

## The Covenants, Grace, And Law (Part 23)

Colossians (D)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 09-Sep-95; Sermon #200

Turn with me to Proverbs 14:12. I do not know how many times I heard Mr. Armstrong say this verse. I have not used it very much myself, but I think it fits into the beginning of this sermon.

**Proverbs 14:12** There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Today we are going to finish with Colossians 2, and go into Galatians. We are going to begin by reminding you of some of the things we covered the last time. Before we do that, I think it is good to consider this verse especially in light of the two sermons that I have given just prior to this. "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Basically, that was what was occurring there in Colosse. They had been presented with something that looked attractive to them. It was something they were told was going to enhance their worship of God, but actually it was something from paganism. It was something that needed to be gotten out of their lives, out of their worship of God, or it was going to lead them completely astray.

They were being led astray by something that appeared right. It seemed so good. It was, in a way. But Paul could see that there was death waiting on the end of that. It was something in which those people, apparently, were deluded into thinking an entirely different way.

Now, humanly, God has given us a huge number of ways to express our personality that have nothing at all to do with sin and that have nothing at all to do, necessarily, with His way. But there is only one "Way," and that is His. When it is alloyed with other "ways," it does not make it any better.

Just as we saw at the beginning of the sermon last time, the word of God is pure, and when things are added to it, it does not make it stronger. It does not enhance it in any way. It actually makes it worse. It makes it weaker.

We can express our personality in things like fashion. Look how many different designs

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

there are to clothing. The same has to do with furniture or automobiles. They try to change them on us every couple of years, to make an appeal. People buy things that appeal to the expression of their personality. The same is true with houses. Look at the landscaping varieties that there are—hundreds and hundreds of different flowers, bushes, and trees that you can put as a part of where you live to express a little bit of the beauty of God in your way. Whatever it is—clothing and food are other examples.

But in terms of morality, in terms of spirituality, the way is extremely narrow. *Broad is the way that leads to destruction and narrow is the way that leads to life; and few there be that find it.* That is the principle that we are dealing with in this case. In Colosse the Christians were victims of yet another attempt to syncretize something moral and spiritual to God's way, but it was something that was humanly devised.

In this case, it was a philosophy that involved asceticism and the worship of demons, which they were being told was going to enhance their worship of God. It appeared to be so spiritual; but what it was doing was effectively cutting them off from the true object of their faith and their source of power to overcome—and that is Christ.

To meet this, in Colossians 1-2 Paul reminded them that the object of their faith is not demons but our Creator and Savior in whom resides all the fullness of the divine nature bodily. In chapters 3-4, he urges them to seek the true source of power to overcome. That is, he told them to seek those things which are above. So he is not addressing the doing away of the Sabbath and holy days at all. What he is addressing is an abuse of how they were to be kept.

Because of such statements as "touch not, taste not, and handle not," some misunderstand. They are led to think that God is unconcerned about rules and laws, and that the Christian is not responsible for disciplining himself to follow God's laws and do all things to glorify Him.

This subject of discipline gets right into the nitty-gritty of life. The Bible clearly shows, in other areas, that the Christian is very much responsible for disciplining himself. While we are thinking about Colossians, turn to Colossians 3. Remember that I mentioned to you the last time that the issue in regard to discipline was why are we disciplining ourselves?

We can discipline ourselves for purely material reasons. We can discipline ourselves for purely vain reasons, cosmetic reasons, vanity reasons. We can do it for glory. We can discipline ourselves in order to reach the heights in athletics or in business, to accumulate a lot of money. We can discipline ourselves for social reasons.

These people were disciplining themselves for spiritual reasons. But, even there, it was not for the right reason.

**Colossians 3:17** And whatsoever you do in word or deed [That is an expression that encompasses all of life, the way that we conduct ourselves.], do all in the name [That is, within whatever that name represents.] of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.

Now, I want you to turn to I Corinthians where Paul made a similar statement.

**I Corinthians 10:31** Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.

This is why a Christian should discipline himself. Remember that Paul admonished Timothy, in II Timothy, that he was going to have to strive according to the rules. If he did not strive according to the rules, then he was not going to be crowned.

How about Paul's own example in I Corinthians 9? He clearly showed that he severely disciplined himself. So severely did he discipline himself that it literally says, in the Greek, that he gave himself a black eye—like he bruised himself. Paul was hard on himself in order to keep within **The Way**.

Sometimes I get a picture of a ball, or maybe a human being, bouncing back and caroming around between two walls in order to stay between the perimeters of that narrow Way, and it takes discipline to do that.

How about Jesus? Did you know that six times it is recorded—in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—that, if you are going to follow Him, you are going to have to deny yourself—discipline yourself—take up your cross, and follow Him.

Right from the Boss, right from one of the chief apostles, right from his own epistles, we find that we have to discipline ourselves. Much of the issue in the book of Colossians had to do with why the Colossians were doing what they were doing. Paul clearly pointed out to them that they were doing what they were doing because of demons—not because of their love and faith in God. It was not enhancing their relationship at all, even though indeed they were disciplining themselves.

Now, disciplining oneself is very difficult. The reason is because we are so self-centered

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and because we are so easily distracted. But God provides us with instruction in His Word in order to isolate areas that He wants us to prioritize. Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:33** But seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness...

That is very clear. There can be no higher priority, in an overall sense, than that. We went through, briefly, and at least touched on things in I Corinthians 13—where He sets a priority of love. The greatest of these is love. In Revelation 2 and 3, the advice is to overcome. We saw a number of times where He specifically said justice, mercy, and faithfulness (or at least something very similar to that). I want to go back to the book of Micah once again, where he asks this question:

**Micah 6:6** Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?

In other words, "What shall I bring to Him? How shall I serve Him? How shall I honor Him? How shall I please Him? How shall I glorify Him?"

**Micah 6:6-8** Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [Micah answers:] He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

That is pretty clear. In these places where statements like this are made, we understand that they encompass very much. They are giant concepts—mercy, justice, and faithfulness. And there is very much within them that needs to be expounded upon. But it gives us a hook upon which to order our life, so that we understand (at least in an overall way) the direction that we are to go.

What we can find in regard to the Colossians is that they were not motivated by truth to do this. They were not motivated by faith in God to do this. Does this mean, then, that sacrifice is of no account? Asceticism is a sacrifice. Keeping the Sabbath is a sacrifice. Tithing is a sacrifice.

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We see here in a place like Micah "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself down?" "*What should I bring to God?*" Then he mentions **sacrifice**. It can lead the unwary to thinking that God does not want sacrifice. No, no, no. That is not true at all! The day of sacrifice is not over, as Romans 12:1-2 very clearly shows.

We are going to put this together now with the lesson of Colossians. Sacrifice, asceticism, giving things up, giving time up, or whatever it might happen to be—**sacrifice without the right motivation, sacrifice without truth, is of no value**. It may profit the body for a little while. But in terms of relationship with God, it does not help at all.

I want to continue on this theme for a while, because it is so important. Let us go back to the book of Amos, and that wonderful 5<sup>th</sup> chapter. Put yourself into this at the beginning of verse 18, where it says:

**Amos 5:18** Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!

Do you desire the Day of the Lord? I think you should. But that has to be understood properly. We should want the return of Christ. But here he says, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!" These people understood that the Day of the Lord was, in its overall sense, going to be something good. But the question is, "Were they prepared for the Day of the Lord?" That is a very important question, and the truth was that they were not.

**Amos 5:18** To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.

He wants those of us reading this to desire the Day of the Lord in the right way, but He wants us to be prepared for the Day of the Lord as much as we possibly can. It is going to be then:

**Amos 5:19** As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.

That is, just one calamity after another. It looks as though you escape one thing, and you get into a worse calamity. The Day of the Lord is going to be a time of unending catastrophe and trouble.

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Amos 5:20** Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it?

Now we come to specific instruction about the people to whom Amos was speaking and writing.

**Amos 5:21** I [God] hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

There is no indication that they were not keeping the holy days of God. But there was something about these people, that God did not consider it to be "His." It was now "theirs." They were keeping it in a self-centered way, according to their own way.

**Amos 5:22-25** Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings [that is, their sacrifices], I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take you away from Me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols. But let judgment [justice] run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Have you offered unto Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?

Well, they were offering sacrifices and offerings.

**Amos 5:26** But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chilun your images, the star of your god, which you made to yourselves.

Think of this, brethren, in relation to the book of Colossians. What were those people doing? They were offering their sacrifices to God, as it were, through demons! The elements of the world—touch not, taste not, and handle not. It seemed so right, so beautiful, so enhancing. They were disciplining themselves, but all for the wrong reasons and to the wrong spiritual beings.

**Amos 5:27** "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus," said the Lord, whose name is The God of hosts.

So God is not saying, "Do not sacrifice." He is not saying, "Do not discipline yourself."

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

He is saying that to do justly and to love has a higher priority. But all those things have to be done with the right object in mind and seeking the right source of strength. You can tie this right together with Matthew 23:23, that famous verse about tithing. What did Jesus say? He said, "This you should do."

Tithing is not easy. It requires a great deal of discipline and faith. But He said, "This you should do, but do not leave the weightier matters of the law undone—judgment (or justice, or being fair, doing unto others as you would have others do unto you); mercy (kindness, compassion); and faithfulness (loyalty to God). There are some things that are more important than others. And those last three—justice, mercy, and faith—Jesus is indicating are more important than tithing.

We touched briefly on those things. God's way revolves around those major concepts. I mentioned to you how that, when Herbert Armstrong said, "You people are not getting it, " this is generally what he meant. We were allowing ourselves to become distracted and letting the less important activities dominate our lives.

Think about when he was saying that the most, which was through the '80s and on towards the end of his life in 1986. Think about that—the tumultuous 12 years or so that preceded his death in 1986, and he knew by that time that the church was slipping away. He felt frustrated and helpless before it.

Do you know what he felt frustrated and helpless before? It was the onslaught of **worldliness** that was coming into the church in a flood. So at the end of his life, he said, "Get the church ready! It is slipping away."

It is interesting about what happened. He died, and the church began to unravel. The church is being made ready, but it just is not being made ready in the way that we thought it was going to be made ready.

We have a lot to prepare for. I am very happy that we are being driven, as it were, to go through the book of Colossians and to go through Galatians because they are so important to understand—so that our faith will be strong and there will be conviction in us as to why we do what we do. We will stand on strong, firm ground and see these principles; and then put them into action in our lives. And remember that discipline fits right into this.

**Colossians 3:8-16** But now you also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. For there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called in one body; and be you thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

This is the practical application of seeking those things which are above. In effect what Paul is saying is that, if we are seeking those things which are above, the resources to overcome these things will be here. They will be part of us, because God **responds** to such as are truly seeking after Him.

Now, be patient. Our relationship with God is not magic. It takes work, does it not? And if any of you have any of these problems, you understand that you really have to hold a tight rein on yourself to keep yourself from doing these things that Paul says to "put off." They are so deeply ingrained within us that they want to break out, all by themselves. That is why Paul wrote that in Romans 7. "The things that I do not want to do, I do. The things I do want to do, I do not do."

So Paul said there were two conflicting laws working within him. There was the law of his mind—which loved God, understood a great deal about God, wanted to submit to God, wanted to sacrifice for God's sake and in His name, wanted to discipline himself. But the law of his flesh, sin that dwelt within him, put up its ugly head and, every once in a while, it would break out.

We do have to discipline ourselves. "Putting on" and "taking off" is not always easy. Sometimes we find that there are certain things that we can do readily. It almost seems like it comes easily to us. But there are other things that are like a thorn in the flesh, and they gnaw away at us, and embarrass us from time to time, and make us feel guilty. They make us wonder whether we will be acceptable before God. They embarrass us, and we wish they were not there. And we know that it takes a great deal of work. Work requires discipline. We know that we are to "put off" those things that do not fit the image of God, and to "put on" the characteristics that do.



The final thing that he mentions there really is love. Love is the crown. It is what tops off, as it were, all of the other virtues and ties them all together. The "putting on" and the "taking off" will actually be the manifestation of the seeking God and those things which are above.

Even when we understand this, even the ability to do this—to "put on" and to "take off"—is a gift from God. The resources to do this come from Him. God responds to those who make Him the focus of their lives. And this is the way that it is exhibited. The evidence begins to show in the way we live our lives.

Now turn to Colossians 2:16-17 because we are going to conclude Colossians right now, but I am going to give you a summary. My summary has six points to it. I have to give credit where credit is due. (I want to do it.) Really the bulk of this came from a United Church of God minister—Larry Walker—in a paper that he wrote. I think he did a fine job in summarizing this. I have added to it, but I think the two of us, in combination, have a very clear summary for Colossians 2:16-17.

First of all, let me give you a paraphrase. It is almost not a paraphrase. It is much more literally what verses 16 and 17 actually say. "Therefore, let no one judge you in eating and drinking." Not "in meat, or in drink", but the actual activity. And you can prove that in any decent commentary. It is not "meat and drink." It is eating and drinking.

"Therefore, let no one judge you in eating and drinking, or in any part of a holy day (or feast), new moon, or of the Sabbaths." Remember me going through that word that is translated "regard," which literally means "division." So, "in any division." In modern English it means any part, any aspect, of the feasts, new moons, or the Sabbaths.

I will put this all together then. "Therefore, let no one judge you in eating and drinking, or in any part of a feast day, new moon, or of the Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body of Christ." Notice the word "is" in italics [in your Bibles]. That was added. It was not in the Greek.

Point #1: The Colossians were observing the festivals, the new moon, and the Sabbath just as surely as they were eating and drinking. "Let no man judge you in eating and drinking;" and the conjunction "or" ties the "in any part of the holy days," etc. right to it.

Point #2: The ascetic Gnostic Jewish-based heretics were criticizing them for eating, and drinking, and rejoicing in celebration on these festival occasions. "Let no man judge you." Remember how God says, "Hey, this is My holy day. Rejoice!" Even the word "feast" comes from the Hebrew *hag*. It means to turn in a circle. It means to dance. It

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

means to do what you do when you are happy. You jump up and down, and go in a circle.

So the Christians were eating, and drinking, and rejoicing; and the ascetic Gnostic Jewish heretics were criticizing them.

Point #3: These occasions have symbolic value—"which are a shadow." These occasions have symbolic value, which serve as a reminder and source of instruction about the basic truths of the plan of God—past, present, and future. You can look back in the Old Testament and in many cases find where they came from. This is how they are applied in the present, and this is what they mean for the future.

So these occasions have symbolic value, which serve as a reminder and source of instruction about basic truths of the plan of God—past, present, and future. I want you to notice, again in verse 17, "which are." That is present tense. Not "were." Not an indication that they had been done away. But Paul writes this in the present tense because they were keeping them. They were not done away at all.

Point #4: Therefore (because of the 3 points that went before), the members should not allow anyone outside of their fellowship to stand in judgment of them, or criticize them, for keeping these days. "Let no man therefore judge you; but the body of Christ."

Point #5: Rather, they must continue to look to Christ to determine **the way** to observe these days. That was the issue. It was an abuse. That is, the Gnostic Jewish people were abusing.

Rather, they must continue to look to Christ to determine the way to observe these days. They must also look to Christ to keep God's people united. The Sabbath and holy days also promote this unity by bringing the members together in commanded assembly—being taught the same things, and reminding them that they are sanctified members of the Family of God; and with that comes responsibility. That is, the responsibility of living according to the Family rules. If we are sanctified by God, then we have the responsibility of living the way He says to do it.

The next point is a little bit long, but it kind of summarizes more of the whole book.

Point #6: Paul's remarks leading to Colossians 2:16-17 clearly identify the spiritual problem. That is, that the object of our faith must be Christ. Not demons, not human tradition, and chapters 3 and 4 show the solution is to seek the Father and Son as the source of the power to overcome—not human indulgences and asceticism.

So these two sections sandwich Colossians 2:16-17 and clearly support the keeping of the Sabbath and holy days (and here comes an important thing) because they are of God—not demons. We might even add to that, or men (even if we leave the demons out).

Point #6 then was that Paul's remarks leading to Colossians 2:16-17 clearly identify the spiritual problem. The object of our faith must be Christ, not demons or human tradition. Chapters 3 and 4 show the solution is to seek the Father and the Son as the source of the power to overcome, not human indulgences and asceticism. These two sections sandwich Colossians 2:16-17 and clearly support keeping the Sabbath and holy days because they are of God, not of demons or men.

That is the end of Colossians, I hope, for a couple of weeks anyway. And now we are going to go into Galatians. We are going to move into Galatians because it too has some verses that have been disturbing to some, because they have been used to teach rank heresy that is a combination of unconverted carnality, ignorance, and tearing them from their historical and biblical context. Three points there. The reason that Galatians is so difficult is a combination of (1) unconverted carnality, (2) ignorance, and (3) tearing these verses from their historical and biblical context.

The same general enemy is present in Galatians as in Colossians. It is the same philosophical system—pagan Gnosticism, which was combined with a religion (Judaism). Judaism itself is not the instigator. This can be discerned by the things Paul wrote. Some of the things do not fit Judaism, and we are going to see this right off the bat.

I know that it seems almost like from time immemorial that we have been taught that the problem here was Judaism. But it is not Judaism all by itself. For instance, though the adherents to Judaism fasted, the religion definitely was not ascetic. Gnosticism by and large definitely was! Gnosticism had its basis in demonism. Judaism was a very bad interpretation of the Scriptures, but its basis was not in demonism.

The major difference between what Paul wrote in Colossians as compared to Galatians is that what was going on in Colosse was affecting members in their approach to God in the area of conversion that we would call **sanctification**. Becoming holy, as it were. And so, in Colossians, it had more to do with how to overcome, how to grow, and be in the Kingdom of God.

In Galatians, we are going to see that the material is very heavily weighted for the specific area of **justification**—that which occurs primarily at the beginning of a person's

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

conversion. One more thing that I want to add here in regards to Galatians is that the book has very much to do with Christian liberty. We will see that as we go through it, a great deal more. But this has much to do with justification too. The two are almost tied together here—Christian liberty and justification.

Regardless of how it was, though, both were very seriously affecting the way people lived their lives. Their entire belief system was being deviously and subtly altered away from the truth of God.

We are going to approach Galatians somewhat differently than we did the book of Colossians. We began Colossians by starting right at the beginning and coming up to Colossians 2. Then we jumped over and went a little bit after it, and then came back to Colossians 2.

Because there is such a relationship between what Paul was confronting in both Galatia and Colosse, we are going to go to those scriptures in Galatians 4 that people find so objectionable. We are going to start there. And then we are going to go back to the beginning of Galatians and come back up to there.

**Galatians 4:1-11** Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. [Does that ring a bell: "Elements of the world."] But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has set forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Howbeit then, when you knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? [Christian liberty vs. bondage. Here are those verses.] You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I also am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.

We are not going to cover every verse here. Let us go back to verse 3. "*Even so we—*" Now, who is the "we"? When Paul uses this in this kind of context, "we" means "church members." "We" means "Christians"—those of us who are brothers and sisters in the

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

household of God. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage." Let us go to Ephesians 2.

**Ephesians 2:1-2** And you has He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past you...

Here is the same kind of context we find in Galatians 4. "You" in this case very, very likely means Gentiles.

**Ephesians 2:2-3** Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: among who also we [Now he includes everybody.] all had our conversation [or, conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

I read that because we need to understand that all of us—Israelite, Gentile, it does not matter who—have been in bondage to Satan and his demons to some degree, some more than others. All slaves, but some more than others.

In Galatians 4:3 he says, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."

**Galatians 4:8** Howbeit then, when you knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Who is the "you" here? Again, even the Protestants agree that it was the Gentiles. So let us put these two together. All of us have, at one time or another, been slaves—we have been held in bondage to Satan, sin, and this world. But, as I said, some more than others.

In the case of the Gentiles, they were completely in bondage because there were things from their spiritual lives that were absolutely absent from them. God had made a covenant only with one people. He tells us:

**Amos 3:2** You only have I known of all the families [peoples] of the earth.

The "you" were Israelites. So those people knew God. The Gentiles did not. The Israelites did know God, and some of their religion (Judaism) came from the Old Testament. Not all of it, but some of it. They were not lacking in knowledge of God. It was not right knowledge. It was very poorly interpreted. And I want to add one more thing.

**James 1:25** But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein...

What is the law of liberty? First of all, it is the Ten Commandments, but we can just consider it broadly as the law of God. Israel had the benefit of the law of liberty. They did not use it rightly, but they did have the benefit of it.

Galatians does put a twist on things, because the Judaizing element in that area is addressed much more strongly than in Colossians. It seems to imply then that the things mentioned here might be the holy days of God. There are, however, some very clear clues that render this view impossible. Hang on to this, because it is important to understanding verse 10.

I have already given you a little preamble. To whom is he primarily speaking? It has to be the Gentile Christians. They were the ones who did not know God. They were the ones who did not have the law of God. They were the ones who worshipped things that were not God. A second area here is that the Jews are consistently shown in the Bible as having God, but turning from Him. There is a big difference there.

A second point: This one has three aspects to it. In verse 3 and again in verse 9, we are confronted with the phrase "elements of the world." This term can mean elementary things. It means things that are put in order. So it can mean things like the "ABCs". But, first of all, there is the phrase "of the world" attached to this. The law of God was not from the world. It was from God! In Luke 2, even the law of Moses was called "the law of God." So it does not say, "the elementary things of God" and it is in the same context of "when you knew not God."

The second big clue under this second point is that they worshipped those things "which by nature are no gods." You put this together with "elements of the world;" and then the "elements of the world" are viewed as **personal powers** capable of being worshipped and obeyed by people who are ignorant of what they are doing—**demons**, again.

Paul says, in verse 3, that they were "in bondage under the elements of the world."

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God's law is not bondage. Sin is! We just read, in James 1:25, that God's law is the law of liberty—not bondage.

Of these people, it is said here in verse 9, "Now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements—" These people are turning back to something, which they formerly observed in their ignorance, that are weak and beggarly. Brethren, I cannot in my wildest imaginings conceive of Paul calling God's law of liberty "weak and beggarly." If that is not close to blasphemy, I do not know what is!

How in the world could he call the Sabbath and the holy days "weak and beggarly," especially since he knew that your Savior and mine kept them? Added to that is also the fact that the book of Acts also shows Paul himself observing the Sabbath and those very same holy days.

The Protestant explanation is almost funny. It puts Paul in the position of condemning the very days he was keeping. That is weird. If the Protestants are correct, then Paul is also saying that God brought Israel out of their bondage in Egypt only to put them into bondage to His law. The reasoning just does not make any sense at all.

Did Paul, in Galatians 1:6, say "I am alarmed because you are keeping the Sabbath and holy days"? No. He said "I am alarmed because you are turning from the gospel." The Gentile Galatians were delivered from their bondage to Satan, and to his demons, and sin, and the world. But they were being deceived into going back.

There is a spiritual warfare going on, and Paul clearly perceives this as vital to our understanding if we are going to succeed in this way. There is a war going on against the principalities and powers. It is not God against them. It is **us** against them! They are trying to get us to go back to Egypt, and we have to fight—discipline ourselves; stay within the truth of God—to stay out of there.

Now, a quote here from the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 10, page 472 concerning Galatians 4:10:

Thus, this whole issue takes on a cosmic and spiritual significance. The ultimate contrast to freedom in Christ is bondage to Satan and the evil spirits.

Did you hear that? "This whole issue takes on a cosmic and spiritual significance. The

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

ultimate contrast to freedom in Christ is bondage to Satan and the evil spirits." These Gnostic Jews were trying to get the Gentile Christians in Galatia to go back to the very thing they had come out of. That is, "days, and months, and times, and years" that came from Gentile paganism—not the Bible.

From *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by Marvin Vincent, Volume 4, page 135:

The Galatians had turned again to the observance of times and seasons which were controlled by the heavenly bodies and their spirits.

That is, demonism and astrology. But let us put the nail on the coffin by going back to Deuteronomy 18.

**Deuteronomy 18:10-14** There shall not be found among you any one that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord your God does drive them out from before you. You shall be perfect [blameless] with the Lord your God. For these nations, which you shall possess, hearken unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for you, the Lord your God has not suffered [allowed] you so to do.

Let me connect this to Galatians 4:10. God's own law forbids the observing of times. Is God contradictory? No, He is not. This is spoken to Israel. And God's holy days are not based on the observation of times. Certainly God's holy days are established each year by the movements of the heavenly bodies. But the observation of times goes beyond that. It involves the intercession of spirits and superstitious reading of omens, and cloud formations, tealeaves, animal entrails, tarot cards, or the rolling of dice, and similar things. The modern day term is "augury."

Look at this same subject addressed in Leviticus 19, right in the holiness chapters. Notice the context.

**Leviticus 19:30-31** You shall keep My Sabbaths [In the broad context, that would include the holy days—the festivals of God.], and reverence My sanctuary: I am the Lord. Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God.



Keeping His Sabbaths and reverencing His sanctuary in this context seems to imply very strongly what God had in mind when He inspired those comments forbidding the observing of times. To me, considering Paul's reverence for the Old Testament, he certainly did not have so-called "Jewish days" in mind at all. He had pagan practices in mind. Galatians 4:10 cannot be used to affirm that one is not to observe God's Sabbath and holy days.

I will conclude with these quotes. First of all from *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, pages 1123-1124, where Chrysostom is quoted. He is one of the "church fathers." This is in regards to **times**. Chrysostom said:

Many were superstitiously addicted to divination. In the celebration of these times, they set up lamps in the market place and crowned their doors with garlands.

Brethren, in modern terminology what we are talking about here involves lucky days, penance days (like Lent), Christmas, Easter, New Year's Day, Sunday, Halloween. One third of the Greek and Roman calendars had [specific] "days" on them, in which it was unlawful to labor, to do business, or to conduct any kind of politics because they were set aside for divination reasons.

From the *Encyclopedia Americana*, under the article "Festivals," subheading "Months:"

Months were sacred to certain Greek gods: Apollo, April and October; Zeus, February and June; Artemis, April; Daces, January.

Same article, under "Years:"

They were set aside biannually and quadrennially, during which were idolatrous feasts and the celebration of the Olympiad, Isthmian, Nemean, and Pythian games.

Brethren, these people were not going back to "Jewish" days at all. Even if we can see that God's holy days involve the observance of days and years, it does not involve the celebration of all four [mentioned in Galatians 4:10]—days, months, times, and years in combination. These people were turning back to pagan observations from their former

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 23) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

years.

From this point we are going to go back to the beginning of the book of Galatians and give an overview that will lead up to Galatians 4. Then you will see why Paul said what he did, in Galatians 4 and beyond.