

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Intruders in the Church" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/19/2012

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The passage we are presently studying is found in the book of Colossians, chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Right now we are focusing in particular on a statement that we find in verse eighteen. But I want to read the entire section for you once again so that we will have the context in our minds.

If you are able, I trust that you will turn here with me in your own copy of God's Word – Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, [and the next statement is our present focus –] 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 our Lord Jesus Christ], from whom all the body [that is, the entire true Church of Christ], nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Therefore [verse twenty], 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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The Nature of Counterfeit Revelation

This passage is, as we have seen, a warning against man-made doctrines. The Apostle Paul, by the authority of Divine inspiration, does not hesitate to condemn man-made doctrines. He does not hesitate to condemn those who seek to bring these things into the church. He tells us that these men and women are setting up their own authority in place of the authority of God. He tells us that they seek to establish their own forms of worship instead of the manner of worship that has been ordained by God.

Paul also tells us that these people who seek to establish man-made doctrines do so in a very particular way. They seek to bring in counterfeit revelation, in place of the inspired revelation of God. Paul says, verse eighteen, that the individual who does this is "intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."

Now, we have seen the nature of this problem in the Colossian church at the time in which Paul wrote to them. People who were under the influence of paganism, and what would become known as Gnosticism, were attempting to bring their counterfeit revelations into the church.

But we also saw that this was not a new problem. It is a problem that is as old as sin itself. Satan used counterfeit revelation to tempt Eve into sin in the Garden of Eden. And later in the nation of Israel there were false prophets, and they were in two categories.

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There were, on the one hand, false prophets who claimed to speak for God, but God said they had no right or authority to speak for Him. And there were, on the other hand, false prophets who tried to lead the nation away from God, who tried to lead them to worship and to serve other gods, false gods, and to engage in the vile practices of those pagan religions, including all kinds of immorality and even the sacrifice of human beings, the sacrifice of their own children, to these false Satanic deities.

The Death Penalty for False Prophets in Israel

Now I want to explain a point about these false prophets before we move on. It is a point that I neglected to make in our last message because of the limits of time. But I believe it is important to explain this point before we move on.

In our last message, we saw in the book of Deuteronomy, in chapter thirteen and again in chapter eighteen, that God commanded that all false prophets in Israel were to be put to death. To put it in present-day terms, God had a zero-tolerance policy toward false prophets, toward anyone who sought to bring counterfeit revelation into the congregation of Israel. God imposed the same harsh penalty on both the false prophet and on the murderer.

Now, why did God do this? Why did God impose the same harsh penalty – the death penalty – on a man who merely uttered words, as he did on the man who took someone else's life? Well, here is the answer.

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The congregation of Israel was the literal dwelling place of God on earth. God said to Moses in Exodus chapter twenty five, "Make Me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among the people." And so that was done. And God came and dwelled, in the very center of the camp of Israel, over the mercy seat of the tabernacle, in the visible form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The presence of God was constantly visible to the entire nation that He had chosen.

But God said, "If I am going to dwell among you, you must be a holy people." You must be holy, because I am holy. And so you must keep this land in which you are dwelling – and where I am dwelling with you – you must keep this land holy by keeping yourselves holy.

And here is what this means. There can be no man-made authority. Only My authority, exercised through Moses and other men of My choosing. There can be no man-made worship. Only My ordained worship as I have prescribed it in detail. And, there can be no man-made, counterfeit revelation. No false prophets. Only the revelation that I have given, and will give, through Moses and other men of My choosing.

Violations of the holiness of God mandated drastic measures in the theocracy of Israel. The men who followed after Korah, the men who challenged God's authority as He had given it to Moses, were killed by God's own hand. Aaron's sons were killed instantly by God when they violated God's prescribed worship. And likewise,

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men were to be put to death if they were false prophets, if they brought in any counterfeit revelation. This too was a violation of the holiness of God.

We Must "Put to Death" Counterfeit Revelation Today

Now, you may be saying, "What does this have to do with Colossians chapter two? We don't kill false teachers today. So how does this apply? How does it connect?"

Now it is true that we have no commandment from God to kill false prophets today. We are not living in the ancient nation of Israel. God is not living visibly in the middle of our camp. There is no physical land that we must keep holy.

Christ's church, the manifestation of His body in this present age, is dispersed throughout the world. But dear friends, God's Word tells us that we individually are the temples of the living God in this age. That is a repeated theme especially in Paul's epistles. For example, First Corinthians chapter three, beginning at verse sixteen, Paul writes this:

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God [literally, "if any man destroys the temple of God by defiling it"], God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

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And then in the verses that follow, Paul goes on to say that one of the principal ways in which every believer is to keep the temple of the living God holy is to reject the wisdom of this world, to reject counterfeit revelation.

And so, Paul tells us in Romans chapter eight, and in Colossians chapter three, that we are to "put to death" these things within us. Just as ancient Israel was to put to death the false prophet because of the holiness of God, we, individually as Christians in this age, are to put to death counterfeit revelation within our own selves, within our own minds and hearts, because we are the temples of the living God and we must be holy temples.

If we put counterfeit revelation to death within ourselves, we will effectively put counterfeit revelation to death within the church.

This is one of the great problems of the church in our time. Christians are not being taught the doctrine of sanctification. They are not being taught that their thinking and their behavior needs to be vastly different from the thinking and the behavior of the unsaved world. They are not being taught about the holiness of God. They are not being taught that the Holy God who lives within each and every true believer in Christ requires this of every believer. It is not an option. It is a command.

If we do not put the thinking and actions of the flesh to death within ourselves, then we will not put these things to death within the church. You cannot harbor sin

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in your own heart, and truly reject that same sin in the church. You will find ways to make room for it in the church. You will find ways to tolerate it.

And this is what we find in so much of the church today, dear friends. People who claim to be Christians are not putting to death the sin of adultery in their own hearts, and so they find ways to excuse the sin of adultery within the church as a body.

In the same way, people who claim to be Christians are not putting to death the sin of false worship within their own hearts, and so they make room for the sin of false worship within the church.

And in the same way, people who claim to be Christians are not putting to death the sin of counterfeit revelation, the sin of doctrinal deviation, within themselves. Many Christians are taken up with the thinking of this postmodern age. They have fallen into the trap of Satan, the kind of thinking that says, "Well, you have your truth and I have my truth. We just see things differently. But that's alright, because the Bible can be interpreted in many different ways."

Dear friends, this is not the language in which our holy God speaks. That is the language of Satan. As Paul makes it clear here in Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen, counterfeit revelation is also a sin of the flesh, just as much as adultery or lying or stealing.

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Notice once again how Paul puts it, Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen. Those who promote counterfeit revelation, and those who follow after them, are “vainly puffed up by [their] fleshly mind[s].”

And so we must put to death counterfeit revelation along with all of the other sins of the flesh. If we do not seek to put that sin to death within our own hearts, we will find ways to excuse all kinds of false doctrine, man-made doctrine, within the church.

And what is the result? Romans chapter eight, verse thirteen: “[I]f you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” That is true for the Christian as an individual, and it is true for the church as a body.

And how do we put these things to death? Paul tells us in that verse in Romans. He tells us that we are to put these things to death “by the Spirit.” By the Holy Spirit. How do we do that? We do it by submitting to the Word of God, which is quite literally the Word of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of God who dwells within every true child of God, the Word that is the only authority for the believer.

You see, dear friends, everything always comes back to the authority of Scripture. The church of Jesus Christ must be the Scripture-driven church. God’s inspired, inerrant Word must be our sole authority, and our infallible critic, in every area of life and ministry. And so with these things in mind, let us move on.

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“Intruding Into Those Things Which He Has Not Seen”

In Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen, Paul says that the man or woman who seeks to bring counterfeit revelation into the church is “intruding into those things which he has not seen.” Now this is a very striking statement. We need to be clear on the meaning of it.

Let me begin by saying that this is a phrase that is translated incorrectly in many contemporary Bible translations. Many contemporary translations leave out the word “not” in this phrase. And that is because these translations are based on a counterfeit Greek source text of the New Testament.

That counterfeit is known variously as the Westcott-Hort text, or the Nestle-Aland text, or by other names. That counterfeit text is based primarily on two counterfeit Greek texts of the New Testament, called Vaticanus and Siniaticus. These counterfeits have been used by the Roman Catholic church for many centuries. But they were rejected by the believing church for over 1800 years.

But men who falsely claimed to be Protestants brought these texts into the Evangelical church in the 19th century, and these counterfeit texts have become the basis for most Bible translations during the past 130 years.

You see, dear friends, one of the most insidious ways to bring counterfeit revelation into the church is to bring counterfeit source texts into the work of Bible translation. That is what has happened. And here we see an example of the result.

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If you leave out the word “not” in this verse, as these counterfeit source texts do, you completely change the meaning. It changes from is “intruding into those things which he has *not* seen” to “intruding into those things which he *has* seen.” But as we look at the rest of Scripture, we understand the reason why the authentic source text, the Received Text, has this verse as we find it translated in the original King James Bible and in the New King James Bible. The correct translation is “intruding into those things which he has *not* seen.”

You see, the men and women who were trying to bring counterfeit revelation into the Colossian church were under the influence of Greek paganism. The Greek pagans put a great emphasis on the idea of “seeing” in their religion. And so these people claimed that they had actually seen these counterfeit revelations that they were trying to bring into the Colossian church. They had seen visions, they said. They had had mystical experiences. The words in this verse give the idea of having entered into something, having investigated it thoroughly, having searched into it, having scrutinized it carefully.

But the Apostle Paul refutes this. He says that these false teachers are intruding into things which they have *not* seen. Things which they have *never* seen. Things which they never *could* see. It all comes, Paul says, from their fleshly minds, literally, “the mind of the flesh,” which has been vainly puffed up in pride. These false teachers boasted that they were guided by some higher and greater knowledge. But the fact is, Paul says, that they are thinking and acting in their own sinful flesh.

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Treading On Air

They have intruded, Paul says, into those things which they have not seen. And the word that is translated “intruded” here in verse eighteen literally means that these people were taking their stand upon things which they had not seen. To put it even more literally, they were “treading on air.” The teachings they were attempting to bring into the church were absolutely without foundation.

And that is because, Paul tells us, verse nineteen, these people are “not holding fast to the Head” of the church, Jesus Christ. This could be translated, quite literally, that they do not *possess* the Head. They do not possess Christ. That is Paul’s point. These people may have appeared to be Christians for a time. They may have entered into the congregation with true believers. They may have used the right words.

But even these who may have given the appearance of true faith in Christ will eventually fail the test. “The time will come,” Paul says in Second Timothy chapter four, “when they will not endure sound doctrine.” Literally, they will not put up with it.

“According to their own desires,” Paul says – according to the desires of the flesh – “because they have itching ears” – literally, because they desire to hear something that will please their flesh and not convict them – they will “heap up for themselves teachers” who preach “fables.” Literally, they will pile up such false teachers, one on top of another on top of another.

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Exercise Spiritual Discernment

Dear friends, in our day counterfeit revelations often come into the church because someone read something in a book, or heard someone on the radio, or saw a program on television. False teachers and counterfeit doctrines are everywhere. Often these people say many things that sound like the truth, but then they will slip in the lie of Satan that destroys the truth.

Do not turn your ears away from the truth. Be careful who you read. Be careful who you watch or listen to. Test the spirits. Evaluate everything by the infallible standard of the Word of God alone. When you hear a false teacher slip in a counterfeit in place of God's truth, put it to death in your thinking. Reject it immediately. Do not give it a foothold. Reject that false teacher.

Put these things to death by the Holy Spirit. Remember the inspired words of the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians chapter two. He declares this:

[N]o one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

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But the natural man [the unsaved man, including the false teacher] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But he who is spiritual [he who is truly a regenerated believer in Christ, he who has the Spirit of God living and operating within him, that person] judges all things [quite literally, that person exercises discernment]...

God's Word and God's Spirit, dear friend, are your infallible safeguards against counterfeit revelation.

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