

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: “The Church Against the World: Restoring a United Battle Front” (Colossians 2:5)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of January 23, 2010

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Introduction

Today we are continuing our series of messages titled “Truth Above All” from Colossians chapter two. And as we begin, I want to call your attention once again to the passage we are considering, Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse one. Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes these words:

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

And today I want to focus in particular on verse five:

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.

A Brief Review

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 need to act upon today. In these verses, the Apostle Paul has made a great declaration. He is declaring that worldly philosophy – worldly thinking –

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thinking the way the world thinks instead of the way God commands us to think – this is the number one trap 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 placing themselves in subjection to the word of sinful man, instead of the Word of the holy God. And these verses also tell us how we can escape that trap.

In our last message we saw that the result of being deceived by worldly philosophy is that Satan carries his 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 carry you off as a captive. He 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 – to preach the Gospel, and to build up the saints in sound doctrine.

In our last message we also saw that the trap that Satan is using most effectively in our time to carry Christians and churches away as captives, is the Purpose-Driven

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Church movement. Last time we saw that the guiding principles of this movement are not at all based upon Jesus Christ and the Word of God. The guiding principles of this movement are the counterfeit principles of the fallen world system that is under God's curse.

What is the Purpose-Driven Church movement all about? The Purpose-Driven 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 its fervor to do this, the Purpose-Driven Church movement is suppressing the truth of the one true Gospel that will save souls for eternity.

The leaders of the Purpose-Driven Church movement are desperately trying to smooth over the critical, life-and-death theological differences between true Bible-believing Christians and unbelieving liberals and Roman Catholics – differences on the authority of Scripture, differences on what the Gospel actually is, differences on the purpose of the true Church, and so much more. Please listen carefully. You cannot smooth over these differences with false religions without throwing away the foundations of the true faith. But these men are willing to do that. They are eager to do that. And by this very attitude, these men clearly demonstrate that they have no grasp of God's truth themselves.

These men promote themselves as uniters, but in fact they are dividers. They may be able to unite unbelievers in an ungodly ecumenical cause, but they are separating Evangelicals who follow after them from the only truth that saves souls.

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The true Church of Jesus Christ cannot, must not tolerate this. Once again, let me remind you of the Apostle Paul's warning to the church at Corinth when they fell into this very same trap. He said,

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: *"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."* Therefore *"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."* *"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."* Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

The Imperative

Now, the Apostle Paul is making the very same point, the very same appeal to believers, in the passage we are presently considering in Colossians chapter two. In fact it is more than an appeal. It is a command – it is an imperative.

In chapter two, verses one through four, Paul emphasizes the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ, over against man and his false wisdom and compromise. Paul

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emphasizes the fact that the truth is to be found only in Christ. Your true riches are in Christ, he says, not in the philosophies of this world. Don't let those philosophies come into the church. Don't let the men who promote those philosophies come into the church and deceive you with persuasive words – words that sound true, but are not true.

And then we come to this in verse five: "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."

Military Terms

Now as we look at this verse in relation to these warnings, we need to understand the kind of language the Apostle Paul is using. In the original language of this verse, Paul is using military terms. And that is a very important thing for us to understand.

Paul says, I am "rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." The words that Paul uses for the terms "good order" and for "steadfastness" are both military terms.

I think it's a sign of our postmodern age that the church so often avoids the military terminology, the warfare terminology, that we find in the pages of the Bible – especially in the New Testament. And often Bible translators seem to avoid it. That is certainly the case with the translation of these words in Colossians chapter two and

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verse five. Some English translations are way off the mark. Others get closer to the military sense of these words. But none of them really give us the true impact.

The word that is translated “good order” in Colossians chapter two, verse five is the Greek word *taxis*. It’s a term that speaks of an orderly and disciplined array of soldiers. It speaks of the idea of soldiers remaining in their positions for battle, and not breaking ranks.

The word that is translated “steadfastness” is the Greek word *stereoma*. This is the only place in the New Testament where this particular word is used. This is also a military term, and it means the maintenance of a solid and fortified front against the enemy.

And so when Paul speaks of what both the Old King James and the New King James translators have called “order” and “steadfastness”, what he is really saying is something much more graphic. He is saying this: You Colossian believers are being pressed hard by spiritual enemies, Paul says. Some of these enemy forces want to draw you away into worldly philosophies. Some of these enemy forces want to draw you away into legalism. And some of these enemy forces want to draw you away into man-made doctrines.

And so Paul is saying, I want you dear people to recognize all of them for what they are. All of them are enemies – enemies of the true faith. Enemies of your souls. Do not have anything to do with them. Maintain a disciplined, united battle front against the world, and against the influences of the ungodly world system. Don’t

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allow these things to come into your thinking as individuals, and don't allow these things to come into the thinking and teaching of the church.

One of the reasons that we need to have this military aspect of the passage clearly in our minds is because Paul's letter to the Colossian church is in many ways a parallel to his letter to the church at Ephesus. Colossians and Ephesians were written at about the same time. And in the book of Ephesians chapter six, Paul goes to great lengths to describe the Christian life in military terms. It is a warfare, he says. It is a battle. In Ephesians chapter six, beginning at verse ten, Paul writes this:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying

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always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:10-18)

And Paul uses the same kind of military terms in his other letters.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 – "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" – not being led away captive by Satan, but bringing our own sinful human thinking into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

1 Timothy 1:18-19 – "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck."

1 Timothy 6:12 – Paul says, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

2 Timothy 2:3-4 – "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."

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And then Paul says this of himself as he comes to the end of his life, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Dear friend, you cannot get around the fact that the Christian life is a life of spiritual warfare. You cannot get around the fact that Satan will do everything he can to prevent the church from fulfilling its mission to preach the Gospel to the world and to build up the saints in the one true faith.

And so this is why the Apostle Paul says to the Colossian church, I want to be sure that you maintain a disciplined and united battle front against those who would seek to make shipwreck of your faith, by carrying you away captive in the pursuit of worldly philosophies, or legalism, or man-made doctrines. Stay firm, Paul says. Stay firm in the knowledge of Christ and His Word. He is preeminent. He is all in all. Don't settle for anyone less, or anything less.

The Disciplined, United Front Has Broken Down

But dear friends, what about the church in our day? Is the church today maintaining a disciplined and united battle front against the world? Is the church today maintaining a disciplined and united battle front against false doctrines? Is the

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church today maintaining a disciplined and united battle front against the substitution of the word of sinful man for the Word of the holy God?

The evidence is all around us that the battle front has broken down. Many, many preachers in many, many Evangelical pulpits are not proclaiming these truths today. They're proclaiming counterfeits. The world has come into many churches and taken over. The church is in disarray, not in battle array. And the enemy has rushed in.

Worldly philosophies are gripping the church and carrying it away from the truth. How else can you explain the fact that nearly 40% of Evangelical church members no longer believe the Bible is inerrant? How else can you explain the fact that nearly half of Evangelical church members no longer believe that Jesus Christ is a sinless Savior? How else can you explain the fact that nearly 60% of Evangelical church members no longer believe that Jesus Christ is the only Way to eternal life?

Legalism is gripping the church and carrying it away from the truth. How else can you explain the fact that nearly 60% of Evangelical church members believe that good works gain eternal life?

Man-made teachings are gripping the church and carrying it away from the truth. How else can you explain the fact that so many churches are mingling New Age teachings and psychology with Christianity? How else can you explain the success of the Purpose-Driven Church movement in leading people away from the truth? How else can you explain the fact that so many churches are falling into the trap of the "word of faith movement" – this movement that says that faith is a force, that your

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words release that force, and therefore you can speak your own reality into existence, that you are in fact a god?

Dear friends, the postmodern Evangelical church is in a scandalous condition today. An appalling condition.

Restoring a United Battle Front: What is the Answer?

The true church of Jesus Christ must once again establish a disciplined, united battle front against the world. The question is: How can the church do that? How can individual believers do that? How can we, by the grace of God, change this terrible picture? More to the point: How does God's Word say we are to do it?

We have the answer here in Colossians chapter two. Pay careful attention to what Paul says, beginning with verse six:

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.

In these verses, 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

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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).

These four things, these four great and vital truths, will be the focus of our next messages in this series. Every Christian needs to get a firm grasp of these things. This is your defense against deception. This is how Christians and churches will escape the traps of the enemy of our souls. This is how individual Christians, and the local church as a body, will maintain "the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."

About the Broadcast

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