

Bible Special 06-10-24b

Let's pick up our study now. We are looking at the distinctives that are at the heart of the Orthodox Church, which in fact are embraced by most Christians. Most Trinitarian groups, denominations, churches, believers, hold to the emphasis, at least, maybe equivalent to some of the details, but the emphasis in these first seven creeds.

Catholics, formally, officially, the Roman Catholic Church, acknowledges and embraces these first seven councils. The Orthodox Church embraces and acknowledges and really focuses on the truths in these first seven councils. Protestant churches, Protestant denominations, generally look to these as informative, but do not assign them the same weight and authority that the Catholics and the Orthodox Churches do.

We look to them as helpful early statements of the understanding of the Church, of Scripture, but we do not assign the same importance to the formal Church that the Orthodox and the Catholics do. Therefore, these formulations by the Church don't rise as high in our esteem. We say, let's go back to the Scriptures.

That's the real authority. That's the place to get your details and your confirmation. Why go to the Reader's Digest condensed version when you've got the Scriptures as your true inspired authority? All creeds, all formulas and formulations are necessarily going to be inferior because they are man's attempt to repackage, rephrase.

This is why I don't particularly like paraphrases. The New Living Translation and the Good News for Modern Man and some of these are paraphrases where someone is trying to help you by changing the language and the terms and the units of measure and the terms of phrase and the figures of speech, trying to help you understand what they think Scripture is teaching. But as soon as you get your human hands on the things of God, you just get them muddy and dirty and greasy and they become sullied and indistinct.

It's always best to go back to Scripture. At a minimum, go back to your English Bible. And if you get the chance, get out of Strong's and go back even further.

Any of you all can get a Strong's Concordance. It's a concordance of all the words and whatever your favorite version is, New King James, King James, New American Standard, NIV, whatever you want to study with. I would suggest the New King James or the New American Standard for study.

But if you get a Strong's Concordance, every English word is keyed with a number. It's usually like a four-digit number. And then in the back of the concordance, there is a Hebrew dictionary and there is a Greek dictionary in there by numbers and the words are transliterated.

Now, it's not perfect. You can't make a lot of deep thought by doing this kind of study because you don't have context, you don't know the language, you don't understand the way these

languages work. But that shouldn't discourage you.

You should go in anyway and look at the words, look at the actual pieces of text of Scripture and look at where you see the word for deliverance and the word for salvation, sotiria, sotirios and so on. Look at the words that make up the text and see where they are the same and where they are different. Why is it that we saw this on Sunday, the word for wind in Scripture? Every place in the New Testament where you have the word wind, the Greek word behind it is anemos, A-N-E-M-O-S.

It's like anemometer or see anemone. When I was a little kid, younger than Anne Lynn, I sent off to the Audubon Society and they sent back these little boxes that had a booklet and stamped things that you could tear out and paste in on the pages because the pages were printed in black and white, but these stamps were in color and so you could put your color illustrations on the pages. It was a lot of fun.

And they sent a card and it had fossils on it and there was a shark's tooth and there was a sea urchin and they were the first fossils I had ever seen. I didn't see fossils in Southern California, but here they were right there on a card in front of me. And I remember they had a picture, one of the glue-on pictures was a sea anemone and it looked like a sea urchin and they were talking about the difference between a sea urchin and a sea anemone that had these waving things and they called it anemone because the little hundreds and hundreds of arms seemed to wave in the wind of the sea, in the current, the water current.

Well anyway, anemos is the word for wind, all the way through the New Testament, except one place. And it's our chapter on Sunday mornings, John chapter 3, when Jesus is talking to Nicodemus and he says, in the English that you have, it says, the wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes. That's the only place in the New Testament where a different word is translated wind.

And it's the only place in the New Testament where that word, pneuma, which is normally translated spirit, is translated wind instead. It's the only place. So why do we do that? Well you wouldn't even know it if you didn't have somebody like me to tell you or if you have a Strong's Concordance and you happen to be going through John 3 and you look up and you'll say, oh wait a minute, this word for wind's got a different number than all of these other words for wind in the New Testament.

You can verify this for yourself if you think, I don't know my Greek, why, get your Strong's out and look up that Strong's key number in the back and you'll see the word animos and you'll see pneuma and you'll see the other places where there is. So anyway, it's very fascinating. But, we're talking about the text of Scripture and how important it is to go to that as your authority.

These creeds are interesting from a historical perspective but we are not people of the creed, we are people of the book. We are not believers in the creeds, we are not believers in the church, we are believers in Christ. And the Bible is the mind of Christ.

What do you call yourself when somebody says, what are you, a Buddhist, a Hindu, or Jewish, or what are you? What do you say? I am a what? Christian. Christian. We're not Popish, we're not Ists, we're not any kind of an Irian or Ist or Ism, we are Christians.

So, our authority is the word of God. This is what distinguishes us as Protestants. But, we're looking at these creeds.

By the way, somebody asked about the Apostles' Creed, which is not one of those that's really listed here. It's even shorter than the Nicene Creed I read to you earlier. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died, buried, descended into Hell. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into Heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, communion with the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

That's the Apostles' Creed. I had to memorize that one now that I think of it. As you can see, it is a bare bones core that you find expanded in the Nicene Creed.

Well, what we're looking at is the seven ecumenical councils. So, Nicene Creed, 325 A.D. This is very early. This is around the time of Constantine when he said, look, you Christians get together and figure out what's right and we're going to get rid of everybody else.

The second ecumenical council was Constantinople. It was about 55 years later. 381 A.D. Same century, but Constantinople.

What does that tell you? Constantine was the big impetus behind getting these things done. He had moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople, so that's where the next big council was. Constantinople, 381 A.D. They revised the Nicene Creed a little bit.

And they said, we've edited this somewhat and now you can't change it anymore. And that version is the version that's used by the Orthodox Church. Let me just give you the rest of these creeds.

I'm not going to say a whole lot about them. The third ecumenical council is Ephesus in 431 A.D. At this one, they started really turning the Catholic Church into Catholicism as we understand it today. Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. Remember now, this is 400 years after Christ.

They said at Ephesus that Mary was the Theotokos. T-H-E-O-T-O-K-O-S Theotokos This means the one who gave birth to God. How many times have you heard these Catholics say, Mary, mother of God? She's not the mother of God.

In case you didn't hear me, Mary is not the mother of God. For crying out loud. But this is an old, old error.

All the way back to 431 A.D. These yo-yos got together and said, Mary is the mother of God. The Bible never says that. Mary didn't give birth to deity.

Jesus Christ always existed. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God.

The Word was God. Mary wasn't around to give birth to the second person of the Trinity. It inflames my nose.

So, some churches already started getting upset. And to their credit, the Assyrian church over there, not far from Constantinople, they said, this Theotokos thing is nuts. We don't forget you and forget your council and your creed.

We don't go for that. So, thumbs up on the Assyrians. Now, the fourth council 20 years later, 451 A.D., is the Council of Chalcedon.

Council of Chalcedon. There are some things that we don't have time to go into that they said were heresy. If you want to look up monophysitism and eutychianism and so on.

But, the big thing that happened at Chalcedon is they clarified the understanding of the two natures of Christ. If you remember at the very beginning when we were talking about the essentials of Christian faith, do you remember that? Do you still remember what it is? The person and the work of Christ. The very first thing.

The person of Christ. He is what? Undiminished deity and true humanity in one person forever. Well, this is where they figured that out.

This is where they put this into a creed at Chalcedon, 451 A.D. His humanity and his divinity. Well, there was an oriental orthodox bunch. The eastern, eastern, eastern, eastern orthodox.

Oriental orthodox guys said, we're peeling off. We don't want to go with this creed. The fifth council, they met at Constantinople again.

This is the second Constantinople. 553 A.D. This is 100 years after Chalcedon. There were some new heresies that came up.

There were some more Aryans. There were some more Nestorians. And there were some more monophysicists.

And they said boo on all of those. Not a whopping lot at the second council. The sixth one is the third council of Constantinople.

And this one was yet another 100 years later. 680 to 681. The heresies were getting more refined and more technical.

This council met largely to repudiate monothelitism. Don't even worry about it. But they affirmed that not only did Jesus have two natures, but he had two wills.

He had his divine will and he had his human will. There was a subset of this that we won't talk about. Then finally, the seventh council is the second council of Nicaea.

The first council was at Nicaea. The last council was at Nicaea. 787.

Seems like they have to get one of these councils off their chest about every 50 to 100 years. 787. They officially proclaimed it to be a good thing to revere and venerate and treat with honor icons.

Statues. Medallions. Stained glass windows.

You get a symbol of a thing and you can sort of pretend like the real thing is behind that and you can venerate that icon. Of course, most Protestants today would say wearing a Saint Christopher, putting a plastic Jesus on your dashboard, none of that stuff is going to do any good. There's nothing in symbols.

But you can see where if you make a symbol out of the bread and you start investing that with supernatural power, if you make a symbol out of the cup, start investing it with actual power, as the Catholic Church does, it's really blood, it's really Christ's flesh, well then you start thinking other things can have sort of mystical, magical power. The whole idea, what do you do if a vampire's coming? How do you stop a vampire? Jesse, how do you stop a vampire? Cross, right? You know what that is? That's iconism. A crucifix.

Hold up a crucifix and the vampire will cover his eyes and run away. Seriously, this has its roots in this veneration of icons. It has power.

If you touch him, it'll burn him or something. This is just nuts. You could make a cross out of a couple of tire irons.

That doesn't give it some kind of supernatural power. Anyway, that was Second Nicaea. They said, venerating icons, thumbs up.

Good idea. Protestants liked to go, a few years earlier, there was a smaller council at Constantinople. It's like the Fourth Council of Constantinople.

And when they got together at Constantinople, they said, boo, thumbs down on icons. We're not going to venerate them. Everybody likes to have seven councils, because seven is a good number.

Now, why is this important? Because, when you get to the Eastern Orthodox Church, that's who we're going to talk about now. 1054, the big schism. They break off, we're in Constantinople, you're in Rome.

I excommunicate you, I anathematize you. Goodbye, we hate you. Stay away.

These Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, it's huge, over in the Middle East, and Southern Europe, and that kind of thing. They, one of the big reasons that they split, in the 1100s, had to do with one of those phrases in the Nicene Creed. Remember I said, pay attention to this, when it says, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father? Well, one of the subsequent conclusions, one of the revisions they made to the Nicene Creed, in the next council, was, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

In Latin, this is philokoke. And, the philokoke controversy, you can't believe it. I mean, okay, where does the Holy Spirit come from? It only comes from the Father.

Oh no, it comes from, because what did Jesus say in the Upper Room? I will go away, but I will send you the Spirit. Other places, the Bible says the Spirit comes from the Father. Some places, it comes from the Son.

So, one Creed said, the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son. Well, the Orthodox guys said, no, no, no, no, no. The Spirit only comes from the Father.

The Son comes from the Father. The Spirit comes from the Father. And actually, this was the last straw that helped split them off from what became the Catholic, Roman Catholic Church.

So, now you've got the Orthodox Church. They don't have a Pope. They were sick of the Pope by 1100 AD.

They said, that whole Pope thing really just is a non-starter. So, they don't have a Pope. Instead, they have Patriarchs.

And they'll have a Patriarch in different regions. So, it's kind of like a headless Catholic. You know, the Catholics have the Pope, and then they have bishops and cardinals and things.

Well, the Orthodox Church has the bishops without the big white hat bishop called the Pope. They just cut the head off and left all of the subordinates. So, they have this Patriarch thing.

So, now, here's the ones you'll hear about. You have the Greek Orthodox Church. Where do you think they are? In Greece.

Good answer. You have the Russian Orthodox Church. Where do you suppose they are? That would be Russia.

They have the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Where would you think? Bulgaria. They have the Church of Alexandria.

Okay, it's a little tougher now. Where's Alexandria? What country? Very good. The Church of Jerusalem.

And the Orthodox Church in America. You've got the American Orthodox Congregation. Some of them will tie themselves back.

There are Russian Orthodox Churches in America. For a long time, right across the street from Dallas Seminary was a Greek Orthodox Church. And then the seminary bought their building and turned it into the bookstore and the cafeteria.

But what is now the DTS bookstore and cafeteria used to be the Greek Orthodox Church. And they would have their... What's that layered Greek stuff people eat all the time? Baklava. They would have a Greek food festival down there and have baklava and black olives and all kinds of stuff.

I went down there and couldn't hardly get to my classes for all the Greek food eating people down there. So Greek Orthodox, there's a lot of these. But these are the major divisions of the Orthodox Church.

You need to know this and know what they believe. Because if you go to Beirut, Lebanon, and they say, Hi there, I'm in the Christian militia. What kind of Christian? Are you a Bible Church Christian? Are you a Baptist Christian? No, they are Orthodox.

They are Eastern Orthodox. And so, what do I know about what they believe? Well, they're real heavy on the creeds. And the Orthodox Churches in general, all of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, are really big on two things.

They're really big on ritual, on what they call liturgy. You know how to spell liturgy? It's not L-I-T-T-E-R. It's L-I-T-U-R-G-Y.

Liturgical things. This has to do with ceremony, with ritual. They're huge on it.

The Catholics, all of them were doing that around 1000 A.D. So they invest a lot in these ceremonies and rituals. And they also are not so interested in the specifics of doctrine. They're more interested in the experience of your faith.

How does it work itself out in your individual life, in the life of the church. They're not so much nitpicky. They say, you know, we've got the creeds, and that eliminated the major errors, and said the major things about Christian faith.

We don't want to nitpick about the rest of it. We're more interested in having robes, and windows, and smoke, and mirrors, and all of that. And coming away as holy people who live a holy life.

Both individually and collectively. That's the emphasis. And it's not necessarily bad.

There's a lot of good things you can say about the Orthodox Church. They are looking for communion with God. Adam and Eve had fellowship with God.

God walked with them in the garden. The Fall separated man from God. And the Orthodox Church believes that your goal is to get back to that fellowship.

Back to that communion. They don't look at it so technically. We in the West tend to look at things from a legal standpoint.

And we have partly the Catholic Church to thank for this. Your sins have created a penalty. There is a judicial pardon that must be granted.

We look at it in terms of courts, and penalties, and legal systems, and judgments, and slicing and dicing the law, and jurisprudence, and punitive action, and so on. The Eastern people, they're more touchy-feely about it. They say the big problem with sin is it has moved you away from God.

What you need to do is don't worry so much about is it a covering, or is it a pardon, is it a redemption, is it propitiation, what's the nature of the jurisprudence of it. You just need to get yourself moved back in the direction of God. Which has some things to commend.

That's not necessarily a bad way of looking at it. This process of being reunited to God is an action of the Holy Spirit. And the Orthodox Churches recognize the role of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, they sort of over-emphasize it. And this is why the filioque controversy got so much in their craw. Because they're really big on the Holy Spirit, and they don't want you monkeying with where the Holy Spirit came from, or how He does His work.

So, they think that the Holy Spirit can sort of charge you up through the rituals, and through icons. Remember, they believe all of those seven creeds, including the last one, that made a big deal out of the icons. And they think that this is sort of an avenue for the Holy Spirit to charge up your battery and give you a mystical return to closeness and fellowship with God.

Now, this is one of those close but no cigar things. Is the ministry of the Holy Spirit important in enabling and energizing our fellowship with God? Absolutely. But what is the avenue by which He does that? It is the Word of God.

The problem with making it liturgy and icons is, where do you get your liturgy and icons? From the church. Hi there, I'm your Orthodox priest. I'm your Orthodox patriarch.

I'll help you get close to God by providing the rituals and the liturgy, and providing the icons, so you really can't get there without me. And this is a failing of the human psyche. This is one of our problems, being fallen and being corrupt, is we like to be important.

We like to be important to other people. And we like to be the go-to guy. Well, if you want something, you've got to come to me.

And it's a bad thing. One of the things I love about our fellowship is that it isn't just a way to come and wait for me to say something. All of you all have great ideas.

You have great questions. You provide a great gift and a great blessing when you come and when you talk. And when you express yourself amongst fellow believers, all of us get to be a blessing to each other.

And I do the main part of the teaching. But what I generally do, I feel like the cook who brings the big platter with a giant piece of meat on it, and plops it down on the table, and then everybody else starts carving and saying, oh, look at this, and look at this, and look at this. And we all get to explore it and enjoy it together.

It's not good to have a mono... I can't even put an ending on the prefix there. To have one guy or one church that you depend on for everything. Christian fellowship is supposed to be just that.

We are built up and edified, it says in Ephesians, by that which every joint supplies. Everybody is a part of the body of Christ. We're not all a mouth.

I'm kind of a mouth guy because I do the teaching. Some people are hands and they do the practical help. Some people are the feet who go and who do missions and evangelism.

Some people are the elbow and they just are there to be a blessing to people who are having to do something else. And because they're there, others of us are encouraged. Others of us are comforted.

Others of us are provided for. Others of us have our questions answered or get an insight that, you know, I could stand up here and talk all day and something is unclear. You can speak to one another and in two minutes, oh, well, that makes perfect sense.

I wonder why Sam didn't say that. Well, Sam cannot be all things to all people. That's why we are a fellowship.

This is the mistake that the Catholic Church made. We will be the brokers between you and God. In fact, who made this mistake originally? Shining One Son of Darkness, right? The guardian angel of the throne room? Come through me, I'll decide who comes on the stops and the goes.

I'll broker a relationship with God. And this is a danger for parents. It's a danger for anybody who teaches.

It's a danger for anyone who, for whatever reason, has personal charisma and people come to them for answers or whatever. You cannot be someone else's pope. You cannot be someone else's priest.

You cannot be someone else's helper in relationship with God. You are a priest. You have Jesus Christ as your high priest, and you as a believer are a priest.

You don't need a priest talking to a priest talking to a high priest talking to God. We go directly

to God the Father because Jesus Christ has ordained us as priests. And we go straight to God's throne.

So this is the problem in the Orthodox Church. They've got a lot of things right. A lot of their beliefs are good, and a lot of their emphasis is good, but they are weighted down, just like the Catholic Church, with liturgy and with the belief that there are these objects that will funnel the Holy Spirit to you, and that's how you'll be drawn closer to God.

And without those objects, and without the Church, and without its liturgy, you can't get there. And that's just wrong. We go straight to the Father.

That's why Jesus died on the cross, to make a new and living way. Hebrews chapter 10. When that veil tore in the temple from top to bottom, there's God, here's us.

Nothing between. And for priests and churches and Orthodox and Catholics to go running into that gap and stand there saying, well now I'll be the new veil, is just wrong. Well, that's the Orthodox Church.

So now we've got the two major divisions of Christianity figured out. We've got a pretty good idea of what they believe. Next time, we're going to come together and look at the Reformation and how the Protestant Church came into being, and believe it or not, there's only about a half a dozen major categories in the Protestant arena.

And we'll see where we fit into all of that next time. But be thankful to God that you have the Spirit and the Word, and that's all you need. Father, thank you for the truth of your Word.

Thank you for the gift of the Spirit. We pray that he will find us teachable and impressionable so that we can live our lives in a way that pleases you and glorifies our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name.

Amen.