

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Man-Made Doctrines: Satanic Counterfeits" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 1 of 12

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Today I want to call your attention once again to the Holy Spirit's great warning against the tyranny of man-made doctrines, which is given to us through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossian church.

I hope that if you are able to do so, you will take your Bible and turn with me to this passage, which is found in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Let us hear the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head [that is, Jesus Christ], from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:18-23)

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Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 2 of 12

---

## **Worthless Substitutes**

Now, we have been considering this passage over the past several messages, and we are now roughly at the mid-point in this part of our series. In our last message we saw that those who invent man-made doctrines and spread them through the church are in fact, as Paul tells us in verse eighteen, cheating believers of their rightful reward in Christ.

We also saw that man-made doctrines are, as Paul puts it in verse twenty-three, “of no value” for the Christian’s real need. We are engaged in spiritual warfare. And the focus of Satan’s attacks in waging spiritual warfare against us is to cause us to live according to the flesh, and not according to the Spirit. Man-made doctrines are of the flesh. They are of the Devil. They can have no value, Paul says, “against the indulgence of the flesh.”

That which is counterfeit is worthless. Of no value. And that is precisely the nature of man-made doctrines. They are counterfeits. They are worthless substitutes for the genuine article.

## **The Human Face of Falsehood**

Now, someone may object, or may question the fact, that I am saying that these things are of the Devil. Someone might well point out that Satan is nowhere mentioned by name in Colossians chapter two, or even in the entire book of Colossians. There is no mention, even, of demons or evil forces. It seems apparent

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 3 of 12

---

that Paul's focus in talking about these matters is upon the people, the human beings, who invent and promote these various evils.

And that is true, as far as it goes. When Paul speaks about the threat of worldly philosophy, he says, "Now this I say lest anyone" – any man – "should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4). "Beware lest anyone" – any man – "cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men" (2:8). And when Paul speaks of the threat of legalism he says, "So let no one" – no man – "judge you" in these matters which were only types and shadows of Christ who has now come (2:16).

And likewise, in the passage we are presently considering on the threat of man-made doctrines, Paul says this: He says, "Let no one" – let no man – "cheat you of your reward" (2:18). And then he goes on to describe these human beings. They delight in a false humility, he says. They are vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds. They are not holding fast to Christ. And Paul speaks of man-made doctrines as "the doctrines and commandments of men" (2:22).

And so, someone may well say that Satan seems to be nowhere in the picture. So why, you may ask, am I talking about Satan? Why have I referred to this chapter as a series of warnings against Satan's triple threat to the church? This is certainly a legitimate and important question, and it deserves a careful answer.

Well first of all, let me explain why Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is taking the approach that he does take in warning against these things in

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 4 of 12

---

Colossians chapter two. These three great evils – worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines – these three great threats to the Christian and the church, these three great tyrannies that we see always hovering like a threatening storm cloud over the life of the Christian and the testimony of the Church in all ages – these things all come to us through the words and works of men. Human beings are the means by which they come. All of these great evils have a human face. They are as real as that.

But the truth is also as real as that. The truth has come in human form in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. "I am the Truth," Jesus declares. Truth also has a human face. Truth is also as real as that.

And so in Colossians chapter two Paul is setting up this stark contrast, this great divide: It is the great gulf between they who represent the false versus you who have received the truth. They who oppose Christ versus you who are forever in Christ. They who would deceive you versus Christ who is the truth and will never deceive you. They who would cheat you versus Christ who is your reward and will never cheat you. They who would judge you unrighteously and condemn you versus Christ who is your righteous judge and will never condemn you, because He has redeemed you with His own blood. They who invent and promote lies versus Christ who is Himself the truth – Christ who has given us the truth in written form. This is the contrast. This is the conflict.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 5 of 12

---

And so that is why Paul is approaching these threats to the church in this particular way in Colossians chapter two. He's putting a human face on them.

### **The Ultimate Source of Falsehood**

But at the same time, we must recognize another factor that we find throughout the Word of God: Behind these visible, physical manifestations of the conflict between truth and error are unseen and supernatural forces. Those unseen and supernatural forces are, if anything, even more real than that which we can see and hear and touch.

What does Paul say in Ephesians chapter six? "We wrestle not against flesh and blood" – not against flesh and blood only – "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." This is the real battle. This is the ultimate battle. You are not simply in a personal conflict with individuals or groups of human beings. The battle you are involved in is ultimately a battle between the armies of Satan and the armies of Christ.

And what does Paul say in Second Corinthians, chapter eleven, beginning at verse fourteen, about the nature of these false teachers who are enlisted in the army of Satan? He says this: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." And the word "transforming" is a Greek word that means that these false teachers are taking on an outward appearance that does not agree with who they truly are on the inside.

---

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 6 of 12

---

And how is this possible? Well, Paul tells us. He says, 2 Corinthians 11:14, that it is "no wonder!" Don't be amazed at this, he says. It is quite easy to explain. And what is the explanation? Verse fourteen again: "For Satan himself," Paul says, "transforms himself into an angel of light." Satan is behind all of this. Behind the human face of these false teachers is the unseen face of Satan himself. Satan himself takes on an outward appearance that is a deception, an outward appearance that does not reflect the consummate evil within him.

"Therefore," Paul says in the next verse, "it is no great thing if his ministers" – Satan's ministers – "also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." They also are taking on an outward appearance that does not at all represent the inward reality. And we find here in Colossians chapter two that they come in a false show of humility, when in fact they are consumed by pride. They come in a false show of wisdom, when in fact God says they are fools. They come with a false claim that they are the spokesmen, the ministers, of Jesus Christ, when in fact they are the spokesmen, the ministers, of the Devil.

Sinful men may be the human instruments that invent and promote and spread these false teachings. But the force that is always driving them is Satan himself. Satan is the author of worldly philosophy; Christ is the author of revealed truth. Satan is the author of legalism; Christ is the author of salvation by grace through faith. Satan is the author of man-made doctrines; God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter sent by Christ, is the author of Holy Scripture.

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 7 of 12

---

Satan leads the spiritual forces that long ago joined him in rebellion against Jesus Christ. Satan and his evil forces exercise dominion and control over the ranks of the unbelieving – over the human forces that are joined with him in that rebellion.

In John chapter eight beginning at verse forty-four, Jesus tells us that the greatest and most outstanding fact about Satan is the fact that he is a liar and the father of the lie. When he speaks a lie, Jesus said, Satan speaks his native language. He “does not stand in the truth,” Jesus said, “because there is no truth in him.”

### **Encouragement in These Facts**

But dear friends, there is encouragement for us in these facts. There is encouragement for us as we face these threats. There is encouragement for us as we face the people that Satan uses to bring these things into our lives and into the church. And the encouragement is this: The conflict in which we are involved is not ultimately a personal conflict. In the great dimensions of God’s eternal plan, the ultimate hatred is not hatred toward us, but hatred toward Christ. That is why Jesus could say, in Matthew chapter five, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

The thing that matters ultimately is not what evil men may say about you in this world, but what Christ will say about you on the Last Day if you are true to Him:

---

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 8 of 12

---

"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Dear friend, when you stand against these things – when you stand against the influences of worldly philosophy in your own life, or in the life of your family, or in your church; when you stand against falling into the trap of legalism, and when you stand against legalistic tendencies in the church; when you resist man-made doctrines, when you strive to keep these things from gaining a foothold in your own life, or in the lives of your loved ones, or in the life of the church – when you take your stand, Jesus said that some people will hate you. Some will even persecute you. Some will spread lies about you.

But what does Jesus say about this? He says, all of this is “for My sake.” Literally, in the original, Jesus is saying, “It is on account of Me.” It is because of Me. It is because I am the Way. It is because I am the Truth. It is because I am the Life. It is because these people are not simply opposed to you – they are opposed to Me. And so they stand condemned. You stand uncondemned.

Therefore, Jesus says, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad.” And so it was with those of the early church in Acts chapter five. They went out from those who opposed them and even physically beat them, we are told, in Acts chapter five, verse forty-one – “they departed...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for [Christ’s] name.” Dear friend, let it be so with you. Great is your reward in heaven when you stand firm for Christ on earth.

---

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 9 of 12

---

## **Satan the Great Counterfeiter**

With all of this in mind, dear friends, here is what we must understand when it comes to the issue of man-made doctrines: Satan is the great counterfeiter. Satan has a counterfeit for everything in God's Word.

Satan has a counterfeit doctrine of the origin of the universe called evolution. Satan has a counterfeit doctrine of man called humanism. Satan has a counterfeit doctrine of sin called psychology. Satan has a counterfeit doctrine of Scripture called higher criticism. Satan has a counterfeit doctrine of Christ that Scripture calls antichrist – and Scripture says there are many antichrists through history as well as the great personage of the Antichrist in the end times. Satan is constantly flooding the marketplace, so to speak, with counterfeits.

One of the most clever and cunning things that Satan and Satan's ministers will do, is to claim to speak for God. From the very beginning, Satan has masqueraded as the one who claims to speak for God.

In the Garden, when Satan tempted Eve, he began by questioning the Word of God: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" But Satan followed that question with a statement in which he claimed to speak for God and to explain God's mind. Satan gave Eve this lie: He said, "You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it [the day that you eat of the tree that God has forbidden] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,

---

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Title: "Man-Made Doctrines: Satanic Counterfeits" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 10 of 12

---

knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5) And so Satan tempted Eve into sin by falsely claiming to speak for God.

Satan even had the audacity to do this when he tempted Christ in the wilderness. Satan quoted Scripture to Jesus in his desperate but unsuccessful effort to cause Jesus to sin.

Satan is the great Scripture-twister, and nowhere does Satan do this with more subtlety and more cunning and more cleverness than in the church itself. Satan's ministers are great Scripture-twisters. As we are going to see in subsequent messages, many man-made doctrines are invented by twisting Scripture – perverting the true meaning of a passage of Scripture. What does Peter say about false teachers, in Second Peter chapter three, verse sixteen? He says that they are "untaught and unstable people who twist" the Scriptures "to their own destruction."

### **Our Approach As We Continue**

And so, as we continue our study of the tyranny of man-made doctrines in Colossians chapter two, I want to focus our attention on four particular kinds of Satanic counterfeits. As we look at the passage before us, we see that the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has each one of these in mind in his warning to the church. Number one, we are being warned against counterfeit authority. Number two, we are being warned against counterfeit worship. Number three, we are being warned against counterfeit intercessors. And, number four, we are being warned against counterfeit mysteries.

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 11 of 12

---

We are going to look at each of these four kinds of counterfeits, each of these four kinds of man-made doctrines, in our next messages. As we look at each of these four kinds or categories of counterfeits, I want to focus our attention on four things about them.

First of all, we need to understand the kinds of counterfeits that false teachers were trying to pass off upon the Colossian believers at the time Paul was writing to them. That will lay the proper groundwork for us to consider the remaining points.

Secondly, we need to briefly consider how similar kinds of counterfeits have developed and spread during the subsequent history of the church. Much of the study of church history is the study of the development of man-made, counterfeit doctrines, and the study of the efforts of faithful men to combat them. This is a vast area of study, and our consideration of this second area will need to be brief. But I believe it is important to understand that doctrinal counterfeits are and always have been a tyranny that the church has had to constantly be on guard against.

Our brief look at church history in each case will lead us to a third point, and that is the fact that we find counterfeits of the same kind in the church in our time. We need to understand the kinds of Satanic tactics that are being used against the true Church of Christ today.

And then finally, in the case of each of these four categories of counterfeits, I want to draw our attention back to the genuine article. Back to God's truth. I want to draw our attention back to the genuine standard of truth on each of these four

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Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/18/2012

Page 12 of 12

---

matters – on the matter of authority, on the matter of worship, on the matter of intercession, and on the matter of mysteries. I want to draw our attention back to what the Word of God says to us positively about each of these things. We must never conclude our consideration of these things with our focus still on Satan's lies. We must always bring our eyes back to behold the glories of Christ and His truth.

And so, the Lord willing, that will be our method of approach as we continue our study of the deception and tyranny of man-made doctrines in our next message.

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