

# OpenTheo

## Traditions of Men (Part 2)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the danger of legalism and the importance of avoiding human traditions in religious worship. He argues that while traditions can be meaningful, they should not be elevated to the same level as the commandments of God. He emphasizes the need to continually seek spiritual truth and love for God and people, rather than merely following external ceremonies and rules. His talk also touches upon the concept of Corbin and the cautionary approach to making vows in religious dedication.

### **Transcript**

The legalism of the Pharisees is of two kinds. One, of course, is that it is outward, it is externalistic. It puts an emphasis on outward ritual rather than inward heart-righteousness.

A second problem with it is that it adds human rituals to the ones that God himself gave. So the two points of legalism that are most dangerous to us today are of the Pharisaic type, actually more than of the Galatians type. Because the Galatians legalism, where someone is trying to wed Jewish law with the gospel, we don't find that being done very much anymore.

I mean, the Seventh-day Adventists do this to a certain extent, and the cult Armstrongism, you know, the Worldwide Church of God, they do that to a certain extent, and maybe a few other groups. And, of course, the Roman Catholic traditions and some of the more liturgical Protestant traditions also have a lot of Judaistic kind of ritual in terms of temple and priesthood and so forth. But I guess we do have that problem today.

But you don't really find the mainstream of evangelicals saying that we need to keep the Jewish law. In fact, they violently oppose it. But the kind of legalism that we find in the church that's a problem today, especially of the evangelical church and fundamentalist churches, is the Pharisaic type of legalism, which places emphasis on outward religious norms, some of which originate from man.

These are the two issues, outwardness and human origin of the doctrines, teaching for

doctrines, the commandments of men. And these are the issues that are addressed here in this chapter. He talks, first of all, about the traditions of men.

And he says the traditions of men actually, unfortunately, can become more important to those who observe them than even the real laws of God. Once you lose sight of the difference between man's traditions and God's commandments, the next step toward degradation is to place man's traditions above God's commandments. It's bad enough to put them on an equal footing, to say that it's as important to keep human traditions as it is to keep the laws of God.

That's bad enough, because that isn't true. But when you go beyond that, so that the human traditions actually are more important than what Christ commands or what God commands, then you've really twisted religion. Now, Jesus said that's what the people here had done.

Look at verse 6 and following. He answered and said to them, well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites? Now, by the way, Isaiah, when he made the statement that's here quoted, it was about his own generation of Jews. It was actually the hypocritical Jews of 700 BC that Isaiah prophesied of.

But Jesus said, he's talking about you too. Now, that either means that Isaiah's time, in a sense, was a type of the time of the Messiah. And Isaiah, by the way, himself is a type of the Messiah in at least one place.

Isaiah chapter 8, Isaiah speaks as if he is the Messiah and his words about himself are construed in Hebrews as being words about the Messiah. Where he says, I and the children which the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel. That's Isaiah speaking about himself and his kids.

And Hebrews quotes it as if Jesus is speaking. So we can see that Isaiah, like David in the Psalms frequently or sometimes at least, is speaking as a type of the Messiah himself. And the times of Isaiah bore a tremendous resemblance to the times of Christ.

Particularly the Jewish norms and customs in the spiritual state of Israel in the times of Isaiah had a direct parallel to those of Christ. So when Isaiah spoke about his own times, Jesus could say, well, he's speaking about our times too. Maybe directly or maybe just by way of extension.

That what was true of Isaiah's times is true of our times. And he was speaking about people of any time who are in the same condition as those of his own time. And he said, well, did Isaiah prosely of you hypocrites as it is written, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Now, that quote is from Isaiah 29, 13. Actually, for some reason, Mark begins the quote where he

does.

But Matthew, in quoting the same passage, starts the quote one line earlier, which seems logical to do. There is a line before this people honors me with their lips and that is these people draw near to me with their mouth. And the only reason I suggest that Matthew includes that in his quote in Matthew 15, the parallel to this, Matthew 15, 8. He gives the quote just the same as here, but he includes the previous line to it, which is these people draw near to me with their mouth and they honor me with their lips.

But their heart is far from me. In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Now, this is, of course, a very searching prophecy.

I mean, if Jesus hadn't quoted it, we could perhaps confine its application to the times of Isaiah. But since Jesus transports its 700 years future from Isaiah's time to his own time, we have reason to believe that it may apply to any parallel situation. And it certainly speaks of a principle that must be applicable wholesale.

And that is that God is offended when people worship him according to humanly devised means, especially to the neglect of the divinely devised means. They draw near to me, he says, with their mouth. They honor me with their lips.

But they worship me in vain. Now, this to me, I don't know how much it matters to other people. I know it matters to some and maybe less to others.

In verse 7 it says, in vain they worship me. That gives me a chill. Because the reason I worship God is because I'm concerned about my relationship with God.

I have come to think that a relationship with God is more important than anything in the world. And that the whole purpose of our creation is to bring glory and honor and worship to God. However, if I wasn't concerned about pleasing God, I wouldn't bother to worship.

I wouldn't waste my time. I think I said this in another connection a few days ago. I just wouldn't bother to go to church.

I just wouldn't bother to pray and read my Bible if I didn't care about my relationship with God. Apparently some people do. They do all those religious things to be seen of man.

But the relationship with God is not really what they're after. Or what is their obsession. They talk like it is, but their hearts are far from them.

They draw near, as it were, verbally and honor him with their words. But in their hearts, there's no truth in it. There's no heart for it.

They don't love God. And their worship is in vain. That it means empty.

It means they worship to no profit. I would hate to be involved in worship that was in vain. Just because I wouldn't want to waste my time worshipping if it was in vain.

Let's go eat and drink and be merry. If there's not going to be any relationship with God. If there's no salvation.

If there's no righteousness in it. Let's not bother with religious externals. That's my disposition.

I guess others have different ways of thinking. But these people are worshipping God. The worst of it is probably that they think that they're pleasing God.

And yet, there's an emptiness to it. God doesn't honor it. And the reason they're making this mistake is because they teach as doctrines the commandments of men.

That is, they have placed the commandments of men at the level of doctrine. Now, properly, only the teachings of God should be part of doctrine. For the Jew or for the Christian.

The word of God is what is to be doctrine. Now, I was talking to a Roman Catholic in Santa Cruz, as I mentioned to you. And he gave me some tapes by this Presbyterian guy who had converted to Roman Catholicism.

And both the man I talked to and later the tapes, I found out where this guy got his arguments. Because they were on the tapes that he gave me. But they were saying, you know, the Bible does not teach the Protestant principle of sola scriptura.

Now, sola scriptura, of course, is Latin for scripture alone. And what distinguished the reformers like Luther from Christians before them, of the Roman Catholic sort, was the emphasis of men like Luther that only scripture should be the basis of doctrine. And only scripture should be authoritative to set norms for Christianity.

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church at that time, and up to this present, holds a different view. The view of the Roman Catholic Church is that scripture and church tradition carry equal weight. Now, I hope I'm not misrepresenting, but Roman Catholics I've talked to have said this.

And that's how they understand it. So, if the Roman Catholic's official doctrine is other than this, they're not doing a very good job of communicating it to the rank and file. Because almost every Catholic I've talked to who's done any thinking on this subject, holds the view that church tradition and scripture are about equal in value.

They believe that because there was a succession from Peter through the various bishops of Rome, which are now called popes, and because Peter wrote scripture, therefore, when the popes speak officially ex cathedra, from the throne, they are

speaking, or the magisterium, the bishops, when they decide officially on something, and it becomes the tradition of the church, that it carries the same weight as if Peter himself, or any of the apostles, or Jesus taught it. And therefore, there is no distinction in the weight of authority between the traditions of the church, on the one hand, and scripture on the other. Now, if you ever enter into any debate with a person who's a Roman Catholic, and by the way, it needn't be a Roman Catholic, there are Protestants who make this same error, but the Protestants do so inadvertently, the Catholics do it without, they do it more honestly.

The Catholics admit that they do it. Protestants often pretend like they don't, but do it anyway. And that is, they let human traditions overrule scripture.

You'll find that you'll get nowhere with a Roman Catholic in most cases, because the basis of authority from which you're arguing is different than the basis of authority from which they're arguing. You will show them scriptures, and you'll wonder why it goes like water off a duck's back, and that it doesn't seem to impact them. And the reason is because they don't agree with you on the basis of the argument.

To you, the scripture alone carries authority. To them, scripture alone doesn't. Scripture and the interpretations and traditions of the popes and the magisterium throughout history are what are equal to scripture.

Now, when this Catholic guy I was listening to on the tape argued this, he said, you'll never find in the Bible the Lutheran doctrine, the Protestant doctrine, of sola scriptura. See, that's different. Luther said, not scripture and tradition, just scripture.

Scripture alone. Now, of course, Protestants, that's sort of the battle cry of Protestantism, is that scripture alone. And the Catholic challenged.

In fact, this guy, this Presbyterian who converted to Catholicism, he's a Presbyterian scholar, he said that he began to question as a Presbyterian, where do we get this doctrine of sola scriptura, and he couldn't find it in the Bible. And he said, this itself is a Protestant tradition, this idea of sola scriptura. Well, I think you could have looked a little more carefully.

I think you can find it in the Bible. How about here? In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. It's quite obvious that Jesus and Isaiah opposed the idea of teaching the traditions and commandments of men as if they hold the weight of doctrine.

Now, in a sense, if we are to argue that the Catholic Church, because it was instituted by Christ through Peter or whatever the argument is, that it carries its traditions, carry the weight of scripture. How do we then differ than the Pharisees who gave the traditions of their rabbis the same weight of scripture? Isn't this the very thing that Jesus is saying

they've erred in? It seems to me that it is. Their error was this very thing, that they gave equal weight to scripture and the tradition of the religious teachers before them of ancient times.

You know, I heard somebody who was speaking in favor of tradition once. He wasn't Catholic, he was of some other mindset. But he was saying tradition is just giving our ancestors a vote.

Now, on the one hand, that sounds fair-minded. You know, we ought to give our ancestors a vote. Who's to say we're smarter than they were? We shouldn't live in some kind of a time capsule that is only aware of our own current thinking of our culture.

We should be aware of what others of other times have thought. They were as smart as we are, maybe smarter in some cases. So we ought to give them a vote about what's true.

Well, that sounds reasonable. The problem is there's no voting going on here. God doesn't decide things on the basis of votes.

And truth is not determined by a majority vote. If the majority of people decide there's no God, that doesn't make there no God. And if the majority of people decide that homosexuality is okay, that doesn't make it okay.

Truth is absolute. And it doesn't matter who's doing the voting. As long as they're human, their votes don't carry the weight of Scripture.

And it may seem very fair-minded and humble to say, Well, I'm not just going to decide this myself. I'm going to let my ancestors have a vote in this. And since they all thought such and such, well, that's what I'm going to think.

That's the whole basis of traditionalism, is to say, Well, even though I don't see this in the Scripture, my ancestors saw it this way, so I'll take their view. I'll take their word for it. That's exactly what the Jews did.

That's what Jesus said was wrong here. Now, by the way, this Roman Catholic guy on the tape who was talking about tradition and the need to embrace Catholic tradition along with Scripture, he was aware of this passage, and he made reference to it. But he said Jesus didn't condemn tradition.

He just condemned bad traditions. Well, I'm not sure that that's a true statement. It's true Jesus would condemn any bad traditions.

But it seems to me that what he condemns is teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. The commandments of men may not be all that bad. By the way, the first legalist in the Bible was Eve.

Because God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The day you eat of it, you'll die. And when Satan said to her, Has God forbidden you to eat of all the trees of the garden? She said, Well, we can eat of all the trees of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. Now, everyone knows she was wrong in her quotation of Scripture. Of course, she didn't have Scripture, but she had a word from God.

God said, Don't eat it or you'll die. She said, God has said, Don't eat it or touch it, lest you die. Now, where'd she get the touch part? Where'd she get the part about touching it? God didn't say that.

Probably, probably a desire to be obedient to God in what he did say caused her to put a hedge around the law. As it were, the law said, Don't eat it. Let's put a hedge around it.

You know, if we don't touch it, we certainly won't eat it. You can't eat it without touching it. Therefore, while God just said, Don't eat it, let's help God out a little.

Let's put a little buffer zone of safety between violation and our actual conduct. And we'll just say we can't even touch it. Now, no one can say that that was a bad tradition.

It certainly was a human tradition. It was teaching for doctrine, the commandments of men, because man, not God, made up the idea about not touching it. Now, that idea is not a bad idea.

Let's face it. If it's wrong to get drunk, it's not a bad idea to avoid all alcohol. Right? I mean, every alcoholic began with the first drink.

If you never take your first drink, you'll never get drunk. And, you know, some people get drunk inadvertently because they take a few drinks not thinking they'll be drunk and then they go too far. I've done that a couple of times myself.

I've never intentionally been drunk. A couple of times I had a couple of beers or something, which ordinarily wouldn't get me drunk, but in Mexico, it was a little stronger than I planned. And I wasn't a vomiting, staggering, you know, drunk, but I was a little lightheaded when I left the table.

And it was a very uncomfortable feeling because I never intended that to happen. But, you know, you can't make that kind of mistake if you don't touch alcohol at all. Therefore, if the Bible says don't get drunk, is it not good advice to not even take a single drink? Yeah, it's good advice, but that's a different thing than the commandments of God.

Good advice is not the same thing as the commandments of God. There's certainly

nothing wrong with deciding in yourself, since I want to avoid being drunk, I will not touch alcohol. Excellent.

Great resolution. But don't ever begin to impose that as if God had said it. As soon as you do that, you're adding to the Word of God.

You're teaching for doctrine the commandments of man because God never said don't drink alcohol. He said don't be drunk with alcohol. It says in Proverbs 30, verses 5 and 6, Proverbs 30, verses 5 and 6, it says, Every word of God is pure.

He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Add thou not to His words, lest you be found a liar. Lest He reprove you and you be found a liar.

Don't add to His words your own commandments, you'll be found a liar. Now, it doesn't mean that you can't add to your own behavior things beyond what God says. For example, you might decide, since you don't want to get drunk, that you'll never drink alcohol.

Fine. You can add that to your behavior, but don't add it to His Word. Add thou not to His Word.

If God has said so much, don't add some more and say, God has said this too, when He hasn't. And this is the problem. When we begin to mix our good advice with the actual commands of God.

I'm sure that to not touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge is good advice. Maybe Adam gave her that advice. Or maybe she came up with herself.

Don't even touch that. Well, fair enough. I mean, I think it's good advice and she would have done well not to ever touch it.

But to, in her mind, not know the difference between the authority of God and the authority of man was the first error and led to the first sin. We could say, in some respects, one of the elements of the first sin was legalism. Was adding human tradition, human commandments, and teaching them for doctrines as if God had said them.

That was what, of course, the Jews did. That is done in many Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church today. From the very beginning.

I mean, infant sacrifice. I shouldn't say that. Scratch that.

I was going to say there's traditions of men about that, but we won't get into what weird groups do. We'll get into what Christians do wrong. The idea of taking communion every week or of even going to church every Sunday.

There's nothing wrong with that. It's a great idea. The Bible says don't forsake the



assembling of yourselves together.

And one of the best ways to avoid that is to have some kind of regular time when you assemble with Christians. However, no one can say with honesty that that commandment, which, by the way, is the principle scripture used in favor of being regular in church on Sundays, do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. No one can honestly say that that tells you how often you have to assemble or in what form, whether it has to be in a home or in a church or or whatever, whether it's just two or more gathered in his name.

But traditions have developed from very early on, the very earliest centuries of the church meeting on Sunday, taking communion on Sunday, every Sunday. These things began to develop. There's nothing wrong with doing them.

And frankly, I encourage you, if that's what you do, to keep doing so. But don't don't do so, thinking that by keeping these traditions, you are somehow keeping the commands of God in such a way as if you didn't do this, if you missed church on Sunday, that you are somehow in violation of the commandments of God. Now, again, in saying this, there's always the danger when you start talking down traditions that are, in essence, are good advice.

It's good to be regular in church. It's good to be weekly, to do something weekly, because if you do something weekly, it's harder to neglect it. It becomes it becomes a habit if you go every three weeks or or, you know, the intervals between going to church are, you know, a couple of days, one week and a couple of weeks, another time and then maybe longer weeks when it's irregular.

It gets easier to just leave it out altogether. When you've got a habit, it's harder to neglect it. And therefore, the habit of going to church is a good habit.

But to say that to miss church on Sunday or, you know, to miss mass on Sunday for the Catholics, that that is a mortal sin. That is, of course, to add much to what the Bible itself says. The baptism of infants of Christian families, that was a tradition that didn't start with the Roman Catholic Church.

That started very early on. I think in the second century, people began to baptize infants. And that, of course, entered into Roman Catholic tradition.

And then in the Reformation, the reformed denominations continue to do so and still do to this day. But that's not something the Bible commands. The Bible doesn't command to do that.

But it is a tradition of men. Now, in Protestant circles, there are traditions of other kinds. And there's so many different denominations that it'd be hard to name any one tradition that is, you know, kept all the time.

But there are traditions which, because persons are converted into or even born into a particular Protestant tradition, they're just part of the whole environment of worship, the whole part of the climate of spirituality that they've become accustomed to, that to neglect them would be, in fact, irreligious on their part. A person can't neglect with good conscience. Paul knew that in the church in Rome, for example, and in some other churches in Corinth and other places, there were some converts who were Jewish.

And these Jewish converts, they just could not allow themselves to stop keeping the Sabbath. Although the Gentile converts had no conscience about this and didn't bother to keep Sabbath, the Jewish converts couldn't stop because they'd grown up all their lives keeping Sabbath. It was drummed into their heads.

Sabbath is God's day. You can't do any work on the Sabbath. And although they were now converted, they just felt awkward.

Doing that which had been drummed in their head was wrong to do, to do any work on the Sabbath. Likewise, although the Gentiles knew their liberty to eat any food they wanted to, there were Jewish converts who, because of the scrupulous abstinence from unclean foods all their lives, once they became Christians, they still couldn't eat it in good conscience. And we know that Paul writes to the Romans about that in Romans 14.

He says some people eat all things. Other people eat only vegetables to avoid certain defilement of meats. So one man keeps one day above another, another man keeps every day alike.

There were differences of custom, probably between Jews and Gentiles in the church, because the Jews grew up with a very strong conscience about these things. Now, Paul did not condemn them for this. Paul could relate with it.

Paul was raised a strict Jew too, although he had broken free from those things. He understood that some people just, they just don't feel comfortable violating the traditions that made up the spiritual climate of their upbringing. And there are perhaps persons who today prefer a more liturgical form of worship, because they were raised in a liturgical church.

Or a more emotionally demonstrative form of worship, because they were raised in Pentecostal churches. Or a more quiet and subdued form of worship, because of maybe their cultural upbringing, you know, and maybe Mennonites or Quaker or something like that. You know, I mean, there's a lot of different things that people may feel comfortable with in worship, and there's nothing wrong with continuing.

Once you're converted, with continuing to worship in those ways, if they are meaningful to you and to God. But the problem is, when those things become to your mind the sum total of religious expression. And if you were separated from those things, you couldn't

worship, for instance, in a church that was wildly different than the one you were raised in.

Or you were thrown in prison and couldn't go to a worship service at all. Would that destroy your walk with God? Would that make your conscience defile and say, Wow, you know, I can't do the things that matter to God. Obviously, you've got to be free in your conscience.

You've got to be freer than that. You can worship God in any legitimate way that God, you know, has not condemned, and that you feel comfortable in. But to interpret that as the true worship of God, and to miss the point that true worship of God is just to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, and that's all that matters, is to miss the point.

And people, let me put it this way. I think spirituality does not come naturally to people. It's a supernatural thing that has to intrude into our lives through the rebirth.

But even after it comes in, there's still many natural ways of thinking that assert themselves upon us. And the spiritual truth of the Bible is that if you have a new heart, and you're walking in the spirit, you'll love God, you'll love people, and no one has to regulate you with rules. But it's so hard to really trust God for that in people that religious leaders, they feel awkward just telling people, well, just love God and do what you want, you know.

Just love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and do what you want. Because they don't really know, or they're not accustomed to trusting the Holy Spirit. And so their need is to regulate people with outward rules.

Don't miss church, you know, pay tithes, and other traditions of this sort that are not really biblical for Christians to be put under. Now, Jesus felt that the Pharisees' problem, first of all, was that they had lost track of the difference between human and divine authority. But the second problem they had was that they had put human authority above divine authority.

Now, this inevitably will happen. If you do the first, you will do the second. If you lose sight of the difference between human authority and divine authority, that is, if you put human traditions on the same level with the Word of God, eventually those human traditions will rise to a place more important than the Word of God.

I'll tell you why. Because the Word of God is concerned with matters of the heart. Human traditions have to do with matters of religious worship and external ceremonies and so forth.

Now, the person who is so mistaken in his thinking to put ceremonies at the same level as matters of the heart will soon become totally occupied with them. Because it's easier

to look at the things that are seen than the things that are not seen. It's more natural to do so.

And the best safeguard against this mistake is to make sure you always keep the commandments of God with reference to heart matters, which are the important things to Him, supreme to all external matters. Now, when we say external matters, we're not talking about matters of morality. Because morality is a heart matter.

Issues of murder and adultery and stealing and bearing false witness and an honor to parents and covetousness, those are heart matters, as Jesus demonstrated. Moral issues are matters of the heart. We're talking about ceremonial religious type stuff.

And as soon as you begin to put such things on the same level, what you've done is lost sight of what the issues are with God. You think that ceremony matters as much as morality. And eventually, that spiritual blindness and imbecility actually leads to being obsessed with the ceremonies because those are visible.

You can judge people by those. You can decide who's in and who's out on the basis of visible performance of those. It's easier to organize on the basis of those.

It's easier to see who's in the group. It's easier to identify yourself as part of the group. I mean, it's just one of those dynamics of religion, that as soon as you interpret ceremony as being an important part of religion, it becomes the obsessively all-important part of religion.

And so, the next problem was, in addition to blurring the distinction between divine authority and human authority, was to put human authority above divine authority. And he says in verse 9, All too well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition, or set aside the commandment of God to keep your tradition. In other words, when it's between obeying God or the tradition, they'll compromise the command of God in order to not compromise the tradition.

They put the human tradition above the divine mandate. And he gives an example of this. He doesn't just make a sweeping statement without pointing out a specific example.

Now, I want to make something very clear here. It's easy to call somebody a legalist or make some other kind of accusation against them in a general way, but they can't repent unless you give them an example, especially if they're unaware of the problem. If you make some kind of a general statement that they don't love God, or that they're a legalist, or that they're a heretic, or that they're in sin, but you don't tell them what their sin is.

They can't repent unless they already know what their sin is. But it's likely these people were blind. Jesus called them blind leaders of the blind.

And if they were blind, they had to be told what their problem was. It's not enough just to say, you guys are too traditional. But he wanted to give them something specific so they'd see the truth of what he was doing, and they'd be able then to repent of it.

For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother, and he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death, or the King James says, or die the death. These are two different places he quotes from Exodus 20, verse 12, of course, is the Ten Commandments. It's the fifth commandment, Honor your father and mother.

The part about he that curses father and mother, let him be put to death is from Deuteronomy 5.16. But both of them are from God, by the way, and from Moses. Jesus affirmed that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch, which liberals deny, but Jesus said, Moses said this. Moses gave you this command.

But in saying that Moses gave it, it's quite clear that Jesus is implying God gave it, because he's illustrating what he said in verse 9, you reject the commandment of God. For Moses said, and obviously what Moses said is what he's calling the commandment of God. So there's no doubt that Jesus is affirming, first of all, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and secondly, the inspiration of what Moses wrote, that what Moses said was what God said.

But then he says what they do instead. But you say, and this is their tradition, if a man says to his father and mother, whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban, that is dedicated to the temple, and you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have handed down, and many such things you do. Now, the particular thing he's talking about was that in the law there was a concept called Corban.

Corban means a gift or a thing dedicated specifically to God, a gift to God. In some of the chapters of Deuteronomy and of Leviticus, there are references to people devoting things to God or dedicating things to God. This was a voluntary thing that people could do.

There was no command given of dedicating anything to God other than the firstborn and the firstfruits and the tithe. These things were to be devoted to God. But there were other things that could be devoted to God voluntarily if you felt particularly thankful to God and wished to show some particular veneration of God.

It's like when Jeff said, God, if you give me the victory here, I'll sacrifice to you the first thing that comes out of my house. He wasn't making a vow that he was required to make. That was sort of like making a deal with God.

I'll give you this if you give me that. Now, such vows were not necessary to make. But once a person had made them, they had no power to get out of them.

And therefore, it's good to be cautious about making vows. It says in Ecclesiastes chapter 5, it's talking about vows when it says, well, let me read it to you because there's quite a bit, a few verses here on the subject of making vows. But this has to do with dedicating things to God, giving things as a gift or Corban to God.

It says in Ecclesiastes 5, 2 and following, do not be rash with your mouth and do not let your heart utter anything hastily before God, for God is in heaven and you're on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. And down in verse four, when you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you have vowed. It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin.

Now, what he's saying is, don't be too rash in making vows. It's better not to make any vow in the first place than to vow and not pay it. If you make a vow, you better keep it.

Therefore, don't be too rash or too hasty to make any vows. Now, the vows he's talking about are vows of dedication, dedicating something to God like Jephthah did. You know, I'll give you whatever comes out of my house.

He made a rash vow and it was stupid to do and he had to keep it. But he shouldn't have made it in the first place. But when something is devoted to God, it is therefore no longer accessible for any common use.

It's like an animal sacrificed on the altar. When a man would bring his lamb to the altar, it might be any lamb from his flock, and it was an ordinary lamb. He could use it for anything common until he brought it to the temple or the tabernacle.

And once he brought it there, there was a law that said whatever touches the altar is holy. So as soon as the priest would take the lamb and put it on the altar, it became not a common lamb at all. It became God's, it became holy, it was separated unto God and could not be used for common purposes.

Up until the moment that animal was sacrificed, that man could exchange that lamb for another if he wished. Or he could just take it back and say, I don't want to give this lamb. That was in his power to decide.

But once it had been touched by the altar, the altar had touched it, it was devoted, it was God's, and it could no longer be used for any common purpose. Anything dedicated to God could not be used for common purposes. Now, the idea here was that by dedicating something to God, you were sort of making a personal sacrifice.

That which you might have personally used for yourself, you're going to deprive yourself of and let God have it. But they had, in their traditions, extended this law of Corban so far that it could be used even to deprive somebody else of what you might otherwise

owe them. If you would have a duty ordinarily, for instance, to help your parents who are poor, or any poor person, but had no heart to do so, you could just declare the thing that they might otherwise have had a claim on, you could declare it Corban, which means that it couldn't be used for any common use.

Well, eventually, in the traditions of the rabbis, it began to be the case that if you dedicated something to God, you didn't even have to take it to the temple. You just had to call it dedicated to God, and you could still use it. But you could also claim that you couldn't give it to anyone because it can't be used for common uses.

I mean, it was just a total hypocritical twisting of things. It was a manipulation of situations where people perhaps didn't love their parents, didn't want to help their parents, or the poor, or anyone else. Probably it was more a concern not to help the poor.

That they just decided, well, if you don't want to help the poor, if you want to enjoy your riches and not have any obligation, just say it's Corban, just dedicate it to God. Your whole estate can be dedicated to God, and then you don't have to, you can't give it to the poor. The poor can't have it, that'd be a common use.

But Jesus said there'd be some cases where that'd be a real violation of God's laws, because God's law says you should honor your parents. What if your parents are poor? Certainly the law would require you to give them something. But if you say it is Corban, you allow a man to give his parents nothing.

His parents can die in poverty while he's rich. But it's okay, because he's dedicated it to God. But that is a tradition.

God never said that people could get out of their obligation to keep the fifth commandment by this tradition of Corban. And so what Jesus said is you've not only elevated your traditions to the level of the commandments of God, you have given them a priority over the commandments of God. Now, there's no question but that Christians have done this too.

And we think of the Roman Catholics, but we might better think of ourselves, because Protestants do the same kinds of things. There are things that have become traditions that are really contrary to the commands of God or to the word of God. We teach for doctrines, traditions, and men.

And whether it's a liturgical or a very free tradition like the Pentecostal, there are still traditions. It's traditional in certain Pentecostal churches to scream in tongues. Now, of course, most Pentecostal churches are a little more subdued than that nowadays.

The original early Pentecostals and some still, some of the smaller Pentecostal churches that scare off the crowds, I've been in them. They run up and down the aisle screaming,

the proverbial holy rollers and stuff. I mean, that becomes a tradition.

If you don't do that, you're not really inspired. I spoke in a black church in Denver once, which was not Pentecostal, it was Baptist, but black churches are different than white churches. I hate to make a statement like that because that sounds racist, but I'm not criticizing them.

I like their style better than white churches in some cases. If there's a black church in town, I might want to go there regularly because they really get into not only their singing, but into the preaching. The preaching is sung by the pastor in kind of a sing-song way, and the audience responds, says, preach it, brother, and so forth.

I mean, there's just a lot of life there. I don't know if it's spiritual or soulful, but you can't fall asleep there. Well, I was invited to speak on a Sunday evening in a black church in Denver, a Baptist church, and I thought I'd visit them Sunday morning to see what kind of service they had, and it was like that, you know, and I thought, boy, I'm going to seem pretty dead to them.

And I thought, well, I'll give it all I've got. I was only 19 at the time, but I went to their Sunday service, and I was a little more emotional than I was comfortable being, and I really put it on a little more than I normally would. I thought I hoped that was good enough, and afterwards, the preacher got up, and he says, you know, if I would give you a nickname, I would have to call you Mr. Cool.

I thought I was being far more emphatic and emotional than I got in here. He was saying, you know, you're pretty reserved, aren't you? And I mean, to him, that just wasn't good preaching. You don't preach without singing it, and that's just a tradition.

You know, you begin to interpret spirituality in terms of the cultural traditions of your way, and in some cases, you even begin to, they didn't, but there are cases where you begin to exclude people and judge negatively of them, which the Bible tells you not to do, but because you're so loyal to your traditions, you judge people on the basis of them. You know, I've told you there's a church I'm aware of that, in fact, there's more than one, that make wearing suits almost mandatory for men. It's highly recommended.

In fact, it's made clear that it is thought to be required by God that you dress up when you go to church. The men should wear suits, the women should dress in their finest clothing, and so forth. Now, they say this is to honor God.

This is not something they do ostensibly for carnal reasons. They do this because they say this is, you know, if you would come before the President of the United States, you'd wear your best clothes, so you should do so if you come before God. It's just a matter of respect.

Of course, it is true that if you did go before the President of the United States, you



probably would wear your nicest clothes, but that's because it would matter to him. Because man looks on the outward appearance. These people seem to have forgotten that God looks on the heart and doesn't look on the outward appearance, so it doesn't matter to God.

It's not an act of disrespect to come as you are to God. In fact, it only honors God when you're dressed up. I presume you can't be very close to God when you're in the shower or in other situations when you're working on the car and you're in your greasy coveralls.

I mean, to make church the only time when people approach God, and therefore that's the time when you should dress up. Other times, since you don't have to dress up other times, it is assumed you're not very close to God at those times because you can only honor God and approach him when you're dressed up. These people obviously make approaching God restricted to the Sunday morning service, and you're not allowed to do that at any other time of the week unless you can get dressed up enough for it.

It's ridiculous. It's a tradition of man. In fact, it's not only a tradition of man.

It goes against the commands of God. Because James said in James chapter 2 that if you show respect of persons, you are violating the command of God. Let me show you a passage of this.

It's just an example. It's a pet peeve of mine, as you can tell, but it's also just a good example of actually rejecting the Word of God to keep traditions. Look at James chapter 2, beginning with the first verse.

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with a gold ring and fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes, and say to him, You sit here in a good place, and say to the poor man, Stand there, or sit here at my footstool. Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren.

Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? Now, obviously, James isn't forbidding people to dress up to come to church, but he's saying if you show any partiality, if you think the person who dresses up to come to church is any better in your sight than the person who wears filthy clothes to church, then you are not thinking like God. You are showing partiality, you become judges of evil thoughts. By the way, elsewhere, I'm not sure where, I think it's in, it might be in Matthew 23, but elsewhere Jesus said that the Pharisees loved to wear long robes and so forth, and to get respect of man, and he certainly indicates that to wear special religious clothing and so forth is a pride thing, not a, it sort of is contrary to the idea of a heartfelt religious system, when you want to be

judged by or you seek to be accepted on the basis of how you dress when you worship God.

In fact, Paul indicated that women of godliness should not, well, look at this real quickly, we're running out of tape, and we've already run out of time, but look at 1 Timothy chapter 2. 1 Timothy 2, and in verse 9 it says, In like manner also that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper for women professing godliness with good works. A woman should be clothed not with, you know, fancy clothes and fancy hairstyles, as that church in particular I'm thinking of actually almost dictates they must, but they should rather dress the way that is appropriate or proper for women professing godliness. In other words, dressing up like that is not proper for women professing godliness.

There is an alternative way that is, and that is that they be clothed with good works and pay no attention to the way they dress, except that they be modest. And modest means not drawing attention to yourself. And so obviously it is customary in some churches, perhaps not many churches anymore require people to dress up.

When I was younger, virtually everybody was expected to dress up when you went to church. Since the Jesus movement, things got slacked up a lot, although there are still churches which you'd be looked at funny if you went in blue jeans and a t-shirt. And maybe for that reason you shouldn't go to those churches, if that's the way you insist on dressing to go to church.

But I mean, you don't want to offend them unnecessarily. But the point is, that's just one of many traditions that has not fully died out and has been very dominant in some Protestant circles. Although Protestants say we don't have traditions, we're not like the Roman Catholics, but we are in many respects.

We do place traditions on the same level in some cases, and sometimes above the commands of God. And that ain't good. Well, actually we've run out of time, but I haven't run out of things to say about this.

We'll come back to this same story next time and take the rest of it in another session.