

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Demolishing Rome's Authority" (Colossians 2:18-23, 2 Peter 1:16-21)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/15/2012

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We live in a time when there is an epidemic of man-made doctrines within the visible church. Man-made doctrines are the source of a great deal of spiritual oppression and tyranny within the church. Those who invent and promote these false doctrines are in rebellion against the unique authority of the Word of God. You as a Christian must be on guard against these things. And the Word of God equips us for that purpose.

And so, let me call your attention once again to one of the great warnings against the evil of man-made doctrines that we find in the Word of God, and it is the Apostle Paul's inspired warning in the book of Colossians, chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Please open your Bible with me to this passage if you are able as you are listening. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Let us hear the Word of God:

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, to 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?

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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)

Review: Four Forms of the Counterfeit

Now, as we have seen, the Apostle Paul is warning us here about four specific forms that the tyranny of man-made doctrines can take as it comes into the church.

First of all, those who seek to bring in man-made doctrines are operating on the basis of counterfeit authority rather than God's authority. And the great spiritual counterfeiter is none other than Satan himself. He is the author of all counterfeit authority.

Secondly, those who bring in man-made doctrines often seek to lead the church into counterfeit forms of worship instead of the true worship of God.

Thirdly, those who bring in man-made doctrines often divert the church away from approaching God through the one true Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and instead they offer counterfeit mediators.

And fourthly, the introduction of man-made doctrines into the church often involves counterfeit mysteries, counterfeit secrets, counterfeit hidden or special knowledge. Things that are not the true knowledge of God. Things that are not the true mysteries that God has revealed and is yet to fully reveal in the course of His plan of redemption of a people for Himself who will live with Him forever.

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The Greatest Counterfeit Authority in Church History

And so we are presently focusing on the first area, the area of counterfeit authorities. Counterfeit authority is the foundation of all man-made doctrines.

In our last message we turned our attention to some of the most significant kinds of counterfeit authorities that we find in church history. We noted that the great counterfeit authority that dominates the long centuries of church history is the counterfeit authority of the Roman Catholic church. No single entity has accumulated and exercised more counterfeit authority for a longer span of time than the church of Rome. No visible church has propagated a greater body of man-made doctrines than the church of Rome.

In our last message in this series, we began to look at the ways in which the Roman Catholic church establishes and exercises this counterfeit authority.

We saw, first of all, that the Roman Catholic church establishes its doctrines by making man the primary authority. The Vatican teaches that the Roman Church itself is the infallible judge of truth. The leaders of the church constitute the final authority, they say, and not Scripture.

Roman Catholicism puts Holy Scripture in second place at best. Over the past 1,700 years, Rome has built a complex web of man-made traditions and arbitrary, changeable regulations that are in fact foreign to Scripture and contrary to Scripture.

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And Rome says that Christians must obey all of these things in order to remain in good standing with the Church.

Instead of judging every word of man by the Word of God, the Roman Catholic church judges every word of God by the word of men. Rome's authority is in fact a perverted authority. It is a perversion of God's commanded order of authority within the church. Jesus condemned those who teach as doctrines the commandments of men. And the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit issues the same condemnation here in Colossians chapter two.

Rome declares that the seat of its authority is the throne of the Pope, and not the throne of Christ in Heaven. But in our last message we saw that Scripture completely demolishes Roman Catholicism's contention that our Lord Jesus Christ designated Peter as the first Pope, and established a line of papal succession. We saw that the original language of the passage in Matthew chapter sixteen that the Roman church uses to support this false doctrine simply does not support it. In fact, the original language of Matthew chapter sixteen says exactly the opposite of what Rome claims. Jesus Christ is the rock on which the true Church is built. And as we saw, Peter himself, in his first epistle, declares to us that Jesus, not Peter, is the chief cornerstone of the Church.

Rome's Degradation of the Bible

Over all of the centuries up to the present time, the Roman Catholic church has made no secret of the fact that the Bible is not its supreme authority. In fact, Rome

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says that nothing is more dangerous than for people to try to interpret and understand the Bible for themselves. There is only one safe thing to do, Rome says, and that is to live in subjection to the authority of the leaders of the church. They alone can interpret the Bible for you, they say. They interpret the Bible according to the accumulation of church traditions over the centuries. The traditions of the church are superior to Scripture, according to Rome. The Bible is not enough.

And so Rome twists the words of Scripture to support its own man-made doctrines. Doctrines that keep people in spiritual bondage. Doctrines that cheat people of the Gospel. Doctrines that cheat people of the reward that is the right and privilege of every true believer in Christ alone for salvation, as Paul tells us here in Colossians chapter two.

But dear friend, listen carefully. The Bible itself disproves and destroys Rome's historic position concerning Scripture. The Bible itself condemns anyone who would invent and propagate doctrines of his own, and make people live in subjection to those doctrines.

Peter's Own Inspired Word Demolish Rome's

And once again today, as I did in our last message, I want to take you to the section of the Word of God that was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the Apostle Peter himself. Rome stakes everything on the false doctrine that Peter – the papacy – is the rock upon which the church was built.

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But as we search the Scriptures we find that Peter himself denies this. Peter himself, in both of his epistles, condemns this idea. And furthermore, Peter not only declares to us that Christ, not Peter, not the papacy, is the cornerstone of the church. Peter also declares to us that Scripture is the sole authority of the church on earth. Not the papacy, as Rome historically claims. Not apostolic succession, as Rome historically claims. Not church tradition, as Rome historically claims. Peter declares to us that no one has the right to establish man-made doctrines. Peter declares to us that no one has the right to interpret God's Word in any way we please.

Turn with me, please, to the book of Second Peter, chapter one, beginning at verse sixteen. Second Peter, chapter one, beginning at verse sixteen. Peter writes this:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the

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will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

Something Even More Vital Than the Apostles' Testimony

Now in this passage, Peter is making two points. His first point, in chapter one verses 16 through 19, concerns the witness and testimony of the Apostles. They saw Jesus Christ with their own eyes. They saw all the Old Testament prophecies about Christ's first coming fulfilled. Peter himself, along with James and John, was on the mountain, as we read in the gospel accounts. They saw Jesus Christ transfigured before them. They heard the voice of God the Father from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In other words, Peter is saying: The facts verify prophecy. We saw this with our own eyes. And that is our testimony to you.

But then in verses 20 and 21, Peter goes on to say that there is something even more important. Something even more important than an eyewitness account. Something, Peter says, that we must understand first. And that is the nature of prophecy itself. And not only the nature of prophecy, but also the nature of Scripture as a whole. Notice how Peter says it — "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture..." Prophecy is a part of Scripture, so what is true of prophecy is true of Scripture as a whole. "Knowing this first," he says, "that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

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The Historic Divide Between Orthodox & Heretic

All the way through church history, these two verses are at the center of every division that we encounter between the orthodox and the heretic. Every division between the genuine authority of the Word of God and the counterfeit authority of the word of man.

The great division between authentic Biblical Christianity and the counterfeit of Roman Catholicism hinges on these verses. The great division between authentic Biblical Christianity and every other kind of religion in the world, every false religion, hinges on these verses. These are key verses in the Word of God.

Rome's Twisting of This Vital Passage

Now many churches, and many cults, look at verse 20 by itself. They lift it out of context. Rome looks at verse 20 and says that it means that it is wrong for anyone to interpret the Bible for himself. Only the church can interpret the Scriptures, they say. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." Period. Authentic Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, claims the universal priesthood of all believers, not just a certain class of men who are called priests.

But Rome declares that it is dangerous – dangerous – for church members to try to understand the Bible for themselves. So there is only one safe thing to do. Go to the church. Go to the priest. But the ironic thing is that when men go to seminary to become priests, the thing they don't study very much is the Bible itself. Instead, they

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spend years studying church tradition. They spend years studying man-made doctrines, instead of the doctrines of Christ.

Dear friends, it all comes down to this: Do you believe that the church has to interpret the Bible according to its traditions or some other standard, or do you believe that the Bible itself is the final authority? And do you believe that the church, rather than standing in judgment over the Word of God, must be judged by the Word of God?

Proper Interpretation of the Passage

Now as I said, the Roman Catholic church takes verse 20 by itself – “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” Period. They stop there. But that’s not the complete thought. Verses 20 and 21 form a single thought, and verse 20 is not complete without verse 21.

The word “for” at the beginning of verse 21 links the two verses together. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation – for – prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Verse 21 explains verse 20.

We also need to take a closer look at some of the words that are used here in our English Bibles. In some cases, it’s difficult for translators to find a concise way of saying in English all that is said in the original. And this is one of those places.

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The Critical Meaning of Words in Context

The Authorized Version and the New King James both use the word "is" in verse 20. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." Some other versions render it "comes" or "came about." Those words are closer to the original, but still not quite enough. In the original language, the word actually speaks of how Scripture "originated" or "came into existence".

Another word we need to understand more carefully in verse 20 is the word "interpretation". This is the only place in the entire Bible where this particular Greek word is used. The word in the original language has to do with "determination" – the way in which something is determined to be true or not true. So the idea of verse 20 is this: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture originated as the result of any private determination of what is true or not true."

In fact, it would be closer to the original language to say it like this: "Knowing this first, no prophecy of Scripture originated in the human writer's own personal determination of what is true or not true." And if we say it like that, we see better how it connects to verse 21: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated in the human writer's own personal determination of what is true or not true, for this reason – verse 21 – prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

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Why Scripture is the Church's Sole Authority

And as we see it in this light, it connects us back to what Peter has already said in verse 19: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed..." Why should we pay attention to Scripture? Why should we study it? Why should, indeed why must, Scripture be the sole and final authority of the true church of Jesus Christ?

The answer is that Scripture is not a mere collection of the words and ideas of men. It did not originate in man's understanding of things. The Bible is not the record of man's views, or man's perspectives, or man's interpretation of events. Man did not decide what is true and what is not true. "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Spirit-Driven Men Writing for a Scripture-Driven Church

There is one other word that we need to deal with in order to understand these verses completely, and that is the word "moved" in verse 21. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Some Bible versions render it "carried along," and that is closer to the original. But it is still not the full force of what is being said. The word translated "moved" or "carried along" is better yet translated, "driven along". Driven along. Driven along by an outside force.

This is what Peter is literally saying: "Holy men of God spoke as they were driven along by the Holy Spirit." Without obscuring their personalities in the writing, God

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gave them the very words to write. The Holy Spirit drove them along as they wrote them down. It's always "thus says the Lord" – "the burden of the Lord" – "the word of the Lord came to me" and so on. They were driven to write the very Word of God.

Revelation Given by Inspiration

So here we have, in one short passage, a statement of the two great doctrines concerning the nature of Scripture.

The first great doctrine is this: That the text of the Bible, the content, the very words, are revelation – they are from the mind of God, not the mind of man.

The second great doctrine is this: The way in which the Spirit of God used men to record the words is inspiration – men driven by the Holy Spirit.

Revelation, and inspiration – these are the two great words that tell us the nature of true authority in the Christian church. It is not the authority of man. It is not the authority of a succession of men. It is the authority of the Word of God, alone, forever settled in heaven. That is the church's genuine authority.

Words That Crush Rome's False Claims

And so, dear friends, let me repeat to you once again these inspired words of the Apostle Paul, words that literally crush into the dust all the efforts of Rome and all the efforts of the other false religions of church history to establish their counterfeit doctrines. Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen:

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Dear friend, here is your authority. Here is your reward. Here is your nourishment. Here is the increase that is from God. Let no man, let no church, cheat you of it.

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The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is that of the Great Commission: to preach the Gospel to the world, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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