

## Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 14)

Colossians 2

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Given 30-Oct-04; Sermon #690

I think we all know that modern Sunday worship, like Sabbath worship, had ancient roots; however, Sabbath worship is far more ancient than Sunday worship, and its roots go all the way back to the Creation week, and the Bible establishes its Creator as God.

God Himself set the example for mankind by stopping the kind of creative activities that He did on the other six days of the Creation week, and then later directly commanded man to also keep it. No other day of worship has ever been authorized by the Bible, and therefore by God, because He is the Author of the Bible.

When God became a man and walked among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, He kept the Sabbath, as did the apostles that He selected and taught. They in turn passed the practice on to those they taught. By way of contrast, the practice of worshipping on Sunday was formulated and practiced by people *apart* from Israel and the Bible. Its roots are shown in secular history as being in Babylon, Egypt and Greece, not Israel, and therefore it came from paganism. Its roots go back to Satan, not Yahweh. Sunday worship, as a regular active devotion to a god, is a deviation from Yahweh's teaching and practice.

By New Testament times there were Greek religious and philosophical teachings that provided the strongest influence against Christian teaching and pagan practice—*not* Egyptian or Babylonish. It was Greek armies that had conquered that portion of the world about three centuries before this time, and was pretty much the force impressed upon the world by the Greek soldier. Greek culture was so attractive even to the militarily- and economically-powerful Romans who dominated the first century. They so admired it that they strove to copy much of it, and thus the Romans participated in spreading some of the culture to the areas they dominated. That included the Israelitish people who by this time were pretty much settled in Northwest Europe.

The Romans dominated that part of the world too, and thus today very much of the western world—the world dominated by the Israelitish people—has at this time many of the philosophical concepts of Pythagoras, Thales, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many other Greek scholars as cultural guides. These same men, and others of Greek ancestry, are the major resources for what has been labeled by religious scholars as "Gnosticism." It was Gnostic thought that provided the strongest doctrinal challenges against the first century church's teaching.

Some of this religious teaching remains to this day, carried to our time by the Catholic and Protestant religions renamed "Hellenistic Christianity," by Alan Knight. It is an appropriate title because those religions are clearly a syncretism of biblical and Gnostic teachings.

We saw in the last sermon of this 14-sermon-long series that some of these roots were in symbolic uses such as the Numbers 7 and 8. To Gnostics, the number 7 is evil, the number 8 is good. Sabbath is the seventh day, and Sunday, by their reckoning, is the eighth. Sabbath is therefore evil. Sunday, to them, is good.

Yahweh is clearly shown by the Bible as Creator. To the Gnostic, the earth is material and therefore evil. Now since Yahweh created the evil earth and authorized the seventh day as His day of worship, they concluded that He too is evil. And thus, since He, the earth, and the Sabbath are evil, and since He inspired the writers of the Old Testament, it too and all of its laws are evil. Israelites are evil because they practice those things.

Bit by bit, Gnostics reached conclusions regarding Christianity, and taught and practiced **their** conclusions. The result is what Paul labels in II Thessalonians 2 as "the mystery of lawlessness." A major problem existed though, because by this time the Gnostics were already in the church, seemingly converted members. Therefore they could spread their teachings from within the fellowship.

Gnosticism is a multi-faceted, Satan-inspired program to destroy Christian teaching and practice mostly by subtle and clever means. As long as the apostles were alive, the Gnostics did not make much progress, but they did plant the seeds.

The most extreme teachings of Gnosticism, like some of those that were just mentioned of the number 7 and number 8, were rejected by those men who became the leaders in what developed into what we now know as the Catholic church. This happened during the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. However, not everything in Gnosticism was rejected. It was during this AD second, third, and fourth century time-period that Sunday-keeping was adopted by those leaders, and impressed upon the membership.

Those who believed in keeping the Sabbath did not just roll over and play dead, though. The struggle between the two factions was at times pretty intense. It was so intense that the Roman emperor Constantine, fearing that much of the empire was going to suffer because of the wrangling between these two, called a conference in the AD fourth century. After much theological arguing, they failed to produce an agreement, and Constantine—the Roman *political* leader—issued an edict imposing Sunday worship on

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the empire in the Christian community.

It is very interesting that the Catholic church leaders readily accepted this edict by the political leader of the empire, thus overstepping them as being a religious organization of this world. They clearly and openly departed from biblical law, and thus God the Creator, because the Sabbath is the sign He gave for His people.

What I have just given you is an overview of how Sunday became the official day of worship of what we can call "Hellenistic Christianity," or we might say the "Catholic" church.

The Protestant Reformation changed nothing in this regard. However, Sabbath keeping was an issue as early as around AD 60, because that is about the time that this issue appears in the book of Colossians. The fact that this issue appears in Colossians shows that the theology for the change from Sabbath to Sunday-keeping was already in place, even though the change did not occur until about 350 more years had passed. Colossians thus shows us what the apostles felt about Sabbath keeping as opposed to Sunday keeping.

We are going to go into Colossians 2. However, I have to warn you that it is very difficult for people today to correctly grasp what is being taught there, because the people of Colosse were immersed in a complex mix of philosophical and theological ideas that we moderns are unfamiliar with, involving a mix of Christian truth and Gnostic error.

The Christian concept and the Gnostic concept were somewhat similar, thus making it fairly easy for the Christians to be deceived. You do not think that Satan would come at the church with something that would be so obvious that everybody would notice it right away. Does not a counterfeiter make his counterfeit, whatever it is, so close to the truth, that if a person is not really on top of things, he is going to be deceived by it? That is what happens. This is why I say that it is almost—in some ways—like we are splitting hairs between what is truth and what is error. I can say it to you, and in some ways what I say to you is going to be so obvious you would wonder at first how they could ever be fooled. Well, it was not so obvious then.

We are looking back at it now for almost 1900 and some years that time has passed. We have had a lot of time within the church for some of these things to be taught to us, and so some of the things that I am going to tell you may seem downright silly, mythological, magic, or whatever, but it was not to them. So let us look at this in Colossians, chapter 2. We are going to read a number of verses, beginning in verse 4. Notice the words, the implication, in what Paul is writing.

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**Colossians 2:4-5** And this I say, lest any man [any one] should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

We know that these people were not weaned away from the truth, but the battle was engaged.

**Colossians 2:6-8** As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him: Rooted and built up in him, and established in **the** faith, as you have been taught, abounding therein 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.

**Colossians 2:16-18** Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Those are pretty strong words that Paul has written there, making it clear, I think, that someone back in their time (at the time Paul was writing this) got news to Paul that somebody was interfering with the unity of the Colossian group. Let us look again at the warnings contained within the overall advice.

A modern translation of the word "beguile" in verse 4 may change that word into "deceived." "Let no one deceive you," makes it pretty clear that they were receiving teaching there that was not in line with Christianity. Then in verses 6 and 7 he strongly urges them to get back to what they had learned in the beginning of their conversion. He urges them to stick with it and keep growing by means of it.

In verse 8, the word "spoiled" more literally parallels the English phrase "take you captive." "Do not let anybody take you captive." It is almost like being taken captive by pirates. Buccaneers have gone out, and they have boarded your ship, and they are going to take **you** as a slave, as the spoils of their conquering of that ship. They are going to take you captive.

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In verse 16 the word "judge" can legitimately be rendered "condemned," making Paul's emphasis much stronger. In verse 18 the word "beguile" can be rendered "defrauded" or "disqualified," which would mean that these people could lose their salvation over this departure from the faith. All of these strong, warning words are indicating that something doctrinally amiss was on the loose in the congregation.

The scholars who write the commentaries see this too, but their problem is in identifying who the enemies were. They argue over whether it was Jews or Gentiles. From our perspective, identifying them is really not all that hard, because the solution lies in Paul's terminology—one in particular, but there are others.

My own personal opinion is that those scholars who try to settle this problem of deciding whether it was Jews or Gentiles who were stirring things up really do not want to yield to a simple solution. I say that because I think a personal yielding would involve a point of obedience. Romans 8:7 is still in the Bible. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." If they assign the blame to the right place, it would wipe out many of their arguments regarding whether Sunday or Saturday should be kept.

In verse 8 Paul uses the term "elemental spirits." It is translated in the *King James*: "rudiments of the world." That is a term straight out of Gnosticism. In one sense, "who was causing the problem" is already answered.

As I explained what was going on here, it must be remembered that Gnosticism was not one body of religious people holding to a single body of doctrines wherever they existed. Like modern Protestantism, they were split into many differing sects, each tweaking their doctrinal position to make themselves somewhat unique.

The Colossian group was fairly strong and influential, and appears to have held the views similar to a man named Valentinus, who came along a bit later. His writings survived him, and they can be used to help us understand what was going on here.

Now "rudiments of the world" or "elemental spirits" are part of a complex Gnostic doctrine having to do with a belief called today "*theurgy*." Webster's Dictionary defines "*theurgy*" as "the belief practiced by certain Neo-Platonists who professed to work miracles by the intervention of beneficent spirits." Another dictionary in my possession in my library said "*Theurgy* is known today as white magic."

According to the Gnostics, there were elemental forces in nature such as wind, rain, fire, springs of water, man, faith, hope, understanding and so forth, that govern such things

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like romantic love and success in business. They taught that the elemental spirits were the personification of those forces, and that they were *the* point of contact between earth and the forces radiating from heaven.

That may seem silly to you. Maybe so also does astrology seem silly to you, but an awful lot of people believe in it today. An awful lot of people believe in white magic today. *Theurgy* is still being practiced.

The Gnostics taught that these spirits assisted in regulating mankind's relationship with the heavens, providing a means for the human to connect to heaven and its power. Therefore, because of the spirit's position, humans can appeal to them, thus connecting **them** with the heavenly forces to gain either material or spiritual success, or both, in life.

It gets more interesting. The Gnostics did not teach that all of the elemental spirits were evil, but rather that there were good spirits as well as evil ones. The good spirits they called "the *pleroma*." The word "*pleroma*" literally means "fullness." The good spirits they called "the fullness" in the sense of spiritual perfection, and that these good spirits were available to help men overcome materialistic lusts and be purified spiritually.

In Hebrews 1 we are going to begin to touch on some of the similarities with biblical things.

**Hebrews 1:13** But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool?

I just want to interject this. Once you begin to understand this, you are going to see mention of Gnostic things all through the epistles.

**Hebrews 1:13-14** But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool? Are they not all [meaning angels] ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

How about that? Gnosticism is drawing closer here to the truth. God indeed does send forth ministering spirits—good angels—to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. Now it is beginning to look a little bit clearer that a Christian might be tripped up and dragged in by these so-called ideas about good ministering spirits that you can connect to, and get in touch with the heavens and be purified spiritually.

Part of the deceptive danger to Christians is the way that it was explained that made these *elementary spirits* sound equivalent to God's ministering spirits. They taught that once a person was united with one of these spirits, the human could not be tempted by materialistic lust, such as the lust for power, money, sex, alcohol addiction ...you name it. The way to purification was to get hooked up with an angel, and that paved the way for the very thing that you are all seeking to become: pure spiritually.

The Gnostic theology taught that connecting to the heavens through the *good* "elementary spirits" promoted the regenerating of the soul by awakening its natural spirituality, guaranteeing that it would rise to the heavens following death. What made it fairly easy for the Gnostic to sell this idea to the Christians is that the Old Testament makes angel/human connections which provided a mis-interpreted platform from Scripture through which they could deceive the unwary.

Let us go back to the book of Genesis. We are actually going to spend a little bit more time in the New Testament rather than just leap all through the Old Testament, because in the New Testament some summary statements are made. Turn to Genesis 48:16. Notice what Jacob says. Jacob is blessing Ephraim and Manasseh here, adopting them into his family, and in his prayer says:

**Genesis 48:16** The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, ...

Does that not begin to sound like Gnosticism, which says, "You get in touch with an angel, and he regenerates you spiritually the way that you should be"? Here is Jacob, one of the great men of old saying:

**Genesis 48:16** The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac: and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

Never mind that the Angel here was Jesus Christ; not really an angel, but He was a messenger from the Father. But Jacob was in touch with the *real* Messenger who *could* redeem him, but the way it is written there it looks like it just could have been one of these ministering spirits, and so it provides a bit of a foundation from which to deceive. We will not turn to it, but there was the angel of death through which Israel escaped when they kept the first Passover.

Let us go all the way back to the New Testament to the book of Galatians where Paul

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mentions something else in Galatians 3:19.

**Galatians 3:19** Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by *angels* [plural] in the hand of a mediator.

Does that not sound like God sent out angels to present this law to mankind, and the covenant that went with it?

**Hebrews 2:2-3** For if the word spoken by angels [Now he has the Bible being delivered by angels.] was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him...?

Let us go to the book of Acts, because these New Testament personalities confirm that angels were deeply involved in God's activities with Israel. In Acts 7:53 Stephen is speaking. Not long after this he was martyred, but he said to those [Jews] who were listening to him:

**Acts 7:53** Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

However, as you can probably discern, their misinterpretations and use made the spirits much closer, as we are going to see, to modern astrology and occultism than with God's angels.

The Valentinian Gnostic, upon conversion to Gnosticism, actually went through a sacrament during which he or she married an angel of the opposite sex, and thus they taught the evil passions that afflict the rest of mankind were miraculously healed. So I guess they would get baptized, and then one of the first things after that is they would get up and go through this mock wedding ceremony in which they were bound to an angel.

I do not want you to be thinking that the Christians in Colosse were doing that. There is no record of that. I am just telling you how far and how strongly the Gnostics themselves believed this.



The Gnostics went on to teach that the evil passions that afflict the rest of mankind can be miraculously healed in this way, and therefore there is no need for law or striving against sin, which they equated with bondage. Instead, their union with the angel produced a miraculous inner-transformation that naturally flowed forth in goodness and gentleness without human effort. For now, you see, you were righteous by nature because you were possessed, as it were, by an angel.

Can you see what these people would be led to do? They are giving their will, their control, over to someone outside themselves. What this was, I think as we can see, is nothing more than a subtle form of demon worship. That is what Paul calls it a little bit later: the worship of angels.

However, the subtlety did not end at this point. The Gnostics were so strongly against anything they interpreted as materialistic, that upon coming into contact with Christianity they cleverly twisted the Neo-Platonist's position by teaching that man must be liberated from these *elemental spirits*. Did you hear what I just said? It is just like they reversed their field. This makes the picture even more confusing. Why did they make this radical change? I think that God forced it on them in order to make their deceptions clear so that the Christian—even the newest convert—would be able to see through this.

Since the Gnostics even more strongly had this hatred toward Yahweh, and because they viewed Him as the Creator of these "elemental spirits"—the evil ones—and the Creator of what they interpreted as "materialism" and the Author of the Old Testament, therefore He and His materialistic way of life must be rejected. Now this all by itself should have given the Colossian Christians everything that they needed to reject the Gnostics, because it is the very thing that Paul attacks in Colossians 2.

In other words, the Gnostics still hated Yahweh even though they were associated with the Christian church. They still hated Yahweh, and they still hated anything associated with the Old Testament so much they also brought antinomianism into the mix of their beliefs regarding what Paul writes in Colossians 2.

Now was the problem disturbing the Colossian congregation a Jewish or a Gnostic one? Well, it was a Gnostic problem. For anybody who believed this junk, it did not matter what his ethnicity was. I ask this, because if you look in almost any commentary, they are going to say that it was a *Jewish* problem. It was **not** a Jewish problem. The commentator himself is imposing his belief that the Sabbath is done away. He has been caught in the "*lawless*" aspect of this.

There is no doubt that Jews would ordinarily **urge** Sabbath-keeping on people. These

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commentators reason that Paul is actually chastening Sabbath keepers in verse 16, because "it has been nailed to the cross, along with other ordinances, and it is merely a shadow of greater things that have now been revealed to the Christian church." That concept, brethren, is simply not true.

**Colossians 2:20-23** Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world are you subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using after the commandments and doctrines of men? which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

The mention again of "rudiments of the world" is already seen as something straight out of Gnostic philosophy, and not the religion of the Old Testament which the Jews would refer to.

Paul's use of the term "of the world," (and though it is of a major point) that term should immediately alert a Christian that this teaching involving "rudiments of the world" is not of God. It is from the world.

The strong language used when Paul writes, "Touch not; taste not; handle not," suggests very strongly *asceticism* which is nowhere taught in the Old Testament, which a Jew would want to put forth. The Old Testament indeed teaches self-control and being concerned about the treatment of our body and of taking care of one's personal as well as public health, but it nowhere teaches asceticism.

The margin in my *King James* version translates "neglecting of the body" in verse 23 as *severe treatment of the body*. Notice also that Paul writes that the source of this teaching is **human**. They are commands and doctrines of men, and not the God who authored the Old Testament.

There is one thing after another in these chapters that shows that Paul is supporting the keeping of the Sabbath and the Holy Days. He is not railing against them at all. He is not railing against the God who authored the Old Testament. He is just implying that this asceticism came straight out of paganism.

The trouble-making group was urging asceticism, which never was a biblical or Jewish tradition. The New Testament adds to Old Testament instruction by stating that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and thus one is required to take care of his body. Surely

Paul would have taught the Colossians this.

Thus far Paul has specifically identified "rudiments of the world" with "philosophy and vain deceit" in verse 8. They are hardly terms that he would use in reference to the Sabbath, or in reference to anything in the Old Testament. In verse 16, where he mentions food and drink, keeping festivals, and the Sabbath, was he condemning them when they are clearly identified in the Old Testament? Or was Paul positioning them against the "rudiments of the world" because the Gnostics were condemning the Christians for keeping them?

Much of the understanding regarding why Paul wrote the way he did in verses 16 and 17 will come from understanding verse 17 and its use of the terms "shadow" and "body." Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come: but the body [substance] is of Christ."

If you look in your bible margin, it will say "substance." The word "body" is not a good translation in the *King James*. The word "substance" is better. If your Bible has "substance," it is closer to the truth there. Now why did the translators translate it "body"? It is because the translators did not look at this chapter from a Gnostic point of view, which Paul undoubtedly did because of what these terms meant to Gnosticism.

"Shadow" and "substance" are also both Christian and Gnostic. "Shadow" is another word for "symbol." "Body" or "substance" infers what the shadow points to. In other words: body, substance, or reality. A shadow then points to the reality.

For example, in today's world a nation's flag is the shadow. The nation is the body. The flag points to the nation. Start putting Sabbath days in there. Sabbath days point to a reality. The *King James Version* renders this in such a way as to lead one to understand that one should let the church judge such matters as being discussed, rather than the trouble-making critics who were bothering church members by complaining about the church members keeping festivals and Sabbaths.

Some modern translators have caught the sense of what Paul wrote much better, and they translated more correctly. If you have a *New International Version [NIV]*, their version is better. In the *New International Version* it states: "These [meaning the Sabbath, the new moon, the rejoicing and eating during festivals] **are** [present tense] a shadow of things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ."

Verse 17 actually highlights another part of what the controversy in Colosse was over.

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That is, what the shadows (or what we would say today *symbols*) represent. In this matter the church and the Gnostics were light years apart. Let us go back to the book of Hebrews again, chapter 8, verse 5. When we get to verses like this we can begin to understand why it was possible for people to become confused and deceived.

**Hebrews 8:5** Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, says he, that you make all things according to the pattern showed to you in the mount.

**Hebrews 10:1** For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

In both of these places the writer of Hebrews is clearly saying that Old Testament shadows clearly point to New Testament realities. Let us look at one that is the best known in all of Christianity.

**I Corinthians 5:7** Purge out therefore the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

The Old Testament Passover and the Exodus is the *shadow* pointing to Christ and Christian liberty that is the reality. Just take that principle and put it into the festivals. Thus the First and Last Day of Unleavened Bread are shadows. They are pointing to a New Testament reality. The same is true of Pentecost. It is a shadow pointing to a New Testament reality. Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Last Great Day are shadows pointing to Christ and to some aspect of His ministry and of His purpose.

A shadow existing does not do away with the reality, and because the reality may have been revealed, it does not do away with the shadow. It is still there. But you see, the Gnostics said, "Well, once the reality is come, you no longer need the shadow." Not true at all! We are still human beings and we need the shadow to reinforce the reality in our mind so that we will follow through on the purpose of God.

Paul made it very clear. He wrote in the present tense: "*These **are** a shadow.*" The shadows are not done away. He did not say "were" They **are** a shadow—present tense. So they still point to Christ in whom is all the fullness [*pleroma*] in bodily form and is

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worthy of worship. He then proceeds in Colossians 2:18 to warn against worshipping angels. "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worship of angels." That refers right back to the Gnostic interpretation of "shadows" and is alluded to in the statement involving "rudiments of the world."

I told you at the beginning this is going to be somewhat complex and convoluted. There is no way to get away from it though. We are not familiar with what these people were experiencing, because Satan threw at them a bunch of mumbo-jumbo that could easily trip up people. It is so easy to be tripped up by them that modern so-called Christians still believe what these Gnostics said.

The Gnostic concept of shadows did not come from God. It came from the philosopher Plato. Did you notice in the beginning the "Neo-Platonist"? Plato's *Theory of Forms* is still taught in modern American universities, which I will explain to you briefly here.

Plato theorized that everything on earth is nothing more than a shadow of a heavenly form, or arch-type. Thus material things on earth are shadows and things in heaven are the "substance" or the "reality." For example, the Gnostic teaching that came from Plato says that all the varieties of trees on earth are merely shadows of **one** idealized heavenly tree, that in our world individual trees grow and die, that they are not identical copies of each other. When we look at them we recognize them as members of the tree family because of their connection to the eternal perfect unchanging tree in heaven. That is what Plato taught.

Plato went on to teach that everything on earth, including humans, is illusory in that everything is unstable and subject to change, and that is why we all differ in our appearance. That is why all the trees are different. Those differences to Plato are identification of degeneration. All of us on earth are subject to disease and aging, and all of us are imperfect shadows of the archetypes in heaven. To them the archetypes are real, perfect, eternal, and unchanging.

However, there is hope for humans if we can somehow attach ourselves to the heavenly world, [then] we can take on the spiritual perfection of the heaven, and ultimately be immortal and unchanging as they are. The medium through which all of this is accomplished is of course angels—the rudiments of the world.

This is outright **demonism!** But do not you want to be perfect? I hope you want to be perfect as God is perfect, not as an angel is perfect—even a good angel.

All of this might sound quite fanciful to you; however it had a tragic spiritual application

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that reverberates down to this modern Hellenistic Christianity.

I asked you at the beginning to remember that word *pleroma*. It means "fullness." To the Gnostic, the *pleroma* was the highest heaven and the abode of pure spirituality. In their teaching, all things are at "rest" there. (Remember one of my sermons at the Feast had to do with the "rest" of Hebrews 4.) They were at rest in the sense that they were unchanging. Now outside and below the *pleroma* things are chaotic, and to some degree defective, [being] only a shadow of that which is within, that when anything leaves the *pleroma* it becomes at least in part a shadow. Their thinking on this even included Christ, who appeared on earth bringing *gnosis* (as they called it) and salvation.

Irenaeus—one of the Catholic church fathers—exposed an application of this doctrine in regard to Christ. I will give you the sense of what he wrote, because to quote the whole thing is long and difficult to understand because of all the symbolism that is involved. Now listen to my paraphrase that greatly digests it. You are going to be able to see another tragic doctrine in this.

Mary, Christ's mother, descended from the *pleroma*, and therefore retained some of her knowledge of heavenly things. She passed this on to Christ, which made Him partially reflect some of the heavenly along with some shadow. When Christ ascended back to the *pleroma* He became fully real; that is, [He became] spiritual again, and thus Jesus only partially reflected the spirituality of the heavenly *pleroma*, and therefore His ministry was defective to some degree. He was contaminated by the Hebrew religion, and that is how they explain away the fullness of Jesus' conduct and teaching. Their conclusion: He only obeyed the law because He was Jewish.

That reverberates still to today, and thus when He taught the correct spiritual observance of the Sabbath, as in Matthew 12, and called Himself Lord of the Sabbath, He was simply reflecting His "Jewishness." But when He ascended back to the *pleroma*, the Gnostics explain, that that deficiency was repaired. The Gnostics called their version of Christianity a more spiritual revelation of it, and thus after the resurrection and His return to the *pleroma*, Jesus gave His inner circle of Gnostic Christians a second, more spiritual revelation, which just happened to be a sycretization of Christianity and Gnosticism.

Evelyn and I have been told by people in the Church of God—people who came out of the same Worldwide Church of God that we came out of—that they have a more spiritual revelation of the truth of God. That was told right to our face.

You probably caught elements of two modern doctrines: (1) the elevation of Jesus' mother Mary, far beyond God's intention, into all the ramifications of the Immaculate Conception doctrine, and (2) the Gnostic rejection of Jesus' earthly ministry is duplicated today in the doctrine of dispensationalism, and is especially strong in Evangelical Christianity. It also encompasses the eternal security doctrine, and it also encompasses why you do not have to keep the law.

Go with me now to Colossians 1:15. I want us to begin to see that Paul used the first two chapters of Colossians to fight what was involved there in Colosse before he gave the practical applications in chapters 3 and 4, but in chapter 1 he was already setting things up.

**Colossians 1:15** Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

I want you to notice here that Paul mentions that Christ is the image of the Father, not an angel. He is the image of the Father. He is not the image of any angel even from the *pleroma*, but He is the image of the Father. Think back to Hebrews 1:13 again: "To which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, ...."

In an overall sense, one of the strongest things the apostles had to combat in the first century was the putting down of Christ as being in a subordinate position and really no higher than any other good angel. Incidentally, the word here that is translated "image" is a word that we are familiar with, and some of us say it every day in relation to computers. It is the word "icon." It can mean two things. It can mean "representation", or stronger still, "manifestation." Either one of them is acceptable and this could easily be translated to mean that Christ was the manifestation of the Father; not that He was the Father, but He was the exact manifestation of the Father.

In Colossians 1:16 you can begin to see how Paul is setting the table here—the elevation of Christ into the proper position that a Christian should hold Him.

**Colossians 1:16** 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.

After first naming Him as being the representation or the manifestation of the Father, Paul now emphasizes Christ's relationship to the creation. ***He IS the Creator. He is***

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**Yahweh!** "Who do you think this is that you are calling no good?" **He is the Creator!** We need to stretch out this concept of creation beyond the merely physical creation to the spiritual creation, because Paul is saying here too that Christ is in charge of the spiritual creation as well. That has been delegated to Him by the Father.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest. Paul does not mention High Priest, but it is Christ's responsibility to save us, so He is really the Author of the spiritual creation as well. Christ is the central instrument of our creation physically and spiritually, and **He** is the focus of our salvation; again, not angels of the *pleroma*, as the Gnostics taught. This principle here is important to feed back into Colossians 2:16-17.

**Colossians 2:19** For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness [the *pleroma*] dwell.

"Fullness" is the word! I will tell you, that was a punch right in the nose to those people! **The whole pleroma is contained within Christ**, and Paul brings this back in, in verses 7, 8, and 9 in the next chapter. **IN HIM ALL THE FULLNESS DWELLS BODILY!** You see, the Gnostics taught the exact opposite, that He was merely an angel **from** the *pleroma*. Paul said, "Hey! Wait a minute. He **IS** the *pleroma*!"

**Colossians 1:20** And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself: by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.

Again, this is pointing out the high office of Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that the Father reconciles all things to Himself through Jesus Christ, not through some angel from the *pleroma*, which is what the Gnostics taught.

The Gnostics were dedicated to unlimited freedom to spiritualize away virtually everything in the Scriptures. This is what they did with the word "rest" that comes up in Hebrews 4. They turned "rest" into nothing more than an aspect of the *pleroma*; not that "rest" is a reality that is coming **to** us, but they said rather it is something we have to go to heaven to get through angels.

Do you remember that in Colossians 1:16, Paul mentions thrones, dominions, principalities, powers? These are all terms referring to aspects or levels of government.

**Colossians 2:15** And [Christ who] having spoiled principalities and powers,



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he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it [meaning in His life and in His death].

**Colossians 2:9-10** For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

Paul is pulling everything together here. Principalities, powers, and dominions are all references that the ancient world would have made to angelic authority, and to some human authority as well. But in verse 9 he says that all the fullness of the Godhead was in Christ, and we are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power.

In other words, we do not have to hook onto an angel and get the fullness that way. We already have the fullness. We have access to it through Jesus Christ. We do not need angels. We already have it, and Christ is their Boss! It is really a putdown to the Gnostic idea. Paul's argument is that since a Christian already has access to the fullness of God through Christ, and is being made complete in Him, giving heed to a Gnostic idea about angels makes no sense at all. In verse 15 Paul adds that Christ is above any angelic ruler, whether real or imagined, and that in Christ we are free from the authority of any angel, whether good or evil, because our King has already conquered them.

**Colossians 2:11** In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

This sets the stage for Paul's argument against asceticism a little bit later, but we have no need of entertaining angels or involving ourselves in asceticism as a means of freeing ourselves from materialism. Christ has already accomplished that for us through the change of heart through spiritual circumcision.

Regarding interpreting this chapter correctly, it does not matter whether the critics were Greek or Jewish, because the critics were Gnostics. That is all that matters. Their ethnicity does not matter at all. They were Gnostics regardless of ethnicity, and they were teaching a perversion that was derailing some who were truly Christian.

I think that what I want to do here is conclude with a summary and a re-reading of II Thessalonians. It is interesting that Paul wrote Thessalonians seven or eight years before he wrote Colossians. It is interesting that we can even go back beyond 60 AD or so, when Paul wrote Colossians, to as far back as about 52 AD when he wrote II

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Thessalonians. Incidentally, the first epistle that Paul wrote was probably I Thessalonians. Everything points to that, and then several months later he wrote II Thessalonians.

**II Thessalonians 2:7** For the mystery of iniquity [of lawlessness] does already work: only he who now lets will let, until he be taken out of the way.

**II Thessalonians 2:13-17** 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: Whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle. [Remember the background here. The "mystery of iniquity" was already working.] Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.

The fanciful things regarding "elementary spirits" have been removed as part of the equation today. However, the conclusions that those things led to remain. It was teaching that one does not have to obey God's laws because Jesus did it for us, and He only did it Himself because He was a Jew. No, He did it because He was human. He did it because He was the Son of God in whom was the Spirit of God.

He did it because He was faithful in all things. He did it because it is the way of righteousness. He did it to glorify God. He did it to set us an example. He did it that we should walk in His steps. He did it to qualify to be our Savior and to be in the Kingdom of God with us. That leads right to us. We must keep them because we are a son of God, because it is the way of righteousness. We must do it in order to be faithful, to glorify God, to walk in His steps, to set an example, witnessing to the world that we might be in God's kingdom.

This fourteen-part series began with me showing you evidence from the Barna Report of rampant lawlessness and doctrinal perversions that the "born agains" feel free to do and make part of their lives. I showed you the same general things are going on as were going on in the first century church.

I showed you the rise of Gnosticism into a distinct religion, and it being syncretized with dissident elements of the true church into the Catholic religion. I showed you the

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Protestant Reformation changed little, except for church government. In following it, the world has now **two** distinct forms of what author Alan Knight calls "Hellenistic Christianity."

Today we have come full circle, and the original lawlessness is still presently being seen in Evangelical-Protestantism teaching that Jesus kept the law for us, and that His teaching that no law is done away and keeping of the Sabbath was done only because He was a Jew. These concepts are supported by the doctrines of dispensationalism; that is, that we are now in the dispensation of grace, and law does not matter, and eternal security, which essentially teaches that it is impossible for one not to be saved.

All three of these things: (1) lawlessness, (2) dispensationalism, and (3) eternal security came right straight out of Gnosticism, and they are surviving to this day. They are alive. They are not biblical truths. If we do not learn anything else from these fourteen sermons, it is that these doctrines are critical to our salvation, that we do not get caught up in them, thinking that somehow we do not have to obey God, that Christ did it for us. God is judging our works, and part of those works is the keeping of His law.