

Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 13)

False Teachers

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I believe that the major lesson to be taken from my previous sermon in this series is that one must be *very* careful; seriously thinking about what one is reading into the way of spiritual material, cross-checking what the author has written with what one has learned in the past from the Church of God.

I did not mean in that previous message that those theologians who wrote those books many of you are reading are deliberately attempting to lure people into the lake of fire. I believe that the vast majority of them are deceived. Satan, though, is an entirely different story, and he is the real enemy in all of this. I want you to turn to a very familiar scripture.

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world.

God means what He says. God says Satan has deceived the *whole* world. By way of contrast you can write down in your notes Luke 12: 32, where Jesus called the church "the *little* flock." That is the way it is translated, but actually the Greek word "little" is a double diminutive, and it means "*little, little* flock." On the one hand we have Satan deceiving the whole world, the church being a little, little flock, and so there is a great gulf in terms of numbers between those who are deceived and those who truly understand what God is doing.

Those authors sincerely believe that they are right, and they are effectively teaching what they believe, and therein lies the danger, and why we must be so prudent about what we are reading. We still have human nature, and what those people teach is *very* appealing to human nature in us, because an extremely clever expert at appealing to human nature has crafted it. You know who that is.

I want you to turn back to Matthew 24: 24 to the Olivet Prophecy. This ought to be a scripture that is easily remembered, if only because of the number association.

Matthew 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect.

This is a special admonition—a heads up to those living in the end-time, warning us that this time is going to feature, as it were, deception of a particularly clever and intense quality. Never has access to instruction of this (meaning theology) and any other nature been so readily available as it is in our time through television, radio, books, and the Internet. This admonition is not declaring that the elect cannot be deceived. It is saying that *if it be possible*, and if there is

a way to deceive one who is *of the elect*, the master deceiver will use it in his attempts.

The "watch word" at this end-time is that the elect have to be particularly careful of deception because it is so appealingly, cleverly, and surreptitiously presented to our "willing to hear" ears in many cases. That is what makes uncovering it especially difficult. Added to this is the truth that these theologians who are writing these books, that much of what they say is not advocating immorality, but a twist against God and His truth will be included. It will be cleverly disguised and appealing, and most frequently that twist is going in some way to support antinomianism—meaning lawlessness, and combined with it the "once saved, always saved" doctrine, or in more formal terminology, the "eternal security" doctrine.

Satan's purpose is to make one relax, let down his guard, and sin. Now how do I know this? Because God shows us the foundation of Satan's deceptions right at the very beginning of the story in Genesis 3. In that place Satan challenged Adam and Eve by saying "You shall not surely die." See, "You are absolutely secure before God."

A bit amplified and put into a modern context, he says, "You do not have to be troubled about obeying what God said or wrote, because your salvation is absolutely secure. After all, His grace is so great that it has no end. So relax. Be at peace. Satisfy yourself with your desire and get on with living life."

The modern writers continued to attempt making their teaching attractive by changing terms without changing the overall thrust of their belief, and thus they have emphasized God's grace at the expense of morality by using terms such as "unconditional love," or "Lordship salvation," or "making excuses," or "the carnal Christian."

To the best of my knowledge, one of the latest propositions to counter weaknesses in their approach, which is why they keep changing things, is to develop yet another doctrine where the catchy title excusing mankind from guilt in having any place in the salvation process. They conclude in this teaching that man is totally depraved. Now why, since the Bible shows no such thing? Depraved? Certainly! But *totally*? If man is totally deceived, he is therefore incapable of contributing anything to the salvation process, so their thrust is, "Why even be concerned?" The key word here is "*anything*."

There is no doubt, that given the right set of circumstances, mankind is capable of consistently committing some very horrible acts of blatant immorality. God portrays this very well while relating Israel's misadventures in the wilderness and elsewhere. But brethren, as bad as Israel was, have you ever noticed that they had to walk all the way to the Promised Land? Have you ever noticed that *they* had to go out and gather the manna, which symbolizes God's word, and that Paul said in the New Testament that we are to work out our own salvation?

Those works that I referred to, as insignificant as they are to the overall picture, were nonetheless a contribution they had to make if they were ever to get to the Promised Land. Suppose they decided not to walk? Suppose they decided not to go out and gather the manna? They would have died right there of starvation. They were required to do those things, so there were not totally depraved. That is what God is picturing here. They could do the small things. In fact, God made sure that *they* had to do works. In addition to that, *we* are required to do works.

Richard quoted Ephesians 2:10 in his sermon last week and I am going to quote it again because it shows that we are required to do "works" if we are ever going to be saved.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works* which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

And so, like the Israelites, we must still walk, or we will not get there, and "walk" symbolizes working.

How then, according to the modern "no works" Evangelical teaching, do people become prepared for God's Kingdom? How are they tested? How are they able to prove the sincerity of their baptismal vow of submission to God's government? According to them it just happens magically, as it were, automatically, without effort, because one has the spirit of God. If this is so, why then did Christ and the apostles *urge* Christians to obedience? If it just happens, why do we need to be urged to do it? Why does God rail so much at Israel against their sins? If God did not expect anything of them, why even record these things for our admonition, as Romans 15:4 states?

Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime [meaning the Old Testament] were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

You see, brethren, in their teaching, an anomaly (a word that means a deviation) from God's word is created by their suppositions.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Notice that Jesus is giving assignments that His followers are required to do: ask, seek, knock. These are symbols of work. Now if righteousness accrues without effort, why would Christ even make these assertions and demand a response? These things represent things we must do in order to continue receiving God's gifts.

I want you to notice that this series of verses also says that mankind is not totally depraved. Mankind is capable of good things even without being converted, because when these words first went out, Jesus was speaking to a completely unconverted group of people. He says that He affirms that those who are unconverted can do good things. Now if we were totally depraved we

would all go directly into the Lake of Fire, because then God would have judged that we could not be changed.

You know very well that there are some people who are going directly into the Lake of Fire. I think we have to assume that since God is so gracious and merciful and lovingly kind that He would give people every opportunity to be converted, and so He must have judged these people as totally depraved.

We indeed are a mixture of good and evil, and the evil tends to dominate because we lack knowledge and do not control our self-centeredness. Some undoubtedly are totally depraved, but they most assuredly are the very few in the overall picture. Most people are simply without a calling, and without a revelation of the saving knowledge of God.

Brethren, these doctrines, which were developed by taking the seeds out of Gnosticism, put mankind into an inescapable bind unless repentance occurs. This bind results because the theologians urge those listening to them or reading from them to be righteous, moral, and do good works, but then they are also told that God's law—the very law against which we are all going to be judged—is done away and does not have to be obeyed. This allows people to set their own standards of morality, righteousness, and good works, and this puts them at odds with God Himself and the laws of His kingdom—an inescapable bind. You talk about being between a rock and a hard place, and not even knowing it!

II Thessalonians 1:3-4 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith grows exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other abounds; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.

Verse 5 is the one I am really aiming at here. Verses 3 and 4 provide the lead into what he is going to say.

II Thessalonians 1:5 Which is a manifest token [or evidence that is given] of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also suffer.

Remember, we are talking about doing works—those works that are required of us by keeping the law of God. Our works are not limited to that, but the works are required. This series of verses proves it, because those works are the evidence that we believe Him, and that we trust Him, that our life is in His hand. Without works one will never give evidence by which God can judge one approved and fit for His kingdom against His standard.

If we are not using His standard, we are going to have to use our own personal standard, and our standard is not going to be the same as God's, and so what will the judgment be? We might do well using our own standard, but when the standard is God's, and He is doing the judging, the conclusion, the evaluation, may be entirely different.

We have to measure up against His standard, not ours. This is the bind that these people are being put into by believing these "no works—You do not have to keep the law—eternal security" preaching people, and so they will instead have given evidence of their self-established standard of conduct. What it amounts to is that they really do not want to be under His governance, to continue working with and under Him for eternity.

Brethren, I hope that you understand that our calling is a gift, in order that we might use our life and all of its activities toward the only correct goal for life.

Here is another example of how cleverly the deceptions of these people are worded. Author Steve McVey is fairly typical of a modern Evangelical Christian minister. There is no doubt that he teaches many true Christian values, and that he does it well; however what he teaches also has a catch in it that the unwary may not perceive, and that catch is antinomianism.

In his book, "Grace Walk," he calls and describes law keeping as legalistic. Have any of you ever heard that term applied to you, that you are "legalistic"? Steve McVey describes as legalistic a Christian who looks to God and His law and prays, "Lord, help me to do the things that You want me to do." Now the Christian does this because he believes what God has stated, and that He wants the Christian to obey His laws. Mr. McVey insists that this is wrong. "It is wrong," he says "because it is focusing on rules, even though they are *God's* rules."

McVey goes on to argue that what a truly spiritual Christian will ask is, "Lord, express your life through me in any way You desire." Now wait a minute! God has already said what He desires in His word. Do you see how subtly McVey is getting around this? In other words, he is removing himself from the Bible and asking for a direct inspiration from God to him.

The last phrase McVey believes is a major key to understanding what a Christian's response is to be. When we get it, I think we are going to see what modern hair-splitting-Gnostic-Evangelical-obedience means. Now why? Because when one of us would read in their books that they also say when Christ obeyed the law, and He reproduces His life of obedience in you, that we might reasonably assume that this means that Jesus would lead us to obey the same law as He did.

Jesus kept the commandments. That is very clear to every one of us, is it not? However, according to McVey, that is not really what the Evangelical is saying. What they are saying is that the obedience Christ will inspire within you is in no way tied to the obedience He practiced during His life here on earth. In other words, we do not have to control ourselves to walk as He walked. This is because Evangelical obedience is *mystical* experience based on a *private* revelation of the spirit, and whatever you do in response to your conscience and inner spiritual feelings, as long as they are in some sense "good," and is not done in response to an externally recorded commandment from God, *that* is obedience.

Well that, brethren, leaves the door wide open to permit what the Bible clearly labels as sin. Now why? Recall to mind, that according to their theology, "good" is defined by one's own personal standard, and that standard is actually the product of one's own mind. According to McVey, trying to conform to rules will always fail, because law only stimulates the desire to disobey. Here we are really getting to the hair-splitting. McVey quotes Romans 7: 5-6 to prove his assertion.

Romans 7:5-6 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

I am going to read these same two verses from *The New Testament Commentary* on the book of Romans, page 217. This is just a little bit different and maybe it will help you see this a little bit more clearly, and I will add some things to it. They translate Romans 7:5-6 this way: "For when we were in the flesh the sinful passions stimulated by the law were active in our members so that we bore fruit for death; but now, having died to that by which we were held fast, we have been released from the law, so that we serve in newness of the spirit, not in oldness of the letter.

Before I go any further, recall one simple thing, and that is that the law has a death penalty that is part of it, and even as this verse says, this is what we have been released from.

Paul is in no way saying that the law is done away, and that one does not have to obey the law. In Romans 6 Paul says, "What? Shall we sin that grace may abound?" "Shall we break God's law so that God is forced to use grace?" He says, "God forbid!" Now one chapter later would Paul contradict himself?

Once you go back to what he said earlier, it begins to become evident that he is not talking about breaking God's law, that we do not have the liberty to do that. Otherwise he would have never said, "God forbid that we should sin." Paul is in no way saying the law is done away, or that we do not have to obey the law. What he is doing here in these two verses is contrasting how a person acts *inference* to law at two different times in his life. The one time is "in the flesh"; that is, *before* conversion, and the other time is "in the spirit"; that is, *after* conversion. Paul is comparing the influence on a person being in the flesh as compared to one being in the spirit. So before conversion, we were governed solely by human nature.

In Romans 8, Paul continues with this same essential thought.

Romans 8:6-7 For to be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

While we were in the flesh (Romans 7:5-6) Paul is saying that we permitted our sinful passions (motions, as it is called in the *King James*). The modern translation says "passion." This includes things like anger, ill-will, malice, hatred, envy, greed, and jealousy to pull us into breaking the law.

We sometimes gave ourselves over to virtually unbridled gratification of the passion, but now, being converted, we have put the breaks on those things and are free to serve, to obey God, in the spirit. This is because God has revealed Himself and His way to us, and we have believed

Him. The result is that our life has taken on new meaning and direction. It is not being lived solely for personal gratification. In other words, we have received the spirit of God, and it is freeing us from self-centeredness so that we can obey. That is the comparison Paul is making. He is not doing away with law. He is showing why *wecan* obey the law of God, and we can obey it because of what God did.

We are going to compare this with something that Peter said. Think about what I just said, because Peter here is talking about the same thing that Paul did, but there is a different approach:

I Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.

If we do not have to be careful about obeying the law, why would Peter even say that?

I Peter 1:13-16 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, ...[Peter knew you had to be obedient to the law.] ...not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts [which is what Paul is talking about in Romans 7:5] in your ignorance: But as he which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conduct: Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy.

The law described holiness. Do you think we do not have to walk in the footsteps of Jesus? Oh, yes we do! He kept the commandments, and we are required to keep the commandments.

I Peter 1:17-22 And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conduct received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently.

Peter and Paul are talking about the same thing, only from slightly different angles. Paul is showing a contrast of conduct from a simple, more or less legal perspective. Peter is showing the direct practical process. Neither of them is discussing the law being done away and no longer available as a guide for life. Both are urging and encouraging us to make the most use of what has been given us because of our calling, and that is the knowledge of God and His

purpose for life. Peter said that ignorance has been removed, and because of this we are now free to keep the commands of God.

We were never free to keep the commands of God until God revealed Himself to us. Because of this we are now free to make right choices, using God's law as the guide for moral conduct. It was lawbreaking in the flesh, which is before conversion, that got us into trouble with God, thus creating the need for Christ's blood (I Peter 1:18) and a new perspective on life. It is obedience—law keeping in the spirit—which is *after* conversion that will keep us from slipping back into trouble with God and to further need of Christ's blood.

But McVey, like the first century Gnostics, is teaching that the solution to sin is to get rid of the law. They say Jesus kept the law for us, and they teach you that if you keep it, it will only entrap you, but Jesus will mystically reproduce His obedience in us. Oh, is that so? Now listen to what John wrote in I John 2:3 and you will see that John was in perfect harmony with Peter and Paul.

I John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

If we do not keep His commandments, we do not know Him, and we will never get to know Him. Why would God take away the very way of life that will enable us to know Him? Jesus said that eternal life is *knowing* God. Without God's law to guide us, we will never come to know Him and we will never have eternal life.

I John 2:4 He that says I know him and keeps not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

He is railing against the Gnostics! Do you understand this?

I John 2:5-6 But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

We are to walk in the same manner, in the same way as Jesus walked.

II Thessalonians 2:6-7 And now you know what withholds that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity does already work: only he who now lets will let, until he be taken out of the way.

I am only interested at this time in the term "mystery of iniquity." What we are considering in this sermon is one of the more visible aspects of the mystery of lawlessness. Back in the late 1950s and on through the 1970s, this theological point of view—the mystery of iniquity—was euphemized as "situation ethics." (Another euphemism!) This is again another euphemistic maneuver that permits one to evade the responsibility of keeping God's law in difficult

circumstances, and so if one feels that Jesus want him to divorce a troublesome spouse, regardless of whether the reason fits within biblical standards, "Well, just go ahead and do it," say they.

They say, "*If your inner-self tells you that you can observe any day of the week to honor God, well, just worship God on a different day. If you do keep His word, you might lose your job.*" The situation is such that you have the liberty to change and decide what is good for you. Or they say that if some volunteer or social work demonstrates the love of Christ, who is to say one is wrong, despite the fact that it is distracting you from more important spiritual and family concerns. "*Do not worry about it,*" they taught.

A thought to remember is the New Testament never prophesies that Gnosticism would survive to the end-time as corporate bodies such as existed in the first two or three centuries following the beginning of the church. Rather it only shows that certain doctrines would survive, and thus their belief in the immortality of the soul, progressive and personal revelation, eternal security, predestination, and antinomianism are five doctrines that have survived in spades. They believe that it allows them to override and modify Jesus' earthly ministry, the Old Testament, and some of the epistles of the apostles.

This was already beginning at the time Paul was writing I and II Thessalonians, which incidentally the scholars feel were the first two epistles that Paul wrote. I Thessalonians was written sometime around 50, 51, 52 AD, and II Thessalonians was written not too long after that. We are going to read II Thessalonians 2:10-12 because the general sense of the mystery-of-iniquity subject continues. See if this does not apply to the end-time too.

II Thessalonians 2:10-12 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe *the* lie: [It should read "*the* lie."] That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In this sermon I have been showing you that this is exactly what the warning is to the end-time church, that it would be especially appropriate for us in the end-time to be very, very aware of the possibility of false doctrine putting the pressure on us.

The path of the true church never went through Rome. This will become more important a little bit later. The Roman church emerged from a second wave of apostasy to confront the true church. The first wave was the Gnostics that Jude said came in unnoticed. That is, they came in stealthily. That era of the church dealt with it and put the Gnostics out.

The Roman church, which really began to form a little bit later, never adopted the wildest forms of Gnosticism, but the Catholic Church nonetheless is accepted today as a weak, but valid, continuation of the *first* century church. I know that you all believe this.

The Catholic Church was never part of the true church, and we all look upon it as that. I bring this up because the world *does* look upon them as maybe weak, but nonetheless a remnant of

the true church. This is because, by God's design, the true church has been small, weak, and barely visible, while Hellenistic Christianity has been large, clearly visible, bearing the name "Christian" which they market before the world powerfully and effectively. The people out in the world are not motivated with sincerity and with an open mind to research into the truth of the matter. They do not look into the history of the Catholic Church.

What Paul writes here in this chapter is important to clearly understand. Paul makes it clear that the truth was made available to the apostates. We are talking here about the mystery of iniquity. It was made available to the apostates, but it was rejected. Now who made it available to them? The true church did! Or we could say God did *through* the true church, *through* the apostles, *through* the epistles of the apostles.

Now the "why" in this chapter in this context is *the mystery of iniquity*—antinomianism—that they should believe "*the lie*." What did that amount to? In a practical application, it amounted to the rejection of God's government over their lives. This is the Catholic Church we are talking about. Their rejection of Him was so egregious and willful that He gave them over to the full effects of their evil.

Remember we are talking here, as Paul was writing, looking ahead to the formation of the Catholic Church which was going to grow out of Gnostic seeds. It was not the Gnostic churches themselves, but was to grow out of some of the doctrines that came from Gnosticism and then developed into the Catholic Church. He gave them over to their minds, you might say, and it was not long before they were involved in a mind-boggling orgy of murder, torture, oppression and political intrigue, and some of the worst violation of humanity that the world has ever seen, in order that they could bear witness to us that they are not of the truth.

It is really strange that many in the world look to the Catholic Church as being the remnant of the *true* church in spite of the fact that they know that this church was guilty of possibly the deaths of fifty million people during the Middle Ages. Does that sound like the true church to *you*?

II Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

Does that church believe in keeping the law? Does that church believe in Sabbath? Does that church believe in keeping the Holy Days? We could go on and on. They do not believe the truth. It is clear to us, but it is not clear to the world because they have been deceived into believing that the law has been done away. The "mystery of iniquity" has really been effective, and the only reason we see through it is because of what God did and opened our minds to it. He revealed Himself and His law, and so we believe the truth.

II Thessalonians 2:14-17 Whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, *stand fast, ar stand fast, and hold the traditions [doctrines, policies] which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle*. Now our

Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us
and has gi