

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Trampling Christ Underfoot" (Colossians 2:11-17, Hebrews 10:26-29)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/3/2011

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Introduction

Friends, let me call your attention once again to the inspired words of the Apostle Paul, which we find in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven:

In Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [that is, in the cross of Christ].

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

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In our previous messages on this passage, we have seen that the Apostle Paul's theme is a warning against the sin of legalism, the danger of legalism, for the Christian as an individual and for the church as a body.

We have seen that in Scripture we find that there are two kinds of legalism, and the Bible condemns both of them. First of all, the Bible condemns legalism regarding salvation. The Word of God mandates a zero-tolerance policy toward anyone or anything that would add any kind of law-keeping to the finished work of Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners. And secondly, the Bible condemns legalism regarding sanctification. Once again, the Word of God mandates a zero-tolerance policy toward anyone or anything that would introduce an extra-Biblical set of man-made rules and regulations for Christians to live by after we are saved. Our standard of holiness is the Word of God alone.

We have also seen that these two kinds of legalism manifest themselves in two different ways. This was true in the time of the Colossian church, and it is also true in the church of the 21st century.

First, there are those who want to bring back aspects of the Jewish ceremonial or civil law into the church. Some of these people insist that you need to keep all or part of the Jewish law in order to be saved. Some of these people insist that you need to keep aspects of the Jewish law in order to be sanctified. Some of these people believe that you need to keep aspects of the Jewish law for both salvation and sanctification.

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And secondly, there are those who want to set up some contemporary man-made set of rules and regulations, and they want to tell you that you need to abide by these man-made rules in order to be saved, or to be sanctified, or both.

We have also seen that there are three parts of the law of God in the Old Testament. There is, first of all, the moral law of God, which is for all time and is still in force. There was, secondly, the civil law of Israel, which ceased to be operative when Israel ceased to exist as a nation in 70 A.D. And thirdly, there was the ceremonial law, including circumcision and the sacrificial system, which prefigured the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ceremonial system was abolished when Christ came and fulfilled it all.

And we said that we need to have all of these things in mind – we need to have an understanding of the categories of legalism, we need to have an understanding of the categories of God's law, and we need to have an understanding of the fact that the Jewish civil and ceremonial law are no longer in force – so that we can honestly and accurately survey the position of the Evangelical church in our time when it comes to the issue of legalism. And so we have begun to identify the major movements that are exerting a legalistic influence on the church today. And as we take up each one, we are seeing how we are to answer these various legalists from the Word of God.

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Messianic Judaism: A Few More Words

We began this survey in our last message. And we began by taking up the groups and movements in our time that are trying to bring back elements of the Jewish law into the church of Jesus Christ. Last time we began with the movement called Messianic Judaism. I want to say a few more words about Messianic Judaism before we move on.

In our last message, I gave you an overview of the core beliefs of Messianic Judaism. I said that most Messianic Jews embrace what is called "One Law Theology." The main teaching of One Law Theology is that both Jews and Gentiles are required to observe the entirety of the Old Testament law. Messianic Jews define sin as any violation of any part of the first five books of the Old Testament. They insist – wrongly – that this is what the New Testament teaches.

I mentioned that this teaching has some very destructive consequences. Many Messianic Jews teach, for example, that a Gentile believer in Christ must be circumcised in order to be a member of the covenant. They also observe the Old Testament Jewish feast days. They hold their worship services on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings rather than on Sunday, the New Testament Lord's Day. And in their teachings they avoid the use of the term, "the cross" because they consider it to be a Gentile term, and they emphasize the use of Hebrew terminology in their teachings.

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Now some of you may be wondering, "Do all Messianic Jews believe these things?" The answer to that question is that yes, 80 to 90 percent of Messianic Jews hold these positions. There are differences among them beyond this core set of beliefs. But the vast majority of Messianic Jews hold to these core teachings that deny the one true Gospel.

Now, some Evangelicals have adopted the position that any criticism of Messianic Judaism is somehow anti-Semitic. Let me answer that charge by saying this. There is nothing anti-Semitic about honest, Biblical criticism of any theology that seeks to bring elements of the Jewish law back into the Christian faith, and this certainly applies to an honest and Biblical evaluation of the theology of Messianic Judaism. Anything that brings the Old Testament Jewish system back into the Christian faith is a denial of the Gospel.

Furthermore, let me say two other things that are very important in any Biblical discussion of Israel.

First, I believe God's promise to Abraham. God said this, in Genesis chapter twelve, verses two and three. He said to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you..." There are two different Hebrew words for "curse" in that passage. Literally, God is saying this: "I will bring down a curse upon anyone who calls you despicable." Dear friends, we as Christians many centuries later must believe this promise to Abraham. And

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furthermore, we must keep in mind that this promise of God to Abraham has two aspects. There is both a physical aspect and a spiritual aspect to God's promise.

When God made His covenant with Abraham in Genesis chapter fifteen, God promised Abraham a physical seed, the nation of Israel. They will go into captivity in Egypt, God said, but afterward I will bring them into this Promised Land with great possessions.

But God also promised Abraham, as we understand from the New Testament, a spiritual seed, and this spiritual seed is the elect of God in Christ, those who are saved, both Jew and Gentile.

In Romans chapter nine, beginning at verse six, the Apostle Paul says this: "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Romans 9:6-8).

And later in that same chapter, Paul says that God did this so "that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Romans 9:23-24).

And Paul says this to the Galatian believers, Galatians chapter three, beginning at verse twenty-six: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For

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as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And" – notice – "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

And so we take note of God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you." That promise applies to both the physical seed of Abraham, the ethnic nation of Israel, and to the spiritual seed of Abraham, the eternal people of God in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, in all ages. This is an unending promise to the seed of Abraham, and it does not matter whether we are talking about Abraham's spiritual seed, the elect of God, or Abraham's physical seed, the Jews as nation. We have no right to curse either one.

But Messianic Judaism is not authentic Christianity. It is another gospel. And Galatians chapter one, verses eight and nine tell us that God Himself has placed the spokesmen for such a false teaching under *His* curse. *We* did not bring down that curse upon them. God has done it. And we must hear, and we must heed, such a pronouncement from God with fear.

Secondly, let me say this. God is not finished with Israel. We do not have time in this series of messages to go into this in detail, but a careful and honest look at Romans chapters nine through eleven tells us that there will, in fact, be a future turning of all Israel as a people, as a nation, to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Paul tells us in Romans chapter eleven, verse twenty-five, that this will occur

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“after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” In the eternal plan of God, both the fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of the Jews will come to faith in Christ. God the Father has given a people to His Son, and He will not lose any of them, Jew or Gentile.

Christians today, both Jew and Gentile alike, should be looking forward to that future in-gathering of Israel. But the legalistic way of Messianic Judaism is not the way in which that future in-gathering is going to occur. That future in-gathering will be in the same manner that Peter talked about in Acts chapter fifteen, as we saw in our last message. Peter said that God, who knows the heart, will give the Holy Spirit to both Jew and Gentile alike, purifying their hearts by grace through faith in Christ, apart from the bondage of the law.

And so on that note I want to leave the subject of Messianic Judaism, and move on to briefly consider two other groups that want to put Christians back under some aspects of the Jewish law, either in the present time or in the future.

Feast-Day Observance for the Church?

Let me turn now to another group that has gained a popular following in recent years. These people mingle a combination of some elements of Messianic Judaism and some elements of Dispensationalism, and the result is that they are insisting that the Evangelical church must re-introduce the observance of some of the Jewish feast days — including the Day of Atonement. They say that this is something that is necessary for the church to do, in anticipation of the Second

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Coming of Christ. One of the groups that is advocating this false teaching is called El Shaddai Ministries, and they have produced a video series to spread this false teaching, and they have received a lot of publicity on the Internet and elsewhere.

This group teaches that Christians should keep the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. They teach that parts of the Jewish ceremonial law are not yet fulfilled. The false teachers who are associated with this heresy call these observances of Old Testament feasts by both Jews and Christians "dress rehearsals" for the Second Coming of Christ. And this group also claims to know the day and the hour of Christ's coming, when the Lord Himself told us that "no man knows the day nor the hour" (Matthew 24:36).

Let me tell you, dear friends, that this teaching is absolutely wrong. Anyone who teaches a return to any aspect of the Old Covenant has, the Bible tells us, "trampled the Son of God underfoot" and "insulted the Spirit of grace." All aspects of the ceremonial law — including the feasts — pointed to the first coming of Christ, and they were fulfilled in the first coming of Christ.

The ceremonial law was temporary. All of it prefigured the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the redemption of sinners. And as we read in our passage here in Colossians chapter two, this included the feast days. Notice what the Apostle Paul says, verse sixteen: "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or" – notice – "regarding a festival [that is, a feast day] or a new moon or sabbaths,

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which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance [the fulfillment] is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

The ceremonial law was completely fulfilled by and in Christ, and this was signified by the rending of the veil of the temple at Christ's death, as we read in Matthew 27:51. In Hebrews chapter ten, the writer says this, beginning at verse twenty-six:

If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, [that is, if we return to the ceremonial law which is completely done away with in Christ, then] there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law [the Old Covenant] dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the [New] covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

On this authority, dear friends, Bible-believing Christians must reject any teaching that places believers, Jew or Gentile, under any aspect of the Old Testament ceremonial law, even the feast days. Dear friends, don't be caught up in this legalistic heresy.

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Dispensationalism's Re-Introduction of the Ceremonial System

Let me turn now to another teaching that introduces legalism by way of the Jewish ceremonial system. In this case, it is something that is said to be in the future. The vast majority of Dispensationalists teach that during the millennial reign of Christ on earth there will be a re-introduction of the Old Testament sacrificial system as part of a renewed system of temple worship. Now, let me explain why this cannot be the case, according to Scripture.

This is a subject to which we could devote an entire series of messages, and perhaps at some future time we will do that. But for now, let me say simply this. As we read the book of Ezekiel, beginning in chapter forty, we find a prophecy in which Ezekiel is given a detailed vision of a temple. Now, there are various interpretations of this prophecy, and it is not my purpose in this message to go into all of those possible interpretations.

But dear friends, regardless of your position on eschatology, you must always remember one thing as you look at Old Testament prophecy. You must remember that the New Testament is God the Holy Spirit's commentary on the Old Testament. And in the book of Acts, and in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and especially in the book of Hebrews we find one central fact: All of the Old Testament ceremonial system was done away forever in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no turning back to it. Not now, not ever. As we read here in Colossians 2:14, God has nailed it to the cross of Christ.

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Hebrews chapter eight verse one says that “the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary” and – verse nine – “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience — concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.” And in chapter eight, verse thirteen, the writer to the Hebrews says that the Lord Jesus Christ, by establishing the New Covenant, has “made the first [covenant] obsolete.”

And so we must view the prophetic vision of a temple in Ezekiel with this clearly in mind. What does that mean? It means simply this: Any reading and interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, or of the book of Revelation, that sees a reintroduction of the Old Testament sacrificial system, is a plain denial of New Testament teaching. It is a plain denial of the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. To envision a coming kingdom, as Dispensationalism does, in which that ceremonial, sacrificial system is re-instituted is to envision a future introduction of legalism into the Christian faith. And on the authority of Scripture, we cannot call that anything less than an abomination in the eyes of God, “trampling the Son of God underfoot,” and “insulting the Spirit of grace.”

Our Next Message

Well dear friends, as we move along in our survey of legalistic teachings in the 21st-century church, this leaves us with two groups or movements yet to consider,

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and these also are both seeking to bring aspects of the old Jewish law into the church in our day. One of these is the ceremonialist movement within the Reformed church – those who are reintroducing elements of the temple worship in their church services today. The other is the Christian Reconstructionist movement, which seeks to reintroduce the Jewish civil law into the church and society in our time. So in our next message, the Lord willing, we shall examine both of these legalistic movements in the light of God's Word.

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