even Jewish traditions, even if they're thousands of years old.

[48 : 39] We must never set up any authority beside the word of God. And baptism?

Baptism is not a mere symbol. When undergone with faith, it becomes a means of grace in God's hand and accords us apart in the death and the resurrection of Christ.

Abstinence, asceticism, separating ourselves from the world in an absolute sense on every level is not spirituality, but it is actually a kind of preoccupation with the world, surprisingly, masquerading in

the forms of spirituality.

And finally, Jesus is God in all and every respect of the term. And when he took on humanity, our humanity, he did not cease to be God, our God.

Let's pray. God, you're almighty and glorious in everything that you do.

[49 : 53] and our delight is in your son, our savior. We recognize that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily.

And we admit that we seldom think of him as we ought to think. All too often we're taken up with our shibboleths, our phraseologies, our favorite customs, instead of making him the focus of our lives and of our endeavors as individuals and as families and as a church.

Lord, teach us to live with all the redeemed in accordance with the gospel. Lord, make Christ so important to us that our differences will fade in the light of his glory.

Lord, cause us to seek from you and in each other nothing more than Jesus and be satisfied with him until the glorious day will come when by the power of grace we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

this we plead in Jesus name. Amen.