

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Beware of Counterfeit Revelation" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/12/2012

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We are focusing our attention at the present time on a passage that comes to us in a chapter of Holy Scripture which reminds us that this Book is the Christian's and the church's sole authority in all things.

And so I invite you to turn there with me once again if you are able – Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. This particular part of this very important chapter is a reminder that we must always be on our guard against those who will seek to bring some counterfeit form of authority and doctrine into the church. 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 [the Lord Jesus Christ], from whom all the body [all the true Church of Christ], 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

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religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:18-23)

Paul's Fourfold Warning to the Church

If you have listened to our recent broadcasts, you will recall that we have been focusing our attention upon these verses for some time. When we consider the present condition of the Evangelical church around the world, it is vital for us to read and to heed the warnings that are given to us here, by the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul.

Here is what we have seen thus far. This passage is a warning against man-made doctrines. And under that general heading God through the Apostle Paul warns us here about four things specifically.

First, we find a warning against man-made authority taking the place of God's authority. Secondly, we find a warning against man-made worship taking the place of God's ordained worship. Thus far we have studied these two aspects of this passage in considerable detail.

There is also a fourth warning in this passage, and it is a warning against counterfeit mediators taking the place of the mediation of Christ alone. And we are going to take up that fourth warning, the Lord willing, in future messages.

But beginning today I want to call your attention to Paul's third warning in this passage. He warns us not to permit the entry of counterfeit revelation into the

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church. He warns us against those who are “intruding into those things which they have not seen” – verse eighteen.

Now, why do we need such a warning? Well, the answer is this: Over the long history of the church, we encounter many occasions when men and women have claimed that they have received special revelation from God outside of Scripture. It was true in the church in Colosse at the time Paul wrote to them. It has been true all through the centuries of subsequent church history.

The Danger In Our Time

And never has it been more the case than we find in our own time. We have men and women in the visible church, all over the world, claiming that they have received special revelation from God outside of Scripture. And because we live in the age of instantaneous communication by means of satellite television and radio and by means of the Internet, a man or a woman in one local church can claim to have a new revelation today, and tomorrow that supposed new, extra-Biblical revelation can spread all over the world.

The technology of mass communication that is available to us in our time can be the vehicle for communicating error as well as truth. And it is the sad case in our time that the largest segments of the nominally Evangelical church are using these powerful means to communicate serious error. And much of that error comes in the form of lying claims that there are revelations from God to the church outside of

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Scripture, and that these so-called revelations must be given equal standing with Scripture, and even supersede Scripture.

Our Four Questions

And so, the Lord willing, we are going to look together at these things. And as we must, we are going to rely upon Holy Scripture as our authority and our standard. Our approach to this warning will be the same as it has been to the others we have already considered, and it involves asking and answering four questions.

First, what was the reason why Paul gave this warning to the Colossian church in the first century? What counterfeit revelations were they dealing with? How were they coming into the church? What was the danger?

Second, what major streams of counterfeit revelation do we find in two thousand years of subsequent church history? We find that the institution that has done the most to originate and propagate counterfeit revelations is the Roman Catholic church. But we also find that there have been such evils in Protestantism as well. Many of them have taken the form of cults, and many of those cults still exist today.

And then we are going to consider a third question: What major streams of counterfeit revelation do we find in the visible church in our own time? What must we ourselves be on guard against?

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And then finally, as always, we shall bring our focus back away from the counterfeit and we shall complete this section of our study in Colossians chapter two by focusing on the genuine article. What is the standard by which we must judge all things?

And of course that standard is the Word of God, and we do have the God-given right and responsibility to make those judgments. Making those judgments is called spiritual discernment. Every believer in Christ has a responsibility to develop and to exercise discernment. In First John chapter four, verse one, we are commanded thus:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, [because] many false prophets have gone out into the world.

That is our responsibility as believers and as the church: To “test the spirits,” under the authority of Holy Scripture and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Problem at Colosse

And so let us begin with our first question: What was the reason why Paul gave this warning to the Colossian church in the first century?

As we look at Colossians chapter two, and as we look at other parts of the New Testament, we find that the main problem in the Colossian church, and in other New Testament churches, stemmed from the intrusion of what later became known

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as Gnosticism into the church. The people who were deceived by this falsehood of Gnosticism believed that human beings could obtain a higher knowledge than that which was revealed in Scripture.

They believed and they taught that you could attain to this knowledge through special acts of private devotion, for example, by meditation – not by meditation on Scripture, but by the kind of so-called meditation where you open your mind to any and all thoughts that might come into it.

These people believed that by these kinds of practices you could receive new revelation, special revelation, extra-Biblical revelation. And so you would be initiated into an inner circle of people who had special knowledge, they claimed, that the common, run-of-the mill church member did not have.

Now these things had their roots not in Christian teaching but in paganism. And this was especially a danger in a time, in the early days of the New Testament church, when the canon of Scripture was not yet complete.

No Paradoxes or Contradictions

But one thing was already clear, even at this time. It was absolutely clear in the teachings of our Lord during His earthly ministry. And, it was absolutely clear in the teachings of the Apostles during their subsequent ministry after Christ ascended to Heaven.

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And that one thing that was absolutely clear was this: There can be, and will be, no genuine revelation that will contradict the revelation that God had already given in the Old Testament. There would be no revelation that would contradict the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ while He was on earth.

There would be no revelation that would violate the nature of God. He is absolutely holy, so there can be no genuine revelation that violates or casts any doubt upon His holiness in the slightest degree. He is immutable, He is unchangeable, so there can be no genuine revelation that will contradict anything God has previously revealed. God is not the God of paradox, but the God of unchangeable propositional truth.

These things, these truths, were the anchors of truth on which Paul and the other apostles called upon the church to stand as they tested anything that came into the church.

And, as the time of the Apostles ended, God closed the Book. He declared at the end of the book of Revelation, chapter twenty-two, that the canon of Scripture is complete. God had said it all. And anyone who would add to it or take away from it would be under God's eternal curse.

Paul's Condemnation of Counterfeits and Counterfeiter

And so with these things in mind, the Apostle Paul, by the authority of Jesus Christ, does not hesitate for one moment to condemn those who were attempting to

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bring counterfeit revelation into the Colossian church. In Colossians chapter two verse eighteen, he warns the Colossian believers that this is yet another way in which sinful man will endeavor to cheat true believers of the reward that is rightfully theirs in Christ.

Notice what Paul, by Divine authority, says about those who claim to have new revelations, those who claim to have had new mysteries opened up to them. He declares that these people are, verse eighteen, "intruding into those things which they have not seen," because they "are vainly puffed up by [their] fleshly mind[s]."

They have come to be in this wretched spiritual condition because, verse nineteen, they are not spiritually connected to the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, to put it plainly, Paul flatly declares that the people who bring such things into the church, and the people who persist in following after them and will not repent – these people are simply not true believers in Christ. They are not saved individuals. They are not part of the true body of Christ. They are sinners in need of repentance and salvation.

They are not receiving what they are receiving from Christ. And of course, the clear implication is that what they are receiving is from an entirely different source. What they claim is a revelation from God actually comes from their sinful flesh. What they claim is a revelation from God actually comes from the Devil who is using their sinful flesh.

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Counterfeit Revelation Is Not a New Problem

Now dear friends, the problem of counterfeit revelation is not a new problem. It was not a new problem at the time of the Colossian church. The problem of counterfeit revelation goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

What was it that Satan was saying to Eve in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis chapter three? He was saying, in effect, "I know something that you need to know, that God did not reveal to you." "I know something, Eve, that you need to know, that God did not reveal to you." That was the greater lie, the implied lie, which was behind the spoken lies that came from the mouth of the serpent.

"God told you, Eve, that if you eat of this tree you will surely die. But that's not the case. I know better, Eve. I know more. God doesn't want you to eat of this tree because He doesn't want you to become like Him. God doesn't want you to have knowledge that only He has – the knowledge of good and evil. God doesn't want your eyes to be opened, Eve."

"You see, Eve? Isn't it all clear to you now? Isn't this liberating, Eve? I'm telling you these things that God didn't tell you. You don't have to listen to God's Word. You need to listen to me."

And so the very essence of Adam and Eve's sin was that they chose to believe Satan's counterfeit revelation instead of God's truth. They were deceived. They did not exercise even the most basic discernment. And so, it was believing a counterfeit

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revelation, and acting upon that belief in doing what God had forbidden, that plunged our first parents, the entire human race, and the entire universe into bondage under the curse.

Serious Business

Dear friends, receiving and acting upon counterfeit revelation is serious business. It is soul-damning business. It is testimony-destroying business. It is church-destroying business. And so we have the repeated warnings, all through the pages of Scripture, against counterfeit revelation, against false prophets, against false Christs.

In Deuteronomy, God delivered these warnings to the people of Israel in the strongest possible terms. Deuteronomy chapter thirteen, beginning at verse one:

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ — which you have not known — ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to

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Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God.... So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

Also Deuteronomy chapter eighteen, verse twenty. God says this:

[T]he prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

And yet hundreds of years later, in the book of Jeremiah, we find that the people of Israel had not needed God's warnings. They had allowed those who spread counterfeit revelations to live and to prosper among them, and to be their religious leaders. And God said this, Jeremiah chapter five, beginning at verse thirty:

An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. (Jeremiah 5:30-31)

And we come to the New Testament, to Second Timothy chapter four, and we find Paul giving the same warning to young Timothy:

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.

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For [notice] 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 [counterfeit revelations]. But you [Timothy, preacher of the Word, pastor of the church] be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Dear friends, just as it was true in the sin of our first parents, it is the nature of every sinful human being to pursue his own way instead of God's truth. Isaiah chapter fifty-three, verse six tells us that this is the very reason why Christ died: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way." And it is for that very reason – because we have followed our own darkened ways instead of God's path of truth – that "the Lord has laid on Him [on Jesus] the iniquity of us all."

There is always this tendency, the tendency of the flesh, to follow the thinking of man instead of the mind of God. To follow the commandments and doctrines of men. To follow counterfeit revelation. And what does Paul say about these things at the end of Colossians chapter two? He says that these things have a false "appearance of wisdom" – but they "are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

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Dear friends, the conflict between counterfeit revelation and genuine revelation is, at its essence, a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. Counterfeit revelation comes from the flesh and through the flesh.

The Only Revelation That Saves, Sanctifies, and Glorifies

And so what must our position be? What is God's imperative for the Christian and for the church? God's imperative is that we must reject any and all extra-Biblical revelation. Why must we do that? For the simple reason that God has told us that His Word is authoritative and complete. This side of Heaven it is God's full, final, and all-sufficient revelation to His church.

And dear friends, that revelation alone is the place of safety for the Christian and the church. Listen to the Word of God – Second Samuel chapter twenty-two, verse thirty-one:

As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.

And Proverbs chapter thirty, beginning at verse five:

Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

That is why Jesus prayed in John chapter seventeen, "Father...Sanctify them by Your Word. Your Word" – Your Word alone – "is truth." God's Word, His

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complete and authoritative revelation alone, is that which sets God's people apart. God's genuine revelation saves the sinner. God's genuine revelation keeps the believer from error and from the dangers of this evil world. God's genuine revelation is that which leads the true church of Christ safely home to glory. Nothing else, no word from anyone else, can save, and sanctify, and glorify the people of God.

About the Broadcast

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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