

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 11)

Dispensationalism

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This current series of sermons began with the question: Does it really matter what we believe? We saw clear evidence from the Barna Report, at the very beginning of this series, showing that undoubtedly sincere people—calling themselves "Christians"—are all over the place regarding what they believe concerning doctrines that in many places are not part of the biblical record.

Now, the result of this is easily seen. We live in a nation that claims to be Christian. However, the conduct of its citizenry certainly does not match what the Bible shows Christian conduct should be. Everybody—including us—acts according to what he truly believes. This is why, in simple form, what one believes is so important. Some of what many believe is not "Christian."

The main thrust of my previous sermon began to more clearly change from the focus on generalities to more specific practices of the Gnostics, especially antinomianism. Antinomian means "against law." We saw that, in contrast to Christianity, Gnosticism was very loosely structured. This allowed people to pick and choose doctrines that they felt comfortable with that were not part of God's revealed Word.

This same practice has carried over into our time in modern Christianity. For instance, modern Christianity proclaims that man has an immortal soul and is going to heaven. These are doctrine that a Gnostic would be familiar with. In contrast to that, God's Word shows man does not have an immortal soul but, following death, must be resurrected at some time off in the future.

We saw that Christianity clearly establishes a very clear goal by focusing us towards the Kingdom of God, rather than a vague going off to heaven. The Bible presents a plan being worked out. And, while that plan is in operation, the Creator God is preparing one for life and participation in the Kingdom of God.

We are not left without clear responsibilities established by the Creator God. In fact, Ephesians 2:10 shows that we are to live life in the here and now doing **works** that He has foreordained. And those works are doing whatever it takes to live life overcoming, maturing in His way, and glorifying Him by stopping sin.

If we had researched further in Psalm 19 during that sermon, we would have seen clear

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evidence that it is *God's law* that defines righteousness, defines sin, and provides guidance for His way of life.

In summary then, it is God's grace—His unmerited favor shown in His revelation of Himself to us providing the purpose and goal itself in the Kingdom of God, redemption from slavery to sin through Christ's blood, and understanding the purpose of His law—that structures Christianity. Christianity is formed around those central issues.

As the sermon was ending, we began to touch upon another doctrine that had a vague but devastating entrance into the church during that same 1st century period of time. That doctrine was not fully developed, though, until the time of the Protestant Reformation in the fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen hundreds. However, it remains to this day—doing its evil work, subtly undermining God's Word. It is named **dispensationalism**.

John 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

I do not use this scripture to say that the whole doctrine is bounded upon this scripture. Rather, this is a scripture that is commonly used to support this false concept. This scripture is translated in such a way as to imply that grace and law are entities contrary to each other—rather than linked in the salvation process.

If one researches in commentaries, one will find an almost invariable putting down of law—almost as if it is to blame for us sinning. Listen to this quote from Adam Clarke's Commentary on this verse:

The law of Moses, however excellent in itself, was little in comparison of the Gospel: as it proceeded from the justice and holiness of God, and was intended to convict men of sin, that the way of the Gospel might be the better prepared, it was a law of rigour, condemnation, and death.

That is kind of interesting. When one looks into the book of James, you find James calling that same law a "law of liberty." Was Adam Clarke looking at things differently than James? Why did not he say something similar to what James did?

I want you to notice the adversative junction "but." "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by through Jesus Christ." That word "*but*" is in italics—showing

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that it was not in the manuscripts the translators worked from; therefore signifying they inserted that "but" because they felt that it was needed to give the statement more clarity and impact. However, it does just the opposite.

The word *and* would have been much better. "And" would have been a better insertion because then the verse would show two parts of the same process preparing us for the Kingdom of God: grace *and* law.

There is no doubt that grace is superior in this context, but they are not opposed to each other. They go hand in hand, each playing a role in God's purpose. In fact, when one comes to understand God Himself and His whole purpose and plan better, one sees that the law is, in reality, an aspect of God's grace. It is a gift, so that there is guidance to life.

Dispensationalism essentially posits that through the ages God worked with and attempted (That word is interesting—attempted.) to save people through one means or another in order to show mankind that it can only be by grace that one can be saved. In other words, in former ages keeping the law was how God saved men; but now one is saved by grace.

Hebrews 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.

This is a place those promoting this belief use as a foundation for their explanation of dispensationalism. They say that, in order for one to rightly divide God's Word, one must distinguish the times in which He spoke and to whom He spoke. Now there is an element of truth in that statement.

They go on to say, then, that nothing but confusion can arise from reading into one dispensation that which relates to another. (Boy, they just said a mouthful there!) Now listen to this quote from Bullinger's Companion Bible, Appendix 195, page 214:

To connect what God said and did in one dispensation with another, in which His administration was on an altogether different principle, is to ensure error.

Brethren, that statement (as it stands, unqualified) is absolutely NOT true. The principles of God's Word are eternal and applicable at all times. Bullinger goes on to list seven dispensations:

1. *The Edenic state of innocence.* [Of course, that ended when they sinned. Who knows, that may have only been a couple of days long.]
2. *The period "without law."* [That is really interesting because there has NEVER been a time in the history of man that there was not law. If that existed, how then did Adam and Eve sin? We are beginning to see that this is stupid, but this is a major doctrine.]
3. *The era under law.* [Beginning with Moses.]
4. *The period of grace.*
5. *The epoch of judgment.*
6. *The millennial age.*
7. *The eternal state of glory.*

From here, Bullinger goes on to state:

There is no authority for taking enactments Divinely fitted for the times of the Jews and transferring them to the present dispensation of God in grace. Similarly, the endeavour to read the precepts of the "Sermon on the Mount", which are the laws of the kingdom of heaven, into such church epistles as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, not only obscures the truth, but antagonizes one part of Scripture with another.

Can you imagine that? This is incredible!

Psalms 119:89-90 [Look at what the author of this psalm wrote.] Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all generations: You have established the earth, and it abides.

Brethren, you talk about confusion. How in the world can God's Word be trusted if the law, or the principle and spirit of what He either commands or exemplifies, in one part of the Book does not apply to another at any time in the history of mankind? They are saying, then, that no instruction in the Bible can truly be linked if what was said in one dispensation is attempted to be fit into another.

Can you begin to see a result of this? One that is obvious just from the world around us is that each person is going to feel free to put together his own story. Thus, the inclination to pick and choose whatever doctrine one feels comfortable with. This results in a multitude of denominations, which is exactly what has happened in Protestantism

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especially.

Now, listen to this modern example. I am going to make this disclaimer right at the beginning here. I am giving this not to make fun of it but because it is a simple, clear illustration of what people feel free to do in regard to worshipping God. If they looked into the Bible, though, they would see that God is the Author of formality in regard to worshipping Him.

This comes from the Monterey County Herald in Monterey, California; and the title of it is "Christian church in the Country." It is subtitled "Cowboy Church appeals to community spirit." The author is Victor Calderon. What the article consists of is his perception of comments made during services as well as other things that he observed. He says:

The first thing a visitor notices about the Salinas Valley Cowboy Church is that it doesn't look like a church.

Fittingly, the congregation meets in the Rodeo Room of the Salinas Sports complex, site of next week's California Rodeo, and at the Salinas Valley fairgrounds in King City.

Instead of an altar, the congregation faces a stage where the country band is likely to be playing and preaching. [Not just playing, but also preaching.] ...

At the beginning of Tuesday's gathering, seven newcomers were asked to stay seated as the other church members stood and welcomed them with a "howdy hug."

Herod [Not the king, but the name of the preacher.] then strode up to the stage and told everyone, "If you're here to sit down and be bored, I hope you'll lighten up a bit here. God wants every person to have fun tonight."

He then got the evening started with a rocking song that had everyone clapping as he sang "There's a whole lot of prayin' goin' on!"

Herod interspersed biblical passages with country-western songs for almost two hours. One song captured the essence of the Cowboy Church and its goal of inclusion. In a room full of people dressed in denim and boots, just come as you are. ...

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Founder Al Stoeberl, 62, who is Catholic, likes it that he has been able to create "non-rigid, free-formed worship" for the congregation. He points to a small group of people who are holding hands and praying together after the service.

"In most churches, they'll tell you to go pray in the back in private," he says. "Not in here. We are open about our relationship with God. Our relationship with Him is our religion."

Bonnie Stoeberl, 63, says an important part of the Cowboy Church is showing people that they don't have to give up country music if they become a Christian. She holds a church to be "not a building, not a denomination, but the people who come together to worship."

Now, that is not a real far out example. I said that this was simple and clear. If they would care to look in the Bible, they would find that God gives some pretty specific indications that He demands a formality before Him. We are, after all, coming before the great King. In fact, in the Bible, He even shows us the songs He wants us to sing. They are called p-s-a-l-m-s.

He shows that the people who are going to be ministering before the people—meaning the priests—were dressed in really fine clothing that illustrated some aspect of God's righteousness. The people were to come before Him in order to learn in a very serious and sober setting. Some of those words are even used, in Leviticus 23, in relation to the feasts.

What modern Christianity has done (because they have found that it works to get people out to services) is to turn church into an entertainment—with bands, gospel singers, and you-name-it. And so one has to ask a question: Why are people really there? They will not go to a church that does not entertain them. And so we find statistics in the newspaper that, in the "normal" Protestant or Catholic churches, the attendance is dropping—while, in those that entertain, the attendance is increasing.

Adding to this sort of modern evidence is the fact that, in the past 40 years, the bastion of false formalism—Catholicism—has lost its heart and is foundering in immorality and internal strife. Neither of these two extremes (the Cowboy Church on one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other) is looking to the Bible for guidance regarding their worship services.

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If I can just impress upon you, the same principle is true everywhere in modern Christianity. They are NOT really looking to the Bible for their guidance. They are not ignoring it completely; but something that pinches somewhat, or might cause repentance or change—if people do not feel comfortable with it, they will not do it.

Because we do look to and believe the Bible, we know that the destination is the Kingdom of God. We know the various parts of God's plan being worked out, and that God has always saved men by grace. We know that He has had the same purpose and plan from the very beginning. We know that it is to this end that we are being created in Christ Jesus. We know that it is our responsibility to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ by keeping the commandments of God, thus fulfilling our part in God's plan.

The last time that I spoke, I mentioned Nicolas of Acts 6, who appears to be the founder of the Nicolaitans. There is one other 1st century Gnostic mentioned in the Bible. That is Simon Magus, who appears in Acts 8. In that brief snippet, the Bible shows that his motivation is from a grasping character.

Gnosticism, as we are going to see as we go along here, permitted that sort of behavior. Peter did not accept it at all. He said, "Get out of here with your money!" Simon Magus was the leader of the Simonians. We are not going to spend any great amount of time on him, because he believed in a way very similar to Nicolas. But there was one peculiar aspect to his false ministry that shows how far out these people were on some points.

He traveled with a woman named Helen, whom he had redeemed from a life of prostitution—claiming that she descended from heaven and gave birth to the angels, who created the material world. However, (Now listen carefully to this.) out of envy, the angels lead by Yahweh rebelled against her and prevented her from returning to the Father.

Do not let this thing slip from your mind because, in another sermon, this is going to be important. That is, their attitude towards Yahweh.

This was his means of illustrating mankind's bondage to the material world. He also claimed that she transmigrated from body to body through the ages, and became the first redeemed from this bondage. And, thus, he offered hope of liberation for all who followed him.

Now, let us update this just a bit—right to our time. Is this doctrine any further out than Catholicism's claim that Mary ever lives? They pray to her for intercession, believing that

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she is co-mediator with Christ. That is a pretty close parallel to Helen. Gnosticism is alive. The names have been changed, and things of that nature; but the same general principles are there.

We are going to spend a bit of time in the book of Jude because, once one knows what to look for, it becomes clear what is at the forefront of Jude's admonishments to the church—that is, to you and me in the end time. Jude is typical of how all the apostles wrote of those dividing the church with their false doctrines.

Always remember—never forget—that you will not find the names "Gnostic," "Gnostics," or "Gnosticism" anywhere in the Bible. The structure of their religion was not completely drawn from the Bible. Despite that, there is quite a lot of information about them in the Bible once one knows what to look for. The Gnostics are identified in the Bible by their doctrines, because that is what the apostles wrote about (warning the brethren).

For example, I John 4:1-3 says this:

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. [This is how the spirit is going to get into the world—through false prophets.] Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God [The key word there is "flesh."]: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

This is a very strong indication that Gnosticism was in the forefront of John's mind as he was writing this. The doctrine that he is referring to is **Docetism**.

Please also never forget that we are not looking at these things merely to find the strange beliefs of some ancient people, who called themselves "Christian" but are now labeled "Gnostics" by modern scholarship. We are looking for these things in order to show that the principles of Gnosticism have not died out. It is alive and very active right now, even though not all of its beliefs have survived the passing of two millennia of time. It has not died out because Satan is still alive, and he is the true author; and it is his spirit that dominates the world. And that was just a long-winded way of saying "what goes around comes around."

Jude 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering

stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

Ominous words. He is describing the false prophets, the false ministers. Jude sarcastically calls them "wandering stars." You will recall that, in the Hellenistic cosmology, the wandering stars were designated as the Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. What Jude calls them is an insult—directly calling these false ministers unstable, confused, and chaotic in doctrine and behavior. They were all over the place!

"Oh, what is the doctrine of the moment?" "Well, I had a dream the other night, and the Lord spoke to me saying..." And out would come this great teaching that probably gave somebody permission to break God's law.

Remember too that, in the Gnostic teaching, a Gnostic associated the seven planets as part of an evil system instituted by Yahweh that included the seven days of the creation of the material world, the Hebrew religion, and the Sabbath—all of which they hated. In other words, they hated Yahweh! They hated the story about the creation, because to them it was absolutely chaotic. They hated the Hebrew religion, because it came from Yahweh. And they hated the Sabbath for the same reason.

Jude also calls them, in the same verse, "raging waves of the sea." This is another picture of instability, adding emphasis to the "wandering stars." He also calls them "waterless clouds," and it refers to their symbolizing (as we do) spirit with water. But calling them "waterless" implies that their boast—of being filled with and guided by private inspiration of God rather than by His revealed Word—is false.

If we were familiar with Gnosticism, we would see that as we read through it. Now you see it. Jude is writing against the Gnostics, and they were right inside the church!

Jude 10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally [not spiritually, but naturally], as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

Now he calls them irrational "brute beasts." I do not think Jude was holding back very far. This refers to a Gnostic teaching that I have not mentioned before. This is kind of interesting. The Gnostics divided all of mankind into three categories, the lowest of which were humans that they judged had no soul. These people the Gnostics compared to being mindless animals.

So Jude turned that right around and said, "*Buddy, you are a mindless animal yourself.*" Seeing how important the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was to them, it is highly likely that this was the worse insult that anybody could throw at a Gnostic. "*You are nothing but an animal.*"

Jude 8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

Here Jude condemns them for speaking evil of God's angels. Remember this: In order for the Gnostics to free themselves from the bondage of the Old Testament, they had completely twisted the truth—believing that the good angels of Yahweh were evil, and the evil angels of Satan (the demons) were good.

Jude 14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of His saints."

Here Jude warns that these false ministers were prophesied to come, and that he supports his warning by quoting one of their own writings—the apocryphal book of Enoch. The book of Enoch was NOT written by the Enoch of Genesis 5. It was not written until the 1st century before Christ.

Jude 15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

Here Jude is carrying on what he said in verse 14, by warning of the judgment that is going to befall these people. He even tells why. It is because of their blasphemous vituperation that they have heaped upon Yahweh for being the Creator and because of His working with the Hebrew nation.

You might want to mark this down in your mind, because this particular doctrine—the hatred of Yahweh, the hatred of His angels, the hatred of the Hebrew nation, the hatred of the Sabbath—is something every Gnostic group had in common. There was a lot that they did not have in common, but this is one they had in common. They also had the 'going to heaven', and they also had 'the immortality of the soul' in common.

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Are you beginning to see a common thread? We have to think of the relationship to modern Christianity where things have been blunted, or diminished a bit; but the same theme is still there, and the result will be the same.

Jude 19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

Here was another really strong put down. He accuses them of not having the Spirit of God. They were unconverted. This was a real slam against the Gnostic because, to them, spirit was everything good.

I have already given to you six references out of the book of Jude, and we have not gotten into his most important one, and that is the one that he mentions first—which is their out and out lawlessness.

Jude 3-4 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares [unnoticed], who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

What he is referring to here is an out-and-out rejection of the One the Gnostics were on the one hand claiming as their Savior. Somehow or another, it entirely escaped them that Jesus Christ was Yahweh! The Gnostics were blind to the reality that their lawless teaching and conduct was, in reality, a rejection of Jesus Christ. When they rejected Yahweh, they were rejecting Christ. When they rejected the law of Yahweh, given in the Old Testament, they were rejecting Jesus Christ's law; and yet they were claiming that He was their Savior.

Next note that these teachers turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. That is, a license to sin. Like modern Protestantism, the Gnostic doctrinal position put them at odds with virtually everything Jesus taught regarding law and righteousness. In addition, it also put them at odds with the way Jesus personally lived His life (without sinning); and it contradicts His teaching to others to repent and strive to live their lives according to the same pattern of moral and spiritual purity that He did. This is the same dilemma that modern Christianity faces and seems to be blind to.

Remember the rich young ruler who came to Christ? He said, "*Good Teacher, what must I do to have life?*" (Implying eternal life.) And what was Jesus' reply to him? Keep the commandments! If a modern Protestant would come to Jesus and say the same thing, "*What must I do to have life?*"—Jesus would say the same thing to him. Do you not think that would put that Protestant between a rock and a hard place if he knew that officially the doctrine his church was teaching him said that the law is done away and it does not have to be obeyed?

Who is right? The Author of the law, the Founder of Christianity—or the modern church? They are between a rock and a hard place doctrinally. Oh, wait a minute though. They have some really fancy explanations for getting around this.

How can this be reconciled? It cannot be. But the attempt is made nonetheless by clever parsing of scriptures, combined with outrageous explanations that oppose what Jesus plainly said. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I came not to destroy, but to fill them to the full."

Here is where the doctrine of dispensationalism is used to ease the burden of these contradictions. It absolves the worshipper of having to obey the commandments of God even though Jesus clearly stated that He did not come to do away with God's law; and then He reinforced this assertion by living the keeping of God's law all during the time of His life.

Therefore, those who believe this false doctrine—that the law is done away—say that what Jesus said and did only applies to the Jews Jesus preached to (not those coming after His resurrection). They say that, because Jesus' preaching fits into that dispensation and that dispensation ended with His death and resurrection, it no longer applies. You see, as Bullinger claimed, you "cannot" take the principles in the Sermon on the Mount and apply them to the books that were written later by the apostle Paul. That is, Ephesians, Philippians, Thessalonians, and so forth.

Paul had an answer. It was pointed and clear. He, undoubtedly, had to face the same confused reasoning in his ministry. Romans 6 is a continuation from earlier chapters in the book of Romans on justification by faith. Prior to chapter 6, Paul teaches that justification produces right standing and access to God. In chapter 6, he teaches that true justification also produces holiness of life. True justification produces holiness of life, as well as access to God.

Paul's subject material, thus, switches from a believer's legal status before God (that is, before Romans 6) to his spiritual and moral condition as he lives his life following his

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baptism. Or, put another way, the subject switches from justification to sanctification.

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? [That is a clear question.] God forbid [he says]. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

The issue, as we begin this chapter, is whether one is "free" to sin following baptism. Paul reminds us that our baptism symbolizes a burial following death, and that death pays the debt that accrued to us because of a life of sin prior to our calling and acceptance by faith of Christ's blood.

The instruction and illustrations continue. In verse 5, the word "for" is a conjunction. It is carrying the thought that verse 4 ended with. "Even so we also should walk in newness of life..."

Romans 6:5-7 For [or, because] if we have been planted [an interesting word] together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

A very clear point is made here. Our baptism is a type of Christ's death and burial. Even as He died and was buried, our death is not to a physical death; but, rather, we become dead to sin (as he mentioned a couple of verses earlier). If one is dead to sin, one must then be buried—just like Christ was buried, because He was buried because He was dead to sin.

Now, His death and burial literally pays for our sins; and our baptism is a reminder of that fact—plus the fact that our sins made it necessary for us to be buried. However, the symbolism does not end with the burial.

Romans 6:8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

You can see the thought is shifting from death to life.

Romans 6:9-11 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He lives, He lives unto God [a clear division there]. Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

From the moment of Christ's resurrection to this present time, Christ has lived solely and completely, absolutely and perfectly, in God's way.

Paul's concern, at this point, is the lesson we should draw from the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. But our thought should be to tie this pattern to our death to sin, our burial in a watery grave, and then our resurrection from that watery grave—even as Jesus was raised—to God's life.

Paul is not concerned, at this point, about the degree of our purity. That is, in our devotion to Christ and obedience to God. But there are practical considerations before that occurs. Just as surely as our baptism is a type of Christ's death and burial, our resurrection from our watery grave is a type of His resurrection. And we, just like Christ, are to live our life completely devoted to God and His way until that spiritual resurrection occurs.

This thought takes us back to verse 4, where it says we are to *walk in newness of life*. Once we come out of that water, Paul is saying that we are to *live* in newness of life. Before we died to sin, we did not live according to God's words, or His law (if we want to put it that way). But since dying to sin, and being buried in the watery grave, and rising to a new life—we are to live according to God's Word.

That is where the change is. "There is no authority in the Bible," Paul was saying, "for breaking God's law. None!" And even as Christ does not literally sin, neither are we to sin either. That is the concept that he is getting across there. So we, following baptism, are to walk—that is, to live—in newness of life. That is, no longer habitually sinning—as we previously did; but fighting it with all of our might (tooth and toenail) to overcome it.

Romans 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign [have rule] in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lust thereof.

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I do not know how he could make it any clearer! But there is an interesting little thing here, because it gives you insight into what these people were doing. In the Greek, it literally says: "Stop letting sin rule your body." That is what they were doing. They were sinning left and right. Gnosticism gave them permission to do that. Modern Protestantism and Catholicism give people permission to sin too.

We will get to a contradiction here in just a little bit. I have already mentioned that contradiction. These people to whom Paul was writing, many of them were making a mockery of their baptism and God's merciful grace in their Christian living by not restraining themselves from sin. That is what Jude meant when he said, "Turning the grace of God into a license to sin."

Romans 6:13 Neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Paul provided further emphasis in this verse to what he just said in verse 12, by adding the words "unrighteousness" and "righteousness."

Psalms 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word: for all Your commandments are righteousness.

The word "righteousness" means *right doing*. What is right doing? It is keeping the commandments of God. So Paul added the word "unrighteousness"—that is, not doing the commandments of God. Do not yield to that. But yield yourself to His righteousness. That is, yield yourself to His law.

In our modern setting there are people who, in an attempt to get around deferring to God's law, say: "All one needs is love." Boy, there is a good one. Any one of us should be able to at least (even though we might not be able to explain it perfectly) know in ourselves that is a hollow saying if there ever was one. God's Word provides us with the support we need to understand we are on the right track. And I John 3:4 defines sin as transgressing the law. Then, I John 5:3 adds to that by saying:

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God [He is going to define love.], that we keep His commandments.

Love is keeping the commandments of God!

I John 5:3 And His commandments are not grievous.

You can write this one down. This is one that Evelyn and I taught our children from the earliest age:

John 14:15 [Jesus said:] "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

That is what love is. That is the foundation of love. It is the keeping of the commandments of God.

Romans 6:14 For sin [breaking God's commandments] shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace.

Being "under the law" meant that the death penalty was still hanging over their head. But because they had repented apparently; because they had accepted Christ's blood; because God in His graceful favor had given them forgiveness and they were baptized and free of sin (They had died to sin.) and now the law had no claim on their lives (They were not under it any more.); they were under grace, and obligated to grace. If one is obligated to grace, "sin shall not have dominion over you."

Romans 6:15-21 What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid [he says again]. Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin [and therefore death], you became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity [that is, from one sin to another]; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness. ["Free from righteousness" because they were not doing anything right.] What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of

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those things is death.

There is, brethren, absolutely NO authorization in God's Word giving one permission to sin! That runs counter to the major issue that is separating God and men. But by cleverly twisting the direct statements of Jesus and the inferences of less direct ones, permission is given on the teacher's own authority to break God's law.

II Peter 3:14-17 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him has written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [twist], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being lead away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

Modern Christianity says that the law is done away; but, at the same time, they want people to keep it and to live a good law-abiding life. You cannot have both and still have salvation, because the overall issue (beginning with Adam and Eve) has been who will obey God by conforming to His law? *Grace* (needed because we have already sinned by the time God begins working with us) combined with *law keeping* determines who those people will be.

The anti-law folks adjust by overemphasizing *grace* at the expense of righteous proof of submission to God's governance through the converted person's *law keeping*. So they proclaim faith alone, conveniently overlooking that the Bible shows that faith is the major motivation for law keeping (as the book of James states). "*I will show you my faith by my obedience*"—thus showing that those who do not have the faith will not keep God's law. Therefore, how can they be saved if they do not have faith in the first place?

Gnosticism and modern Christianity are a confusing mixture, whose fruit is a fitful and weak obedience to God in most cases, but at times it also produces a rebellious and overt direct rejection of submission to God because of one's abhorrence against law. (Romans 8:7 is still in the Bible.)

But there is another aspect that is important, because Gnosticism failed to teach its

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adherents responsibility to a Person; and that Person is Christ. He is not a code of laws written in a Book or inscribed in stone—but a Living Being that we are deeply indebted to, and who loves us beyond our understanding.

Romans 6:3-4 [Paul says:] Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

We are baptized **into** Christ. This means that we are immersed *into*, made part of, a personal relationship with the One who lived and died for us and who is now our High Priest—the One who is responsible to the Father for our salvation. We are drawn by faith and baptism into a very personal relationship with a Living Being.

We are responsible to Him, to live our life as close to the way that He did as we possibly can. We owe it to Him. But, at the same time, it goes beyond mere obedience done because it is owed. This relationship reaches for warmth, and intimate affection, and caring that leads to marriage. How can we truthfully say that we know Him if we have not even striven to be like Him? And how can He marry someone who gives no proof that they love Him?

The confusing and contradicting array of Gnostic doctrines could not work to produce this, because those believing them either (1) were not drawn into this relationship with Christ in the first place or (2) withdrew from it when they came to believe those doctrines, because those doctrines led them away from Him.