

Truth (Part 1)

Why is Truth so Difficult?

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I am going to begin with a quote from a man that many of you will recognize. His name has a great deal of notoriety, and especially those people among us who are a little bit older will certainly recognize his name. At any rate he said,

The truth frequently seems unreasonable. The truth frequently is depressing. The truth sometimes seems to be evil. But it has the eternal advantage. It is the truth and what is built thereon neither brings nor yields confusion.

The man who said that was Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company. The problem is, on many occasions, to recognize truth. Winston Churchill was the one who was quoted as saying, "Some men practically fall over truth, but pick themselves up and go on as if nothing happened."

This search for, and the recognition of, truth is an age-old problem. It began with Adam and Eve. They fumbled the ball right in the Garden of Eden. There is such a variety of opinion that is available to all of us that it is a major cause of confusion and a major reason why there is such a diversity of systems among men.

Take government for example. One can take his pick of democracy, communism, fascism, some system of royalty, or even anarchy if one wants that, and I think that we will find that there are a variety of options available within each one of those forms of government as well.

How about religion? Christianity, Islam, the New Age, Oriental, and seemingly endless varieties within those as well. In the economic realm one can delve into socialism, and there are many varieties of that, or capitalism, and there are varieties of that. Which one is one going to take? Which one in any one of these systems is going to be the true one?

Because we are people who are supposed to be in a lifelong search for truth, I am going to pursue one aspect, a major force that is impacting upon our search for truth. The reason I am doing this, at least at this time, is because truth played such a large part in overcoming Satan.

I think that I can go on record as saying that to us there is nothing that is more important than truth. We are commanded by God to live by faith. He says in a couple of different places in the Bible, "The just shall live by faith." That is, on the one hand, a statement of fact. On the other hand, it is a command. So we are supposed to live by faith.

Do you want your faith to be in something that only has as its basis human reason? If it is just human reason we might put our trust for several years into something that we have considered to be true and then, to our consternation, find out that what we put our faith in was wrong.

This is very clearly seen, I think, in areas of health, diet, medicine, and it seems as though yesterday's truth is something that we find out today was wrong, and that all along they have been guiding us

with something that really was not that helpful at all. So they said things like, "Oh, you have an upset stomach? You're pregnant? Morning sickness? Take thalidomide. It's the best thing on the market to settle you down."

Several months later a person had a baby and the baby was deformed. It was not until years later that they found out that the cause was the medication that was given to settle down the stomach so that one would not have morning sickness. But that was considered to be a truth, a prescription that would, if followed, give a person ease and relief from that.

I use that as a way of illustrating that when we are dealing with something that is involved only with human reason, there is a pretty good chance that maybe human reason is faulty, and maybe we should not be putting our trust in it. Maybe somewhere there is truth that is pure and absolute.

Do you not want to put your faith in something that is absolute? That is the way the Word of God is presented to you and me. We are confronted with a choice. Are we going to live according to the Word of God, or are we going to live according to the word of man?

If it is looked at in this regard, then I would have to say that faith is the most important thing in life.

Here Jesus is on trial before Pilate just before His crucifixion:

John 18:37-38 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."

Jesus said that the very reason that He came to the earth was to bear witness, to give testimony on, and to declare truth. He further stated that anyone devoted to truth would listen to Him. That word "listen" means more than just "hear the sound of." It indicates "the use of" as well. The life of the person who is listening to Him would be characterized by submission to truth.

Truth, as it is spoken of in this context, is what we might consider to be ultimate truth—the very things about which the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus involved. We are talking about the purpose and the plan of God. Another way of saying it is that He is talking about the true knowledge of God.

Let us consider Pilate because he is an important player in regard to truth, and it was his question that triggered this response that indicates to you and me how important truth is. It is the very reason Christ came. That is important!

Pilate, I think that we would have to say, must have been a fairly well educated and a fairly successful person. I think that if he had the normal ambitions of someone in government, recognizing that he was a part of the bureaucracy of a very great empire, he undoubtedly wanted to advance himself further in the Roman government. He is introduced to us as a procurator, which would be the equivalent of a governor of a state today.

He was a man accustomed to searching for and sifting evidence in order to make judgments. That is what was happening here. He was being called upon by the Jews to make a judgment in regard to

Jesus. What he was looking for, at least ostensibly, was truth. He was a man for whom the search for truth was an ever-present responsibility if he was going to do his job well, impress his superiors, and move up the ladder of success. He was a man who had power over life and death.

Now in what kind of an attitude did he ask this question? Was there the sneering and cynical and sardonic humor of a disillusioned man accustomed to people twisting the facts to ones' advantage so as to win the case? It is very evident in the dialog that takes place in this whole trial that Pilate knew that the Jews were doing this, that they were twisting the evidence in order to get a favorable judgment on their accusation against Jesus.

Pilate, knowing this, was of course wondering whether this Man who was standing before him was of the same ilk that he knew that they were. Thus the question, "What is truth?" So, was it cynical?

Or maybe there was a sort of impatient weariness. Maybe the wistfulness because of a constant but unsuccessful search for something that, as far as he was concerned, was still a mystery. He had not found it himself.

Or was there maybe the scornful haughtiness of one schooled in mighty Rome who felt that it was impossible for these unschooled provincials to teach him anything?

Then on the other hand, maybe it was honestly and sincerely asked, because right after this he got up and he said, "I find no fault in this Man."

Now brethren, are we not surrounded by truths about God in His creation? We are practically drowning in it. We are surrounded with it. It is all around us. The creation gives witness of His creative power. It gives witness of His providence in the way that He supplies the needs for men. It gives witness of His wisdom. It gives witness of the awesomeness of His thinking, and of how great that He is.

And yet, sometimes truth is a very precious and difficult item to come by, because we are surrounded by such an overwhelming mass of evidence that we are confused at arriving at what really is the truth, and we think of it as being virtually impossible. On the other hand, sometimes we are confronted with such a dearth of information that it also makes conclusions to be equally difficult.

In addition to that, the information that we do receive in our search for truth is sometimes misleading and sometimes it is downright untrue. And of course there are factors within us, like prejudices, so that we really do not want to recognize truth whenever we see it.

Would you agree with me that if I said to you that there is a very good chance that when you were younger that you were more likely to say, "I know!" than you are now, and that as you grow older that you are more likely to say, "I think" rather than "I know!" because in youth there is the tendency to view things within very narrow parameters?

But as our experience increases we see that most situations that we are involved in are puzzlingly complex, far more complex than we ever believed, many-sided, and we begin to see that there is almost no opinion that does not have at least some truth, some facts within it that are true.

I once read of a man by the name of Charles Kingsley. He was a scholar of some reputation a number of years ago, a historian. In fact he was the Chairman of the School of History in a major English

university. He resigned his Chair in History on the ground that there was no such thing as history, that there was no such thing as the dependable record of past events as they actually happened, but only inaccurate accounts colored by prejudice and bias.

But brethren, there are areas of life that we must be able to say with conviction, not, "I think" but, "I know!" Notice, Jesus was asked whether He was a king. His reply, if we can paraphrase it, was, "Not in the normal sense." He said, "At this time, My kingdom does not consist of territory."

We know that in the future it will, but remember the question involved the present, as Jesus was then, and so His Kingdom at that time did not consist of territory, but rather in individuals. It was in their heart or in their mind. It does consist of those who hear the truth that He bore witness of.

This is important to you and me because He is saying that it is the response of individuals to His truth that is going to differentiate His people from those who are of this world. That is what He said. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, then My servants would fight. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

So how one responds to the truth which Jesus of Nazareth gave to you and me is going to determine whether we are going to be in His Kingdom. It is going to be what separates us from the rest of the citizens of Planet Earth. With that in mind, turn to John 8.

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

This is just another way of saying what He said in John 18:37. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." Those who hear the voice of Christ, those who hear His truth are going to then submit to that truth. That is what is going to separate them from the world.

John 8:32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

When we add one more scripture to this—John 17:17, where He said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth,"—we ought to be able to see that it is not enough just to assent that something is true, but rather it must be continued in. That is what the word "abide" means. It means to "live in," "continue in," "be a part of." The thought, the idea is of "making use of."

Let us read that definition back into verses 31 and 32.

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in [make use of] My word [the truth], you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

If one does that, then, it will separate him from others because they are not continuing in the truth and the path of their lives will diverge. "Can two walk together except they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3)

Now there are all kinds of truth, but the Bible generally confines itself to those truths which concern God's purpose; those truths which, if used, will enable us to be in the Kingdom of God. It focuses on life's most important values.

The fundamental question all of us consciously or unconsciously—and it is *much* better consciously—are going to have to give answer to is this: What will I give my life to? Is it going to be to a career? Is it going to be to pleasure and entertainment? Is it going to be to amassing wealth? Or is it going to be to God's purpose?

Now what we use as the means to achieve these things is going to determine how our life is lived. The priority, of course, is already set by God. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" is what He says in Matthew 6:33. His calling to you and me was for the very purpose that this should become what we are going to—or what we are now consciously devoting our life to—achieving.

This is where truth comes into the picture. It is through the recognition, the acceptance, and the use of truth or these values that I spoke of a little earlier, by which we cross the border into His Kingdom.

Then what do we do? If you can think of yourself as crossing the border into something, what do you do then? Do we just settle down and not press on to the fullness, or we might call it maturity, that there might be in Christ? Unfortunately many do this.

Consider this: A disciple is a learner. Discipleship—that is, the state of being a disciple—begins when a person accepts what Jesus says about Himself and about life and about God's purpose as being true. But it is continuing in, it is pressing on, that gives spiritual freedom from sin and its effects. That is what is being spoken of here.

In John 8:31-32, these people to whom He was speaking had begun. They believed in Him. Now He is taking them one step further in terms of truth. You have got to continue in it. It is not good enough to just step across the line with a measure of commitment, acknowledging that what we have so far is true. There must be a continuous searching for more truth that pertains to this top priority in life—seeking first the Kingdom of God. There must be a continuous process on to the end so that there is growth to full maturity.

But it is right here, right at this point that the devastating effects of Laodiceanism comes in. A Laodicean is one who, having judged his spiritual condition by wrong standards, has allowed himself to become distracted from his calling, and what Jesus is saying here in John 8:31-32 is that discipleship is a continuing process. Therefore, the search for truth never ends.

This whole mess on earth began whenever Helel believed a lie that he told himself. This is important to this sermon because self-deception is still a major problem, one which perhaps gives us more trouble than any other and it keeps us from growing as we should.

I am going to begin with an episode in Judah's history which illustrates how bad a condition can get whenever people deceive themselves that a certain action that they have taken will be "okay." This appears in Jeremiah 5 and the time of this event was, of course, during the prophesying of Jeremiah.

The scholars feel Jeremiah began preaching sometime around 625 BC. He preached right through the kingship of Josiah and on into those unfortunate descendants of Josiah ending with Zedekiah, and he preached right through the invasion by Babylon. Babylon came in three waves against Judea. The first one was in 607 BC, the second one was in 593 BC, and the third one was around 586 BC, and that was the *coup de gras*. By that time Judah was completely subjugated and under the authority of the Babylonians.

This time period then was at the very height, you might say, or the very depths of Judah's degeneration. God gave Jeremiah a job to do in verse 1:

Jeremiah 5:1 "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her."

Can you imagine that? God asks Jeremiah to see if he can find *one* person who is actually seeking truth. Of course, I think we have to understand this primarily in a spiritual sense. Somebody who was seeking the truth of God. This is what applies to you and me. I do not think that we can limit it to that entirely. Maybe God was saying, "Jeremiah, see if you can find anybody who is seeking truth, even in a general sense," at least from the things that are described here.

Jeremiah 5:2-4 Though they say, 'As the Lord lives,' surely they swear falsely. O Lord, are not Your eyes on the truth? You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return. Therefore I said, "Surely these are poor. They are foolish; for they do not know the way of the Lord,"

The first thing that Jeremiah did was go out on the street, you might say. He went into the working places. He went into the shopping malls. He went into the gas stations. He went into the areas that the common man would be working and mixing it up in. He went into the schools maybe. I guess he asked a lot of questions, kept his ears open for what was going on, and he came to the conclusion that there was not anybody there seeking truth.

Then he got to thinking, "Well maybe we can excuse these people because they are not well educated. They are not people of power. They don't have their finger on the buttons of power. They're not people who are high up where they have influence to affect things. They are not making decisions for a nation. They are not the high and the mighty. They are not sitting in academia. They don't work in the think tanks. I'm going to go to those places."

Jeremiah 5:5 "I will go to the great men and speak to them, for they have known the way of the Lord, [now these people are not ignorant] the judgment of their God. [But what did he find?] But these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds."

Can you imagine how discouraging that must have been for Jeremiah? God gave this nation an awesome promise. "I won't allow you to be invaded. I won't allow your culture and civilization to come to an end. I won't allow your young men to be killed in warfare. I will rescue you. I will give you peace. If we can just find somebody who is seeking truth."

What we see here is a nation of corrupt leadership and apathetic people. It is an appalling and horrible picture. Let us jump all the way to verses 30 and 31. We will begin to see some of the root of the problem.

Jeremiah 5:30-31 "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets [the preachers, the religious people, the people who should be leading the people in terms of morals, of ethics, and setting the spirituality of the nation] prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?"

Every piece of information that we need regarding what was going on in Judah is not supplied in chapter 5, but the basic lie came from religion. It was Baalism, if I can give a general term. It began whenever the ministry deceived itself into allowing a bit of falseness to creep into their preaching, and convinced themselves that a little bit would not hurt at all. It would be all right. And what they did over a period of time was they gradually severed their mooring to God's law and the restraints that are contained therein.

The implication in verses 30 and 31 is that even those who say they are looking for truth really are not. I mean when a society gets this corrupt, they have no idea what truth is anymore, and the people loved, God said, to be lied to.

A few years ago, practically the whole nation at one time or another watched the Senate hearings, the trial of Oliver North. And it was interesting, at least in terms of this sermon, because Oliver North admitted that in the national interest he lied to a Congressional committee. That was his justification. It was in the national interest to lie. Oliver North came out of those hearings a hero. The people loved it because of his persona. He "looks" so nice. He "looks" so clean. He was so dynamic. He was so sharp. He was a liar! And the people loved it.

That is not unusual because we have reached that state in our American culture where lying is taken for granted—in the political arena, in the relationships that we have with other nations—it is part of the game. Everybody knows that everybody else is lying in the national interest. Nobody trusts anybody else.

President Eisenhower lied to the whole nation when Gary Powers was shot down in a spy plane (the U2 incident) over Russia. So in a report to the nation, he lied.

Did President Nixon lie to us? Of course he did. And who knows how many other lies are done in the name of the career of the politician.

Jeremiah 5:18-19 "Nevertheless in those days," says the Lord, "I will not make a complete end of you. And it will be when you say, 'Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us?' then you shall answer them, 'Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods [Baalism] in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.'"

You see, what that lying by the ministry did was it shook the people loose gradually, over a period of time. It shook them loose from their covenant with God because they soon began to forget that their relationship with God is maintained by obedience to Him. And then the people were taught—you might say "deluded"—into believing that they could rely upon God's grace because He was so loving, so forgiving, that His justice and His purpose of building character was downplayed. "Everything will be all right . . . hunky dory . . . okay . . . smooth things."

In terms of ethics this is the way the preaching hit the people. We will make it very clear. "You shall not surely die." Does that sound familiar? "Neither shall evil come upon us." This is what the ministry was saying. "You'll be okay." Only I am making it very plain. "You don't have to pay the penalty for your sins. Did God say you shall die? You won't die. You're an immortal soul."

It is the same old story. It is the one that Satan pawned off on Adam and Eve at the very beginning. He just uses variations on a theme, bending people away from the simple truth of God. "If you go this way, you're going to die." That is simple. That is clear. It is true.

Now we have today: Christmas, Easter, Halloween (the very day today), Lent, Mardi Gras, Good Friday, Holy Sunday, and Ascension Day. People love them. Did we not just say the people love to have it so? People love them.

Let us ask a simple question. Do you not think that at some time in people's lives they somehow stumble across the truth regarding these days? Just like Winston Churchill said, remember, people stumble on the truth but they pick themselves up and they go on as if the truth did not mean a thing.

Every Halloween there will be, depending upon the size of the newspaper, an article about where Halloween comes from—about witches and goblins and demons and the druids and Satan, Satan-worship, demon-worship. People will go into those things, and people will read that and say, "Isn't that cute? Isn't that interesting? How quaint." And go right on.

Why? The same thing happens with Christmas. "Well," it will say in the newspaper, "it doesn't really appear that Jesus was born on December 25th." People can figure those things out. They do not need to be converted.

They can figure other things out about Christmas as well. They see that it lines up perfectly with the Saturnalia and the Brumalia. They can see that many of the things have direct connections to paganism.

They see the same things in regard to Lent and Easter. They say the same thing. "Isn't that quaint? Isn't that interesting?" And they may even talk about it at a Christmas party. "Oh, you know what I read about Christmas?" And they chuckle and say, "Isn't that interesting?" But they brush themselves off and they go on.

Do you know why? Because religion, because the ministry is not confirming them in the truth of God. They are not hearing it from their Methodist minister, their Presbyterian minister, their Catholic priest, their Anglican priest. They are not telling them the truth. At least, we might say, there is some justification for why the person on the street goes on in his ignorance and error. And it really is a sad thing that "religion" is lying to them.

Brethren, that is what God is describing in Jeremiah 5. It was the underlying problem that the ministry did not respond properly to God. They passed on, little turns away the truth of God, little by little, year after year, until it came to the place that the truth of God was unrecognizable. It did not happen in great leaps and jumps but a little bit at a time. Do you know what it is called by the scholars? It is called "syncretism," a joining together with something else. We will get to that a little bit more later.

Religion represents just one area of life about which religions lie, or we might say, blunt the truth, because what people believe regarding religion has wide-ranging effects on how people conduct the business of life. What people believe about the purpose of life affects ethics and morals. It reaches into every area of life and it ultimately determines the quality of life itself.

It impacts on economics, business and work ethics, education, government, marriage and family life, and child rearing. Where else? Things like heaven and hell, and the immortal soul. Homosexuality, adultery, and fornication become looked upon as being okay if you really love the other person. It impacts on disrespect for authority, and the rearing of children without corporal punishment.

They say, "Have safe sex. Use a condom." Do you know why they push that? So that people can continue in their perverted lifestyle without seemingly having to pay the penalty. "Nothing will happen." That is exactly what Satan said to blunt the truth of God. Satan said it so simply. "You won't die." These people who say, "Use a condom," are not even looking beyond the fact that the lifestyle itself is evil. They are deceiving themselves. They are hiding from truth.

Now in our day and age the religionists have shut their minds to the gospel of the Kingdom of God and thus they have deprived mankind of the very reasons why they should turn to the truth of God. The ultimate goal is of supreme importance because in this case it gives us something to point our lives toward that requires that we do something with our life right here and now, and if we are going to do something with our life right here and now, then it becomes absolutely necessary that we look for truth.

Think about the gospels that these people are preaching out there. They do not require much of the individual in terms of doing anything for himself. If I can perhaps even *oversimplify* it, they say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." without ever going on to expound to people what the term "believing" means. And that blunts the person's search for truth because the idea is that if you just step across the line into the Kingdom of God, that is through acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ, you are saved.

We cannot afford to do that. The search for truth is of the highest priority for you and for me. Unfortunately audiences out there have itching ears and because of the deception they want to hear things that do not require a great deal of commitment or, we might say, work for them to do. We do not want to allow ourselves to drift into that kind of thinking because we will be like the person that Mr. Armstrong described so frequently as being one who wants to see how close to the edge of the cliff that we might get and still stay within God's good graces.

Jeremiah is the same man who said in Jeremiah 17:9 that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

If we put this thought together with the teaching that is in John 8, then we can understand that if we put our faith in other things it is going to blind us to the acceptance of what is really true, because our deceitful heart is going to work to turn us away. See, if you continue, you will know the truth, but the deceitful heart does not want you to continue.

We have to understand this is part of the ground rules by which we operate our life, that we have been bombarded by the same basic concepts that bombarded Pontius Pilate, because human nature never changes, because Satan never changes. Names and faces may change. Things within society in terms of man's technology may change, but human nature **never** changes because the same forces that were at work when Adam and Eve were put in the Garden of Eden were also at work when Pilate lived, and are also at work when you and I live. We have been bombarded by the same forces that hit and impacted on the life of Pontius Pilate.

Think of this. The apostle Paul stated in Romans 7 that sin still worked in him. It is thought that the apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans in the AD 50s, so that was somewhere around twenty years after Paul was converted and sin was still working within his life, twenty years after conversion.

Do you think that it is still working in your life? Certainly it is, and we would be either arrogantly proud or totally ignorant if we were not aware and did not admit to the fact that sin still works in us. It is something that we have to be constantly aware of. It is part and parcel of our thinking processes. It is deceitful and it is going to exert its influence in trying to turn aside from the truth of God.

Where did that nature come from? It came from Satan the Devil, and he was a murderer from the beginning. He was a liar. He still is a liar, and it says in John 8 that it is part and parcel of his nature to lie, that lies come out of him as naturally as truth comes out of God. So this deceitful heart is going to try to blunt our mind from the recognition of truth.

Those things that impacted on Pontius Pilate, and impact upon you, we might call "philosophies about life." These philosophies purport to show us how to live. They undergird every aspect of our culture—American culture, Canadian culture, English culture, Norwegian culture, Swedish culture, Russian culture, Chinese culture. It is everywhere. Philosophies that are somewhat different and somewhat the same, and they undergird the systems in which people live—the educational system, the social system, the business systems, the religious systems.

The Bible warns us in Colossians that some of these philosophies have a show of wisdom. That is, they appear as though they are true. We might go so far as to say that they have within them principles that are true. But we have to be very careful because the whole package, though it contains some parts that may be true, is not from God. He does not endorse it, and He would call it a lie.

Let us go back to Colossians and we are going to look at something there because it is very important that we understand this.

Colossians 2:8-10 "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

Galatians 4:8 "But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods."

Just put yourself in that. When you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. Remember Satan is the god of this world. Paul in another place said there are lords many and gods many [I Corinthians 8:5], but we know there is only one true God. There are many who want to pawn themselves off as god, and each of these has "truth." Or let us use a better word, "philosophies of life."

Galatians 4:9 "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?"

Did you notice a phrase that was similar in both places? In Colossians 2:8, "according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world." In Galatians 4:9, "the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?". There are many in this world who try to tell you that those traditions of men, the basic principles of the world, the weak and beggarly elements, is the law of God. Not so. Not so at all.

Can you imagine an apostle of God calling the Old Testament "weak and beggarly"? It is atrocious even to think that. No, he is appealing to these people about something that is so bad that he is trying with all of his heart to help people to be able to see it and to turn away from it.

All of us are aware that in the book of Daniel there was a great vision, a statue, the idol that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of where there was a head of gold, the shoulders and upper part of the body was silver, and then we have got the bronze, and then finally we get the iron, and then the feet of iron and miry clay. We understand that is the system that in the Bible is called "Babylon."

In the Bible, we also understand that this system spread worldwide. Not that Babylon itself spread worldwide, but Babylonish thinking, organization, systems, economics, educational, religious, social systems, that is what spread worldwide. It is interesting that the head was Babylon. That is where the brain is. That is where the thinking is. That is the part that dominates and guides and directs the rest of the body.

So what God is showing is that the Babylonish thinking, the Babylonish system spread to Medo-Persia, spread to Greece, spread to Rome, and then we bring it right down into modern times. It is everywhere. The only difference is that each culture has put its own identifiable stamp on it, so that the Japanese culture, which is really Babylonish in its roots, is a little bit different from Chinese, or Indian, or Russian, or European, or American, but they all have the same roots, and those roots go back to Babylon. It is a simple picture, but it explains the truth that is missing from this world's thinking.

If you begin to understand, then, we can say that at the very least the philosophies that dominate life have largely come out of Babylon. But these verses here in Colossians 2:8-10 and Galatians 4:8-9 show that there is taproot that goes even deeper than that and this is interesting.

Here in *Barclay's Commentary* on the book of Colossians, pages 136-137, he is explaining the Greek word *stoicheion*. It is that word which has been translated "the basic principles of the world" in Colossians 2:8 and the "weak and beggarly elements" in Galatians 4:9. It is the same word, *stoicheion*. And he says here that the word has two basic meanings:

Literally things that are set out in a row. It is, for instance, the word for a file of soldiers. [Soldiers march in a row.] But one of its commonous meanings is the letters of the alphabet [ABC], because they form a series or a row. Now because "stoicheion" can mean the letters of the alphabet it is also very commonly meant or used to mean elementary instruction in any subject. We still speak of learning the ABC's of a subject when we mean "taking the first steps in it." It is possible [he says] that this is the meaning here. . .

[However there is a second meaning] Stoicheion has a second meaning. It means "the elemental spirits of the world." [Did you catch that?] The elemental spirits of the world

and especially the spirits of the stars and planets. There are still people today who take astrology seriously. They wear signs of the zodiac charms and read newspaper columns which tell what is forecast for them in the stars.

Now I am going to read something from the *Interpreter's Bible*. It is also on Colossians 2 and we are going to read here from pages 191-193 in Volume 11:

Paul now comes to the cardinal error of this "philosophy." It teaches men to propitiate the elemental spirits of the universe instead of giving their allegiance to Christ. The word *stoicheion* has a very wide range of meaning. The word may be taken in the sense of elementary things such as the ABC's [and he goes on to explain its use there, but then on page 192 I am leaping ahead to another place] . . . [or it] Indicates that Paul is speaking of the *stoicheion* as rivals of Christ, objects of human allegiance, who are set in the place that belongs to Christ alone. . . . The doctrine which Paul combats then appears to involve an exposition of the nature of the physical world and man's place within it in terms of astrological determinism and that instruction in the cult practices [which are shown a little later in the chapter, asceticism, taboos, and angel worship], which will propitiate these astro-spirits and enable the devotee to attain to the fullness of life.

Okay, let me make this very plain. The apostle Paul is stating to these people in Colossae and also in Galatia that human reason aided by demonic inspiration, elemental spirits, is the source of the philosophies that undergird our societies, and if one is searching for truth about life and its purpose, that philosophy is not the place to look for it. Our fullness is to be found in Jesus Christ.

In this particular place, this particular philosophy is stating that things are astrologically determined. Now listen to the impact of this. If a man's nature and destiny are determined by the elements that make up the physical world, then human personality is not spiritually free and self-determining. One simply does not have free moral agency.

This philosophy is still alive today. Are people still reading the astrological charts? Is there a New Age religion? Is science telling us more and more that character and personality are not determined by moral choices, but rather by particular combinations of genes and hormones? They are [telling us that]. And the New Agers are telling us that our life is determined by the harmonics of crystals! It is still alive today. Nothing has changed!

If we are going to be searching for truth, we absolutely will not be looking for it in the philosophies of men. The fullness of truth is found in Jesus Christ.

If one uses this astrological determination, both the sense of guilt and forgiveness vanish. Do you know why? Because the person really is not responsible for his actions. "The stars made me do it." "Satan made me do it." It is a deception that human nature is very quick to grab onto. It is a self-deception. That is the very direction that Satan wants to lead people and feel very comfortable, then, with their lives, because now they can blame it on their genes. They can blame it on their hormones. They can blame it on the stars. They can blame everything on circumstances that are beyond their control.

This, then, brings us to the fundamental difference between philosophy and the true religion. With philosophy, the final arbiter is human reasoning. With the true religion, the final arbiter is God's revelation.

One final thing: I do not want us to lose sight of what I am trying to impress on our minds here and that is the reason we have so much trouble with truth is because that for most of our lives we have been immersed in cultures that use the name of God, but in actual fact are anti-God.

Romans 8:7 "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God. . ."

And that is where the philosophies and cultures of men have come from. They came from human reason aided and abetted by demons. So they have a show of wisdom. They have bits and pieces of truth in them, but they are not the whole truth regarding the most important things in life. Those things are revealed in God's Word and it is so difficult to shake the influence that this world has had on us.