

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Deception"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 11/21/2010

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## **Introduction**

I want to call your attention once again to the passage we began considering in our last message, Colossians chapter two, verses four through ten. If you're able to do so as you're listening right now, please open your Bible and follow along as I read God's Word. Colossians chapter two, verses four through ten. The Apostle Paul by divine inspiration writes this:

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

As we began studying this passage last time, I said that these verses present to us the most important teaching that Christians as individuals, and churches as a body, need to hear and act upon today. In these verses, the Apostle Paul has made a great assertion. He is declaring that worldly philosophy – worldly thinking – thinking the way the world thinks instead of the way God commands us to think – is the number one trap

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that Satan uses to undermine the individual Christian, and to undermine the church as a body. This passage addresses the most essential problem that individual Christians and congregations of Christians confront today. That problem is what happens to individual Christians, and to entire churches, when they fall into the trap of being in subjection to the word of fallen man, instead of the Word of God. And this passage also tells us, most importantly, how to escape that trap.

### **Review: The Nature of the Trap of Worldly Philosophy**

Last time we focused on the nature of the trap of worldly philosophy, and we saw five things. First we saw that the trap of worldly philosophy is a trap to which all Christians are susceptible. The Colossians of the first century lived in an environment that was thoroughly polluted with various kinds of worldly philosophy. They were a small minority living in a world of pagans. And likewise, Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are a small minority living in a philosophical environment, a thought environment, that is thoroughly polluted with falsehood. Postmodernism, naturalism, materialism, evolutionism, secular humanism – these are the things, these are the ways of thinking, that pervade our world today.

Second, we saw that the essential characteristic of the trap of worldly philosophy is that it involves deception.

Third, we saw that the trap of worldly philosophy most often takes the form of enticing words. Words that on the surface may seem to be true – but if you exercise godly discernment you will find that these persuasive, enticing words are in fact a lie.

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Fourth, we saw that the content of the trap, the bait in the trap, if you will, is the teachings of men whose thinking is driven by the basic principles of this fallen world, the world-system of which Satan is the god and the ruler.

And fifth, we saw that the effect or the result of being deceived by worldly philosophy – by persuasive but empty words that contain man's false wisdom and not God's genuine wisdom – we saw the effect is that it carries its victim off as a captive. Satan knows that if you are truly a Christian, he cannot have you as his victim for eternity. He knows that your salvation is secure in Christ. But while you are still living in this world as a believer, Satan will do everything he can to place you as an individual Christian, and the church as a visible body, in bondage to the world-system of which he is the god.

Satan will do everything he can to make Christians and churches ineffectual in this world. He will do everything he can to keep us from doing the two things that Christ put His church in this world to do – preach the Gospel, and build up the saints in sound doctrine. Satan will do everything he can to keep Christians and churches busy doing lots of other things that have nothing to do with the reasons the Lord Jesus put us here.

Satan will do everything he can to get believers to forget the fact that we are in a spiritual battle against the forces of this world-system as long as we are in this world. Satan will do everything he can to try to make Christians and churches comfortable in this present world. He will do everything he can to try to get Christians and churches

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to make peace with this world, to make alliances with this fallen world. And he does this through enticing deceptions.

Today I want to focus our attention on the element of enticement that is involved in all of this. I want to focus on this because we live in a time when so many Christians, so many pastors, so many church leaders, and so many congregations, are being enticed into deception. And so I want to focus on two questions:

- First, what does it mean to be deceived by persuasive or enticing words?
- And second, what is the most glaring example, the most dangerous example, of this kind of deception in the church today?

### **What Does It Mean to be Deceived by Enticing Words?**

Let us then take up the first question. What does it mean to be deceived by persuasive or enticing words? In order to understand this fully, we need to focus once again on what Paul says in verse four and verse eight about the nature of worldly thinking.

Notice verse four once again: "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words." Let me give you an expanded translation of that verse from the original Greek. Here is what Paul is saying: "Now this I say, for this reason: lest anyone should deceive you by false reasoning -- reasoning that seems to be credible on the surface, but in fact is reasoning based on error that leads others into error."

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And then notice verse eight once again: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." I want to give you an expanded translation of this verse also, and here it is: "Exercise discernment, lest anyone should carry you off as a captive through unsubstantiated thinking that is characterized by clever deceit, thinking that is in fact destitute of spiritual wealth and does not produce the true fruits of the faith, thinking which is according to the theories of men, theories that are in agreement with the fundamental principles of this fallen world system, and are not in agreement with Christ."

I want to repeat that for you, please listen carefully, because this is so very important. Paul says this to the Colossians, and to us: "Exercise discernment, lest anyone should carry you off as a captive through unsubstantiated thinking that is characterized by clever deceit, thinking that is in fact destitute of spiritual wealth and does not produce the true fruits of the faith, thinking which is according to the theories of men, theories that are in agreement with the fundamental principles of this fallen world system, and are not in agreement with Christ."

Here is the essence of the enticement of worldly thinking for the church. The enticement is to be carried away by unsubstantiated thinking that sounds attractive, rather than remaining firm in the truth of God. It is the temptation to become the victim of clever deceit instead of following hard after the only One in the entire universe who is truly and consistently trustworthy. It is the temptation to run after the changing theories of man, the bright idea of the moment, the current religious fad,

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rather than to remain grounded on the sure and unmovable foundation of Christ and His Word.

The enticement of worldly thinking offers what may appear to be prosperity and success in the world's terms. But in fact, this kind of thinking offers only spiritual poverty and unfruitfulness in place of the riches that are in Christ. It offers fleeting treasures on earth instead of eternal treasure in heaven – and I'm not speaking here of just material treasures, but also treasures of the mind and the heart, placing a value on the things of this world instead of recognizing that the things that men value most in this world are in fact dung, refuse, as Paul puts it in Philippians chapter three, in comparison to "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Satan's trap of worldly philosophy offers enticements in such clever ways that undiscerning Christians, undiscerning pastors, and undiscerning churches will exchange heavenly diamonds for worldly dung.

### **Purpose-Driven Deception**

That is what it means to be deceived by persuasive or enticing words. And that brings us to our second question. What is the most glaring example of this in the church today? What is the most damaging example in the church today? What is the one thing that is doing more damage to the church in our time than perhaps anything else? I submit to you that it is what has come to be known as the Purpose-Driven Church movement.

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This is the most widespread and influential movement in the Evangelical church today. And it is not just influencing large churches. It is influencing churches of all sizes. It is undermining churches that were once faithful to the Word of God. Over 400,000 pastors and church leaders have been trained in the philosophy of this movement. The influence of this movement is worldwide. Millions of Purpose-Driven books and videos have been sold. In a recent survey, Evangelical pastors name Rick Warrens books, *The Purpose-Driven Church* and *The Purpose-Driven Life*, as the two greatest influences on their ministries.

Why is the Purpose-Driven Church movement so dangerous? How do we know that this movement is not of God? The answer is that we need to look at the foundations of this movement, and the fruits of this movement, in light of Colossians chapter two. And what we find is that the roots of the movement are evil, and the fruits of the movement are evil.

Purpose-Driven Church movement leader Rick Warren is calling for a "new reformation" in the church. But what kind of "reformation" does he advocate?

Well, the first clue is that Rick Warren constantly criticizes Christians who seek to hold to sound doctrine. He says that they are letting theology stand in the way of the greater good of "a new Reformation" that would come about if mainline liberal churches, Evangelicals, and Roman Catholics would come together to spread a "gospel" of worldwide social and economic reform.

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Rick Warren thinks that the Protestant Reformation was a mistake because it was based on differences in doctrine. He sees churches and churchmen of all stripes, regardless of their beliefs, as "Christian". And, he believes that a "second reformation" will bring them all back together under a single, Purpose-Driven, big tent. He says that if Evangelicals would team up with Roman Catholics (and I'm quoting him now), "that's called a majority." Let me quote him further. He says this:

“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.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Myths of the Modern Megachurch," a transcript of Rick Warren's remarks to the Pew Forum's Faith Angle Conference on Religion, Politics, and Public Life, May 23, 2005, Key West, Florida, as viewed on 10/6/2008 at <http://pewforum.org/events/index.php?EventID=80>.



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“...what binds us together is so much stronger than what divides us.

“I really do feel that these people are brothers and sisters in God's family. I am looking to build bridges with the Orthodox Church, looking to build bridges with the Catholic Church, with the Anglican church, and say, 'What can we do together that we have been unable to do by ourselves?'”<sup>2</sup>

### **Throwing Away the Truth**

Now, we as Bible-believing Christians need to ask ourselves: What is Rick Warren doing here? What is he advocating? What is the Purpose-Driven Church movement all about? Well, here is what he is doing. He is trying to smooth over the critical theological differences between true Bible-believing Christians and unbelieving liberals and Roman Catholics – the differences between truth and error – in order to promote the Purpose-Driven agenda. And that agenda is not to save souls, but to build a better world in the here-and-now by promoting what is in fact a re-hash of the old "social gospel." And in his fervor to do this, he is suppressing the truth of the one true Gospel that will save souls for eternity.

The extent to which Rick Warren and other leaders of the Purpose-Driven Church movement are willing to smooth over these vital differences — difference on the authority of Scripture, difference on the content of the Gospel, differences on the purpose of the true Church, and so much more — this willingness to throw away the

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<sup>2</sup> "Pastor Urges Anglicans to Unite and Care for Poor," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 12, 2005.

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foundations of the faith clearly demonstrates that these men have no grasp of God's truth themselves. They may use a lot of the Evangelical jargon, but the words they speak are words of deception. And many people are being deceived, because they want to be part of something they are being told is big, and important, and will bring everyone together in a great task – a task that Rick Warren and his followers are substituting for the task that Jesus Christ actually gave His church to do.

This is Satan's trap, and both the Apostle John and the Apostle Paul warned believers about such persons and commanded us to have nothing to do with them:

John said this: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." (2 John 9-11)

And Paul said this: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple [in the original, *akeraios*, 'unmixed'] concerning evil." (Romans 16:17-19)

Rick Warren and his followers are posing as uniters, but in fact they are dividers. The Purpose-Driven Church movement may be able to unite unbelievers in an ungodly

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ecumenical cause, but it divides Evangelicals who follow after it from the one true Gospel. It divides them from all of the fundamental doctrines of the faith.

### **What Must Christians Do?**

How is the Christian to guard against such deception? How are you going to do it? How is your church going to do it?

We have the first indication of what we are to do at the very beginning of Colossians chapter two, verse four: "Now this I say..." "Now this I say..." This is a transitional statement. Paul is reminding them of what he has been saying up to this point. What has Paul been saying? He has been saying that Jesus Christ is preeminent. He must be preeminent. If anything, or any theory, or any person, or any movement, or any cause, usurps the rightful place of Jesus Christ as Head of the church and Lord of the church, then that thing, that theory, that person, that movement, that cause, is absolutely wrong. Absolutely to be avoided. Absolutely to be considered as worthless in terms of the things that count for eternity.

Now I know that those are strong words. But we need strong words today, because the Bible uses strong words against such error. So many of us have forgotten what it means to take a stand against apostasy. So many have left their first love. In reality, so many who call themselves Christians, so many who call themselves Christian churches, have forsaken Christ at the most basic and fundamental level.

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How do we change this picture? How does God's Word say we are to do it? We have the answer here in Colossians chapter two. Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us that we are to maintain a solid front against the thinking of the world by doing four things: We are to walk an enlightened walk (verse 6). We are to grow upon a firm foundation (verse 7). We are to trust in a complete Savior (verse 9). We are to rest in a complete salvation (verse 10).

That answer, those four things, will be the focus of the remaining messages in this part of our series. Every Christian needs to get a firm grasp of these four things. This is your defense against deception. This is how Christians and churches will escape the trap of worldly philosophy.

#### **About the Broadcast**

**The Scripture-Driven Church** airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, 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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