

The Covenants, Grace And Law (Part 20)

Colossians (A)

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Given 12-Aug-95; Sermon #196

In the last several sermons in this "Covenants" series, we have begun taking a more serious look at specific verses that are points of contention regarding our responsibility to God under the New Covenant. A part of the answer to these verses lies in an area that at first seems to have nothing at all to do with solving the problems of these difficult scriptures.

Part of the problem has been our tendency to look at these verses too narrowly. I think we have to learn to look at them much more broadly, to fit them into the big picture. If we do not fit them into the big picture correctly, then I do not think we are going to get the proper specific understanding of them.

Those of us who have been in the church for quite a period of time, and maybe witnessed Mr. Armstrong speaking personally before a congregation, know that every once in a while he would, with his jowls shaking and his head going back and forth, say something like, "You people are not getting it!" What was generally behind that statement was his belief that people were getting too focused on specifics, that they forgot the overall purpose of God's work and what their responsibility was within it.

Faith is the foundation of our relationship with God. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is *the* substance of things not seen. We cannot see God, but faith is the substance. *Substance* there is the English translation of the Hebrew word *hupostasis*, and the translators felt that the word *substance* fits what the word *hupostasis* means at that particular place.

It is interesting because we have generally lost what the English meaning of the word *substance* is. It means "to stand under." Sub-stand. It means "that which stands under." Faith is *that which stands under*. Faith is that which supports our belief in whatever it is for which we hope, and faith has to be taken into consideration in understanding these difficult scriptures of which the apostle Paul generally was the author.

This is where everything begins, and it continues to be of major importance right up to the resurrection of the dead. Then we are going to see God as He is, but now we have to walk by faith; and salvation is by grace through faith. Faith, then, is germane to everything in Christianity. Faith in what? It is not just in the fact that God is, but also in what He is doing.

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For me, the S.P.S. of the entire Bible—S.P.S. being a Spokesman Club term meaning "Specific Purpose Statement"—appears before you even leave the first chapter of Genesis:

Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness."

That is what He is doing! Is that hard to understand? Right at the very beginning of the Book, He tells us what He is doing. The project, the work began with the formation of man as physical but in the bodily form of God, and it will not end until we are in the nature of and the character image of God.

In order to do this, God gave us **free moral agency** for the purpose of enabling us to choose to follow His way and assist in the development of His image in us, because we cannot be in His image unless we voluntarily choose to do so. Then the character is truly ours, as well as being truly His, because it is inscribed in us as a result of what we have believed and what we have done with our lives in our experiences.

God is not merely eternal; God is supreme in every quality of goodness, and in Him absolutely no evil dwells. In the Bible, this goodness is called *holiness*, and holiness is transcendent purity. It permeates every aspect, every attribute of God-life. God's character is holy, and it flows out from Him in acts of love. It is therefore impossible for Him to do anything evil. This is the state towards which He is drawing us.

Law has to be seen in this context. If you tear law from the context of God's purpose, then you can come up with anything you want to say about law. You can say, "Oh, it is all done away," or "We do not need to do this." However, you cannot tear it away from the purpose of God, and there is a reason why you cannot.

Is God a law-abiding God? Brethren, the creation screams at us that He is! Everything that He creates operates by law, and it does because it came from this wonderfully orderly and organized Mind. It is a reflection of what His mind is like because this is the way He is. He is a law-abiding God, but we cannot see Him—not literally, with our eyes. It is here that faith enters the picture: We can see evidence of Him, and we can believe what He says. His law outlines the way that He lives. Do not ever forget that! It is **the way** of this holy, law-abiding God.

Turn with me to Psalm 119:1; we are going to look at this to lay a foundation for this sermon. I want you to apply this verse to YOU.

Psalms 119:1 Blessed [favored] are the undefiled in the way [Then he describes what "the way" is.], who walk [live, conduct their life] in the law of the LORD.

For just a minute, look at that word *undefiled*. Do you know what that word is describing? You know what the word *undefiled* means. It means "those who are not polluted, those who are not contaminated." What is God concerned about in terms of His way of life? He is concerned about those who are not contaminated by living, or conducting their lives, different from His way; that is, those who are not defiled or contaminated by sin. *Undefiled* is referring to those who are holy!

Those who are pure in the way that they are living are the ones who are blessed, favored. Therefore, "blessed" or "favored" are those who are **holy**—those who are living in the same way that this holy God lives. Of course, we are not doing it perfectly; but we are on our way. *Undefiled* explains who the subjects are going to be here.

Notice also the use of the specific article: *the way*, *the law*. It is not the general article *a*. He is talking about specifics. Blessed are the holy in *the way*, and the way this holy God lives is described by His law, which the apostle Paul—the man who it is claimed did away with the law of God—said is holy, just, and good.

Tell me, is this God—who has a project going in which He is making man in His image (Mr. Armstrong expressed that as, "God is reproducing Himself")—is He creating in us His holy character with our cooperation by making free choices? Is He about to destroy the very directions that He has given for us to know how to live, if we are to cooperate with Him?

I do not know about you, but I came here by way of a map. It showed me the way to get from Newark to Summerville. It said to follow I-78; and then follow I-287. However, I had received wrong directions. That is no kidding. The wrong directions came from the motel. They said to exit from 287 on exit 10. I found out later that there is no exit 10. The way was not undefiled. Evelyn and I got off the way, and we got lost.

What if God did that to His law, threw parts of it out, so that we would not know the way. Do you know what would happen? The same thing that happened to us: we would be without directions, and we would be lost! Is God about to throw away the directions on how to be like Him (that is, the part that we are supposed to perform)? It is ignorant to think anything like that.

The idea that God has thrown out His law or parts of His law only applies if God is only trying to save people, which is the general theme of most of Protestantism. Yes, He is trying to save people; but that is NOT all that He is trying to do. He is the Master Potter. God is, above all, **Creator!** He is creating. He never stops creating. Jesus said,

John 5:17 "My Father works hitherto, and I work."

God is working salvation in all the earth, and His work is what He announced at the very beginning. He is reproducing Himself; He is making man in His image. However, we have a part in this: We have to cooperate. We have to come to the place where we want to be as He is and to give our part in seeing that this is accomplished by and through means of faith and obedience to His way of life.

If all God wanted was company, He has company with the angels, and there may be millions of angels. If we want to throw figures around, just using a few things out of the book of Daniel along with the book of Revelation, it might be calculated that there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 million angels that He has created. He has plenty of company! He wanted more than that.

God wanted **companionship** of those who are *of like kind*. We might make a human analogy in that humanly we might have "company" by having a dog. Can a dog take the place of somebody who is like you? No. God wanted companionship on a family level; that is, companionship with those who are like Him. Because of this, we are in the position that we are. We are now a part of that awesome purpose, and it has become our responsibility—our life—to choose to live according to the pattern established in His law.

There is a strongly held concept in this world's Christianity that what Jesus did, and what Paul interpreted, did away with the law of God. Another less strongly held concept is that, even though the Old Testament is considered the Word of God, it is somehow less important than the New Testament.

This is probably a problem because the Old Testament contains much of God's clearly-stated laws for man, and that principle stated in Romans 8:7—that the carnal mind is enmity against God—is always at work. That carnal mind wants to do away with the responsibility of keeping that law. Therefore, it denigrates the law of God. It denigrates the Old Testament because that is where much of the clearly stated laws of God are contained.

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In addition, another reason why the Old Testament may be looked down upon is that it contains a great deal of history and prophecy, and people tend to think that is not nearly as important. It also contains what we call the Wisdom sections—the poetic areas like Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. People may consider them to be good reading, but somehow or another those books are not as authoritative to them as the New Testament.

The result of that is an ambivalent relationship with the Old Testament. In fact, it is considered so unimportant that people will buy only the New Testament and give it as a gift to somebody, or read it as though they have the whole story there. The Old Testament is figuratively held at arm's length. Even when it is read, it is read with less attention and concentration than the New.

Is Paul's true attitude reflected in what people normally think? The answer, of course, is no. Paul's attitude is reflected in what he says in his epistles, and his epistles show that the common assumptions are wrong.

I am going to read some things to you that are quotations from a book entitled *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* by E. Earle Ellis. These were compiled by Keith Hunt; I did not do it myself. I think you will find Keith's research to be quite interesting.

Quoting from Mr. Ellis:

The writings of the apostle Paul reveal a person immersed in the content and teachings of the Old Testament. H.A.A. Kennedy, after a study of Paul's religious terminology, found that practically every leading conception in this field of Paul's thoughts had its roots definitely laid in Old Testament soil. Whether he is giving a dogmatic proof, an analogy, or an illustration, or merely using language with which to clothe his own thoughts—the Old Testament appears frequently throughout the Pauline Epistles.

The Pauline use of the Old Testament appears in three distinct forms: (1) quotations proper, (2) intentional and casual illusions, (3) and dialectic and theological themes.

Dialectic is an argumentative form of writing—first this side and then that side, as if he is holding a conversation with somebody.

The task of defining quotation in Pauline literature is rather difficult, and the

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decision in the end is somewhat arbitrary.

I do not know if you have ever tried to go back to the Old Testament to find what Paul was quoting. I will tell you sometimes Paul's use of Old Testament scriptures is wild. You and I, if we did not understand who he was, would think that he was misinterpreting what the Old Testament said.

He was not the only one. Have you ever read what Peter said in Acts 1, when he was quoting two different Psalms to justify the appointment of an apostle to take the place of Judas? Read it sometime. If Mr. Armstrong had done that, you would have thought he was guilty of twisting Scripture. However, this is part of Scripture. Once you see the way Peter used it, then you say, "Yes, that is right." They were being led by the Holy Spirit. I know that has happened in these carnal people's writings about the law being done away.

Going on with the quote now:

The apostle probably did not have our concept of quotation marks.

That is what I mean. It seems wild the way that he uses them sometimes.

He certainly did not give to it the sanctity which characterizes our literary usage. Some references which are introduced with an explicit citation formula echo only the tenor of the passage. Others, not given even the dignity of an introductory conjunction, follow the Old Testament text verbatim.

Paul quotes the Old Testament 93 times. Although the quotations are drawn from sixteen Old Testament books, three-quarters of them are from the Pentateuch [33 of them], Isaiah [25 of them], and Psalms [19]. The citations appear both singularly and in combination.

Paul's attitude of the Old Testament cannot be understood apart from his attitude towards it. To him the Scriptures are holy and prophetic. They constitute the very oracles of God, and they were written for our learning.

In the past several sermons, I have quoted Romans 15:4 to you a couple different times,

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together with I Corinthians 10:11, and showed you that the Old Testament was written with you and me in mind. It was not written specifically for those in the Old Testament times under the Old Covenant. It was written for YOU AND ME under the New Covenant! That is what people want to do away with—the very thing that was written for our salvation. That is, the beginning of the story.

The essential difference between Paul and the Jews in their employment of the Scriptures was an interpretive one. In Paul's eyes, the Jews stood on the Scriptures. Though they extolled it, they erred because they did not know it.

They were unconverted. In Romans 10:1-3, what did he say? Paul said, "My fellow men (those Jews), they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge." Do you remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees? He said, "Full well you reject the commandments of God that you might keep your own traditions." Their interpretation was way out. They had the Scriptures, and they revered them; but they did not understand them. Therefore, they could not use them properly.

Continuing the quote:

In I and II Corinthians, Paul teaches expressly that a correct understanding of Scriptures is impossible without the Holy Spirit. The place of the Spirit does not lessen the authority of the Old Testament for Paul, nor is there any antithesis between the Scripture and the Spirit.

Besides the Scriptures, there are several other authorities to which Paul appeals to support his assertions. They are (1) the law of nature [He used the evidence from God's Creation.], (2) the conscience of the individual [That was important because other people have had experiences in which they related to God, to eternal life, and to why we are here. And so the formation of their conscience was important to the apostle Paul.], and (3) his own direct revelation from Christ or the Holy Spirit; and also, attached to this, is the teaching of Christ as received through the oral or written apostolic tradition [that is, what he got from the other apostles].

But the Old Testament was not one of those things that Paul counted as lost for the sake of Christ. Indeed, it could only be understood in the light of Christ. For Paul, Jesus was above all 'the Christ.' And to divorce the Messiah from the Book religion [that is, the Old Testament] was hardly a task for a Jew, even one converted through personal revelation.

The sum of this is that the Old Testament cannot be separated from the New Testament, nor can the New Testament be separated from the Old Testament. The story of the Old is found in the New, and the Old cannot be understood without the New. Their various elements are entwined like so much cooked spaghetti on a plate. Both parts must be used in conjunction with each other to be fully understood.

When somebody tells you that the laws have been done away, you can understand that person is ignorant of very much understanding. I am not saying that he is stupid; I am not saying that he is not sincere; but he is refuting the very words of his Savior, who said that not one jot or tittle of that law would be done away until all is fulfilled. Everything has not yet been fulfilled.

In my last sermon, we saw that even the sacrificial laws are not done away. They are needful to ground us thoroughly and to give us understanding in the sacrifice of our lives in service to God and to man. This is because sacrifice is no longer the slaughter of an unintelligent and uncomprehending beast. Instead, it has been changed to the intelligent and the deliberate sacrifice of the self. Those laws apply in their spirit, and we need them to understand the spirit.

Remember that the word *spirit* is drawn from the word *intent*, and the word *intent* comes to us from the Latin language, and means "to stretch out." The spirit of the law is **the stretching out** of the letter of the law! There can be no stretching of the law unless there is the letter to stretch out.

We also saw, in the book of Ezekiel, that in a later time those sacrificial laws are going to be restored in their fullness physically. God is going to require the Levitical family to carry through with what they failed to do before.

It is because of these things that Jesus could make the statement that He did—that not one jot or tittle will pass from the law until all be fulfilled. This is why it is important to understand Paul's attitude and his use of the Old Testament. He had nothing but the very deepest of respect for it. It was the Word of God. It was God-breathed.

Paul was not doing away with even one jot or tittle in his writings. He was merely explaining the proper function of law in reference to justification and sanctification. Law and grace are absolutely inseparable. They go hand and glove for fulfilling God's purpose.

Probably at least some of us have taken for granted—at least, in some time of our

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life—that Paul was admonishing Christians in the books of Colossians, Galatians, and Romans that the keeping of God's Sabbath and Holy Days was Jewish and that it need not be done.

Listen to this surprising statement. This is drawn from *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* by Conybeare and Howson. They were two Englishmen. One of them was a theologian. (I believe it was Conybeare.) The other one was a historian. (Howson.) They wrote back in the early parts of this century the book, or the work, that is still considered to be the benchmark against which all other works on Paul's life are measured. This comes from page 346:

The festivals observed by the apostolic church were at first the same as those of the Jews. [He is talking about while the apostles were alive.] And the observance of these was continued, especially by the Christians of Jewish birth, for a considerable time.

Actually, that considerable time stretched until the first century church—the true church—was devastated by some of the same things that we have gone through in these past 10 years.

A higher and more spiritual meaning, however, was attached to their celebration [He admits that they were observing them.] and particularly the paschal feast was kept no longer as a shadow of good things to come but as the commemoration of the blessings actually bestowed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

A little later on, they make this comment in reference to I Corinthians 5:7-8, where Paul says, "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us":

In spite of the opinions of some eminent modern commentators, which is countenanced by Chrysostom [Chrysostom was an ancient "father" of the church.], we [Conybeare and Howson] must adhere to the interpretation which considers these words as written at the paschal feast [that is, at Passover time] and suggested by it. The words leaven, lump, paschal lamb, and feast all agree most naturally with this view. It has been objected that St. Paul would not address the Corinthians as engaged in a feast which he, at Ephesus, was celebrating [Now listen to this reason. This is not Conybeare and Howson's reason. It is the opponent's reason.] because it would be over

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before his letter could reach them.

Now, you and I probably will not quite relate to this answer. Remember that they are Englishmen, and they are writing near the beginning of this century.

Anyone who has ever written a birthday letter to a friend in India will see the weakness of this objection." [The slowness of the mail system.] But was the recipient displeased because his friend got the letter there a little bit late?

There was another factor involved in this: God was the one who inspired it, and God inspired it for all time. It did not apply just to that situation that Paul was writing about, but it applied for the church for all time—because God is the real Author of it, not Paul.

It has also been urged that he would not address a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles as engaged in the celebration of a Jewish feast. Now, those who urged this objection must have forgotten that St. Paul addresses the Galatians—undoubtedly a mixed church—as if they had all been formerly idolaters [That appears in Galatians 4:8. Were the Jews idolaters? Of course they were!]; and addresses the Romans sometimes as if they were all Jews. [Romans 7:1]; and sometimes as if they were all Gentiles. [Romans 11:18]

The truth was that they were all Christians. It did not matter whether they were Jews or Gentiles.

If we take [Here he is quoting I Corinthians 5.] 'As you are unleavened' in a metaphorical sense, it is scarcely consistent with the previous 'cast out the old leaven.' For the passage would then amount to saying, 'Be free from leaven as you are free from leaven.' [In other words, he would be saying a riddle that was exactly the same thing.] Whereas, on the other view, St. Paul says, 'Be free from leaven' metaphorically [Now listen to this:] 'as you are free from leaven' literally.

Do you know what these Christians were doing? They were getting the leaven out of their houses! How about those apples?

There seems no difficulty in supposing that Gentile Christians joined with the

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Jewish Christians in celebrating the paschal feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven in the love feast.

They—Conybeare and Howson—can see it. The first-century Christians, both Gentiles and Jews, were getting the leaven out of their houses, and they were not eating leavened bread during the Days of Unleavened Bread, just like the Jews. It seems to me like one of these former associations that you and I all had, telling us now that we do not have to worry about leaven during the Days of Unleavened Bread. However, these unconverted men can see it plain as anything. They then go on to say, "It can be shown that St. Paul still observed the Days of Unleavened Bread in Acts 20:6."

Commentators have to say such things if they are going to be honest with the Scriptures. The Scriptures show the early New Testament church keeping the holy days of Leviticus 23. I want to add something to this by going to I Thessalonians 2:13-14.

I Thessalonians 2:13-14 For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe. [Listen to the evidence Paul is going to give to show that it was working in them:] For you, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in are Judea...

To whom is he writing here? To a Gentile church of which he himself had been the instrument of raising. They were doing the same things that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were doing! Why? They were believing the same Scriptures. They had faith in the same laws. They had faith in the same way of life that the Jews did. They did not do it because the Jews were doing it, but because they had faith in God. They had faith in that God in the same way that the Jewish converts in Palestine did.

Thus, they became followers. The word here is the same as the one that is in I Corinthians 11, where Paul said, "Be you followers of me (be you imitators of me) as I follow Christ." Here was this church in Thessalonica that was imitating the Jewish Christian churches in Judea.

I Thessalonians 2:14 ...for you also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.

I want to pick up something in II Thessalonians 2:10. This is the chapter about the man of sin. This is the chapter about the apostasy that Paul was prophesying was going to take place, because Christ would not return until the church was hit by a severe apostasy. There arises, then, the fight—the war—that is going to take place in people's minds between lie and truth.

II Thessalonians 2:10-11 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And so for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.

II Thessalonians 2:13-15 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth [truth again]: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, [Notice what he says here:] stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

What, brethren, did Paul teach them that he calls here "traditions"? I am going to tell you what my King James Bible says in the margin for traditions: "It refers to more than customs. In view here is the totality of the apostolic doctrine as it was given to them."

We are not talking about the rituals. We are not talking about the ceremonies. He is talking about keeping the commandments of God. He is talking about the Sabbath. He is talking about the Holy Days. He is talking about the way of life. He is talking about salvation by grace through faith, Jesus Christ, and the whole smear. We just read, in I Thessalonians, that they were imitators of the churches in Judea. Pray tell, brethren, what were they doing with their lives? They did not think the law of God was done away.

I have gone through this so that **your faith** will be increased, and so that it will be strong when you understand that Paul was NOT doing away with the law of God. Colossians 2:15-16 does not do away with God's Holy Days. It does not do away with clean and unclean meats, foods. Neither does Galatians 4:9-10, and neither does Romans 14:5. Paul was simply explaining where they fit. They are part of the way of life that, when we make the choices by faith, is going to assist God in creating us in His image.

I will tell you that if we do not live like God does, we will not be in the Kingdom of God. I am not setting a standard here, because I do not know what standard God is going to

have. For each person, it is going to be somewhat different. "To whom much is given, from him much is required." Undoubtedly, the scale is going to be a sliding scale from something that is minimally acceptable to that which is expected. I am sure that a great deal more was expected of the apostle Paul than you and me, because much had been given to him, in terms of what we apply to our lives. Therefore, I am not setting any minimum standard.

If we are not living this way, do you know why we are not going to be in the Kingdom of God? We will not fit! Everybody there is going to be holy. Everybody there is going to live the same way of life, or they are not going to be there.

As a matter of fact, we will not want to be there. Do you know how we will have shown God that we do not want to be there? We will have refused to live **His way of life** as a human being. It is that simple. There is nothing complicated about this. The law of God is not a sword of Damocles that is hanging over our heads. It is the directions, given by a loving God, of how He wants His kids to live.

When you were a kid, you know that your father and your mother said to you, "Do this, do that." They said, "I want you, when you go to school, to follow a certain path. You go down this street, and then that street. I do not want you to deviate." Why do you think that they told you to follow that path to school? Did they hate you? No. They did it because they wanted to see you arrive at school; and, from their perspective and their point of maturity, they decided that was the safest way for you to go.

That is not hard to understand. They wanted you to get to the second grade, the third grade, the fourth grade, the fifth grade, and so forth. They wanted you to graduate from high school. They wanted you to amount to something. They wanted you to glorify them and their family name. They wanted you to bring honor.

What we are going to do is examine the book of Colossians. How much we will get through, I do not know. We are going to begin in Colossians 2, to begin to lay a bit of a foundation. Then we are going to go back to Colossians 1, and begin to see why Paul said what he did. What Paul was presenting, in the book of Colossians, is an argument. It is one side of an argument that leads up to the climax, which is in Colossians 2, from about verse 14 to the end of the chapter.

Then, from that point on, he is giving the solution. However, we will not be going into the solution because, once we go through the problem, you are going to begin to see why he wrote what he did in what is now Colossians 3 and 4.

Colossians 2:1 For I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.

Since Paul did not raise up this church, they were unfamiliar with him as a man. He was somebody that others were quoting, somebody of whom others were saying, "Paul did this," or "Paul did that," or "I was in the presence of Paul when such-and-such a thing occurred." This was his response. This is what he said in that situation.

You will often hear the ministry do much the same thing in regard to Mr. Armstrong. He gets quoted very often. That is the reason why: he was the leader that God raised up at the end time.

Paul had not been there. They had heard of him, but they were not familiar with him.

Colossians 2:5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

These people were following Christ; but the pressure was on, as Paul had heard from somebody else. We will speculate that it might have been Epaphras. It might have been Tychicus. It might have been somebody who is not even mentioned in the book. Somehow the word had come to Paul that the people in Colosse were undergoing a great deal of pressure. The pressure was so great that the apostle Paul was afraid that they were going to crack, that their faith would give away under the onslaught of an attack on them. He was afraid that they would weaken.

I think it is going to become evident as we proceed through this that the problem was a deceptive and persuasive philosophy that appeared to have very many things in agreement with Christianity. The pressure was not necessarily coming from their pagan neighbors, pressuring them to stop keeping the Sabbath or the Holy Days. I think there was undoubtedly some of that, but the main problem was a philosophy that had been brought **into the church** by members, from the outside, and held to be of some value in making Christianity better than that which they had received from the evangelists.

Colossians 1:3-5 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up

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for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.

I will just highlight certain things as we go through here. I want you to notice that we are only into verse 5, and he is already talking about *the truth*. He gives the source of the truth, to be sure that nobody misunderstands. There is the truth about a lot of things. There can be truth about an automobile or any other kind of product. There can be truth about any kind of a human circumstance, or event.

We are talking about a specific truth, though, and that specific truth has to do with that which is contained within **the gospel**. *The gospel* means "a certain message." Paul is already beginning to establish the source of this truth. They got this from whomever it was that took the "good news" to them, whom God used to establish the congregations.

Just in case you think this is not a valid means for setting a foundation for what is going to come, I want you to go to I John 1. I think anybody here who has ever given a speech in which he quoted somebody, or anybody who has ever written a paper in which he did research and extracted from this research certain quotations, knows that it makes a big difference—does it not?—if the quotations come from sources that are unimpeachable. That is what Paul is doing here.

I John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with *our* eyes, which we have looked upon, and *our* hands have handled, of the Word of life.

Who is "we" here? Who is "our"? I will name them for you. One fellow's name was Peter, another one was Andrew, another one was Paul, and another one was John. Why would their sources be unimpeachable? John is telling you why: "We were with the Boss 3 1/2 years. Our Lord, our Master, our Savior—we heard Him with our own ears. We saw Him with our eyes. We watched Him do miracles. We saw Him walk on the water. We touched Him. We ate with Him. We slept with Him." It really makes a difference to have good sources.

I John 1:2 For the life was manifested, and we have seen it...

To whom was he speaking? John was speaking to people who did not have this privilege. Why? Why was he writing this? There were people going around, brethren,

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saying that John did not know what he was talking about. There were people coming around saying, "Oh, that guy is almost a hundred years old. He has Alzheimer's. He can hardly hear any more. His eyes are dim. He can hardly write, he is so shaky." People looked upon him physically, and he lost his credibility. Because they were walking by sight, rather than by faith, they criticized him. John is saying, "Where is your authority to match this?"

Let us delve a little more deeply. Do you know who these people were who were calling John into question? Brethren, they were the same people who were bothering the Colossians! I do not mean individually the same people, but I mean the same system; that is, people who were representing the same system. I will tell you what it was in just a little bit. It was not Judaism.

I John 1:3-4 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Back to Colossians. What Paul is doing, as we get into Colossians 1, is that he is preparing these people to see a clear contrast between what Paul was against and what they seemingly were falling for, what they were being threatened by.

Colossians 1:6 [The gospel] which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and brings forth fruit, as it does also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.

"The grace of God in truth." What is he beginning to say? He is saying, "Here is the truth. What you are being tempted by is not truth." He is not saying it directly yet, but he will. God, writing through the apostle Paul, is a master of psychology.

Colossians 1:7 As you also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.

Epaphras was either the man who was used to raise up the church, or he was their pastor. The feeling of the commentators is that he was probably the man who was used to raise up the church, and that the pastor at the time this was written was one Tychicus. Epaphras was probably also in the area, in the background, as well.

Colossians 1:8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Epaphras seems to have been the man who brought the message to Paul of what was going on in Colosse, and asked Paul's help in countering it.

Colossians 1:9-11 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it [their problem], do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled [Filled with what?] with the knowledge of His [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God [Not other kinds of knowledge, but the knowledge of God.]; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.

The key thing in those verses is a *specific knowledge*—knowledge of His will, knowledge of God. It is not knowledge about God. It is God's knowledge that we are receiving.

Colossians 1:14-17 In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

What Paul is doing here is exalting Jesus Christ; and that is important to his argument, as we will see in chapter 2. First we have the gospel. That is where truth concerning this situation is resident. Now he is exalting Jesus Christ. The way he is doing that is using the word that is translated "firstborn" two different times. In one section, he is talking about *chronological preeminence*. In other words, Christ was before. The second time he uses it, he gives *status preeminence*. Christ was not only **before** the sources of what is coming a little bit later on, but He is also given preeminence in terms of **authority** over what is coming later on in the argument.

In verse 18, he establishes Christ as the head of the body, the church. Then, beginning in verse 20, he brings in Christ's death for us for our forgiveness.

Colossians 1:22-23 In the body of His flesh through death, to present you

[you Colossians; and, of course, us] holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight: *if* you continue in *the* faith...

There is a stipulation. There is a string. There is a rope. There is a qualification attached to being presented unproveable and unblameable in God's sight. He is talking about glorification. Remember that the Colossians were being weaned away. They were being threatened by something that was very persuasive to them.

Paul is establishing, "Here is truth. It is in the gospel. Here is authority—Christ, in terms of status. Here is chronological preeminence. Here is Christ presenting you before the Father, and you will be brought into the Father's presence in glorification IF you continue in the faith."

Faith here indicates the body of teachings, **the truth**. It is a warning that there is a condition attached to completing the fulfillment of God's purpose: They have to remain faithful. Here we get back to faith again.

Colossians 1:23 If you continue in the truth grounded, and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.

Colossians 1:28 [Christ] whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Paul preached the truth. Please attach this to the very beginning of this sermon. Faith and the truth of God: we are saved by grace through faith. It is not faith in the fact that God exists. It is not just faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. It is faith in **the way of God**. If you have that faith, it will show up in the way that you live. That is what Paul is urging these people to do: continue in it.

Colossians 2:4-6 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in Him

Interpretation: He said, "You had better go back to what you first did, when you first learned the truth. Continue walking in that way. Do not be deviating from that path."

Colossians 2:7 Rooted and built up in Him [in Christ]...

The division is beginning to become very wide between that at which Paul is aiming and that by which these people are being persuaded.

Colossians 2:7-8 ...and established in *the* faith, as you have been taught [what Epaphras taught you, what Tychicus has been teaching you], abounding therein [Do not deviate from it.] with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Paul has moved right into the midst of the battle now, and he has given us four descriptives of the problem: It was a philosophy; it was empty deceit, a lie (such as in II Thessalonians 2:11, where people believe a lie); it was human tradition; it was the rudiments of the world.

What was *it*? Philosophy might be defined as a specific system of concepts and values that underlie an approach to accomplishing something. "We are going to do this, that, and the other thing; and this is our philosophy for doing it." In this case, it was getting the most out of life; or, if you want to put it in a religious context, this is how to really please God. The salesman for this philosophy would come along and say, "This is how you can really make it into the Kingdom of God, and please God while you are doing it." Boy, that sounds appealing! "Oh, wow! That would really be good. I want to please God, do I not? Sure. I want to be in the Kingdom of God, do I not?" Whatever it was, Paul, an apostle of God, said, "Hey, this is empty deceit. It is the rudiments of the world."

I have said to you before that the problem here was not Judaism. Judaism was not a philosophy. Instead, this was a philosophy that had some Jewish overtones to it because it became attached to Judaism. Judaism was not the problem. Philosophy was the problem. Paul said that it was the philosophy. Since we have the Word of God, we know that it was not Judaism. This philosophy came from the world, not from God; and it is a deceitful human tradition. It was something that was being added to what had been given by the church, that is, by Epaphras.

It was yet another attempt by Satan to syncretize **the true way** by mixing it with

something from the world. Satan's way has always been to syncretize the true way. *Syncretize* means "to mesh together"; that is, to mix a little evil with the good. Make it really appealing when you do it, though.

We know from history that this philosophy was **Gnosticism**. Gnosticism was not a religion at the time the book of Colossians was written. The reason was that it was not aimed at worshipping any particular God.

In this regard, it was very much like Buddhism today. Buddhism is a philosophy. It is a way of life. Did you know that? It is not aimed at any particular God but can be attached to a religion—like Hinduism or Taoism. It was the same thing with Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a philosophy that could be attached to a religion. These philosophers would guarantee that it was going to make a religion—any religion—better. They did not care what religion it was.

Gnosticism had an elaborate system of concepts that, if followed, were supposed to give one the ability to get the most out of life. Most of us have heard of Stoicism and Epicureanism. They were two Greek philosophies. In fact, they were earlier Greek philosophies. Gnosticism shared some of their concepts.

Gnosticism gets its name from a root word that means, "to know." These people claimed to have a higher knowledge; therefore, they became known as the Gnostics.

It is kind of interesting that one author described Gnosticism as a strange mixture of religious ideas, combining elements from—pay attention to this—Orphic beliefs; cosmological speculations ("I guess..."); astrological lore (the Zodiac, for example); and magical demonology from Babylonia, Persia, and Judea; as well as mystical theurgy from Egypt.

It existed for a long time before the period of the book of Colossians. It became Hellenized and became a Greek philosophy that spread through the Greek-speaking world when Alexander the Great conquered the known world. He began to impress Hellenism—the Greek way of life, the Greek language—upon all the areas where he went.

The Greeks also picked up things from those areas that they conquered. In regard to Gnosticism, the result of that was that it began to be spread and to pick up ideas from a number of different countries and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, it became an amalgamation—sort of like a universal—catch that name—way of life.

I mentioned earlier that Gnosticism was a philosophy intended to be attached to something else. Thus, there were Gnostic Syrians. There were Gnostic Babylonians. There were Gnostic Greeks. There were Gnostic Jews.

Just about this time is when Christianity came along. When it entered the picture, the Gnostics began to interpret Christian theology in light of Gnostic philosophy and to blend the two together. By the time the books of Galatians and Colossians were written, Gnosticism had become a strong force **against** God's clear and plain truth.

There are very many veiled references to Gnosticism throughout the epistles of Paul and the epistles of John especially. Among other things, the Gnostics believed that matter was entirely evil, and the only good was spirit. This led the larger portion of them into asceticism, because asceticism was viewed as a way to purge oneself of evil.

On the other hand, there was another group of Gnostics who concluded that, since the body is material, and food is also material, and both, therefore, are evil, it did not matter what one did in the conduct of his life because nothing good and pure was being harmed. What that did was lead them into a hedonistic lifestyle—with sin of the grossest sort not only condoned but also promoted.

Remember that Paul said, "What? Should we sin that grace may abound?" That was Epicureanism. That was a Gnostic philosophy. "God is glorified because you sin often because He has all this ample opportunity to forgive your sins, and that makes Him look good."

John said that sin is rebellion. Sin is lawlessness. He says that in I John 3:4. As I told you earlier, there are some commentators who think the whole book of I John was written against Gnosticism.

They also believed in the immortality of the soul and what is now called Docetism. Docetism proclaimed that Jesus was not really human, that He only appeared to have a body, that He really did not die on the stake, and that He did not even leave any footprints. They also denied that Jesus was God, or that He was Creator. Remember some of the things in Colossians 1.

They thought that He was merely an emanation from God, and that Earth was created by another emanation. Their teaching regarding redemption is that man is a prisoner of this evil material world. Of great importance is the teaching that in order to escape this world—in order to have salvation—one must be given secret knowledge by a redeemer, which enables him to pass through a series of gates guarded by the world rulers of this

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present darkness, which leads to the realm of life, above the realm of stars (i.e., heaven).

You might think that we are beyond this in our modern world, but let me tell you something: It is alive and well in Masonry. It is still here. We probably find this to be very strange, but in the context of their time, it sounded as though it had very much that could be used to add to, to enhance, Christianity. We will stop here because we have a foundation to think upon until the next sermon.