

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Christ vs. Reconstructionism"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/24/2011

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We are continuing the message we began on our last broadcast. Our general topic at this point in our study of the book of Colossians is the evil of legalism. At present we are dealing with the legalistic movement called Christian Reconstructionism.

As we resume today, let me direct your attention once again to the great declaration of God through the Apostle Paul that we find in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven. Here the Spirit of God tells us that

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].

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.

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This great declaration, as we have seen, is a pronouncement against legalism in its many forms. This great declaration is a statement of the fact that the individual believer in Christ, and the church of Jesus Christ, has been freed from the curse of the law and the bondage of the law.

We have seen from this passage and others related to it that Christ has freed us from obedience to the Old Testament ceremonial law. His perfect life, His atoning death, and His glorious resurrection and His ascension to the Holy of Holies in Heaven have made these things obsolete. And so as we have surveyed the situation of the church in the present day, we have seen the Bible's answer to those who say that we must reintroduce any part of that obsolete system, either in order to be saved, or in order to live the Christian life. Such a thing is a spiritual monstrosity in the eyes of God.

We have also seen that Christ has freed both Jew and Gentile from any hint of obedience to the code of civil law that He established for the theocracy of ancient Israel. That law code ceased to be in effect when the theocracy ceased to be in effect. But in our last message we took note of the fact that there is a movement in our day called Christian Reconstructionism that seeks to reinstitute the Jewish civil law code, not only in the church, but in the world at large, as the rule of law for all nations.

Reconstructionism's Core Teachings

This is the core, or the essence, of Christian Reconstructionism. The theorists of the Reconstructionist Movement often try to hide that fact by stating their position

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in less direct terms. They speak of “faith in all areas of life.” They twist the “dominion mandate” of Genesis chapter one, verses 26 to 28. This was God’s mandate for mankind to be the custodian of the earth and the lower orders of life in the creation. But the Christians Reconstructionists twist this into a mandate, not for mankind in general, but for Christians specifically, to establish what they call “Biblical law” – which is in fact a euphemism for the reinstatement of the Jewish civil law code – over all of humanity. They teach that Christian man can establish theocracy in this world.

Now as I said last time, we need to focus upon this fundamental core of the Reconstructionist Movement. The spokesmen for this movement use many other terms, and some of them differ on other issues. But this legalism is the essential core.

Reconstructionism’s History and Spokesmen

As I mentioned last time, Christian Reconstructionism is a comparatively young and immature movement in the history of the church. It has really only existed as a movement for the past forty to fifty years. And beyond its core teachings, it is a changing and evolving movement. That is why we must focus on the core.

The first generation of leaders in this movement consisted of two main individuals. One was a man named R. J. Rushdoony, who died in 2001. Rushdoony wrote what is considered the classic book of the movement, called *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, which was published in three volumes in the 1970s. The other early leader was Greg Bahnsen, who died in 1995. Bahnsen wrote a book called

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Theonomy in Christian Ethics which is also considered a classic statement of the principles of the movement.

The second or current generation of leaders of this movement includes several men. Mark Rushdoony, who is R. J. Rushdoony's son, is president of the organization his father founded, which is called the Chalcedon Foundation. Gary North, who is Rushdoony's son-in-law, is also active in the movement. Gary DeMar, who is president of an organization called American Vision, is another major philosopher of the movement. All of these men are still living. David Chilton, who was also a major spokesman for the Christian Reconstructionist Movement, died in 1997.

Reconstructionism's Influencers and Influence

All of the men I have just named are Calvinists and postmillennialists, and all of them have been strongly influenced by the philosophy of one man in particular, Cornelius Van Til, who was a professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia from the 1920s to the 1970s. Van Til's philosophy was deeply flawed by the fact that he did not believe that the Bible is the actual Word of God. He taught that the Bible is only an analogy of what is actually in the mind of God.

The Reconstructionist Movement is a major influence on today's political Tea Party Movement. The Reconstructionist movement has also had a significant influence on men and churches that are not Calvinistic and not postmillennial. In fact, Reconstructionism has had a major influence on men and churches who are

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Dispensational in their outlook. You see this reflected in a theme that you find in many parts of the Evangelical world today – the theme that we must somehow “reclaim America for Christ” – we must somehow “reclaim the culture” – we must somehow “reclaim science for Christ” – we must somehow “reclaim the arts for Christ” – we must somehow “reclaim government for Christ”.

Here is a quotation from an article by the late Dr. Henry Morris. This is Dr. Morris’ description of Jesus Christ’s Great Commission to the church. Dr. Morris says this:

We must diligently try not only to win the lost to Christ, but also to bring the world itself back to God. We must try not only to win individual scientists and educators to Christ, but also win science itself, and education itself, to Christ. The same is true for every sphere of human life, for all this is implied in God’s primeval command to ‘have dominion’ over the earth and all its creatures. – That must be our ultimate goal – to win the world and all its systems back to God...¹

Dear friends, I have the greatest respect for the late Dr. Morris as a pioneer in the restoration of the Biblical doctrine of literal six-day creation. But as we are going to see in a few moments, what he has stated here is simply wrong. It is a very tragically flawed view of the Bible, and it is a tragic distortion of Christ’s mission

¹ Henry M. Morris, “Back to Genesis” in *Acts and Facts* magazine, published by the Institute for Creation Research, July 2011, page 20. This article was adapted from an article by Dr. Morris titled “Beginning at Genesis” which appeared in the February 1994 edition of *Acts and Facts*.

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for His Church in this world. And Dr. Morris was far from alone in stating this view. It is a very common one in the church today.

Christ vs. Reconstructionism

The fact is, dear friends, that Christian Reconstructionism is opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now some of you may find that to be a shocking statement. Some of you may strongly disagree with it. But I want to explain to you from the Word of God why it is true.

Now, Rushdoony and Bahnsen and other leaders of the Christian Reconstructionist Movement are considered to be great intellectuals. They put forth complex arguments for their position. Many people simply accept what they say because of this complexity. They say, in effect, that these men can only be really understood by men who are their intellectual equals.

But here is the fact of the matter: Quite often we find that the complex intellectual arguments of men can be brought crashing down by simple analysis – a simple analysis that strips away all of the verbiage and gets down to the fundamental issues. The Christian, equipped with the Bible, can demolish high-flown but false arguments simply by identifying a handful of very basic flaws, or even a single basic flaw. If you doubt that this is true, I urge you to go to your Bible and read the first two chapters of First Corinthians. The Apostle Paul, one of the great intellectuals of his day, says exactly this.

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As we look at Christian Reconstructionism in the light of the Word of God, and in the light of Christ's own statements, we find that Christian Reconstructionism is condemned by four fatal flaws:

- First, Christian Reconstructionism is the dangerous reintroduction of legalism into the life and thinking and activities of the Christian individually, and the church as a body.
- Second, Christian Reconstructionism is contrary to God's plan and purpose for the church, as we find it in the pages of Scripture.
- Third, Christian Reconstructionism is contrary to God's plan and purpose for this present world, as we find it in His written Word.
- And fourth, Christian Reconstructionism is contrary to God's revealed plan for the sanctification of the believer in Christ individually, and the sanctification of the church of Christ as a body.

There is a fundamental and irreconcilable difference between Reconstructionism's abuse of the Jewish civil law code and God's intended *right use* of His moral law. The purpose of Christ's church in this world is not the moral improvement of unsaved men apart from saving faith in Christ. Our purpose is the Great Commission – the preaching of the Gospel to bring about the salvation of men out of this condemned world, and the teaching of the whole counsel of God to

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believers, in order to prepare those who do come to faith in Christ for life in the world to come.

Both aspects of the Great Commission require the right use of God's moral law, and no other law. Galatians chapter three tells us that God's moral law is the sinner's schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. First John chapter five tells us that God's moral law is no longer a burden for the believer. Psalm one and Psalm forty tell us that the moral law of God is the believer's delight.

God's Will For This Present World

God's will for this present world – and especially for Christians in this present world – is not civil government by theocracy. God's will is what we find in Colossians chapters three and four. God's will is that in all of the areas named, in all of our relationships – in the world, in the home, in the church, on the job – in all of those relationships, it is God's will that *Christians* should be conformed more and more to the image of Jesus Christ, crucifying the old nature, and walking in newness of life.

There is no idea of anything but a remnant, ever. Christ said that the Father will give the kingdom not to an overwhelming mass of converted humanity, but to a "little flock" (Luke 12:32).

Many Christians talk today of "reclaiming America for Christ" – "reclaiming the culture" – "reclaiming science for Christ" – "reclaiming the arts for Christ" –

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“reclaiming government for Christ”. If only we could “reclaim” these things, they say, the world would be so much better. The church could have so much greater influence.

Is this true of you, dear friend? I hope it is not, because it is contrary to God’s Word. This kind of attitude – this Reconstructionist mentality about the role of Christians in this present world – reveals the tragic ignorance of what the Word of God tells us in several key areas. This ignorance is widespread in the present-day church.

Reconstructionism Ignores the Nature of Christ’s Authority

First, the Reconstructionist mentality reveals a tragic ignorance within the church of the fact that all of these things are under the authority of Christ now. He has all power now. The passage we read at the beginning of today’s program tells us that Jesus Christ is the One who has disarmed principalities and powers at the cross. These things are now under His authority just as those who put Him to death were under His authority. Jesus said to Pilate, You cannot do anything to me unless I permit it (John 19:11). Jesus said to His disciples, when men came to arrest Him, Put away the sword. Put away human power. Do you not know that right now I can call more than ten legions of angels to deliver Me? But I am not going to do it, because the Scriptures must be fulfilled (Matthew 26:52-54).

How does the Great Commission begin? Jesus said, All power, all authority, has been given to Me in Heaven and on Earth...*therefore*...Don’t take over

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governments. Don't impose Old Testament law on present-day society. *Do what I have told you to do: Evangelize the world. Edify the saints.*

Reconstructionism Spreads the Myth of Upward Progress

Secondly, the Reconstructionist mentality reveals a tragic ignorance within the church of the fact that the pattern revealed in Scripture is not the upward progress of man, but the downward progress of this earth and this world-system toward judgment and destruction.

Human government has failed. It will continue to fail. It will always fail until the curse of sin is removed forever. Human culture has failed. It will continue to fail. It will always fail until the curse of sin is removed forever.

Human scientific endeavor has failed. Science is becoming more and more a matter of perfecting ways to destroy human life, to pervert the very definition of human life. Man's efforts to supposedly save or restore what is called the environment – those efforts are actually destroying the environment. Human science will continue to fail. It has always failed to solve man's true problem. It will always fail to do so, because it cannot. The answer to man's deepest need does not lie there. No amount of reconstruction of these things will do any eternal good.

Reconstructionism Denies Prophecy

Thirdly, the Reconstructionist mentality reveals a tragic ignorance of prophecy. What do we find as we come to the book of Revelation? Do we find man and this

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world on an upward and righteous course when Christ comes again? Dear friends, that idea is absolutely laughable.

When Christ comes to set up His kingdom, He will come upon a scene in which man has made an absolute and ultimate disaster of this present world. Christ will come upon a scene in which man by his own hand would have destroyed the human race and made this earth utterly uninhabitable, except for the restraining hand of God. Christ will come upon a scene of ultimate tribulation, such as no man will have ever seen before. Christ will come upon a scene of horrific judgments that He Himself will have unleashed on this world.

Dear friends, does this look at all like what the Christian Reconstructionists speak of? Does this look like a world taken over by authentic Christianity? Does this look like Christ coming to simply take over a kingdom that Christians have already ushered in? No! What we see in the prophetic picture is Christ standing outside the door of the church and knocking, desiring to be let in.

What we see in the prophetic picture is the answer to Christ's own question, Luke 18:8 – "When the Son of Man comes [again] shall He find faith on the earth?" What we see in the prophetic picture is a world that God in His infinite wisdom will have given into the hands of the Devil, and mankind operating in complete submission to the Devil. What we see in the prophetic picture is a world in which God will have permitted sinful man to show his true nature to its lowest depths.

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Why? So that God may show to all the watching universe that the death of the Son of God Himself was the *only* thing that could redeem such a world.

Reconstructionism Denies What Must Be Done to Reclaim the Universe

Fourthly, the Reconstructionist mentality reveals a tragic ignorance of the fact that only Christ can do what must be done to reclaim this world. The curse of sin, the curse of the law, must be removed forever. That is what is vital. That is what is essential. Only Christ Himself can do that. Only Christ could pay the price that was necessary not only to redeem individual sinners, but also to redeem a place for those redeemed sinners to live in forever – the New Heavens and New Earth, this universe renovated and restored and exalted to an even greater glory than its original state of perfection.

But first, Peter tells us, this present world must pass through the fires of destruction. The elements must melt with fervent heat, he says. Nothing less than that will do what is necessary to renovate and reclaim this world for God's eternal glory. Nothing less than that will make righteous rule by human beings possible on the Earth. The very idea of man, even Christian man, reconstructing this present world is an insult to God and to Christ.

Reconstructionism Twists the Great Commission

Fifthly, the Reconstructionist mentality reveals a tragic ignorance of the Great Commission. It is the job of the true Church of Jesus Christ to preach not a message

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of reconstruction *of* this present world, but to preach the message of rescue and redemption *from* this present world.

The Reconstructionists and their followers have twisted the second part of the Great Commission, the command to teach all nations. They have twisted that part of the Great Commission to say that it means that the goal is the Christian takeover of the world, or as they put it, the Christians' reclaiming the world for God – and in the case of core Reconstructionist theory, placing the world back under Old Testament Jewish law code. What a cruel deception of the Devil this is!

There is no hint in the pages of Scripture of any idea of the Christian Reconstruction of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse or Thessalonica. The mission of Christ's church is *not* to gain power in this world.

The fact is that we would mess up this world just as badly as other sinners have. Look at the history of the church. Look at the failure even of Christians to resist the temptations of the Devil even in governing the church. Look at the failure of churches and denominations in our own time to uphold the truth of God's Word. Look at the failure of churches and denominations in our time to govern themselves righteously. Look at the corrupt conditions to be found even in many reputedly conservative denominations today. Christians cannot even effectively and righteously govern in the church. How can we expect that Christians in their unglorified state would do any better in governing society at large?

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Critical Questions for God's People

Dear friends, are we willing to listen to what God's Word says about the rulers of this world? Are we willing to bow the knee to the fact that it is God – not us, but God – who raises up one ruler and puts down another? Are we willing to bow the knee to the fact that God's Word says that He often places the basest of men in positions of authority and rulership, for His own purposes and for His own glory?

Are we willing to bow the knee to our Lord's own statement that the kingdom for which we labor is not of this present world? Are we willing to bow the knee to the words of Colossians chapter one and Ephesians chapter one, where Paul tells us that it is Jesus Christ who will restore all things? Are we willing to bow the knee to the fact that "all things" includes us? Are we willing to bow the knee to the fact that we ourselves must ultimately be restored?

Are we willing to bow the knee to the fact that we cannot possibly rule and reign with Christ in these present vile bodies, while the warfare of the flesh against the Spirit rages within us? Do we understand that we must be ultimately sanctified and glorified and made like Him, before we will be fit to rule and reign with Him forever?

The job of the true Church of Jesus Christ is to bow the knee to these vital facts. The job of the true Christ of Jesus Christ is to proclaim *His* power to save sinners and to deliver them *from* this present evil world into a new world.

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Only Christ's church can proclaim that glorious message. But today much of the church is not proclaiming that message and that message alone. Today the church is busy doing a thousand other things that actually run contrary to that message. Dear friends, that is the great sin of the present-day church. Our need is not reconstruction. Our need – the world's need – is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. But judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). We must repent of our wrong thinking on these matters, and once again submit to the clear teachings and authority of the Word of God alone.

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