

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

Title: "Today's Un-Protestant Church: The Solution" (Romans 11:33-12:2)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10/19/2019

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We began this sermon on our last program, and conclude it today.

This transcript contains the material from both broadcasts.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
(Romans 11:33-12:2)

We hear a lot in our society today about transformations, makeovers. We hear and see lots of advertising about "makeovers." They used to call it "home remodeling" or "home redecorating" – but now it's "an extreme makeover for your house."

Many women go to a spa to get a makeover. And even some men do it these days. People go and get a new look. A new hairstyle. New makeup. A new wardrobe. A makeover. A transformation.

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A number of passages in the Bible speak of transformations. But these aren't the kinds of transformations that the marketing gurus of Madison Avenue invent and try to sell to us.

There are negative kinds of makeovers in the Bible. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter one about the unbeliever who changes the glory of the incorruptible God into images of various kinds and worships them. Man tries to do a "makeover" with God. Man wants to create a God in his own image.

An Extreme Makeover in the Church

And today, the Evangelical church is getting an extreme makeover. The major movements among Evangelicals today say that we need to redefine the church. They say that we need to stop focusing on building up the people already in the pews, the saints that we have. They say that we need to go to unbelievers and ask them what the church should look like. We need to ask them what the church should preach. We need to ask them how the church should worship. We need to find out what will please and impress unbelievers. And then we need to give it to them.

The modern makeover movements among Evangelicals go by various names. The Purpose-Driven church, the emergent church, the new paradigm church – these are all makeover movements. Forget what the Bible says. Do the things that will bring greater numbers. In the last few years, over 400,000 Evangelical pastors and church leaders have gone to seminars and workshops that tell them how to give their churches that kind of an un-Biblical makeover.

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And in the process, the church's message has gotten an extreme makeover. Much of the Evangelical church no longer preaches that the Bible is totally accurate in everything it says. Much of the Evangelical church today does not preach the one true Gospel in its fullness – the Gospel that saves souls. Much of the Evangelical church today does not train and instruct people to have Biblical discernment – to test everything against the authority of Scripture. Praise God, I know that it's different here at Reformation Bible Church.

How Evangelicalism Became the Un-Protestant Church

But what happens when you do those things? What happens is that the Evangelical church becomes the church unplugged. The church disconnects itself from its Source of true power and authority, the Word of God.

And the church unplugged – the church that has disconnected from its true Source of power and authority – soon becomes uncertain what it believes. It becomes ineffectual in fulfilling its genuine mission of preaching the Gospel to the world and building up the saints in sound doctrine. And the church unplugged from the Word of God becomes ill-equipped to do battle, and it finds itself retreating in the battle against the enemies of the truth. The church unplugs itself from the wisdom of God that we find only in His Word, and instead, it plugs into the word of man and the wisdom of the fallen world.

The church that reinvents itself to meet the specifications of unbelievers may attract hundreds or even thousands of them. But it doesn't truly lead them to Christ. It

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has no Gospel message to offer. And while it seeks to please the unchurched, it neglects the saints. The saints aren't fed. The saints aren't built up in sound doctrine.

A church that adopts this "new paradigm" places itself in a deadly downward spiral. Here is what happens, and you can see it in Evangelical churches all over America today. As the church caters more and more to the way unbelievers want the church to look and feel, and preach, the percentage of unsaved people in the congregation continually goes up. But at the same time, the percentage of genuine Christians in the congregation continually moves toward zero. And within a surprisingly short time, sometimes just a few years, the thinking and practices of an unsaved super-majority dominate the church.

Notice that thus far this morning I've talked about the Evangelical church. I haven't used the word Protestant. And I've done that deliberately, because much of the Evangelical church, even much of the Reformed church, has forgotten what it means to be Protestant. The church today - the vast majority of the nominally Evangelical church, the vast majority of the nominally Reformed church, is going back to the pre-Reformation position. And as we commemorate the great historical fact of the Protestant Reformation, and all that it means, let me submit to you that it is important for us, first of all, to go back and understand the state of the church before the Reformation. Because that is the state to which the nominally Evangelical church is rapidly returning.

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What characterized the pre-Reformation position? What was the church like, 600 years ago? Let me briefly name four things.

A Church Built On Biblical Illiteracy

First, the pre-Reformation position was built on Biblical illiteracy. Before the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was un-translated. The Bible was literally chained to the pulpit. People couldn't read the actual Word of God in their own language. The modern movements among Evangelicals today are also built on Biblical illiteracy. And it happens in two ways.

The first way is through the deception of the Bible paraphrase. The modern church makeover movements encourage Biblical illiteracy by using and promoting so-called Bible versions that are not faithful translations of the Word of God, but man-centered paraphrases. One that has become quite popular through the modern church makeover movements is called *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Tens of millions of copies of *The Message* have been sold. But it's actually not a Bible at all. It's a paraphrase. And the author of this Bible paraphrase is Eugene Peterson, a man who for thirty years was a pastor in the liberal Presbyterian Church, USA. He founded and pastored a church just a few miles from here, in Bel Air, Maryland. That's the first way that the modern church makeover movements are encouraging Biblical illiteracy, a return to the Pre-Reformation position. They give people something to read that says "Bible" on the cover, but it's not the authentic Bible inside.

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The second way these makeover movements encourage Biblical illiteracy is through their attitude toward Scripture. The man who wrote *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary English*, says this: "Christians...should be studying [the Bible] less, not more. You just need enough to pay attention to God." One wonders, how can you pay attention to God unless you read His authentic Word? Well, the modern Evangelical makeover movements say that you pay attention to God by going to a church service that's not a worship service, but a staged entertainment event. And that brings us to the second way the church is returning to the pre-Reformation position.

A Church Built on Emotional Experience

The pre-Reformation position emphasized going to church as an experience. In the 15th century it had to do with the pomp, the ceremony, the robes, the ornate altars and statues, the incense, the procession. In the 15th century, you didn't hear the Word of God preached, you didn't really worship God, but you had an experience.

Well, today, the church is going back to the pre-Reformation position of emphasizing the church experience. Today, going to many Evangelical churches is going to a carefully produced "show." The emphasis is on performed music, often in the style of "American Idol" or MTV, rather than congregational singing. The emphasis is on the stage setting, the lights, the sound system, the special effects. There's a magazine called Church Production magazine, that tells churches how to

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do this. Every year there is a convention – actually a trade show – where thousands of Evangelical pastors now go to spend a week finding out how they can turn their church services into a multi-media entertainment production.

I might also add that more and more churches are adding the trappings of Rome back to their services – the robes, the altar, the incense, the banners, the processions, and all of that. So you have two different cases in the 21st century, but both of them emphasize experience.

The 21st century experience is different from the 15th century experience, but the emphasis is once again on experience, not on the preached Word of God. This is the second way the church is returning to the pre-Reformation position.

[Today's broadcast begins here.]

A Church Built On Pluralism

Third, the pre-Reformation position was pluralistic. Rome was, and is, the great chameleon. Over the centuries, even today, Rome is quite willing to adjust its message and methods, even bring pagan practices into the church, in order to get people under the authority of the Catholic church. Let me give you just one example. Today, Roman Catholic churches in Indonesia and other parts of the Muslim world, use the name “Allah” in the mass, instead of “God” or “Jesus Christ.” They do that quite comfortably. The goal is to gain numbers.

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Today, the Evangelical church is moving back to this pre-Reformation position of inclusivism. The church is bringing in all sorts of worldly practices, just to get people to come. And the Evangelical church makeover movement is pluralistic about beliefs. And we see the results today. 57% of Evangelicals in America today do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. Dr. Timothy Keller said in a television interview that there may be some "back door way to Heaven" other than Jesus Christ. I intend to say more about these things later in our conference, but today I must move on.

A Church Built On Man's Word, Not God's

Fourth, the pre-Reformation position emphasized deeds instead of doctrine. The 15th century position was that good works and penance will get you to heaven. Don't worry about doctrine. Just do what we tell you to do.

And once again, the Evangelical church is returning to the pre-Reformation position. Let me quote Rick Warren, the man who is the acknowledged world-wide leader of the Purpose-Driven church movement. He says this:

"You know, 500 years ago, the first Reformation with Luther and then Calvin, was about creeds... [the new reformation that we're bringing about through the Purpose-Driven church] will be about deeds... The first one was about what the church believes... This one will be about what the church does.

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"The first Reformation actually split Christianity into dozens and then hundreds of different segments... This [new reformation] is actually going to bring them together. Now, you're never going to get Christians, of all their stripes and varieties, to agree on all of the different doctrinal disputes and things like that, but what I am seeing them agree on are the purposes of the church. And I find great uniformity in the fact that I see this happening all the time. Last week I spoke to 4,000 pastors at my church who came from over 100 denominations in over 50 countries. Now, that's wide spread. We had Catholic priests, we had Pentecostal ministers, we had Lutheran bishops, we had Anglican bishops, we had Baptist preachers. They're all there together and you know what? I'd never get them to agree on communion or baptism or a bunch of stuff like that, but I could get them to agree on what the church should be doing in the world."

What this man is actually doing is advocating and leading a return to the pre-Reformation position. One church, under one head – and that head is not the Lord Jesus Christ.

What Is the Answer?

The Evangelical church has largely forgotten what it means to be Protestant.

Today's focus is on giving the church an extreme makeover. The focus is on man's power to transform things. But this morning, we have before us a passage of

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Scripture that talks about God's power to transform. This is power of an entirely different kind. And it was by this transforming power that God took men from among those who had been conformed to the Roman Catholic pattern for centuries. The pattern of the world. The pattern of false religion. And he took those men, the Reformers, and He renewed their minds by the power of the Holy Spirit. And through those men – Calvin, Luther, Beza, Zwingli, Knox, and all the rest – through those men God kindled the flames of Reformation that swept across Europe, and brought a faithful remnant of God's people to the truth.

Romans chapter 12:1 and 2 – "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Now in order to understand Romans 12:1-2, we need to understand two particular words that are used in this passage. You can't fully understand these familiar verses unless you understand these two words. They're the Greek words that are translated "conformed" and "transformed" in verse two.

The first word is *schema*. This word means "an outward appearance that does not represent the inward nature." In other words, what you see on the outside does not reflect what is on the inside. If a cup looks clean on the outside, but it's filthy on the inside, New Testament Greek calls that outward appearance *schema* – it doesn't

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reflect what's on the inside. As the old saying goes, "Looks can be deceiving." When we talk about a scheming person, it's from the same root word. We usually mean someone who is crafty, conniving, or tricky. We sometimes say that a person like that has a "hidden agenda." What that person says and does outwardly often does not reflect his true intentions, the inward reality. So that's *schema*.

The second word we need to keep in mind is *morphe*. It's the opposite of *schema*. *Morphe* means "an outward appearance that truly represents the inward nature." What you see on the outside accurately represents what is on the inside. If a cup that looks clean on the outside is also clean on the inside, we could say that its outward appearance is *morphe*. What you see is what you get.

So keep those two words fixed in your minds. *Morphe* means that the outside appearance agrees with what's on the inside. It is the true picture of things. *Schema* means that the outside appearance does not agree with what's on the inside. It is a deceiving picture of things.

With those two words in mind, let's look at this passage together. In Romans 12 verse 2, Paul exhorts us, "Do not be conformed to this world." This is the word *schema*. Do not be *schema*-ed to this world. Don't appear to be something on the outside that you are not on the inside. You are not your own. You have been bought with the precious blood of Christ. You are the temple of God the Holy Spirit. That's the inward reality.

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And Paul is saying to the church, "Make sure your outward appearance conforms to that inward reality." How does that apply to the church today? It means what it says: Don't conform yourself to the world. Don't be driven by the world's agenda. Don't go back to the pre-Reformation position. Maintain your true identity. Be Protestants.

It's also interesting that the form of the word schema that's used here indicates having a relationship with something that is transitory, changeable, or unstable. In other words, the church is not to take on an outward appearance that is conformed to a world that constantly changing its mind, and is ultimately passing away. The church must never take on a worldly outward appearance that does not agree with the inward spiritual nature that is ours by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

This world is passing away. Our focus should not be on that which won't last. The true Protestant church shouldn't think, talk, and act like the unsaved world – and we need to remember that the unsaved world includes all churches and religions that oppose the true faith. If we are truly believers, if we are truly Protestants, acting like the world is a masquerade. Making common spiritual cause with people who are the religious enemies of Christ is a deception. Our thinking, talking, and actions should reflect our new life in Christ, and the eternal values that characterize that new life. As Paul writes in Philippians 3, "our citizenship is in heaven."

Instead of being "conformed to this world" – *schema*-ed to this world – we are to

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be "transformed by the renewing of [our] minds." The word "transformed" here is *morphe*. Be on the outside who you are on the inside. Don't hide who you truly are. Be Protestants, and don't be ashamed of it. The word translated "transformed" here in verse two is literally the word *metamorphosis*. This is a process. This transformation should be something that is more and more and more true of us all the time.

To what are we to be transformed? Paul tells us in Romans 8:29 that God predestined believers "to be conformed to the image of His Son." Conformed in this case is *morphe* – the work of the Holy Spirit on the inside making us more and more like Christ on the outside, in the way we live, as individuals and as the church, in this world.

How are we to be transformed? We should note two things:

First, we are transformed "by the renewing of [our] minds." That word "renewing" literally means a renovation of our thinking. The church today needs an extreme makeover, but it's not the kind that the Rick Warrens and Joel Osteens think it needs. They are taking the visible church back to the pre-Reformation position. The church needs the kind of makeover that will establish it as firmly and unashamedly Protestant once again.

Second, we need to take note of the fact that the word translated "be transformed" here is in the passive voice. This is something God does in us. The initiative lies with Him, and we are to cooperate. We're told in Philippians 2:12,

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"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." God works, and we work -- not to be saved, because that is all of grace, but to become more like Christ. To think more like Christ. To have our thinking in every area of life and ministry driven by Scripture and not by worldly wisdom.

There is one other thing we need to mention this morning. The Apostle Paul begins Romans chapter 12 by saying, "I beseech you therefore..." That is one of the Apostle Paul's favorite words. He uses it 105 times in his epistles. The way Paul writes is to build one thing upon another, and another, and another. His writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is highly logical.

"I beseech you therefore." What is the basis for this exhortation to truly be on the outside what we are on the inside? To put it the context of Reformation Sunday, what is the basis for this exhortation to truly be Protestants? We have it summed up for us in the preceding verses, chapter 11 beginning at verse 33:

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

Through the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul has been building the case for what we today call the five solas of the Reformation:

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Sola Scriptura: Our doctrine is from Scripture alone.

Solus Christus: We are saved by Christ's work alone.

Sola Gratia: Salvation is by grace alone.

Sola Fide: Justification is by faith alone.

Soli Deo Gloria: The glory belongs to God alone. "O, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Today's church makeover movements deny all of these *solas*. They are exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

The modern church growth movements are exchanging *Sola Scriptura* for man's fallible perspectives on Scripture.

The modern church makeover movements are exchanging Christ alone for Christ-plus works.

They are exchanging grace alone for a denial of the merits of Christ.

They are exchanging faith alone for justification by man's faithfulness.

And thus, the modern church makeover movements deny that all the glory belongs to God alone. They put man on the throne instead of Christ; they remove Scripture from the place of sole authority; human works and human wisdom are in the ascendant.

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Dear friends, true Christians, true Protestants, we must oppose all these things with all of our being. And we must stand for the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, at all costs. We must learn once again what it means to be truly and vigorously Protestant. A number of years ago, a Reformed Baptist minister wrote this:

It is my firm conviction that [the word] "Protestant" means absolutely, positively nothing unless the one wearing the term believes, breathes, lives, and loves the uncompromised, offensive-to-the-natural-man message of justification by God's free grace by faith in Jesus Christ alone...In the vast majority of instances today a Protestant has no idea what the word itself denotes, what the historical background behind it was, nor why he should really care. And a label that has been divorced from its significance no longer functions in a meaningful fashion. We need a Reformation in our day that will again draw the line clearly between those who embrace the gospel of God's grace in Christ and those who do not. And how one answers the question 'How is a man made right with God?' determines whether one embraces that Gospel or not.

Dear friends, the Holy Spirit calls us to be Protestants. Scripture commands us in the most unequivocal terms to be true to the untainted Gospel and the unique authority of Scripture, both long veiled in darkness by Rome but brought back into the light at great cost by the Reformers.

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I praise God that this church takes that kind of a stand today. Dear friends, value what you have here. But never be afraid to critically analyze what you have, what you are holding onto, against the infallible standard of the Word of God. Why? Because the history we find in Scripture and the history of the church since Pentecost shows us that drift is the natural tendency. Never be afraid to admit it when you find the church deviating from Scripture in even the smallest point. Preserve and protect what you have here. And seek to propagate what you have here.

May we be truly Protestants, not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove – that we may truly regard as valuable – what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

For more information, please visit our website, www.teachingtheword.org.

The prayers of our listeners and supporters are vital to all we do. We thank you for bringing this ministry before the throne of grace.

**May the Lord richly bless your personal study
of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**

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