

99-01-06b Colossians

Let's resume our study now in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 16. After what we've seen in the first session, just a few of the many passages that parallel the ideas that Paul is presenting to us here, he reiterates once again in verse 15 of Colossians chapter 2, so let no one judge you in food or in drink or regarding a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. And what are these? These were contemporary examples of spiritual faith and practice.

How do you live your worship life? How do you live your life as a believer? What sort of things do you set as priorities? And these people are saying, well, it is your observances, it's your method, it's your priorities when it comes to celebrating these feasts and acknowledging these days and abstaining from certain foods and so forth. This is a measure. And they could probably quote Old Testament scripture, you know, here's the feast of the new moon and the feast of weeks and the feast of tabernacles and all these other feasts, and they could say this is all scriptural and biblical and so forth.

But Paul says, don't let anyone judge you by these. Even in the Old Testament, these were not a system for one believer to judge another, were they? And the temptation to spend all of our time occupied with those around us is indulged by disguising it as love and concern. Oh, I want to help and pray for and counsel and meet with this person and so forth.

Now, again, I'm not saying that all concern for others is bad. I'm saying that when we take that and make it the central feature of our spiritual life, we have taken a good thing and made it bad, just like the Israelites did with the law, just like the church has done with evangelism. You can do it with a lot of different things.

People have taken the Holy Spirit. There's nothing wrong with the Holy Spirit. But if you set Him at the center stage, that's not His place.

He's equally God with God the Father and God the Son. I could make a nice strong case for Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost revival and so forth. But that's not the place He's supposed to occupy in God's plan.

He doesn't want to occupy that place. That's not His mission or His goal. But people put Him there.

It's the same with this. So here in verse 16, let no one judge you in food or drink or regarding festivals, new moons, sabbaths. These are a shadow of things to come.

The substance is Christ. Don't occupy yourself with shadows, with peripheral things, things that illustrate or exemplify or reflect reality. The thing to occupy yourself with is the reality.

We are supposed to grow in Christ. How many of us could sit down and really talk at length about

Jesus Christ and explain Him, go through His actions in the Gospels and say, You know why Jesus Christ walked into the pool of Bethesda and only healed one man? Here's why. You know why Jesus was at the mother-in-law's house and healed her of a fever and all the people crowded to the door and Jesus disappeared in the middle of the night and left them all standing there? Do you know why Jesus said what He said in the Sermon on the Mount? Do you know why Jesus said what He said in the upper room? Do you know why Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist and washed the disciples' feet? These are questions that if we know Christ, we will know the answer to.

These are things that if we have pursued the goal of understanding the Christian life, we will know Christ. His actions and His words will be understandable to us. And, of course, none of us can give a wonderfully complete answer to all of those questions.

That's the great thing. It's a pursuit. It's like saying, well, do you completely know your wife or your husband? Well, you could be married 20, 30, 40 years and you still don't know every little crack and crevice of their character and personality.

You know, Daniel Boone, so the story goes, before he got married to Rebecca, wanted to find out what kind of girl she was because back in those days everybody had formal dates they didn't touch. They sat side by side and conversed. Usually there were parents in the room and so forth.

They found themselves sitting out on the front step of the cabin. There wasn't anybody else around. He had an eye on her for marriage, but he wanted to know more about her than he knew.

So he pulled out his big hunting knife and grabbed her apron and just cut a big slash right in the middle of it. And she, of course, reacted and said, what did you do that for? Well, he wanted to see what her reaction would be. There's been people that thought they had a wonderful relationship and they've met for many, many dates and everything seems to be going fine.

Everybody's got their best foot forward. Then all of a sudden they're driving to a restaurant or something in a rainstorm and a tire goes flat and all of a sudden the woman realizes as this guy blows his top and gets out there and doesn't handle the stress and the pressure well and you see a side of somebody under pressure that you never saw when everybody's best foot was forward. Well, there's no end of learning especially when it concerns a person and that's the thing about Jesus Christ.

We can study him and study his unique nature. It's a wonderful pursuit that even in eternity we will continue to find out and enhance our understanding and grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's our goal.

And why is that not the mission statement? Why are we not the Christological church instead of the evangelical church? Why do we not say our first and foremost goal is to know our Savior and to reflect his glory instead of saying we're going to go drag other people to him? Well, that's like

grabbing people and introducing them to your companion whom you yourself don't know very well. Oh, well, have you met so and so across the room? Let me go introduce you to so and so over here. Well, you yourself haven't spent any quality time with that individual and it's like these trophy wives they talk about in the business world where some man will go marry a nice looking lady who can throw a good dinner party and then just spends all the time trying to keep her occupied with other people.

Well, Christianity has turned into that in some ways. People acknowledge that Jesus Christ is wonderful and say a lot of great things about him without ever having had the experience of really coming to know him. It's our goal to be quiet and mind our own business and learn about our Savior.

That's our goal. Plenty of opportunities will come under the ministry of God and the Holy Spirit to do all of these other things. So he says don't let anyone judge you.

If you start to pursue that path, people are going to find fault. They're going to say you're not doing the traditional things. The eating and the drinking.

But these are a shadow. These are a reflection. These are outgrowths.

These are peripheral issues to the central issue which is Christ. Well, if this is another of the warning passages and we figure the warnings in scripture are going to concern themselves with the important things, unlike our culture today where you get silly warnings. You get a pair of computer speakers to plug into your computer and you look in the paperwork and there's this caution warning.

Read this first. Don't immerse these speakers in water. They're subject to electric shock.

They don't even plug in. They just have a signal cable. But there's all these warnings.

Oh, if I could get my computer near enough to the bathtub and then take my speakers and throw them in. We get silly warnings because people are trying to protect themselves from liability. But the Bible is not that way.

If there's a warning passage, it probably concerns something important. What do the warnings concern themselves with? It's our thought life. It's our priorities.

It's what we pursue as the mission. And you find this elsewhere, the parallel passages. Romans chapter 14, verses 5 and following, is parallel to Colossians 2.16 and following.

One man esteems one day better than another. Another man esteems all days alike. Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind.

Did you realize that it is more important for you to do what you think is right than it is to determine

whether what you think is right is actually right or not? That's kind of a funny thing to say, and you have to say it cautiously because it's important for us to know exactly what is right. But if you think something is wrong and you do it anyway, you're sinning even if technically what you're doing is not wrong. If you think it's wrong and you do it anyway, you have crossed a line in your soul that constitutes sin.

You may think that you are stealing something from someone, and then you find out later, well, it didn't belong to them anyway. It was a gift they were going to give to you, and you stole something that actually belonged to you. But the theft that you committed was a sin because in your mind you were taking something that did not belong to you.

It's kind of an absurd example, but that's the principle the Bible teaches. Sin happens in our soul. Sin happens in our mind.

So the Bible says, be convinced in your own mind. This is a great piece of truth that compels us to love others, and specifically to live and let live. If there's a fellow believer who is enthusiastic and who seems to love the Lord and yet doesn't understand the things that we understand and may be pursuing their walk with the Lord in a different way, if they are convinced in their mind at their stage of growth that's their understanding and they seem to be positively disposed toward the things of God, it is more important for them to be doing enthusiastically what they are fully convinced of in their mind than it is for us to go straighten them out and correct them and say, well, technically you're not supposed to be waving your hands and doing this, that, and the other, and you really shouldn't be making these funny noises when you worship.

If they really are pursuing their relationship with God, they will learn their way out of that. Something will ring hollow to them, and they'll start to ask. They'll say, I notice you don't do the thing that I do here.

What's your reason for that? Did you see something in the Bible? You say, well, actually, yes, this is the reason I don't think that that's a part of worship. They will grow out of it, it is not our job to go. We have this laser beam focus on other people.

We want to go fix other believers, and we want to go fix unbelievers and gratify ourselves in the process. That's the substance of Christianity, traditional Christianity today. Over and over again, these warning passages say, you've got to pay attention to what's going on in your mind.

You've got to pay attention to what's going on in your soul. We keep wanting to look elsewhere. It's easy to find fault.

It's easy to get upset and throw rocks at people in the government, or people in the periphery, or people in the family, or people elsewhere in the body of Christ. It's a wonderful occupation, because all the time you spend looking at other people, you don't have to spend looking at yourself. But what do the warning passages of Scripture say? You need to examine yourself and

see if you're in the faith.

You need to be fully convinced in your own mind. If you want to observe a day, fine. Do you have a doctrinal justification in your mind for that? Do you have Scripture that you believe supports that? You can say, well, that guy over there, he's fully convinced, but he's wrong, and that's really an abuse.

Why are you worrying about that guy over there? Why do we not worry about ourselves? If he's fully convinced in his mind, that's between him and God. It's not our job to go straighten him out. If he asks a question and we have the opportunity to speak the truth in love, that's different.

But all of us can easily succumb to the temptation to look at somebody that we think is outside the periphery, just like people do to us, and say, let me put my arm around your shoulder and guide you into the straight and narrow path that I myself am treading here. They may not be ready for that. Maybe they haven't grown to the point of being able to digest and operate on the truth that we have come to know.

It's not the right time or the right level of foundation in their soul. Are we going to elbow the Holy Spirit out of the way and decide when and where and how this person is going to learn this truth? If they're not asking and seeking in that area, we are just as wrong to judge them and then go try to fix them as somebody would be to do it to us, somebody that thinks that we're messed up. So what is the focus? How do we accomplish this mission that Paul is putting before us? First of all, we have to know what it's not, and it's not focusing on other people.

Love, part of the great commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. But loving someone doesn't mean occupying yourself with them and sticking your nose in their business, straightening them out, living their life for them, pointing out their flaws, figuring out different ways to manipulate and maneuver and cajole and otherwise put some sort of emotion on somebody. That's what it has become, but that's not what it is.

And we resent it when someone does it to us. Well, where do we get off doing that to someone else? But we've institutionalized that and called it Christian love today, to meddle, to butt in where the Holy Spirit has not prepared any ground, hasn't created an opportunity, and any kind of a knowledgeable growing Christian wouldn't be barging in where angels themselves literally fear to tread. We have our plate full with our own soul.

If we fully understand what the reason for our existence is right now, it's the cultivation and the transformation of our own soul. It's a full-time job. And there will be times when we can assist and be a blessing and have a spiritual gift benefit to others around us.

But it's peripheral. It's a product. It's a result.

It's an afterthought to the primary daily opportunity to be transformed. That's why the exhortation

passages in the New Testament focus on the thoughts and intents of the heart. That's why the fruit is said to be attitudes and character.

That's why the warning passages concern themselves with don't abuse your brethren. Don't stick your nose where it doesn't belong. Let each one mind his own business.

There's lots in the Scripture about busybodies who go from house to house meddling where they don't belong, leading silly people astray, and so on. Same thing here. In Romans 14, verse 5, let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind.

He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. We're talking here about the growing healthy believer that's in a different place of growth than we are. If he's still observing, maybe this is a person that came out of Judaism.

They still want to observe Passover. They want to have a Seder in their household. Great! You don't have to go over there and say, really, Jesus Christ fulfilled all this.

This was a shadow. It's been fulfilled. You're wrong to be doing this, and I think you're really setting a bad example for your children.

I just thought I'd come over and try to make sure you understand that I know more than you do, and I want to bring you up to my lofty level of understanding. If he's observing it to the Lord, people can find meaning in that. A lot of Christians will go and observe the Passover.

If it's meaningful to them, great! If somebody goes to a charismatic service, and it's much more important what's going on in their soul, and we are exhorted and we are commanded not to put out the Spirit's fire. All of us grew and came from somewhere. God doesn't correct all of our mistakes at once, does he? If he pointed them all out to us once, we'd get so discouraged, we'd never do anything.

He leaves us with a lot of our errors and our erroneous thinking for years sometimes, and we eventually grow out. Don't give other people that latitude. Don't put out the Spirit's fire.

Don't butt in and elbow the Holy Spirit out of the way and decide that you have picked the optimum right time and right place to correct someone and straighten them out. Love suffers wrong, and sometimes you have to suffer wounds against your theological understanding of what's right and what's wrong in the interest of letting God do his work, because our primary responsibility is not straightening other people out, and that's what a lot of evangelism boils down to. We want to straighten them out.

Well, let's get them safe so they'll quit going down and doing all that drinking and quit doing all that abusing and quit doing all that nasty immoral habits. Maybe they'll quit smoking. Maybe they'll do this, that, and the other, and everybody wants to go out and get them safe.

There's a lot of natural concern for people's eternal... I'm not saying everybody's doing false motives, but if you occupy yourself with that, anybody that occupies themselves with getting other people safe is not tending to the primary. Jesus told the Pharisees, you know, you're tithing the spices in your spice cabinet, fine, but don't do that and leave off the important things of the law, justice and mercy and so forth. You should do these main things and then do these that don't forget the others, but you're doing these peripheral things and you've missed the center.

So that's what it's telling us here in Romans 14, the very same thing. He who eats, eats in honor of the Lord since he gives thanks to God. When he abstains, he abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

If somebody's observing a day and eating and does it to the Lord, leave them alone. If they're abstaining and abstaining of the Lord, leave them alone. And hopefully they will do the same for us.

None of us lives to himself. None of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord.

If we die, we die to the Lord. So then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. This is the reason Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? This is the verse we'd like to send to other people that are annoying us and picking at us. I'll sign a little greeting card to you and put my little verse. Romans 14, 10.

Why do you despise your brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of whom? Judgment seat of our peers? Judgment seat of Christ. Judgment seat of God. It is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall give praise to God.

So each of us shall give account of himself to God. There are many of us as believers in traditional Christianity today that are going to be fully prepared to give an account of all the people in their periphery to God at the judgment seat. And there are going to be one, their conversations will be nothing but a string of adversative conjunctions.

But, but, but, but, but, but. And it's God's going to be saying, what about you? What about what was going on in your soul? That's a wonderful thing that you scrutinized all the people in your periphery and determined their spiritual health and well-being and which ones needed to be evangelized. You went over and applied yourself vigorously to all of these other people.

But what about your primary mission? You know, in the military, if you're an officer, you, lieutenant, you get sent out to a unit, they say, you are the fire direction officer for this battery. That was one of my first jobs. You're the fire direction officer.

By the way, you are also the training officer, the legal officer, the classified materials custodian,

the, you know, latrine officer, the urine analysis testing officer, the, you know, dust under the bunk inspection officer, and all these other little peripheral things. Well, all of those are necessary and important functions. But if I spent all of my time crawling around under the bunks looking for dust and the battery is out in the field trying to shoot and there's nobody there directing fire, I could be the best bunk inspection officer in the world and I'm going to be in totally hot water.

Well, this is what is happening to us. This is why Paul is saying, don't let yourself be taken captive. Don't let yourself be deceived.

Don't let yourself be led astray into these things that have a veneer and have a semblance of validity. People quote scripture and say, this is what you ought to be doing. This is love.

Love is going out and winning the loss and so forth. It's a wonderful collateral duty, but don't lose sight of your primary duty. Your primary duty is to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

That's the measure. That's what we will give an account for. According to Romans 14, verse 12, each of us shall give account of himself to God.

And it's not going to be an account of what did you do for others. It's going to be an account of what you are, what you have become, what your understanding is of the plan and purpose of God. Same thing in 1 Corinthians 4, verse 1. This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy, faithful. But with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human body, any human court. I do not even judge myself.

I'm not aware of anything against myself that I am not acquitted because I don't find anything against myself. It is the Lord who judges me. Each believer stands or falls before his Maker, before his Savior, before his God and Father.

Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes. Because when the Lord comes, that's when the things that are now hidden in darkness will be brought to light. He will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Do you want to know what the basis of evaluation is? It's right there in 1 Corinthians 4, 5. He will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness. Body counts and the number of people that walk the aisles and so forth, that's not hidden in darkness. People count that and publish it, put it on boards and so forth.

But it is the hidden purposes of the heart that will come to light and be judged by God. Then every man will receive his commendation from God. What is commendation from God based on at the judgment? It's based on the purposes of the heart.

What is the purpose of your heart? Even if you are doing all the right things, if you are going out and evangelizing, which is a wonderfully good thing, but if you're doing it and you have not driven the enemies out of your soul of bitterness, self-centeredness, self-pity, vindictiveness, anger and so forth, if you have an untransformed soul, all of these other things don't count because your actions are judged by the purpose of the heart. Same thing in 1 Corinthians 6. Do you remember in 1 Corinthians 6 where the believers were taking each other to court? There was an issue. Somebody wronged another person.

They drove home one day and were pulling up to back into their driveway, smashed into your car, left their paint all over your badly dented automobile, backed into their driveway and didn't say or do anything about it. You say, they've wronged me. We both go to the same church, but they've wronged me.

Janelle was out there backing up and just smashed right into my car. What does Paul say? Why do you take each other to court? Why do you try to get justice in circumstances saying this is right? It is right that I should be recompensed for my badly dented car. I say that because at the moment I have a badly dented car.

Janelle didn't do it though. He says in verse 6, brother goes to law against brother and that before unbelievers. To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you.

You going out and saying, but it's justice, it's truth, it's right. Paul says it's defeat. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? You would win the victory if you let yourself be damaged and didn't sue your brother.

Because the circumstance isn't the issue. It's this rancor in your heart. It's this self-defending, self-centered insensitivity to others, lack of fellowship with others, lack of understanding, lack of brotherhood, lack of mutual fellowship in the Lord.

You get against one another and you take each other to court. It's a terrible, terrible thing. Do we do the same thing today? We do.

We hold grudges against believers. We try to penalize them in some way for their real or perceived failures. We ostracize.

We gossip. We make them pay the penalty of reputation. We damage or destroy reputations of others by dropping anecdotes about them, what they did or what they didn't do.

You should rather be defrauded. So somebody didn't help you after the holiday meal clean up the dishes, or somebody didn't make their beds when they stayed at your house. In families this happens a lot.

People go and visit other people and say, Oh, you know, she's just the sweetest thing, but you

know, what a slob. She stayed at our house and wet towels everywhere and let their kids, all their dirty laundry scattered around. We worked so hard on the meal, and when it came time to clean it, nobody was there.

And I just don't understand how somebody could, you know, there's just all this talk floating around about, oh, this person's shortcomings and so forth. You might as well just take them to court because you are judging jury and you're making them pay the penalty. You are causing them damage in the mind of other people.

That's what this is. We like to think, oh, well, I've never sued anybody. I've never sued another believer.

We make up our own little kangaroo court, and then we pass sentence and we execute it on other people. And Paul says, you've been defeated because the mission is what goes on in your soul. And if you let that get under your skin and you go out and retaliate, you've been defeated.

There's nothing in here about evangelizing. There's nothing in here about missions. We've been defeated when our soul doesn't function in a Christ-like way, when we don't have a heart that's been transformed by the renewing power of God's Word and God's Spirit.

If it's not at work in there, we're defeated. The spiritual battle has been lost. Paul says it would be better for you to be defrauded, to lose your worldly goods and have integrity in your soul than to go out and do this.

This is what happens when this deceit, when this traditions of man, this is normal, this is usual. People expect it. People will inflict this on us, won't they? We'll be in a conversation.

Somebody will say, oh, you know, I had the nicest visit from so-and-so, from your relative here. Just fill in the blank of a sibling or a cousin or whatever. Oh, you know, we just had the nicest time.

But, oh, my, you'll never believe what happened. And then we start getting these stories. Well, it's normal.

It's acceptable. People take this in stride. And they'll tell their story, and then they kind of pause and wait for you to tell your story.

Because they know that that same so-and-so stayed with you back, you know, two months ago. And they want you to, oh, yes, you know, the very same thing happened when those people were at my house or when I was over at their house or whatever the situation is. Well, we've been defeated.

And the sad thing is it's an eternal loss. It's not just a loss in that day or that week or that month. There's an eternal weight of glory that has been sacrificed.

There's a piece of inheritance. There's an opportunity to reflect the glory of Christ that has been lost. And you can't get that day back.

You can't get that conversation back. You can't get that opportunity. Just like the papers that you get in school.

You keep getting these assignments, getting these little pop quizzes. You can always take more quizzes in the future, but you're building an average over time. And the teacher's got the gradebook up in the front.

And that quiz last week that you failed, well, that F is still there. And, you know, you can do better in the future, but you can't go back and retake that quiz that you failed. And it's kind of depressing because we think, oh, gosh, I've got plenty of those failures racked up in the past.

The wonderful thing is that God's mercies are renewed every morning and we have the chance to do better from here on out. But we don't want to be casual. We take a casual approach.

Believers in general in the traditional church, traditional Christianity, take daily life casually. We don't consider it very important. We think daily life and what's going on in our soul is, the Bible mentions it, and it's sort of important, but it's nothing compared to the big mission of evangelizing, the big mission of missions, the big mission of discipling and mentoring and being down there at the church and, you know, being a part of the momentum and the thrill and the worship and the new music and the drums.

And, you know, I can get off of that. But, you know, we've taken the major things and made them minor. We've taken minor things and made them major.

Well, remember, what goes on in our soul, that's the major thing. That's where the battle is won or lost. Paul says defeat.

Paul says taken captive. Paul says you've been made a prey if you fall in these areas. How can we miss this? It's a daily opportunity.

No matter where you are or what you're doing, this is the battle. You can't construct the situation where this is not the battle. I can construct lots of situations where you can't evangelize or you can't do missions or you can't do all kinds of church works.

But this is why we're here. How have we missed this as a church? In Galatians 2, verses 11-14, Paul records his confrontation with Peter. Then Cephas, that is Peter, came to Antioch.

I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. The four certain men came from James. He ate with the Gentiles.

But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. What

did Peter do wrong here? All he did was not sit down at the table with the Gentiles for a couple of meals. The men from James came up.

Peter had been eating with the Gentiles, eating some of that good bacon. Some nice pork chops. Had him a nice honey-baked ham up there with the Gentiles.

But then the men from James came up and Peter said, Ooh, this could look bad. When he got his tray in the cafeteria, he went over and sat with the Jews. He wouldn't sit with the Gentiles anymore.

Paul came up and condemned him publicly to his face for an attitude, for a retreat from grace. With him, the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity, by their attitude, by this hypocrisy that crept into their soul. It isn't where did he set his tray, who did he talk with while he was forking the vittles into his mouth.

It was the defeat in the soul, being taken captive by the idea that man's measure is what counts. I can't be seen to be eating with these Gentiles. Peter lost, and these other Jews lost it in their soul.

Paul says in verse 14 of Galatians 2, When I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, Paul says this is a part of the truth of the gospel, who you're eating with, whether or not the law is still in effect, whether or not you have to conform yourself to human standards of measure. He says they abandoned the truth of the gospel. Since when did who you eat with and what you eat have anything to do with the gospel? Since we came to understand what the gospel is, it is the truth for believers to live by.

He said, I said to Cephas before them all, If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile or not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? How can you raise this false human standard of measure that's based on something wonderful, the Old Testament Scriptures, but does not apply? The battle is lost in the soul. Same thing in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 12. What is the purpose of the prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers? They have been given to the church to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

The reason we're here and the reason all these gifts have been given to the church is to build up the body of Christ. People like to think that that's a miracle. We're going to go out and win the lost and that will add to the body of Christ.

This will be the equivalent of just adding to obesity. If you're just going to add quantity to a body, you haven't improved the body, have you? It's not adding to the quantity of your body that makes your body better. It's the growth and maturity and the health and vitality of the body that is in view.

These prophets and pastors and teachers and evangelists are here to equip the saints for the

work of the ministry. That work of ministry builds up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Faith and knowledge, that's what brings us to maturity.

That's what completes and brings about this mature manhood. The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is brought about by this growth. Is there ministry? Is there evangelism? Are there missions and all these other things? Of course, those are perfectly wonderful things, but you almost have to sound like you're against them, like Paul did with the law, to point out how we've abused them and put them in a place where they don't belong.

So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men, by their craftiness and deceitful wiles. If it wasn't a good argument, if it didn't have a lot of good sound to it and a lot of appeal and a lot of conviction behind it, people wouldn't be deceived, would they? If you're going to carry out... You saw that movie with Robert Redford and Paul Newman, *The Sting*. That whole movie is about people deceiving each other, pulling off cons.

And of course, the whole movie itself is a big con. You get to the end of it, you find out what the title really means, because all the viewers of the movie have been the victims of a big sting. A deceit isn't any good unless it's convincing.

These are convincing arguments. It's a convincing scenario, but it's deceit. And how can we avoid it? We have to be built up in the faith.

We have to know the truth. Speaking the truth... What is the matter in verse 15? Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head. The same language you have in Colossians 2. The head.

Jesus Christ. Hold fast to the head. He is the head of the body, the church.

We want to go out and hold fast to each other. We want to go out and hold fast to the lost and dying world instead of holding fast to Christ as our anchor. If you're holding fast to Christ, you can reach out from there and grab a hold of anybody.

But people who have not held fast to Christ are reaching out to each other and reaching out to the lost, and they've got no anchor. You know how this is if you've ever taken life-saving classes. One of the first things they tell you is if you jump in the water with a drowning person, you make sure that you can stay afloat.

Don't just swim in there and go over there. They're going to grab a hold of you and you're both going to drown. Be sure you've got your life jacket or you've got your life ring.

Don't go to a drowning person without it. Well, believers who go to the lost and to the hurting in the church, not anchored to Jesus Christ, are going to be dragged down together with the hurting

people. You've got to hold fast to the head.

Over and over again it tells us this in the Word of God. You can see this in passage after passage. We don't have time to look at them all tonight.

Take a look, for example, at 1 Corinthians 3. I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh.

How is that measured? How does he demonstrate to them that they are of the flesh? For where there is jealousy and strife among you. These are attitudes of the heart. Jealousy and strife is the opposite of love, joy, peace, patience, and so forth.

The measure of fleshliness or worldliness versus spiritual growth and maturity is what's going on in the soul. You're behaving like ordinary men when you say, I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos. You're just merely men.

You can go to Galatians 4. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings or things that by nature are no gods. Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid I have labored over you in vain.

You've missed the point. So that brings us to Colossians 3. If we're holding fast to Jesus Christ, if we have an understanding of what the goal is, how do we accomplish it? We know what it's not. We know what the distractions are.

We know what the pitfalls are and what the dangers are of all these false and competing philosophies and things that are put forward. What is the alternative? In Colossians 3, verse 1, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Set your mind on things above.

What are the things above? How can you have this thing where you're so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good? If you're sitting around thinking about the streets of gold and the pearly gates and harps and wings and angels and city four square and all that, how can you be of any earthly good? What does it mean to set your minds on things above? That's where we're going to begin next time. We're going to see not only in this first few verses of Colossians 3, but in many other places in the New Testament, we have a very clear description of what the things above are. This is what we're going to set our minds on.

The things that are good, noble, right, pure, lovely, of good report. The things that Paul says, Think on these things, and the peace of God will be with you. What specifically are these things above? That's what we'll investigate the next time we meet in Colossians, but let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the privilege of studying your word. We thank you for the wonderful calling that you have placed before us. We thank you for the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We pray that we will be worthy of that calling, that we will be able to take advantage of the resources you have given us in the person of your spirit and in the form of your word. We pray that as a result of knowing these truths and seeing them clearly communicated in your word, we will be compelled by the love of Christ to fulfill this great opportunity. We thank you for our Savior.

We thank you for your provision for us day by day. We pray that our lives will reflect his glory today and in the days to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.