

98-12-16a Colossians

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you as always for your grace, your faithfulness, your provision for us, the many blessings that we have enjoyed, your protection, your sustaining of our health and our transportation and our situation in life that enables us to come together here with believers of like mind to be nourished up through the truth of your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us.

We know that he is our true teacher and that as we look at these things tonight, our souls will be strengthened. The foundation for application and for seeing our lives as you see us will be enhanced and that we will live in a way that pleases you and that glorifies our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name.

Amen. I have gone a little light on covering our memory verses, but I want to continue to encourage you in that regard. The two that we are currently working on are both from the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 26.3. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.

That is how it goes in the Old King James and I am not going to relearn it just because I have a new King James now. But that verse interestingly ties directly to our study in Colossians tonight. The mind that is stayed on the Lord is kept in perfect peace and the reason is because that is where faith is directed, because he trusts in you.

Our other memory verse is Isaiah 41.10. It is a little bit longer, but it is such a beautiful, it is well into the realms of poetry even in the English translation. It is exceedingly, of course all of Isaiah is wonderful to study in Hebrew, but even in English. Fear thou not, for I am with thee.

Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand. The right hand of my righteousness.

Whichever version you memorize that out of, remember that we studied about the right hand of God's righteousness. God has given his righteousness to us. He has declared us righteous just as he did Abram.

It isn't God's righteous right hand, it is the right hand, the strong support of God's righteousness that is in view. It brings God's righteousness much closer to us because it is actually within us. So, I will strengthen, help, uphold with the right hand of my righteousness, God says.

So those are two memory verses and we will review those and take just a real quick look at the language in which those promises and principles are expressed in Hebrew on Sunday. But let's resume tonight in Colossians chapter 2. We are quickly finishing this chapter and approaching chapter 3. Paul here is now more or less directly addressing the various ideas that are being advertised to the Colossian church. We know the foundation, we know the situation here.

And what we are looking at now are the similarities in that ancient day. It is hard to believe in some respects that 2,000 years ago the same sorts of distractions, the same kinds of substitutes were being offered to those believers that are offered to us today. And we want to be alert.

If you remember way, way back, I think most of you were here when we did our watch and pray study. That was a few years ago and we may refresh ourselves on that principle. But if you just think, you will recall that there are a number of passages in the Bible that exhort us to be alert, to be sober, to be vigilant, to be watchful.

There are several that specifically say watch and pray and bring those two things together. Time and time again, whether it is the words of the Lord, the words of the apostles or the general principles expressed throughout the Bible, be alert, pay attention. We have the tendency, there is a syndrome in the church, to sort of settle down in the comfortable chair of our salvation and wait for the movers to pick that chair up and take it to glory.

And not to be aware of the currents and the subtle erosion that takes place. There are people dismantling that chair and if you don't sit up and pay attention, you find yourself in empty space. The attacks that Paul is going to specifically address here in the last half of chapter 2, every single one of them has a counterpart, has a parallel today.

And each one of them is directed at you and at me. There is nothing that the enemy would like better, there is nothing that the program that Satan has undertaken in this age, there is nothing that would fit into it better than for us to fall for these distractions. Now if they had a big label printed in international distress orange that said manufactured in Satanville, we could recognize it and say, well I'm not going to, we have the cults, you have the fanatical things and the people that tattoo and pierce themselves and look real strange.

Those are easy to identify as erroneous. The things that slip under our guard and take us hostage and neutralize us are things that are dressed up to look just like grand, good old fashioned Christianity. And most, this is a terrible thing to have to say, most of the believers in the church in our generation are in that category.

They have been deceived. They have been taken captive. They have been cheated of the opportunity to lay hold of the inheritance that Jesus Christ died to give us.

They have missed the opportunity to bear the fruit that God has cultivated us as a field to produce. Most of us as believers today in this generation as in many other generations including the days of the church in Colossae, most of us wind up being the field of Hebrews chapter 6 that has been watered and cultivated many times, but it is bringing up, it is bearing only thorns. But to the unpracticed eye, to the uneducated eye, it looks like fruit.

People think this is fruit, this is good, this is great, God is being glorified, praise God, hallelujah, hosanna and so forth. And it is a terrible, terrible deception. That is the thing about deception.

Deceptions fool people. Without becoming a master of the obvious there, it is necessary for us to realize that it is not going to just be an obvious thing. And if we are not alert, if we don't know the ground and the foundation, if we are not trusting and holding fast to the head, we will be deceived.

And many of us have been deceived along the way. Almost everyone falls prey to this at some time or another. But thanks be to God, we have his word and we have his spirit and we are delivered and we continue to be delivered day by day as we learn and grow.

And this is our daily salvation. Remember we noticed back in the first chapter of Galatians. If you turn back to Galatians chapter 1, verse 3 and 4, Paul in his greeting says, Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins so that he might deliver us from this present evil age.

Not the lake of fire only, not eternal damnation only, not permanent estrangement from God and slavery to sin, but to deliver us out of the present evil age. And this expression of truth continues to be true generation after generation after generation. Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins so that he might deliver us from this present evil age.

The age in which we now live is evil. And that evil takes many forms. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So we are in the process in Galatians chapter 2 of doing our best to understand the application of what Paul is telling the church to our present day. So we find in Galatians chapter 2, verse 14, Paul telling us the reason that we don't have to be victimized by these things. He has already said in verse 8, Beware lest anyone cheat you.

It's a very strongly worded warning. He talks about what God has done for us through Christ when he raised him from the dead in verse 12. We in verse 13 were dead in trespasses and uncircumcision of our flesh, but God has made us alive together with him, having forgiven trespasses.

Why does Paul bring this up in the context of deliverance and avoiding deception? Because this is one of the ways people will drag us into their philosophy, will drag us into their version. They themselves often don't think that they are deceiving people. They often are committed and believe that this is a wonderful great thing.

They themselves are deceived. They deceive others. It is the blind leading the blind.

And they both fall into the ditch, as Jesus said. What's one of the hooks? What's one of the inducements to fall in this way? What is one of the things that is attractive to us or that impels us in one of these false directions? It's not realizing that our sins are forgiven. It is the pull.

It's the guilt that we feel. It's the shame that we feel from our failures, present, past, whatever they may be. Sometimes it's just an association.

But whatever it may be, people, consciously or unconsciously, you know how it is. When you're trying to convince, persuade, you're trying to cajole. We see this going on in our national government even now.

We've got a pool of undecided representatives in the Congress and there's an important decision at stake and people are trying to figure out how can we get them to come to our side. Well, instinctively, consciously or unconsciously, one of the levers to pry someone in a different direction is their own faults, their own failures. People love to quote the Lord.

Well, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. How can you bring someone into judgment? What would happen if we appointed a special prosecutor and let him investigate you? And so forth. And so using the presence of sin or the presence of failure, using the guilt of our own failures and transgressions against us, this is a powerful inducement.

This is a lever. Watch out, Paul says. Beware.

Someone will take and try to use that as a chink in your armor and get you to feel like you're not, your worship of God, your study of the Word of God, the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, the things that God has done for you are inadequate. Something more needs to be done. You need to somehow cleanse yourself of this guilt.

You can work off. You can sort of balance the scale by getting into some positive action, by participating in a ministry, by taking on a hair shirt and denying yourself something. Sort of, well, it's labeled asceticism, self-denial in some form.

Humbling yourself in some way, denigrating and abasing yourself. And people think, well, I don't see that happening in the church. It all depends on what church experience you've been in.

The public confession of sin movement, where people are encouraged to stand up and give a testimony, quote-unquote, where under the guise of talking about the great things God has done for them, they first start out by saying all of the bad things that they have done before. And this is where I need to stop and make an important point about everything that we're going to cover tonight. Because none of these things is necessarily intrinsically bad.

Looking and seeing where you have come from. This is something Paul does in this context, doesn't he? He says, remember when you were dead in your trespasses and sins. Remember when you were victims of and controlled by the principalities and powers, the elemental spirits of the world.

Remember when Paul himself points to these things. Now, is Paul using this illegitimate lever to

try to forward his agenda in these people's minds? There is a difference. And the difference is, what are you getting people to look at? Where are you pointing their faith and their trust? What is it that you are going to end up viewing? You, the audience, listening to all these ideas.

Where is your attention going to rest? What are you going to put your faith in? If you wind up putting your faith in a procedure, lots of people from our particular corner of Christianity have put their faith in a procedure called naming your sins. Well, if I name my sins, I'm going to cling to that. I'll just review from time to time and figure out, put a name to what I've done, and I'll name that.

Is this a biblical principle? Yes, it is. Is it part of God's plan for cleansing our souls, washing our feet, as it were, so that we can be clean? Yes, it is. But we can ab-use.

The word abuse is use with a negative in front of it. The letter A, and since you're in front of a vowel there, you've got to put another consonant in between. Ab-use means to use something wrongly, to abuse the principle of confession, to make it a mantra, to make it just a procedure without thought, without application, without understanding, without the concomitant, without the accompanying attitude of a desire to walk in the light, a genuine desire to please God.

We just reach out for it like a Catholic would reach out for lighting candles or going to confession. You see these Italian mafia movie plots where these horrible, murdering, thieving, conniving mob types go down to the priest and name what they've done and walk out feeling like everything's okay now, but they're still a thieving, conniving, murdering mob type. Well, we're no different.

If we seize on to 1 John 1.9 and say, well, I named my sins, everything's okay now. So this is what we want to distinguish. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with a testimony.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with looking back and seeing from where you have come. And there's nothing intrinsically wrong, occasionally there are times and places where it is a good thing and it's a part of speaking the truth in love between believers to go back and talk about those things. But when this becomes an end in itself, when this is what we're putting our faith in and it becomes a legal thing, we use it like the Pharisees used the law.

Well, I've tithed my spice cabinet today, so I'm a holy man. I've stood on the street corner in sackcloth and ashes and raised my hands to heaven. Look how I've abased myself.

Look how I've embarrassed myself in public. God has to be pleased now. And have missed the higher and greater principles of faith, hope, and love of which these things are supposed to be an expression.

They are not a means. They should be a result. But that's not the kind of thing you can go diagnose someone and say, you know, I can tell just by looking on the outside that you've got this all backwards.

This is something each of us has to apply to ourselves. We can fool the public. We can fool most of the people most of the time.

We can appear to be genuinely humble, genuinely loving, genuinely faithful, genuinely hopeful, genuinely bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The only really true evaluation is in the privacy of our own souls when we stand before the Lord. And nobody can come apply this for us.

Nobody can come and open the door of your soul and tell you for sure how this is really going. We each have a responsibility to take these things and go before the Lord and let the harsh light of the Word shine in there and find out if we are in the faith or not. But if someone tries, if someone starts taking these things and begins to use them as a lever to move you in a direction, this is when we start reading, beware, watch out, don't let someone cheat you, because this is a personal responsibility.

Other people don't do this for us. All of these mentoring groups and discipling groups and let me take you under my wing and I will model the Christian life for you interposes a human being between you and God. And Jesus Christ died to take that intermediate step out of the way.

Remember in verse 14 of Colossians chapter 2, He wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. There was something that stood between God and Israel, wasn't there? There was a veil in the temple. There were ritual requirements for cleansing.

Somebody could hit you with a stray rock and cause you to bleed and that blood rendered you unclean until evening. You could have a natural bodily emission that is a part of daily life or a part of the normal cycle of life from day to day or month to month and it would render you ceremonially unclean and you could not approach God to worship. The ordinances, the handwriting of regulations of the law stood between people and God and it reinforced the necessary understanding of our sinfulness and God's holiness.

But that point was made. It was made over the course of 1400 years. And when Jesus came, He said, Okay, that point's been made.

He fulfilled those things. He was the culmination of those things. He did not destroy the law.

He fulfilled it. And when He fulfilled it and when He died on the cross and paid the judicial penalty for our transgressions, that handwriting of ordinances was wiped out. This intermediate thing that stood between us and God was taken out of the way.

It says in verse 14, He nailed it to the cross. They took Jesus' body down from the cross and He was raised. But that handwriting of ordinances didn't get taken down from the cross.

It was permanently nailed there. It died there and it never came back. It didn't say anything about God the Father, God the Holy Spirit resurrecting the handwriting of ordinances.

It died and it stayed dead. There is now no condemnation. There is now no intermediate fence reminding us that we are unholy and God is holy.

That's been done. Don't let anybody else walk into that gap and say, I need to be your intermediary. My little program, my procedure, my ritual system, my standards, my take on the Word of God is now, you need to come to this and this will get you to God.

That is what Paul is talking about. It should not take place. If it does, it will cheat us.

So, we have this taking place today. We have people filling, it's horrifying to me, to turn on the TV and see these big auditoriums and big stadiums filled. How old are they? What color are these people? It's a combination of astonishment and sadness to see big, big, big rooms full of hundreds and hundreds of people being led willingly astray, being led by their emotions.

One of the first ways it takes place is by this idea that, well, you're sinful. You've got to do something more. You've got to verbally confess.

You need some groveling. You need to do this or do that or do the other. Or you need to balance the scales.

Look at the damage you've done. Now you've got to go do it right. There's even an old gospel song.

As much as I love Southern gospel, there are some gospel songs that are great, reflect wonderful biblical principles, and there are others that just don't. I just try to leave those off of the tapes I make or whatever. There's a song that many singers have sung.

Jay Cass has sung it. I'm just checking up on my payments to the Lord. There's a mighty long list of bills I've got to pay and so forth.

I did a lot of wrong things. God saved me. Now I've got to shovel in that big deficit I made with my sins.

This is a thread of thought in the church. Don't fall for it, Paul says. When you look at what he's talking about in the last half of chapter 2, he brings up every one of these major crowbars that a deceiver and a philosophizer and a ritualizer will use to convince us that we need to go that way.

That first one, he says, look, you put off the body of sins of the flesh in verse 11. This death in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh in verse 13, that was all taken care of. It was wiped out.

The handwriting of requirements was contrary to us, stood in the way. He took it out of the way. He nailed it to the cross.

So be aware. If you start feeling guilt, especially over old things, that's one thing to be convicted

of a wrong practice that we're currently engaged in. If we had some sort of an ongoing pornography problem, if we had some sort of an ongoing works problem, if we had some sort of an ongoing attitude problem with another believer or another person, if we had some current ongoing problem, that's one thing.

If truth is communicated, the Holy Spirit uses that truth to lay bare something in the thoughts and intents of the heart that needs a remedy now, that's an entirely different thing than someone looking in the past. Even about this thing now, this happens even in Christian counseling. Right down the road here, you can go and they will say, well, let's dig into the life of your parents a little bit.

What sorts of problems did they have? What sins did they commit? Let's see if we can't find a source for your problems in the sins of the fathers and this kind of thing. Anybody that starts luring you down the path of the past and wrongs in the past is leading you away from Christ and into a philosophy and will cheat you of your reward. Paul says, we forget those things which are behind.

Some people say, well, you can't understand the present and you can't move into the future until you resolve the past. Well, let's find a passage of scripture that supports that. Let's find our paragraph in Paul or in John or in Peter and let's explore that and see if that is in fact a part of the truth of God or is that a human understanding because that's the only way human beings can wreak any sort of a change is by radically shaking up the whole mindset of someone.

You can take a deck of 48 cards and you can throw them up in the air and pick them up and they're all reshuffled. You've still only got a deck of 48 cards. They're different now.

You can take a kleptomaniac and cure their kleptomania and now they're a pyromaniac or now they're so inordinately proud of having gotten over their kleptomania that they're insufferably antisocial. If you've only got 48 cards and you're supposed to have 52, it doesn't matter how you stack them. You can shake them up and you can make a change.

They'll deal differently, but you've still got a short deck. God's power and God's truth is the only thing that will completely transform and fix those kinds of problems, but it's very prevalent for people to use our transgressions. But Paul says, anytime somebody starts using that, just remember.

Go back and think. Jesus Christ paid for our transgressions. He took care of the death in our souls that was a result of those transgressions.

He took care of the handwriting of ordinances that pointed out those transgressions. Anything having to do with transgressions as far as being something that holds us back and separates us from God, Jesus Christ solved it. It's a done deal.

Are you going to say the work of Christ is inadequate? Are you going to say God is no longer satisfied with what Christ did on the cross? That's what you do if you get dragged back into something as a result of guilt or something as a result of shame. Someone makes you feel like, well, I've got to compensate somehow for my failures. Paul says, don't do it.

What's the second thing he mentions in this passage after transgressions? You go all the way back up to verse 11. He says, you're complete in Him. He's the head of all principality and power.

In Him you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. This was a ritual requirement. This was going back to the law of Moses and saying, well, you know, we've got people that say you need to worship on Saturday, that nothing ever revoked the Sabbath laws.

You need to tithe, the ten percent requirement to pay your tenth and the windows of heaven will open and so forth. Not so much in the area of failures of sin or through guilt or shame to motivate us, but you've missed some of the requirements that the Bible puts on you. The Bible's got some things to say if you're going to please God, there are some things you need to do.

You've got some obligations to fulfill. You've got some ritual type of things. You need to be water baptized.

Now, there's a sensitive subject. I come from a long line of Baptists. And water baptism has become, and this is one of the passages they'll come to, you come to the last part of chapter 2 there where it says you were buried with Christ in baptism.

Right here in verse 12. Buried with Him in baptism, in which also you were raised with Him through faith and the working of God. And if you don't read this closely, I've had people even in their late, late life come to me and say, you know, I was in a different denomination and now I'm in this church and I'm wondering if maybe I should undergo water baptism.

We have to be careful because do people who have been, and then people make a distinction. Well, I've been baptized, but not only was I baptized, I was dunked. I think you were not really baptized because you were only sprinkled or maybe you were effused.

Or maybe you haven't had any water applied to you at all and there's a distinction. You haven't really been fully obedient until you follow the Lord in baptism. Seems like such a silly thing, but you look at the number of churches that have got that big tank built right into the front of the building there.

It is a big deal. And people make it a big deal. There are many churches who will not let you join as a member unless you either get baptized there or bring a piece of paper that says you were dunked somewhere else or sprinkled somewhere else or effused somewhere else or got a certificate that you were baptized as a child.

You've got the whole issue of infant baptism. In our particular periphery we don't hear much about that, but in other parts of the church that's a big, big deal. I have been asked to baptize an infant or to dedicate an infant and this is seen to have some sort of efficient working in the life of a child.

If you get them dedicated and baptized when they're small they're going to be sanctified and set apart and they're going to have a little better chance of being saved later on or being a good Christian later on. We have to watch out for this kind of thing. Involvement in the work of the church is a ritual requirement.

You need to be here when we have the doors open. You need to participate when we go out and hand out things or knock on doors or participate. We're going to go to the rally or Billy Graham is coming to town and we're going to go down there and you're just kind of a second class citizen if you don't join.

Is there anything wrong with Billy Graham? Not that I know of. He's done a wonderful thing of expressing and exercising his gift, but people can make it a wrong thing when they start to make it a measure of your spirituality, whether or not you come and participate. You look at it differently if you're there or you're not there.

You look at it differently if you're baptized or you're not baptized. You look at it differently depending on what you do offering-wise or attendance-wise or dress-wise. Again, we're very fortunate in being free of a lot of these things in our particular group, but I think all of us have been in groups where it makes a difference.

You are noticed and note is taken if you dress a certain way or say or fail to say a certain thing. All different kinds of behaviors are seen to be a part of proper church life. Well, this is ritualism.

This is setting a standard that's not based on the Scripture. Years ago, hats were a big deal. Are you wearing a hat or not wearing a hat? You ought to wear a hat.

The Bible says a woman doesn't have her head covered when she prays. It's an offense, and this, that, and the other. Then there was a big thing.

Well, if you wear a hat, you're a big distraction to the people behind you, so you should not wear a hat. How can we discern these things? Just look. Is someone making an issue out of your behavior instead of your faith, of the way you act or the way you look instead of what you're trusting in? If someone does that, where you go to church, the way that you worship, the type of church that you attend, that's an issue for us.

We're, I suppose, in a minority, although apparently there's a big movement afoot of which I know virtually nothing, but apparently we're trendy and we don't even know it. But there's a big home church, cell church, I don't know what all they call it, but they've got a website and they've got books and all kinds of things. But for people that are used to a traditional church with a steeple in

the parking lot and so forth, choir, pews, cards, little plaque up in the front, attendance this Sunday, attendance last Sunday, offering this Sunday, offering last Sunday.

So forth. We look pretty strange to someone who is really ingrained in that model. Well, if someone from that background or someone with that view makes an issue of it or tries to make an issue of it, we are commanded in this passage, do not let anyone judge you.

Obviously, you can't stop them from thinking these thoughts and from believing that you're in a cult or there's some other weird thing going on. But Paul nevertheless says don't let anyone judge you. Well, you can't stop them.

What he's saying is don't feel judged. Don't let yourself play the part of the defendant. Don't let yourself feel like you're standing in the box and you're the one on trial.

If you are in fact, and this is a first class condition, if and it's true, if you are in fact the possessor of biblical understanding, if you know that your worship is legitimate, that you are learning and growing, that your faith is in the Son of God, that you are in fact clinging to the head, you are the stronger believer and you are dealing with a weaker believer. Don't let someone turn the table over and make you feel like you're somehow a weaker believer, that you're deficient. This is the ploy that Paul is identifying.

And he says watch out. If you fall for this, if you let yourself think this way, you will lose your reward. You will forsake the opportunity to bear fruit because this is the challenge.

This is the test. Can you remember who you are in Christ? Can you remember that your legitimacy and your value and the honor of your walk before the Father depends on Christ? It doesn't depend on somebody's evaluation. It doesn't depend on what they think and what they think they know or how many people like them can all get together and look askance at once.

We are very prone. This is another one of those chinks in our armor that they're going to try to stick that crowbar in and make us change. Why does anyone care? Why can't they just say, well, bless you.

You're studying the Word of God. You're with a group of believers that loves the Lord and encourages you and prays for you and so forth. Praise God.

Why don't we have that attitude? That's the attitude we ought to have. I'm not out trying to tell everybody if you sit in a pew, God help you, your life is over as a Christian or how dare you go up there and sing in the choir or gracious sakes, you've got a baptistry. Well, anathema.

I'll talk to you when you leave that church. We ought to recognize as believers that each one of us is individually responsible before the Lord. Don't let, Paul says, don't let another believer dictate the terms of your spirituality.

If you do, you lose your reward because it's a test and it does happen. It will happen. So this is the second category.

The first category is they're going to try to use our trespasses against us. Paul says, think about it. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for those.

Jesus Christ made us alive. He solved the death problem that was a part of those trespasses. Not only that, He took the handwriting of ordinances that pointed out those trespasses.

Remember back in Romans when Paul was talking and he said, before the law came, sin was not counted. Sin wasn't reckoned before the law. It was present and the death associated with it was present, but it wasn't tallied.

It wasn't quantified before the law. The law came and sin was quantified. Now you could nail it down and say, here's exactly how far off the mark you are.

Here's how grand the holiness of God is. Here's how low the sinfulness of man is. Well, that was a phase in human history.

But in the same way that before the law came, sin was not accounted. Well, guess what? The law was nailed to the cross and left there, so there's no accounting now either. The death that comes from sin can still be a factor.

The failure to bear fruit and the failure of taking advantage of the grace of God is still there, but the accounting of sin is over with. Paul says it wasn't accounted when there was no law. Well, guess what? There's no law now, so it is equally not accounted.

There's not a tally going on to browbeat us with as far as handwriting ordinances against us. We're now being evaluated on a higher standard. What are the thoughts and intents of our heart? Can the person you're talking with over the holidays weigh and value the thoughts and intents of your heart? They cannot.

So do they have any business judging you? They do not, any more than we have any business accounting and judging them. So trespasses are not a valid lever to pry us away from direct faith in Christ, direct confidence in His Word, and accountability directly from ourselves to Him with no intermediary, no law, no priest, no other believer. In the same way, church traditions, church rituals, even though they try to quote scriptures and so forth, Paul says, you want to talk about circumcision? You've been circumcised with a higher circumcision.

It goes beyond the removal of the flesh. This is a circumcision of the whole body of death. You have the opportunity to bear divine fruit, to bear eternal fruit that you didn't have before until that body of death was circumcised away in Christ.

We've been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. This is circumcision of Christ.

It's a direct result of Christ's work.

You can slice yourself down until you're nothing but a brain and a heart, and you're never going to come close to this higher, greater, divine circumcision separating us from the power of sin and the power of death. The strength of sin, which was the law, we're separated from all of that, and so now we're free to bear fruit. So anybody who wants to bring up some ritual, it's so tiny and meaningless.

Attendance. Did you bring your Bible? How much offering was there this Sunday or last Sunday? It's so pitiful. It's so tawdry compared to the grand things that God has done in Christ.

How dare we even allow someone to compare one to the other, Paul says. What's the third thing? He says in verse 10 and again in verse 15, he refers to the principalities and powers. This is a third appeal.

There are things that you know not of. There are higher and deeper mysteries. There are messengers.

There are angels. There are demons. There are things unseen that are influencing life, and you've got to get in tune with this.

If you don't fall for the crowbar of your sins or your past failures, if you don't fall for the crowbar of this is what the church expects, then here's the third crowbar. Unseen angels. Tongues of fire.

Demons. You've got to bind Satan. The guardian angels.

There's an angel following you around and you get your mind all wrapped around. Do these things exist? Absolutely. Do we wage our battle against unseen forces? Yes, we do.

Paul says so in Ephesians 6. Just like all these other things are true, we do have failures. There are things that are a part of church life that are important, but if somebody makes this the issue, if this is where your confidence is, if you find your spiritual self-esteem in these things, it has become a wrong thing. You can take truth and twist it into error.

This is what has happened in the first two categories and it's happened in the third. Yes, there are angels. Yes, there is an angelic conflict.

Yes, there is Satan. He has a program. He is actively roaming the earth seeking whom he may devour.

He does want to take believers who are making progress and sift them like wheat, as Jesus told Peter. What are we supposed to do in that area? How do we respond? What's our level of involvement or sensitivity or knowledge in those areas? This is a good place to pause and take our break. When we come back, we'll delve into the realm of the unseen and see what our

response should be there.