

# How Did We Get Here?

By Bob Vincent

**Bible Text:** Colossians 2:20-233

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Colossians chapter two and at the very end of that chapter he says in verse 20:

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?

These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.<sup>1</sup>

I want to talk about that verse for a moment where he talks about self imposed worship and I want to talk to you about history tonight which is a little bit of a departure. We have been thinking about what the Bible says about worship. And two weeks ago we looked at the book of Leviticus as an example of Old Testament worship. Every thing in the Old Testament about worship is laid out in minute detail.

For example, Leviticus chapter 16, the Day of Atonement. Even the kind of underwear that the high priest is to wear is explicitly told us in the book of Leviticus. They have to be boxers, and they have to be made out of linen.

And so everything is explicitly laid out: the blood of a bull is to be sprinkled, not five times, six times or eight times, but seven times. And the blood of that bull is for the priest and his family. Then the blood of a goat is to be sprinkled, not five times or six times or eight times, but seven times for the sins of the people on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement. Everything about Old Testament Worship is laid out in minute detail. Nothing is left to the imagination.

Now when it comes to New Testament worship, there is obviously some kind of change. And we began to look at that last week in terms of examination of Scripture. During the period of time when the Jewish people were removed from their homeland, when the

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 2:20-23.

temple was destroyed in 587-86 BC, the Jewish people were no longer able to carry out Old Testament worship as it was explicitly laid out in Scripture. They no longer had a temple. They no longer had the ability to offer blood sacrifice. And so the Jewish people devised a method for instruction and fellowship called the synagogue. The word “synagogue” is not a Hebrew word, even though we associate it with the Hebrew people. It is a Greek word. It comes from the Greek συναγωγή (soon-ag-o-gay’) which is from a compound verb, *sun* (soon), which means together or with and *αγω* (agoh) which is “to lead.” And so, literally, a synagogue is simply a gathering together.

And it is a Greek word, and I think that is significant because what we find is that during the time of the exile from the Promised Land, the Jews are under the Babylonian kingdom until 539 when Babylon falls. Then they come under the Persians until around the year 333, anyhow in there, when Persia is defeated by the Greeks. And when the Greeks take over, they impose Greek culture and Greek civilization and Greek language on everybody, so everybody speaks Greek. And it is in this period of time, from the Babylonian Captivity through Persian and Greek rule, when the Jews are out of their homeland, that the synagogue develops.

If you study the worship as we did last week. We looked at some examples of synagogue worship both in Acts 13:13 where Paul and Barnabas are going into a synagogue. If you examine the picture of synagogue worship that is given to you in the Gospels, you discover that it is a fairly simple service. They would sing from the book of Psalms. They would pray. They would read the Scriptures. There would be a comment on Scripture, and then there was a freedom for the men of the synagogue and visiting men if they wanted to share something from Scripture, a comment or a testimony of something, there was that opportunity to do so. And then there would be gathering of money for alms, that kind of thing, to help poor people.

So the synagogue worship is pretty simple. There is the reading and the explanation of Scripture, the sharing of testimonies. Any male may lead in synagogue worship, but there is somebody in charge, the president of the synagogue. He is the one that recognizes someone to come up and read from the Scriptures. There is singing and there is praying.

And so this is the “gathering together,” the synagogue.

Now there are other elements of Old Testament worship that Jews observed that didn’t have to be in the Temple, and that is as families gathered as families to observe the Passover.

Now what I submit to you is that if you look at the picture of worship in the New Testament—and this is all review from last week—if you look at the picture of worship in the New Testament, the couple of glimpses that we have, for example, in the first few verses of Acts chapter 20, where Paul goes on and on. Luke says he went on and on. And then about midnight, somebody fell asleep in church. You can watch this, a guy named Eutychus. If Paul is not around you better be really careful falling asleep in church. Eutychus fell out the window and died. And Paul interrupted his sermon—there are times to inter-

rupt a sermon—went down and prayed over him and brought him back up. His life was restored and then Luke adds, “And he continued on to dawn.”<sup>2</sup>

So that’s a picture of New Testament worship.

Now, I will make a comment in a moment.

Another picture of New Testament worship that you are given is at the end of 1 Corinthians 14, where he talks about when you gather together, each one has this, each one has that, has a Psalm, has a prophecy, has an interpretation, has a tongue and so on. Let everything be done decently and in order. Let everything be done to build up the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Now that is the picture of worship. And I drew this conclusion with you last week. I said that if you want to understand God’s way of worship in the New Testament, you understand that it is not like the way of worship in the Old Testament, unless you are talking about the gathering of God’s people in the synagogue, because it is the synagogue that really is the beginning of New Testament church worship.

New Testament church worship is simply, we might say, an evolution out of the Jewish synagogue because the pattern of worship in the New Testament church, as we are given to see it—and we have very little description of it—is of freedom of communication, of some measure of spontaneity, and yet there is a structure that is there: the reading of the Word, the interpretation of the Word, the sharing of words of exhortation and encouragement, praying together, sharing money together to help poor folks and to advance God’s kingdom through the preaching of the gospel—singing and, of course, praying.

So it is a very simple structure. And one last thing and that is taken from the gathering of the Jewish family in the Passover. Jesus with his new family, his disciples in the Upper Room, on the night when he was betrayed, the night of the Passover. He takes the Jewish Passover, and he transforms it into the central ordinance after the Word, the central ordinance of the New Testament, which is the Lord’s Supper which, whenever it is observed, takes us back to Calvary and points us to the finished work of Christ. So that is New Testament worship.

New Testament worship, then, in this rather lengthy review of the past two week’s messages on Wednesday nights, leaves us with no New Testament book of Leviticus. What do I mean when I say we don’t have a New Testament book of Leviticus? I mean a book that tells you exactly how to do everything, exactly this way, this way, this way. How many times when, where and what. Okay? It doesn’t do that. In fact, even how we do the Lord’s Supper—in the New Testament it appears that it is done a little differently at different times.

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<sup>2</sup> See Luke 20:11.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Corinthians 14:26-40.

For example, if you compare the four accounts of how to do the Lord's Supper—Matthew, Mark, Luke and 1 Corinthians—you discover that the words of institution in Matthew and in Mark are identical, and they differ from the words of institution in Luke and 1 Corinthians.

“This [cup] is my blood of the [new] covenant,”<sup>4</sup> Matthew and Mark. “This [cup] is my blood of the [new] covenant.”<sup>5</sup>

Luke, on the other hand, and Paul in 1 Corinthians have it this way: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”<sup>6</sup>

Which is it? And my point is: the Holy Spirit deliberately inspired Luke and Paul to agree and Matthew and Mark to agree and for them not to agree together to tell us a basic truth. What happens if you get the words wrong? Nothing. It is okay. It is okay to say, when you lift the cup, “This cup is my blood of the new covenant.” It is okay if you lift the cup and say, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”

Now, a lot of folks do not argue over the words that you say over the cup. But there are a lot of folks that argue over the words you say in baptism. We know, for example, for a church in our community, this is a huge argument. If you have not been baptized a certain way, and the words said over you are not “in the name of Jesus,” then you are not biblically baptized. And since they believe that water baptism is essential for salvation, that means that probably most folks here tonight are not going to go to heaven because you may have been baptized by immersion or sprinkling or pouring, but you were probably baptized according to Jesus explicit command in Matthew 28, “in the name of the Father... Son and... Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

Now what is my point? Why would the same Holy Spirit who inspired Matthew to write in his Gospel the exact words of Jesus:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...<sup>8</sup>

Jesus' explicit words... Why would the Holy Spirit who gave Matthew to record that, give the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, as he stands up and presents the gospel and explains the phenomena that occurred—because there were multiple phenomena that occurred on Pentecost: the rushing mighty wind, the tongues as of fire, the people speaking in words they had never studied, words that the people who heard them understood in their own languages, speaking and praising God and obviously, great exuberance—as Peter explains these phenomena on the day of Pentecost, he then comes to his invitation.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:19.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:18-19.

And he says, “Turn from what you have got and come to Jesus.” In other words, “Repent and be baptized unto Jesus for the remission of your sins.”<sup>9</sup>

And so his invitation to come to water is not unlike a modern day creature in revival service while the pianist is playing the 17<sup>th</sup> stanza of *Just As I Am*—is there a 17<sup>th</sup> stanza? It was written by an Episcopalian, you know. But as the choir is singing *Just As I Am* and as a gospel appeal is given, you see, his appeal is to come in a public way identify with Christ by means of baptism. But it is identifying with Jesus.

Why does the same Holy Spirit who inspired the apostle Matthew to record Jesus’ explicit words, inspire the apostle Peter to say, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins”?<sup>10</sup> Why? Because it really doesn’t make any difference to God how we baptize.

There is no New Testament book of Leviticus. What is important is **that** you were baptized. Everybody needs to be baptized.

Why? Baptism identifies us with Christ. Baptism identifies us with Christ.

How did they do it? I don’t know. A lot of people think they do know. I have studied it long enough I have become an Agnostic. I don’t know. And I am extremely dubious of somebody who believes they know exactly how it is done.

And my point is that the New Testament gives us conflicting data about how people are baptized and conflicting data about how they did the Lord’s Supper because there is an emphasis in the New Testament, unlike the Old Testament with its book of Leviticus, with a rule book to tell you exactly how to do it, on freedom and spontaneity and the Holy Spirit is involved in those words. The Holy Spirit is giving those words to the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost when he says, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”<sup>11</sup>

So where am I going with this?

Well, here is the little historical sketch. It is quite brief, but I want you to kind of see what happened in Church history.

If I am correct—and I am absolutely sure I am—if I am correct, that the emphasis in the New Testament is a structure of worship that is essentially the worship of the Jewish synagogue, modified to the community belonging to Jesus, endowed with the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis is on freedom within an overarching structure of such things as the Word read and taught, the testimony, praying, the Lord’s Supper, water baptism, singing and sharing together, then what do we do?

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<sup>9</sup> See Acts 2:38.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Well, here is what happens. Human beings are rarely comfortable with change. Here I am speaking at this end of the fellowship hall tonight, messing everybody up. Everybody now saw Pete when he came in late. And that was a great meal, Pete. God bless your catering business, amen.

Human beings don't take change well, and there is a natural tendency for human beings to figure out a way to do things that works well and that gets passed on to continue to do it this way.

So what happens to this basic structure of worship that comes out of the Jewish synagogue that has this tremendous emphasis on freedom? It also comes about in a gathering in the church that has a very loose form of government.

I'll give you another quick opinion. The form of government in the early Church appears to be that every local assembly of believers is headed up by a gathering of men called elders, and that there is some connection between one group of Christians led by a group of elders and another group of Christians led by a group of elders. And there are also deacons in there, and exactly what the difference in the two are is not absolutely clear, but there are... clearly the elders have to do with teaching and praying, and the deacons more with meeting the needs of people in everyday life.

And, if we look at the Scripture, it appears that the first century Church is a Church where all elders are bishops, and all bishops are elders.

But remember that the Church undergoes 300 years of persecution. And we have very few records of those 300 years. We do have records. We have people like Irenaeus. We have other people who tell us things. We have a document from the second century called the *Didache*. And they give us pictures of how people did things. But I want to submit to you something: we didn't get the printing press until Gutenberg in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, and when people are just hand writing things, a lot of stuff is left out. We have a very sketchy record of what went on because the Church throughout the Roman Empire is an outlaw religion, because the moment that someone says, "Ἰησοῦς κυριος" (ee-ay-sooce' koo'-ree-os), Jesus is Lord." That was a revolutionary statement that was viewed as treason by the Roman authorities, Jesus is Lord, because Caesar is lord.

And so Christians are persecuted. Wave after wave of persecution takes place until in the year AD 313, a Roman general named Constantine claims to have seen a vision in the sky of a cross and these words in Latin: "*In hoc signo vinces*," in this sign conquer."

He won this battle outside of Rome, the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, and in the next year he issues an edict called the Edict of Milan that granted freedom of religion to Christians.

Within the next decade, Constantine becomes the emperor of the entire Roman Empire, and he makes Christianity, not simply a legal religion, but **the** legal religion. And this had profound, profound impact on two areas, at least, in the Church.

Number one is government, because as soon as you get in bed with the government, you begin to operate under the pressure of the government. And so there is always a payback. And the government wants a church that it can control, not a loose affiliation of believers gathering together in homes and other places in a loose confederation. It wants a rigid structure.

And so the Church in the fourth century begins to develop clearly a hierarchy that is very much modeled on the civil government structure of the Roman Empire, so that you have a head preacher in every big city called a bishop. And then you have those elders or presbyters: they are pastors of local churches, and each local church has one elder instead of having many, and that special elder called a bishop.

Then you have the five principle cities of the Roman Empire. You have a super big shot bishop called a patriarch—Alexandria, Egypt; Constantinople; Rome; Jerusalem, of course; and Antioch. So you have a change in the structure of government because it has become... because the church becomes an agent of the government, an agency of the government.

But you have something else that happens. And this has to do with worship. You have a worship structure that is designed to be uniform. And so instead of a spontaneity within biblical structure of the reading and the preaching of the Word, exhortations and words of encouragement and testimony, singing of psalms and praying and sharing together and having the Lord's Supper and doing baptisms, you have got a much more rigid structure. And remember this. The beauty of New Testament worship is utterly dependent on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is pretty empty.

And so what happens is, as you can imagine, around 325, when Christianity becomes the legal religion—then if you want to win office, you have got to become a Christian. And so what happens is people who are not converted begin to flood into the Church. And in order to appeal to those people, the Church begins to take the customs of paganism and adapt them to Christianity.

Now that is not totally foreign to a biblical way. For example—and I won't go into this all now. I am trying to do this as very much a quick sketch—but in the Old Testament you have pagan mythology. You have a chaos dragon, a pagan mythological figure called Tiamat, and you have celebrated, for example, in the book of Job, the victory of Yahweh, the victory of the God of the Bible, over Tiamat, over this chaos dragon. In other words, even in the Old Testament, people are familiar with the mythology and pagan ways of doing things, and they take those myths, and they adapt them, and they say, you know, in effect, "Yahweh is bigger than your god. He defeated the dragon. He did this. He did that. He destroyed Rahab." And Rahab is not only the name of the prostitute of the book of Joshua, but is also the name of a chaos monster. And so the Lord defeated her.

In other words, what I am saying is, even in the Old Testament, the prophets are familiar with the literature of the Ancient Near East, and they address that to lift up the Lord.

So what do you find the Church, now, the Church after it becomes a legal and, indeed, **the** legal, the established religion of the Empire? It begins to take in wholesale, the pagan structure and bring it into the Church.

So what you have is—and see if you can get this picture in your mind. You have the Old Testament where everything is explicitly laid out. Do it this way, only this way, seven times, not six, we sprinkle the blood.

You come into the New Testament which is simply a transition through the synagogue to New Testament worship, and it is very much a simple structure with a lot of freedom, spontaneity, but done decently and in order.

But when the Church becomes legal in the early part of the fourth century, there, then again, begins to be imposed on the Church, a hierarchy of government that is actually under the Roman government because the head of the Church in the Church of the fourth century is the Roman Emperor. And he remains the head of the Church until Byzantium falls in 1453 to Osama Bin Laden's predecessors, the Islamic, Ottoman Turks.

So that is the head of the Church, the civil government. But the worship also becomes very colorful, very structured. And since the Church is an agency of the government, the government wants everybody to do it exactly the same way. They don't want a group of believers over here doing it one way and another group of believers doing it this way. And so there begins to be imposed on the Church, a liturgy, a form of worship that is very structured. And as this goes on, many things are added to the worship of the simplicity of the New Testament Church.

Christmas, for example. Where did Christmas come from? Well, Christmas came from, for example, in Roman days among the Romans, the various winter festivals. People want that. People miss that. And, again, if the New Testament Church depended on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to be rich and meaningful, and if you now have lots of pagans coming in, you have to give them something. You have to appeal to them.

And so what I am saying is that, a little here and a little there, things are added.

Easter. What does Easter sound like? By the way in the King James Version of the Bible actually the word "Easter" occurs. It is odd because it has not translated the Greek word "Passover" which is there, but they have actually put the word Easter there which isn't there in Greek at all. But where does the word "Easter" come from? Easter sounds like what? Ishtar, exactly right. And so, going back to pagan mythology with Ishtar—by the way, Esther, the heroine of the book, the only book of the Bible that never mentions God or prayer—the name Esther sounds like Ishtar because she is like her cousin, Marduk-kai—Marduk was the chief God of the Babylonian pantheon. And so you have Ishtar and Marduk-kai, the hero and heroine, and what is amazing in that story is such unlikely people as a girl who allows herself to get in a pagan beauty contest and end up as a harem girl for a Persian king—who takes the name—who hides her Jewish name, Hadassah, Myrtle, and becomes, "Hey, look at me. I am Ishtar, sex goddess."



So why do we have Easter eggs? Why do we have bunny rabbits? Because Ishtar is the goddess of sex, of reproduction. Eggs, rabbits.

My point is what? My point is that as the Church encounters paganism, it seeks to adapt itself to the pagans to draw the pagans in. The trouble is after about 1000 years of this stuff, the gospel and the simplicity of Christianity with its worship and its government that is so simple and its simple gospel message which is: Turn from your selfish sinful self and come to Jesus and the blood of Jesus washes your sins away. And if you put your trust in him, you are going to heaven—becomes incredibly complicated.

And so along comes the Protestant Reformation, and it encounters a Church that is still the Church and it still has the gospel in it, but it is the gospel that as when I was a Scout master and would go out the next morning, after the camp fire the night before, and I want to have some coffee, there is no camp fire, so what I have to do is: I have to get down on my hands and knees, and I have to clear away some of the ashes, and I have to blow on the wood that is down there. And as I blow on that wood, the fire that is still there, if I blow away all of the ash, the air begins to get to it; it ignites again. I have got a little camp fire. I put some twigs on it and before long I have got a roaring fire, and I have got a nice hot pot of coffee.

That is what the Reformation is. The Reformation is an attempt to rediscover what is still there in the Church in terms of its preaching of the simple gospel and of its simplicity of worship.

So there are two basic approaches that come out of the Reformation.

And you say, “Well, this is pretty tedious.”

But bear with me for a moment because I want us to see why we are the way we are.

So there are two basic approaches in the Reformation. There is the approach of Martin Luther who was a godly man in spite of the fact that he also was a man who messed up in some major areas. But this is how he approached worship, and this is how he approached the government of the Church.

He said, in effect, pardon my language, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

In other words, he is saying, “If it doesn’t distort the gospel, if it doesn’t hide the gospel, leave it in place.” And so if you go into a Lutheran Church you discover that its form of worship tends to be, tends to remind you a lot of the way that the Roman Catholic Church worships or the Eastern Orthodox Church, heavily liturgical, lots of things, lots of structure, the church calendar, all these kinds of things.

Well, a short time after Luther comes on the scene, a follower of Luther, a Frenchman—had to be a Frenchman—John Calvin. And he goes to Geneva, and he attempts to do a more radical reformation than Luther. And so what he does is he wants to recapture the simplicity of the worship of the early Church. So he attempts that. He is not perfect, but he attempts that, and so he wants to get more and more of the ashes away so that primitive way of the church's worship would be there.

In the following century... and I won't go into elaborate history here, but as a result of a lot of people, Henry VIII dies, his son Edward succeeds him. Edward lives about five years, and then his half sister, Mary—known in history as Bloody Mary—who is not the gal we love—and she persecuted the Church. All of these people from England who were following this way left to go to Europe, most of the leaders who weren't killed. They study under Calvin. They come back, and they attempt a more thorough reformation of the Church of England. Remember the Episcopal Church, its worship style reminds you a lot of Catholicism, as well.

And so what happens is around the turn of the century into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, early 1600s and King James, there is a lot of foment. And a group of people called the Puritans—they are nicknamed the Puritans because they want to really purify the Church. They believe that Luther was really wrong for leaving anything in place that wasn't based only on the Bible. And so the Puritans come up with a very simple—but I want to say, perhaps, overly rigidly, overly legalistic, simple way of worship. And so the form of worship of a Puritan service would be very similar to the synagogue service that we studied. And I am almost through. And it would be that you would have the Word, you would have the exposition of the Word or the teaching of the Word. You would have prayer. You would have the singing of the Psalms. Because the New Testament doesn't have any musical instruments, there would be no musical instruments. And you would have the Lord's Supper, and you would have baptism and you would take a collection. And that is the simplicity of it.

I think, however, that the Puritans were, perhaps, overly legalistic about that. And so I am going to conclude my little historical survey by coming back to this.

As I look at the history of Christianity in terms of worship, and I have given you just a thumbnail sketch, and I hope I haven't lost you, I see that as the Church in its freedom sought to adapt itself to different people in different cultures, there were dangers in that, and the dangers were in becoming rigid.

“This is how we have got to do it.”

And it becomes passed on. And if we do that long enough over generation after generation, fundamental basic stuff gets hidden. The Reformation tries to pull that away: Luther, moderately, Calvin and particularly 100 years later under the Second Reformation in Scotland and in England, a much more thorough reformation.

I think if we remember this basic thing we are okay. All of the New Testament proof texts that the Puritans used in order to say that they would legalistically chop worship off are not really about formal worship at all, but—as in the case of Colossians two—they are about life, because a fundamental thing about worship in the New Testament, as over against the Old is this: all of life is worship. All of life is worship.

“Whether you eat or drink,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “do it all to the glory of God.”<sup>12</sup> And so the emphasis is, then, not on binding the conscience of someone. It is on allowing people freedom to be who they are.

Pete is going to be different than Diane. Dick is going to be different than Diane and Anne and Steve whom I have know for 20 years, almost. People are different. There is freedom. And so it will come down to one last thing, and then I will see if anybody has any questions.

Take the issue of Christmas. Christmas is not a Christian holiday. But Christmas has been adapted by Christians to share Jesus with people. Today we find ourselves in 2006 with a holiday that people are often times interested in the Church during that time.

You have Christmas music. You have other things. You can get people who are pagans to come to church. What should be the church’s position? What is the Puritan position? No Christmas. It was against the law in Colonial New England; it was against the law to observe Christmas. Why was it against the law to observe Christmas? Because they were Puritans. And they wanted, you know, if it wasn’t explicitly taught in Scripture, you can’t do it.

What do I think? My opinion is that we should neither impose Christmas on others—because that would be imposing what isn’t in the Bible—nor should we say in an absolute way that it has no place. I am saying that what the Church did in the very beginning is not absolutely wrong. It has just got a dangerous tendency to it.

What did they do in the very beginning? They adapted some things in the pagan culture to reach the pagans. But we have to be aware there is a danger of that, that it is very easy for the tail to wag the dog until the Church, in effect, becomes pagan.

Now, that is my own view, and I realize I have done more history tonight than I have done exposition, but remember the lengthy review of the two previous teachings.

Anybody got any questions or comment that we have? We are running out of time. Any comments or questions?

Let’s pray.

*Lord, help us as we navigate the difficulties of worship in a book, the New Testament, that really gives us a lot of freedom, that we not be bound so rigidly as our Puritan fore-*

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<sup>12</sup> See 1 Corinthians 10:31.

*bears who gave us the Presbyterian Church and the Congregational Church and the Baptist Churches, Lord, tended to be very rigid. And yet, Lord, not to swallow hook, line and sinker a way of doing things that fundamentally turns the Church into a pagan institution.*

*Lord, we pray that we would hold fast to what is clear in the Scripture and we could be gracious and allow a lot of room for diversity in those things where the Scripture does not rigidly forbid us or rigidly require us. Help us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

**b**