

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Beware of Reconstructionism"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/17/2011

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Introduction

Let me call your attention once again to the great statement of the Apostle Paul that we find in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven. If you are able to open your own copy of God's Word as you listen today, I trust you will do so, and follow along as I read these verses from Colossians, and also some other passages in our message today. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven. Paul writes this:

In Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] you [that is, you who have believed on Christ] 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].

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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 [that is, the reality or the fulfillment] is of Christ.

Legalism's Two-Fold Danger

In this passage, God the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through the pen of the Apostle Paul about the great evil of legalism. Over the long history of the church, many individual Christians, and many church bodies, have fallen into the sin of legalism. Satan is always seeking to undermine God's people in this way.

That was true in the time of the Apostle Paul, and that is why he wrote these words of warning and encouragement to the Colossian church. But it is just as true in our time. I seriously doubt that there is anyone listening to my voice today who has not experienced the evil of legalism at one time or another yourself. Perhaps you yourself have fallen into the deception of legalism. Or, perhaps you have been afflicted by some individual or some church that has fallen into this great sin. Sooner or later these things happen to all of us. And so it is vital for us to focus our attention on this section of the book of Colossians where Paul is warning us about this evil, and he is encouraging us to stand firm against it.

Now as we have seen, the danger of legalism is two-fold. First of all, a legalist may tell you that you need to add something to the perfect and finished work of Christ, in order to be saved. Secondly, a legalist may tell you that you need to add something to God's all-sufficient written Word, and God's authoritative Holy

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Spirit living within you, in order to be sanctified, to be conformed to the image of Christ. Sometimes the legalistic message is a subtle one. The legalist may not directly deny these essential truths of God's Word. But sooner or later, the legalist will, in effect, tell you that he has something more to offer to you than God has to offer to you. The legalist will tell you that you need to do something more for yourself than God has already done for you, and has promised to do for you.

Today: A Shift In Our Focus

Now, in our most recent messages we have been focusing on legalists who want to take Christians back under elements of the Old Testament law that have become obsolete through the work of Christ. Specifically, up to this point, we have been focusing on forms of legalism that attempt to take believers in Christ, and the church of Jesus Christ under the New Covenant, back under elements of the Old Testament ceremonial system.

We have seen that this is still a threat to the church after all these many centuries. And, we have seen that the Word of God clearly tells us to turn away from such things, to flee from such things. We have seen that it is vital for us to cling to the person and work of Christ, because He made these things obsolete. He Himself has fulfilled all the ceremonial types and symbols of the old system by His incarnation, His perfect law-keeping, His perfect atonement, and His glorious resurrection and ascension to the Father.

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But today I want to turn our attention to a movement in the Evangelical church that seeks to return the church to the other obsolete element of the Old Testament law. These people want to reinstitute the Jewish civil law of the Old Testament. And not only do they want to reinstitute this law in the church, they also want to reinstitute this law over the entire world-system. The movement that seeks to do this is most widely known by the name Christian Reconstructionism. Sometimes you will also hear it referred to as Dominion Theology, or as Theonomy. In this message I am going to use the term Christian Reconstructionism, since that is the most common name that these people use to describe themselves and their movement.

Christian Reconstructionism: A Recent and Evolving System

Now before we move into this discussion, I need to say something that is very important. In the long history of the Christian church, Christian Reconstructionism is a very recent development. It has only been on the scene for approximately the last forty years. And so Christian Reconstructionism is, in historical terms, a very young movement. It is an immature movement. It is an evolving movement.

The two leading figures who founded and promoted the Christian Reconstructionist Movement have now both been dead for over ten years. New spokesmen for this movement have now come to the forefront. These men are the followers and successors of the founders. Like all immature movements in the history of the church, Christian Reconstructionism is not a fully developed or

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unified system of teaching. Different spokesmen for the movement today are saying different things. They are defining their terms in different ways. Sometimes they actually disagree with one another. And, some leaders in the movement have changed their positions on particular elements of Christian Reconstructionism over time.

Lessons From Church History: The Dangers of “Movements”

Now I must say to you that as we look at the history of the Christian church, we find that this changeable nature of such movements is, in itself, a danger signal. It is a danger signal that is true of all man-made movements within the church. And for this reason alone, dear friend, apart from any other consideration, I say to you that you should beware of anyone within the church who tells you that you need to join a movement. It doesn't matter what kind of movement it is.

As you look closely and carefully at all of these man-made movements, as you look at them with Biblical discernment, you will find that one thing is true of virtually all of them. All of these man-made movements change their positions and teachings over time, and you find that eventually and inevitably they all come to a place where they disagree with the clear teachings of the Word of God at one or more critical points.

So you need to beware of man-made movements within the church. Church history, even over just the past two hundred years, certainly demonstrates this to us. Let me give you just a few examples.

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The Dispensationalist Movement began in the early 1800s under the leadership of a man named John Nelson Darby, and it has grown and evolved now for nearly 200 years. And it is still evolving, and it is still promoting the falsehood of a carving up of the Word of God in order to fit their paradigm of a complete separation between Israel and the church.

The Revivalist Movement began around the same time, the early 1800s, mainly through the teachings of a man named Charles Finney. This movement has deceived many people into thinking that they can simply repeat a formula prayer, or go the front in a meeting, and they can be guaranteed eternal life on that basis, and it doesn't matter how they live after that point.

The Revivalist Movement was a great deception. In those days, the teachings of this movement caused thousands of people in certain parts of the United States to base their hope for eternal life not on true faith in Christ, but on the fact that they went forward in a meeting and repeated a formula prayer. Other evangelists who came through those parts of the United States at a later time, preaching the true way of salvation, found that these people had been, in effect, inoculated against the Gospel. When they were presented with the Gospel, these people said, in effect, "Oh, I don't need that. I went forward in a meeting twenty years ago. I have my eternal life insurance policy. It doesn't matter that I haven't been inside the doors of a church since that day. It doesn't matter that I'm still living the same kind of sinful life I lived before. I have my free ticket to Heaven." And we find

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people saying the same thing even today. This is the fruit of the Revivalist Movement.

Earlier in my own lifetime, there was the Twentieth Century Reformation Movement under the leadership of Carl McIntire, and the Moral Majority Movement under the leadership of Jerry Falwell. Both of these movements were, in many ways, the forerunners of the present-day Christian Reconstructionist Movement.

And in the 20th century we also saw the Ecumenical Movement that denied the Gospel. And that movement was the forerunner of present-day movements – the Purpose-Driven Church Movement, the Emergent Church Movement, and the Progressive Christianity Movement. All of them deny the Gospel, and all of them seek a false unity on a man-made basis. Today we also have the Word of Faith Movement among the charismatics, a movement that says that Christians are “gods” with a small G. We also have the New Calvinist Movement that is marrying Calvinism and charismatic teachings and sowing seeds of confusion. And, we have the Christian Reconstructionist Movement, which is our present focus of attention.

The Common Flaw of Man-Made Movements

Now all of these diverse movements, and many others we could name, have one thing in common. Each of these movements is the work of a man or a group of men who came along and put their movement forward as THE thing that the

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church has been lacking. Each of these movements says that it offers THE way of looking at Word of God that we need to adopt, in order to understand the Bible properly, in order to understand the Bible in a way that no one has ever understood it before. Each of these movements says that it is THE answer to the problems of the church and the problems of the world.

Now, this phenomenon is not new. There were also man-made movements in the early church, and Paul and the other New Testament writers all warned believers about such things. The Judaizers were a legalistic movement that threatened the church at Colosse and all of the other early churches. The Judaizers tried to take the early Christian believers, both Jew and Gentile, back under the Old Covenant system. On the other hand, the Gnostics were a philosophical movement that threatened to remove the early Christians from their firm understanding of their true position in the New Covenant in Christ.

As we look at Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, First Corinthians chapter one beginning at verse eleven, we find a different form of what we might call the "movement mentality" in that church. Paul writes to them about the fact that he has received word that each person in the church is identifying himself with a particular teacher. Each one said, "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos" or "I am of Cephas" or "I am of Christ". Some of them were saying they belonged to Paul's movement. Paul's movement is THE thing. Some of them were saying they belonged to Apollos's movement. His movement is THE thing. Some of them

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were saying they belonged to Cephas' or Peter's movement. Peter's movement is THE thing.

In fact there is no evidence in the New Testament record that any of these men were trying to lead a movement. All of these men were faithful ministers under the sole authority of Jesus Christ. But the Corinthian believers had developed a party spirit, a movement mentality, if you will. Some of them were even saying, "I am of Christ" – they were putting Christ on a level with Paul and Apollos and Peter.

But Paul says this to them, in First Corinthians chapter one, verse thirteen: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" And then in verse thirty he reminds them of this: "But of [God] you are in Christ Jesus" – all of you – "who became for us" – all of us – "wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that, as it is written, 'He who glories,' – every one of us – "let him glory in the Lord.' "

Your glory, Paul says, is not in individual teachers. To put it in terms of our present discussion, Paul is saying, in effect, that your glory is not in movements. Your glory is not in a party spirit. These things are not the source of your wisdom. These things are not the source of your righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Christ is. God's Word is. Hold fast to Christ. Hold fast to His Word. Don't get caught up in a movement mentality, as the early Corinthian church did.

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How Christians Must View Any Movement

How then should Christians view Christian Reconstructionism, or any other man-made movement in our time that is contrary to the Word of God? Let me remind you of some passages of Scripture that are probably familiar to many of you, but we do need to remind ourselves of them when we face any threat to the church.

First of all, let me remind you of the Apostle Paul's charge to Timothy that we find at the end of Second Timothy chapter three, and the beginning of chapter four. And if you are able as you are listening, I hope you will turn there – Second Timothy chapter three beginning at verse thirteen. Paul tells Timothy that

evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you [he says, you] must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

And then Paul reminds Timothy that it is not men or movements but Scripture alone that is the authority of the individual Christian, and of the minister of the Gospel, and of the church of Jesus Christ. Verse sixteen:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [it is God-breathed, it is the very words of God], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

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correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And then Paul gives this charge to Timothy, chapter four, verse one:

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

And then Paul reminds Timothy of one of the main reasons why he needs to do this – because there will be the constant temptation for people and churches to be carried away by man-made movements. Notice verse three:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Let me also remind you of John's words to the church, in First John chapter four, verse one. He says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Let me give you an expanded translation of this verse from the original

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language. John is saying this: Do not immediately place confidence in every new teaching that comes along, and in every new teacher. Rather, test these individuals, and test what they are teaching. Test it to make sure it meets God's specifications. Test it to make sure that it is entirely in agreement with the Word of God.

And the clear implication is that if an individual and his system of teaching do not adhere to the Word of God, you must reject both the person and his teaching. The two things – a man and his teaching – are inseparable in the original language of this passage.

Christian Reconstructionism's Fatal Flaws

And so as we look at Christian Reconstructionism, this legalistic movement, we need to look at it in the light of these things. And as we do that, it is very important for us to focus on the essentials.

There are things that are changeable and changing about all of these movements. But all of these movements have an unchanging core. They have a basic set of teachings that do not change, even though other things about their system and their movement may – and often do – change.

And so this is how we need to look at the Christian Reconstructionist Movement. We need to focus on the elements where all, or at least most, of the representatives of the movement, are in agreement.

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And what we find is that those areas of agreement are enough to condemn this movement, because those areas of agreement among all of the leading representatives of this movement are in *disagreement* with the Word of God. Christians must reject this movement because God's Word rejects this movement. And the essential thing that condemns Christian Reconstructionism is the fact that it is, at its core, a legalistic movement. And the inherent legalism of the Christian Reconstructionist Movement manifests itself in three ways:

First of all, Christian Reconstructionism establishes a legalistic purpose for the church, that is contrary to God's plan and purpose for the church as we find it in the pages of Scripture.

Secondly, Christian Reconstructionism seeks to establish a legalistic regime in the unbelieving world-system that is contrary to God's plan and purpose for this present world-system, as we find it in His written Word.

And thirdly, Christian Reconstructionism seeks to establish a legalistic system of sanctification, which is contrary to God's revealed plan for the sanctification of the believer in Christ individually, and for the sanctification of the church of Christ as a body.

Our Next Message

As we continue this study in our next message, we are going to ask and answer several questions. First, what are the core doctrines of the Christian

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Reconstructionist Movement? Second, who are the main leaders of the movement? Third, what is the history of this movement? Fourth, how do we know that the Christian Reconstructionist Movement is contrary to God's Word? And finally, how should Christians who desire to be true to the Word of God deal with this movement when we encounter it?

I hope you will join us next time as we take up these vital questions, in light of the things we have considered today.

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