

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Beware of Man-Made Doctrines" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/12/2011

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Today we begin a new section in our study of the book of Colossians. We are in chapter two, and we have now come to verse eighteen. In Colossians chapter two, the Apostle Paul deals with what we have called Satan's triple threat to the church – three things that Satan constantly uses to attempt to undermine the Christian as an individual, and the church as a body. Paul exhorts us to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against these threats of the enemy.

We have already covered the first two sections of this chapter. In the first section, verse one through ten, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit focuses our attention on the threat of worldly philosophy. In the second section, verses eleven through seventeen, Paul focuses our attention on the threat of legalism.

And so now we are about to deal with the third section of this chapter. In this section, verses eighteen through twenty-three, the Holy Spirit through Paul focuses our attention on the dangers of man-made doctrines. Doctrines that do not have their foundation in Jesus Christ and in Holy Scripture. Doctrines that have been invented by men.

Let me read those verses as we begin today, and as always I hope that you will follow along in your personal 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, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly

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puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, 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 religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Colossians 2:18-23)

### **A Reminder About The Importance of Context**

Now, we are going to be considering these verses together in this message and other messages that will follow. And I want to begin our study of these verses by reminding you of their context. Whenever we study any passage in the Word of God, one of the most important things for us to do is to understand the context. We will avoid many dangers, and many pitfalls, and we will avoid wrong interpretations, if we make sure that we have a solid understanding of how a particular passage fits into the rest of the Word of God.

And so as we begin our study of these verses, let me remind you of how they fit into the overall picture, the overall plan and theme, and into the exposition of that theme, that the Holy Spirit has inspired and delivered to us through the Apostle Paul.

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The first thing we need to remember is the great purpose of this epistle. That great purpose is the exposition and the application of the great doctrine of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater or richer statement of the doctrine of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ than that which we find here in Colossians. The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is setting forth this great and central truth of the Christian faith in a very clear, powerful, direct, and practical way. So this is the first thing we need to remember – the great purpose, the great theme of this book: the preeminence of Christ.

A second thing that we need to remember is the structure of the book of Colossians. The book of Colossians consists of three main sections under this overall theme of the preeminence of Christ.

Now if you have been following our series of broadcast studies for any length of time, you may recall that there is an easy way to remember the subject matter of each of those three sections. Those themes all begin with the letter D.

The theme of Colossians chapter one is Christ's preeminence *declared*. This is Paul's exposition of the great truth. The second and third main sections of the book of Colossians deal with the application of this truth. The theme of Colossians chapter two is Christ's preeminence *defended*. And, the theme of Colossians chapters three and four is Christ's preeminence *demonstrated*. And so there you have the entire book of Colossians in summary. It is all about the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ – declared, defended, and demonstrated. The preeminence of the Lord Jesus

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Christ declared to the entire world, indeed, to the entire universe, in chapter one. The preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ defended against the attacks of Satan, in chapter two. And, the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated in the Christian's life, in the Christian's home, in the Christian church, and in the Christian's witness, in chapters three and four.

A third thing that we need to do, as we begin this new section, is to remind ourselves of the meaning of this term "preeminence". What does the Word of God mean when it speaks of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Greek word that is translated "preeminence" in the New Testament means, very simply, "to have first place" or "to be supreme." And that is exactly the rightful position of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul puts it in chapter one, verse eighteen, Jesus Christ has the right to preeminence not just in some things, but in all things.

In other places, the Bible speaks of the preeminence of Jesus Christ in other ways, and in other terms. For example, in Matthew chapter twenty-eight, before He went back to Heaven after His resurrection, Jesus said that "all power [all authority] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Power and authority over all things – preeminence.

Romans chapter ten tells us that salvation comes through an understanding of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. To truly believe in the person and work of Christ is to believe in the preeminence of Christ. Romans chapter ten, verse nine: "If you will confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in the heart that God

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raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." To believe in the *person* of Jesus Christ – to believe that He is who Scripture says He is – means confessing with the mouth that *Jesus is Lord* – that He is Jehovah, that He is the One who is *supreme* over all things, and also to believe that Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation, to believe in the full sufficiency of His perfect life and His atoning death, which was attested to by the fact that God the Father raised Him from the dead.

Philippians chapter two tells us that God the Father has exalted His Son Jesus and has given Him "the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" – that He is preeminent – "to the glory of God the Father."

And so also, here in the book of Colossians, in chapter one verse eighteen, Paul says this: that Jesus Christ "is the head of the body, the church," that He "is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" – first place, the position of absolute supremacy, in all things.

### **Christ's Preeminence Declared in the Gospel**

And so in chapter one of the book of Colossians, Paul declares the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ to us. He gives us an exposition of the four vital aspects of that preeminence, that supremacy, of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to remind you of these four things, because they all have a great bearing on the section of the book we are about to consider, on the great danger and evil of man-made doctrines.

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First of all, in chapter one, Paul declares that Christ is preeminent in the Gospel. Any so-called "gospel" that does not ascribe absolute supremacy to the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who accomplished full and final salvation, any such so-called gospel is a false gospel. It is a man-made gospel. It is no true gospel at all. And of course Paul puts this even more forcefully in Galatians chapter one – that if anyone, man or angel, comes to you and preaches any other gospel than the Gospel of the preeminence of Jesus Christ – let that person be accursed, eternally separated from God in Hell.

### **Christ's Preeminence Declared in the Creation**

Secondly, Paul declares in Colossians chapter one that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation. All things were created both by Him and for Him – all the things that are visible to the human eye, and all the things that are invisible as well. And most importantly, for the section we are about to study, we ourselves are His creation. And Jesus Christ has the full right of authority and ownership over us, because we are His creation. We did not evolve. We did not become what we are by time and chance, or by our own efforts. And therefore we have no right to strike off on our own, in matters of doctrine or in anything else.

### **Christ's Preeminence Declared in the Church**

Thirdly, Paul declares the great fact that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Church. And it is especially important for us to remind ourselves of this truth as we approach this next section in chapter two, where Paul deals with the evil of man-made

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doctrines. We must remember that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the church. There is no other head of the church. No man on earth is the head of the church.

False religions attempt to give man that title. Islam treats Mohammed in this way. Religions of the East treat Buddha and Confucius in this way. Roman Catholicism gives its pope the title of "the vicar of Christ." Rome says that this title signifies the pope's "supreme and universal primacy," as they put it, "both in honor and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ."

Dear friends, the Word of God says no such thing. That statement itself is a man-made doctrine. No man on earth serves as the head of the church. No pastor on earth is the head of the church. No bishop or elder on earth is the head of the church. The Head of the church is in Heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father, and He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, today the word you hear used most often to describe pastors and elders and deacons in the Evangelical church is the word "leadership." These men are referred to as "the leadership". They call themselves "the leadership". I believe that is a mistake. I believe that is an un-Biblical approach. Why do I say this?

The reason is that you will not find that word "leadership" in the New Testament as a description of the role of such men in the church. You will find them called servants. You will find them called under-shepherds. You will find them called protectors and guardians and overseers of the flock of God. But always – always – under the supreme authority and the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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One of the great problems of the Evangelical church in our day is that we have placed far too much emphasis on human leadership, and far too little emphasis on Christ's headship. And, far too little emphasis on follower-ship, faithfully and carefully following the Head of the church, the Christ of the Bible.

Today many men are leading churches in directions that Christ would never lead. They are leading the flock into spiritual danger. Christ the great shepherd, the good shepherd, would never do that. Christ the good shepherd would never lead the flock of God into spiritual poverty. Christ the good shepherd would never lead the flock of God into barren pastures. Christ the good shepherd would never lead the church into paths of unrighteousness. But many men who call themselves leaders of the church are doing just those things today.

Many men are leading churches into activities and alliances and coalitions that are unacceptable to Christ. Why? Because they are not following the preeminent Christ. They are not following the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. They are following worldly philosophies. They are following legalism. They are following man-made doctrines. They are following their own sinful pride. Often they are following some other man who is not following Christ. They are not following Christ.

The Word of God calls such men "blind guides" (Matthew 23:24). Jesus spoke of such men in this way, in Matthew chapter fifteen, verse fourteen: "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, they will both fall into the ditch." Dear friends, Jesus said that we should forsake such men.



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What is our attitude to be? God tells us what it should be, through the prayer of David at the end of Psalm 139: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24). The pastors and elders and deacons of the church must above all be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the rest of the flock of God must be. Our emphasis must not be on human leadership, but on human submission to the doctrine and the authority of the One who is the only Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Christ's Preeminence Declared in Genuine Christian Ministry**

As we prepare to consider this section of Colossians chapter two dealing with man-made doctrines, we also need to remind ourselves of a fourth declaration that Paul makes in chapter one. At the end of chapter one, Paul also declares the great fact that Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine Christian ministry.

Any ministry that is genuine Christian ministry teaches these truths about the Lord Jesus Christ. Any ministry that is genuine Christian ministry exalts the Lord Jesus Christ, and keeps the saints – all of the saints, regardless of what titles or offices they may or may not hold – in the position of servants, bondslaves of Christ, and completely subject to His Word.

That is the position of the Apostle Paul himself. Repeatedly, he opens his epistles with those words: "Paul, a servant" – a bonds slave – "of Jesus Christ." That is who I am, Paul says. There are no spiritual elites in the body of Christ. I have no right to

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lord it over anyone. As Paul puts it in Colossians chapter one, verse twenty-eight, genuine Christian ministry, ministry in which Christ truly is preeminent, is ministry that involves warning every Christian, and teaching every Christian, so that every Christian may be presented perfect, or complete, or mature, in Jesus Christ. There are no spiritual elites in the body of Christ. There is no one who has any exalted position. There is no one who has any right to invent man-made doctrines.

### **Colossians Chapter Two: Satan's Triple Threat**

Now with these things in mind, these great declarations of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter one, Paul then moves on to the defense of the preeminence of Christ in chapter two. He says that the individual Christian, the Christian church, the Christian pastor, the Christian deacon, the Christian elder, all need to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against Satan's triple threat. There are three things that Satan uses most often, to get believers off the track, and to get churches off the track, and to get our focus off of the preeminence and the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word, and to get our focus onto other things that are false and deceptive.

First, as we have seen previously, there is the danger of pursuing empty philosophies, worldly philosophies, instead of Christ. Secondly, there is the danger of pursuing legalism instead of Christ. And thirdly, there is the danger of pursuing man-made doctrines instead of Christ. The danger of the church being in bondage to men, in

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bondage to this world, in bondage to the flesh, instead of being bondservants of the preeminent Christ.

### **Key Characteristics of Man-Made Doctrines**

In this last section of Colossians chapter two, Paul gives us a very clear picture of the general characteristics of man-made doctrines, and a very clear picture of the general characteristics of the teachers of man-made doctrines, those who introduce them into the church, and demand obedience to them. Let me list these for you briefly, as we find them in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen.

- Man-made doctrines originate in the fleshly mind, which is another term for the sinful nature. Man-made doctrines are by their very nature, by their very source of origin, evil doctrines.
- Man-made doctrines can take many forms, and Paul lists a number of them that we are going to study.
- Man-made doctrines go hand-in-hand with worldly philosophy and legalism. Worldly philosophy and legalism are implemented in the church through the invention and the enforcement of man-made doctrines.
- Those who introduce man-made doctrines seek to cheat Christians of their reward.
- Those who introduce man-made doctrines take delight in things of the flesh.

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- Those who introduce man-made doctrines demonstrate that they are not holding fast to Christ as the Head of the church.
- Man-made doctrines deny the believer's position in Christ.
- Man-made doctrines introduce principles that are foreign to the life of the true believer in Christ.
- Man-made doctrines have a false appearance of wisdom.
- Man-made doctrines are of no value to the believer in living the Christian life. And in sharp contrast to these things, in chapters three and four Paul will set forth the things that are truly of value.

### **Notice The Pattern**

Dear friends, as we close this introductory message on the evil of man-made doctrines, let me call you attention to one last thing. Notice the pattern that we find here in Colossians chapter two. Notice verse eight: "Beware lest anyone cheat you." Notice verse sixteen: "Let no one judge you." And, notice verse eighteen: "Let no one cheat you of your reward." Paul is warning the Colossians, he is warning us, that Satan's triple threat to the believer and to the church – worldly philosophies, legalism, man-made doctrines – these things are a cheat, they are a lie, they are a fraud. Don't be taken in, Paul says. Keep your eyes and your minds focused on the preeminent Christ and on His Word alone.

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I hope that you will take these things to heart in your own life today, if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. And I hope that you'll stay with us for the upcoming broadcasts in this series, as we look more closely at the evils of man-made doctrines, and as we see the Apostle Paul defending the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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