

99-01-06a Colossians

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of God's Word this evening with a moment of prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your watch care over us, your protection and provision, and all of the many blessings that we have enjoyed.

We thank you for the privilege tonight of gathering together to be nourished from the truth of your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will cleanse our hearts and enlighten our minds through the things that we study this evening. We pray that as a result we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We resume tonight our study in Colossians.

We are finishing Chapter 2 and ready to launch into Chapter 3. There are some passages that parallel in thought and principle the sections of Chapter 2 that we have seen in this latter portion that I would like to briefly examine this evening. There is a syndrome, I guess, in our culture, our Christian culture today that is widespread. We've made mention of it and taken notice of it often in the past.

And it is not new. It's new and yet it's not new. And that is the creation of a pseudo-gospel.

And when I say pseudo-gospel, I'm not so much talking about corruption of the plan of salvation as gospel in the sense that we have come to understand it through our studies, which is the gospel of Romans Chapter 1 and verse 16 and 17, where the gospel of Christ that is the power of God for deliverance to all those who are trusting. It's the gospel that sustains us and that gives meaning to our lives. We are saved.

We are heaven-bound in the sense of spending eternity with God. But God has left us here on this earth and allotted to us days, time. And we grow up like a flower of the field and reach our peak and then fade and wither away and die.

And from God's perspective, I'm sure from an angelic perspective, we are exactly like the Bible describes us as a flower that springs up or the grass that springs up and then withers and fades away. And it has ever been thus. The angels, God himself has watched generation after generation of human beings be born, live and die just as we are currently in the process of doing.

So you can wax philosophical and say, well, what is the real meaning of my life? What is its purpose? Am I just trying to get by? Am I trying to have a minimum of suffering and a maximum of pleasantness and not make any huge mistakes and just kind of dog paddle until life is over? Is that all there is? Just eat, drink and be merry while you can and try to prolong your life and have a reasonably happy set of circumstances. Fortunately for us, because of what Jesus Christ has done in coming and taking our shape and living our life and accomplishing his work on the cross, we can redeem our time. We can convert the days of our lives into something permanent and

something eternal.

We can purchase with our time and with our faith righteousness and peace and glory. That's what Paul is reemphasizing as he does in all of his writings, as indeed the entire New Testament does, but especially here in Colossians as a result of the distracting alternatives that are being pushed at believers. He practically says, come and ask Paul, how do I counter this very attractive but deceptive group of ideas that are circulating in the culture? So what Paul does is not so much try to go point by point and attack and shred these competing philosophies and these pseudo forms of Christianity.

What he does instead is contrast them with the real thing. We talked before the break about how easy it is during the holidays to get around, especially the holidays because people travel and visit even more so than usual. We could probably compare notes and see how good my gift of prophecy is that we would receive some testing in the area of perception and in the course of conversation.

Different believers have different understanding of the Bible and of what the Christian life entails, what church life is or should be, where we stand, how we measure up. We are often hopefully the subject rather than the perpetrator of judging by believers. But this inevitably comes about.

It's not a bad thing to take a look at ourselves and ask ourselves the question, are we in the faith? That's what we're encouraged to do. Second Corinthians, examine yourself and see if you are in the faith. So if we are in fact in the faith, then our lives and our priorities and the way we stand before God will be confirmed as valid even under scrutiny, even in the face of misunderstanding or misperception or whatever it may be.

But the wonderful thing here in Colossians and in the parallel passages that we're going to look at tonight is that Paul doesn't spend a lot of time dwelling on the negative. There's been a lot of ink spilled trying to figure out what was the Colossian heresy. The scholars and the students of the Word can't really nail it down and tell you, well, it was Zoroastrianism or it was a second generation Gnosticism or some such thing.

The reason they can't is Paul doesn't spend a lot of time on it because he takes his own advice. He doesn't let his mind run on and on on things that aren't noble, aren't righteous, aren't lovely, are not of good report. He takes note of them.

He makes mention of the contrast between their features that don't measure up. He says there are people who get distracted by the messenger, get distracted by angels. There are people who get distracted by things that they think they have seen, people who get puffed up in their fleshly mind and so forth.

But these are general characteristics of almost any competing or any competitor to genuine Christian faith and practice. And so by talking in these terms, Paul leaves himself plenty of room

and plenty of time to talk about the positive. And that's where he's going to end up here when we begin Chapter 3. What I'd like to do here is briefly look at some of the passages that shed light on what Paul has said in the last half of Chapter 2. You remember last time we saw Paul telling us, see to it that no one takes you captive, that no one makes prey of you.

I first learned what the word prey means, P-R-E-Y, when I was a little boy in, I think it was around the third or fourth grade. And remember we used to have film strips where there was a little cassette player with somebody talking and it would beep and the teacher would turn the knob and you'd get another still picture up on the screen. Well, they had a film strip of a praying mantis.

The praying mantis is up there on a stalk and the woman's voice is talking about the praying mantis and his little buggy eyes and his little twisty head and so forth and his claws and one thing and another. And then it beeps and the next slide comes up and here's a little hapless insect crawling down the leaf. She goes on to say, you know, because of his prehensile parts and so forth, he's going to be able to nab this thing.

And then it beeps and they turn to the next one and you see his little praying arms extended and grabbing this insect. And then the last shot in that sequence, you'd see the last of that insect being devoured by the praying mantis. And they said, well, it's a praying mantis.

They call it P-R-A-Y-I-N-G because of the posture of its four legs, but it makes a prey of these little insects, P-R-E-Y. And so I learned the difference. It takes it captive.

It reaches out and snags it and makes a meal out of it. And Paul says, don't let anyone make a meal out of you. Don't let anyone take you captive.

Make a prey of you, P-R-E-Y. By these things, philosophy and empty deceit. It is interesting to me that in the contrast that we've noted many times, standard Christianity pretty much, if you define it, we say, well, we're evangelical.

We believe in evangelism. The mission of the church is to evangelize. Go out and win the lost for Christ.

Fields are ripe for harvest. Go out into the fields, et cetera, et cetera, and give the gospel, preach the gospel to every creature. We have learned through virtually every passage that we study that God is concerned about the lost more than any of us could ever hope to be.

He loves the world. He sent his son to die for the lost world. His spirit is the evangelist that brings the knowledge of sin, righteousness, and judgment to every man who makes the truth of the gospel perspicuous, understandable to every man.

God does the work of evangelism. We are privileged to be sort of in the vicinity and to be able to point people to a scripture or to summarize the truth of the gospel for them. And sometimes we're very privileged to be there at the point when someone accepts Christ as their Savior.

But the church has sort of taken the entire load on itself and said, well, we're going to go out. We're going to convict of sin. We're going to talk about righteousness.

We're going to scare them to death with judgment. We're going to preach hellfire and brimstone. We're going to get out there and carry them on our shoulders into the kingdom of God.

And yet when we look at the scriptures and see the teaching for the church, over and over again, it is personal holiness. It is faith. It's the fruit of the spirit.

It is what happens inside our minds. What are the thoughts and intents of our heart? That's the focus. So let's take those side by side for a moment and think.

If the mission of the church is evangelism, then not only should we have a lot of passages that encourage us and exhort us to go out and preach the gospel and win the lost and infiltrate our communities and impact them and so forth, but if we run the risk of failing our primary mission, then we ought to also have warning passages in scripture, don't you think? Beware lest you fail to be ready always to give an answer, or beware lest you shrink back and fail to bear witness. We ought to have some warnings. The most important things, you have both proactive, encouraging, exhortatory, command-type language, go out and do this, and you have your warning, this is what will happen if you fail, passages.

Well, we have many, many warning passages in the New Testament, don't we? What do they concern themselves with? Can you think off the top of your head or use your concordance? Can you find a passage that warns you about failing to preach the gospel to every creature? Beware lest because of embarrassment and awkwardness, you fail to push that tract out to your passerby in the airport or whatever. I have done a lot of looking and I haven't found any such passages. It seems astonishing to me that the mission of the church has neither positive statements of exhortation nor your cautionary statements of warning for the most important thing, ostensibly, that we do.

What do the warning passages of the Bible concern themselves with? What are the warning passages in the New Testament talking about? These are the ones that warn me and warn you about failure. They're probably going to concern themselves with our primary functions as believers, wouldn't they? Well, this is one of them. The last half of chapter 2, what does Paul say? Beware, watch out, lest you fail the grace of God.

Don't let someone make a victim of you by philosophy, empty deceit, human tradition, elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ. This is a warning and the others like it. We want to take a moment to look at some of the parallel warnings to see, now is this just an isolated thing? This is sort of a minor thing that you could be distracted by tradition.

But the main thing is, even if your theology is fouled up and you don't really understand what the

Bible is saying, if you're out there winning the lost, you're still accomplishing the primary mission and this other stuff is less critical. What do the warning passages concern themselves with? This one says, don't let yourself be deceived. Don't let your thought life be led astray and gotten off on the wrong track.

Don't be operating on a false philosophy. Don't be operating under a deceptive set of priorities that don't reflect the truth and are not according to Christ. Well, in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 14 and following, Paul says the love of Christ constrains us.

The love of Christ compels us. Some translations say controls us, but control is a bad word. I will also digress here for 15 seconds and say that there have been phrases used in the past like the spirit controlled life or let the Holy Spirit control you.

There is no such thing as control. Control means somebody has got a hold of your gear shift and your steering wheel and they're figuring out where and when and how fast you go. We are never controlled by the Holy Spirit.

We are to have self-control. We're not to be spirit controlled. There's no such thing as spirit control.

The fruit of the spirit is self-control. We have been given sovereignty over our own soul. We are captain of our ship and master of our fate in the sense that we decide whom to serve.

So don't be lulled to sleep by control language or be seeking the control of the Holy Spirit. There are people who keep throwing up their hands and surrendering saying, Oh God, just take control. Take control of my life.

That's a cop-out. That's saying it's too much work for me to develop and exercise self-control, so I'm just going to take my hands off the wheel and you steer. You shift the gears.

You point the direction. That's a cop-out. It's laziness and it's a deceptive philosophy.

Too many believers today have taken their hands off the wheel and they're sitting day and night praying for control by God. God's not going to do it. God's not going to take control of anyone's life.

The Holy Spirit is not going to control any of us. If you leave yourself open long enough looking for somebody to control you, there are other forces who will, but God the Holy Spirit will not. We are called to be accountable and be responsible.

We are sons and heirs of God, and we are called to have self-control. This is responsibility. This is effort on our part.

This is finding out what the goal is and pursuing it consciously, knowledgeably, under the

guidance and direction and sustaining power of the Spirit but not control. So I just digress. I guess that was a little more than 15 seconds, wasn't it? 2 Corinthians 5.14 The love of Christ, in this translation it says, controls you, but it's not controls.

Constrains or compels is a better translation. Because we are convinced. See, the love of Christ compels us because we are convinced.

We have been convinced of a truth. That's why we're compelled. Truth compels us.

The truth of God is compelling. That's why we spend time, even when it isn't exciting, even when it isn't convenient, even when it isn't stimulating, we know that the truth of God in our souls is going to establish a reality that will be compelling, and it will change the landscape of our priorities and our thought life. It's amazing, if you put a powerful force near someone, how it changes the way they operate.

If you tell somebody that there's a million dollars on the line, you can see people do pretty silly things on game shows when there's the possibility of winning a lot of money. You can see people compromise their standards when there is some sort of instant gratification at stake, because it's a reality. It's potential.

It isn't any more concrete than it was before they knew about it. But the people on the plane are riding happily along. The people in the cockpit suddenly discover that three of the four engines have gone out, and the fourth is on its last legs.

Well, the people back in the passenger cabin are happy-go-lucky. They're flying along, and they're completely unconcerned. The people up in the cockpit are in a total panic.

The captain gets on the radio and says, Ladies and gentlemen, I need to let you know that three of our engines are down and the fourth is going out. We're going to have to make an emergency landing. The plane can be flying just as smoothly and levelly as it was before he made that announcement, but that piece of information completely changes priorities and thoughts and comfort level.

Just a statement. Just a statement of fact. You look around when people say, Oh, such and such a food will kill you.

Same plateful of food sitting on the table as before the statement, but now it looks like the great monster that's out to grab you by the throat and end your life. Well, a minute ago, those eggs looked great, and that cup of coffee looked wonderful. And now, in some people's minds, some nameless, faceless study at some unknown place has said, I heard a thing on the radio this morning.

See, I'm having so much trouble getting through 2 Corinthians 5. I heard a thing this morning where they were talking about carotene, and they said people take this beta carotene, it's

supposed to be really good for you. And so people have been rushing out, buying bottles of beta carotene, chucking these things down, but guess what? They've got a study now, and if you smoke, it's bad for you. Instead of helping you, it actually doubles the risk of lung cancer if you're overdosing on beta carotene.

Well, so now all the people that are clearing out their shelves and tossing it out, this is all based on statements. Somebody somewhere says that they did a study, and that their results indicate. You see the point.

People have no problem operating on faith, do they? Somebody somewhere made a statement of fact, and people will alter their life for it. Well, we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and this truth in the word of God is what alters our life. This is what compels us.

This is what constrains us. We want it to be truth, not deceit, not philosophy, not conjecture, not humanly fabricated tradition, humanly fabricated standards. This is the battle.

This is the whole thing. Every time we cave to human standards and human ideas about what's right and wrong, and what's acceptable and not acceptable, what is honorable and dishonorable, what's thumbs up and what's thumbs down, based on a human idea, we fail the battle. We miss our mission, our main mission.

It would be the same as what the church considers. Here's a lost person in your periphery, and you had a chance to share the gospel, and you just got a little embarrassed and turned away and didn't share it with them. They lay all kinds of guilt trips on people for having an opportunity to share the gospel.

I say, this is why we're here. What's the point of being a Christian if you can't share the gospel? Their blood is on your hands, and it goes on and on with all this big... Well, if we understand what the mission really is, this is our area of failure. This is where we miss the mark and fail the grace of God, is allowing ourselves to be measured by these false standards, allowing ourselves to be compelled by, shall I say, false truth, false principles, false belief systems.

They're persuasive. There's a pull in our psyche to be approved and accepted by others, and it's a hard thing. How do we counter that force? It's the truth of the Word of God.

It has to be real to us. It has to be known to us, and it has to take precedence over what other people think, what other people say, any philosophy, tradition, deceit, persuasive argument, misunderstanding of Scripture, or anything else that's floating around. Paul is in the meat of his argument in Colossians here, when he says, don't let someone take you captive.

You are a prisoner of war in a spiritual battle if you lose the mental battle, if you lose it in your mind, if you let yourself be classified as a second- or third-class Christian, or as a failure, or as a do-nothing, or as a sit-soak-and-sour, or whatever. If somebody belittles you and makes you think

that what you're doing isn't really the real thing, that's where we lose the battle. That's where we're taken captive.

And so when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5.14, the love of Christ compels us because we are convinced that one has died for all. This is a truth of Scripture. This isn't anything anybody made up.

That Jesus Christ died for all. Paul says we're convinced of that, and because we know that truth from the Bible and we're convinced of it, the love of Christ is a reality in my mind. He came and died for everyone.

Jesus Christ came and died for all the lost. He paid for the sins of the whole world. That has a lot of implications.

That means nobody is going to be punished for sins eternally. The eternal penalty for sin has already been paid. Nobody is going to go to the lake of fire to pay for their sins.

It's not that they have rejected Jesus Christ's payment. They don't have the authority to reject the payment of Jesus Christ for sin. The payment for sin that Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross is a transaction between the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

It has nothing to do with people. We have no say-so over whether or not sins are paid for. They're paid for.

That aspect of what separates man from God is over and done with. The penalty for sin is a non-issue. It has been paid for everyone.

Nobody can pick it up and try to pay it themselves. Nobody can go to hell and pay it. You couldn't spend enough time in hell to pay the penalty for sin that Jesus Christ paid on the cross.

What He went through on the cross is worse than eternity in the lake of fire. But eternity in the lake of fire is the penalty for rejecting relationship with God through Christ. It is after the Holy Spirit comes and says, God is there, He's righteous, there's a judgment coming, and there is grace available, and someone says, I don't want it.

Well, the penalty for not wanting relationship with God is to not have relationship with God, and that's eternity in the lake of fire. So, knowledge of that and realizing that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for the world so that anyone that believes in Him can have everlasting life. There's no eternal penalty for sin hanging over anyone's head.

The opportunity for relationship is there because the rest of what Christ accomplished can be seized and held by faith. Paul says, we know that one died for all. Therefore, the love of Christ is manifest.

It compels us. If God loved us and made this way of salvation for us, gratitude and love for God is such I can not help but want to live for Him, to find out His plan and make that my goal for the rest of my natural life. You find the same idea time and time again in the Scriptures.

A great passage is Galatians 3. There are many that we could go to. But he's talking about the law. Galatians 3 is one of those that as soon as people set one foot in it, they feel like they just got the first edge of the swamp.

And when they step with their other foot, now they're mired in the swamp and it's a hard chapter to get back out of because it seems to get convoluted and sticky very quickly. But he says in verse 21 of Galatians 3, is the law against the promises of God? What about the law? This was the big alternative that was being pushed at the early church. You're walking away from the law of Moses.

We've lived under the law of Moses for 1,400 years. You can't just... You're walking away from the Bible. You're walking away from the Scriptures and your tradition and your culture and all this big structure of priestly oversight and Phariseeism and Sadduceeism.

Paul says, no, you're not under the law. You're under grace. You don't need to observe days and rituals and foods and sacrifices of animals and all that.

He says, that's all been fulfilled in Christ. So what about the law? Are they opposed to one another? Is it either law or grace? He says, certainly not. The law is not against the promises of God.

If a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. They're not opposed. They're complementary.

You had to have the law to point out the problem to appreciate the solution. And if the law could have been the solution, then you wouldn't have needed the promises. If you could get righteousness by the thing that points out the problem, which is the law, then you'd be all done.

But the law was just the first phase of what God was trying to communicate. It's a good thing and it's complementary to the promises of grace. You had the promises of grace before you had the law and you have them again after.

The law has a place in God's plan, but it's not the whole thing. You can't get everything through the law. This is what happens today when you look around at the programs and the procedures and the plans and the steps and the mentoring and all of the other claptrap that is floating around passing itself off as this is the way to live the Christian life.

What does it do? It concentrates on a partial solution. Many of the things that people concentrate on are perfectly good. Prayer, scripture memorization, fellowship with other believers.

A lot of them incorporate scripture and scripture study and so forth. There's nothing wrong with these things. And Paul faced the same problem here that we face today where if you try to point out that something is out of balance, something is out of whack, people say, oh, you're calling what we're doing bad.

This is what the Judaizers are calling it. They say, well, you're saying the law is just a bad thing. And Paul says, no, the promises and grace are not opposed to the law.

But the law can't accomplish everything. And these things that people focus on and set up as the Christian life, that doesn't make righteousness. They may be perfectly wonderful things.

Every single thing you look at in one of these programs or one of these books or one of these philosophies may be a wonderful thing. But it doesn't have the essential pieces that are a part of righteousness by faith, spiritual growth between the believer and God as the most important thing. You can't take good things and say, it's like birthday cake.

You know, your birthday comes around, somebody says, well, what's your favorite cake? Well, make it for your birthday. You say, well, I like German chocolate or I like lemon or whatever. So somebody goes and makes that cake.

That can be your very favorite dessert. I like that ribbon Jell-O that's got the cream cheese that's in the middle of that and strawberries and boy, that is an amazing and I found out that it's not even a dessert. I guess it's a salad.

It's got little walnuts and things in it and all kinds of, it's a delicious, delicious thing. It's a wonderful thing. But if I was to say, you know, that is just, I can't think of anything that I like better than that or I think that is the greatest food there is.

You got your food groups, you got the fruit, nuts and the dairy and stuff in there. This is a fine, fine meal. And so I say, don't feed me anything but ribbon Jell-O.

That's all I want. That's the essence. Well, I'm being a nut.

Obviously, you can't, and is there anything wrong with ribbon Jell-O? No, there's something wrong with me for thinking that ribbon Jell-O is the only food I need and the only food there is just because it tastes so good and it's wonderful. But that's what people do with parts of the Christian life, like evangelism, like fellowship. Fellowship has substituted, fellowship between believers has substituted for fellowship with God in the bulk of the church.

I would say 95% of the church has substituted the Christian culture and the wonderful camaraderie and fellowship in their church for the wonderful camaraderie and fellowship that we can have with the Lord God Himself. Well, you've taken the dessert and said, this is my subsistence. This is my whole thing.

Well, if somebody comes up and says, you know, you're really abusing that. That's not what you ought to be eating. So he says, you just don't like ribbon Jell-O.

You're throwing rocks at my dessert. What's the matter with this? It's wonderful. And they go on and on about how great it is and how good it tastes and everything else and how can this possibly be bad? Lots of other people like ribbon Jell-O.

Most people like ribbon Jell-O. I think everybody I know likes ribbon Jell-O. How can you possibly be throwing... This is the thing you get into.

This is what Paul got into when he tried to point out the law is not a bad thing. We're not throwing rocks at the law. And we're not throwing rocks at evangelism.

We're not throwing rocks at fellowship. We're not throwing rocks at any of these perfectly good and healthy things. What we're saying is you can't subsist on that.

And you can't make it the mission and the definition of being a Christian. And don't let anybody else try to do that for you. That's what Paul is saying.

The truth will compel us in the right direction. But we have to know the truth. And we can't be shaken.

We can't be swerved. We can't be blown about by a wind of doctrine that somebody tries to blow at us. And I like that wind of doctrine because that's how doctrine comes.

You know, all these different ideas and stuff. It's a big wind. Well, I won't go into that.

There is a lot of air involved. So, in Galatians chapter 3 is the law against the promises of God. Paul is pushing faith in the promises of God here.

Other people are pushing the law. He says, are these two things opposed? They're not. If there's a law that can make you alive, trot it out.

Show me the Mosaic law. Show me the passage in Deuteronomy that can give you spiritual life. Well, show me the church program.

Show me the book. Show me the seminar. Show me the video series or the tape series that can give you a healthy, fruit-bearing walk with God.

If you find one, great. It's a good thing. But if it is a man-made, flash-in-the-pan, spirit-controlled temperament, I'm a phlegmatic cleric and you're some other combination of... If it is a man-made extract of the plan of God, you can't take that and make it the main thing.

You can't take missions. You can't take evangelism or any of these others. So Paul says, look at the things that tend toward life.

Where is the fruit? Where is the production coming from? It has to come from what God provides. God's Word and God's Spirit are the only things that will produce fruit. How do you measure fruit? Look in your soul.

What is your level of patience? What is your level of anger? What is your level of contentment? What is your capacity for love? What is your capacity for life? Do you enjoy the things of God? Do you enjoy getting into His Word? Do you enjoy coming to a fresh understanding of some part of God's plan? Are you patient? Can you roll with a wrong that is done to you? That's the truth telling. You can put up with a lot of things. We have almost a perverse ability to endure suffering and pain and all kinds of things.

But one thing nobody can take is unjust criticism. None of us can take for long unfair accusation. It goes too deep to the very core of our pride.

We have to defend ourselves. We have to respond. There's a good barometer.

If somebody is maltreating, mistreating, failing to treat you at all, just ignoring you, what's our coping level? What is our ability to focus on the things of God, on where we stand before God, and not worry about what people think? That is the measure of fruit. Because what is the fruit? Love, joy, peace, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, not returning evil for evil, praying for those who spitefully use you. Can you make a list of three people that have spitefully used you in the past six months, and then can you think of the last time you prayed for them and earnestly went to God and tried to figure out what it is that makes them tick and what God can do to fix their problem? That's a measure of our spiritual health and well-being.

Do you have a concern for those who could care less about you and would just like to see something bad happen to you? Can you get past their sin against you and realize that there is somebody that really does have a need and has a problem that only God can fix? Can you pray intelligently for that? Don't just say, Oh God, bless so-and-so that keeps talking bad about me and making my life miserable. Lord, did you see what they did to me yesterday? I'm praying for them, but I just want you to be sure you don't forget what they did yesterday and the day before and the day before and the day before. It's more than just saying, Oh God, bless so-and-so.

You can think about someone who is doing you any wrong and get a good measure of objectivity is to get past what they're doing to you and think, Why would somebody be this way? What is the wrinkle in their soul? What is the lack in their soul? And is there a way I can appeal to God for Him to come and make them aware that He can fill it and that kind of thing? If the law could make you alive, if these little partial things that may be good in themselves, if it could do the whole thing, then great. Righteousness would come by the law. But the Scripture has consigned all things to sin through the law so that what is promised by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to everyone who trusts.

Faith in the promises of God, faith in the truth of God, faith in the attention that God is paying to us, that is where righteousness comes from. And God will write the story problems all different kinds of ways. Every new day there will be a different set of circumstances to bring us to the point of deciding, Am I going to trust the invisible God or am I going to operate in the visible world? Am I going to use human tools and human solutions and human viewpoint or am I going to believe what I cannot see, which is that God has a plan, God knows, God will make a way, and I am going to function according to the truth in my soul.

That's what's going to compel me. I will not be compelled and controlled by my circumstances. I will control myself and I will be compelled by the truth of God.

That's our choice. Before faith came, we were confined under the law. This is a fascinating thing.

You can spend a lot of time studying. What does it mean before faith came? Is there no such thing as faith in the Old Testament? I thought Hebrews 11 said by faith all these old parties did all these great things. What does it mean before faith came? Before functioning, before the rule of daily practice was faith in the promise.

Daily life was guided by the law in the Old Testament. Daily life today is guided by the promises, truth and faith. So this is the priority of faith, the faith, rest, life, it has been called.

This is now the mission. This is the goal. The goal used to be to keep the law.

God said, Your goal, Israel, keep the law. Follow my commandments. In trying to achieve that goal, it made a point in God's plan.

God says, Okay, we've made that point. Everybody's consigned under sin. Now, your goal, church, live by faith.

That's faith. Before faith came, everybody had to try to achieve the law. That was a part of God's plan.

But now, they were kept under restraint until faith should be revealed so that the law was our custodian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith. Everybody saw that the law could not empower. You know all the things not to do.

It's like the Surgeon General. Don't smoke, don't smoke, don't smoke. It'll kill you.

Well, you can put that on all the packs you want, but every person that's reading that is opening a pack of cigarettes and smoking. So it's kind of an acknowledgement of the fact that that truth isn't compelling. It doesn't give you the power to quit.

Oh my gosh, the Surgeon General says it'll kill me. Well, that's my last pack. I mean, that doesn't work.

So the knowledge, by the law comes the knowledge of sin. That knowledge of sin didn't bring life, did it? It just made us aware of how miserable we really were. That was the purpose of the law.

It was a good thing for us to find that out, but now faith has come. And yet, we time and time again want to go back to a law-based, a rule-based, a visible measure-based method of life. The law was our custodian until Christ came.

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian. For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. As many of you who are baptized into Christ have put on Christ, there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

You are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. The promise is the guiding principle.

The promise is our mission to seize the fruit of the promise by faith. That's our goal. That's our calling.

Well, how do we bring that about? What is the contrast? It's such a hard thing to point out. Paul spends a lot of his time saying, I'm not bashing the law. Because people are going to come back and say, well, Paul just hates the law.

He's anti-Gnomian. He's anti-Moses. He doesn't like Moses.

He's anti-Old Testament. Paul was a Pharisee. He had the Old Testament memorized in his head.

But this is the same thing that will happen today. You may have had this experience. If you try to express these things to someone who is in the grip of these philosophies and traditions, they're going to say, you just don't have a heart for the lost.

You've just got this self-absorbed, it's just me and God, and let the rest of the world literally go to hell. It's the same kind of thing. We're not saying that at all.

But in trying to correct the focus and in trying to stack the priorities the right way, this is the argument that's going to come back. It's a defense mechanism. The people that think you're somehow attacking their life and their achievements and so forth are going to get defensive.

This is exactly what you're going to hear if you do, a lot of times, if you do express any of these things and try to present a biblical viewpoint. This is what you're going to get in response. Well, love is evangelizing.

How can you have love and not evangelize? If you love, you're going to go share the gospel with the lost. Well, yes, but are you going to channel all the love of God into that tiny little straw? What does the scripture say about love? Who are the objects of love in the New Testament? About

99.5% of the time, it's fellow believers. What about that? Oh, well, of course.

We just take that for granted. We've already got a lock on that. We've got that all figured out.

Now we've got to go out to the lost and love them. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at just a couple of other parallel passages for what Paul has said in Chapter 2. This will finish us up on the negative side of things, what the plan of God is not.

Then we'll be free to focus on the great, challenging truth that Paul gives us in Chapter 3, what our goal is and what we set our minds on. Let's pause here and take a break.