

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "The Foundation of Man-Made Doctrines: Counterfeit Authority" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/25/2012

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We are now in the last six verses of Colossians chapter two, and we are studying the Bible's warning against the tyranny of man-made doctrines. As we continue that study today, we are going to take up the vital question of authority.

By what authority do man-made doctrines come? The Bible tells us that the men and women who invent and promote man-made doctrines are exercising counterfeit authority. Illegitimate authority. There is only one genuine source of authority, one legitimate source of authority, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And for the Christian and for the Church in this world there is only one legitimate written authority, one authority for doctrine and for life, and that is the Word of God which has been given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So as we take up this question of authority today, if you are able to do so, I hope that you will open your Bible with me to the passage we are considering, in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Let us go to our legitimate authority on this question, the inspired words of God the Holy Spirit, given to us through the Apostle Paul. 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 puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head [that is, Jesus Christ], 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

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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)

### **Four Forms of Counterfeits**

In our last message we focused on the fact that the ultimate source of man-made doctrines is Satan himself. We looked at a number of passages of Scripture that prove this. Satan is the great counterfeiter. Satan has a counterfeit for every truth that we find in the Word of God. We saw from several passages last time that those who invent man-made doctrines are in fact the ministers of Satan. Satan and his ministers often claim to speak for God. Always, behind the visible, human face of falsehood is the invisible face of Satan himself – who, Jesus tells us, is a liar and the father of the lie.

At the end of our last message I said that as we look at the passage before us in Colossians chapter two, as we see Paul warning us against man-made doctrines, we find that Paul is warning against four specific kinds of Satanic counterfeits that all come under this overall heading of man-made doctrines.

Number one, we find that man-made doctrines always rest upon counterfeit authority instead of God’s authority.

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Number two, we find that man-made doctrines often stimulate counterfeit worship.

Number three, we find that man-made doctrines often tell us that we must approach God through counterfeit intercessors.

And, number four, we find that man-made doctrines often propagate counterfeit mysteries that are not the true mysteries of God.

### **Our Approach As We Continue**

Now, we said that we are going to look more closely at each of these four kinds of counterfeits that are involved in man-made doctrines. It is vital for us to understand the nature of these counterfeits. We need to compare and contrast them with God's eternal truth. And so last time I mentioned that we are going to examine each of these counterfeits – counterfeit authority, counterfeit worship, counterfeit intercessors, and counterfeit mysteries – through a four-step process.

First of all, we need to understand the kinds of counterfeits that false teachers were trying to impose upon the Colossian believers at the time Paul wrote to them in the first century. We always need to seek to understand that kind of background as we look at any passage of Scripture. That will lay the proper groundwork for the steps that will follow.

Secondly, we are going to briefly consider how similar kinds of counterfeits have developed and spread during the subsequent history of the church over the past two thousand years. We cannot dwell on this for very long, but I believe it is

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important to understand that doctrinal counterfeits are and always have been a tyranny that the church has had to constantly guard against over the centuries.

Our brief look at church history in each case will lead us to a third step in our analysis. That third step is that we need to understand that counterfeits of the same kind exist in the church in our time. In our day the church is experiencing an epidemic of man-made doctrines. Satan has been at work all through history, and he is still very much at work in this way in the church in our day.

And then finally, I want to draw our attention back to the genuine article. I want to draw our attention back to the genuine standard of truth. And so as we look at each of these four counterfeits – counterfeit authority, counterfeit worship, counterfeit intercessors, and counterfeit mysteries – I want to draw our attention each time back to what the Word of God says to us positively about authority, about worship, about intercessors, and about mysteries. It is always a wrong emphasis to leave the subject of false teaching of any kind, with our focus only on Satan's lies. We must always bring our eyes back to behold the preeminence of Christ and His truth.

And so, we begin today on this four-step basis as we examine, first of all, the evil tyranny of counterfeit authority, which is always the underpinning of man-made doctrines.

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## **Counterfeit Authority**

Man-made doctrines have their roots in counterfeit authority, and counterfeit authority has its root in the person and work of Satan himself.

So let us now take the first step in our analysis. What kinds of counterfeit authorities were men seeking to impose on the church at Colosse, and the churches in the surrounding region, at the time Paul wrote the words we read a few moments ago?

Paul tells us in verse eighteen that the Colossians needed to remain free of anyone who would cheat them of their reward. And you may recall from an earlier message in this series that we said that the original language here is very descriptive and very instructive.

What Paul is saying is this: Do not let anyone judge you as disqualified to receive the reward that is yours in Christ, because you do not obey that individual's or that group's teachings which have no basis in Christ and no basis in His Word. These people claim to have the authority to set up their own doctrines. These people claim to have authority to judge you by that doctrinal standard. But they do not have the authority to do either thing. They are exercising counterfeit authority.

Now, in Colosse and the surrounding region there were two main groups of people who were seeking to do this.

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## **The Judaizers**

The first group were the Judaizers. The Judaizers were saying that you had to keep the Old Testament Jewish regulations – circumcision, the dietary laws, the feasts, and all the rest – in addition to believing on Christ, in order to be saved. Now Paul has already addressed these false teachers decisively in the preceding section of chapter two, in verses eleven through seventeen. God has nailed these things to the cross of Christ, Paul says. "Let no man judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which [were] shadows of things to come" – types and symbols that were fulfilled once and for all in the first coming of Christ.

But it is clear that Paul also has the Judaizers in mind when he talks about man-made doctrines in verses eighteen through twenty-three. And the reason this is true is because the Jews of the first century, and for many centuries before this, were always adding to and subtracting from Scripture with their own man-made doctrines.

By this time the Jews had built up, and they would continue to build up, a huge and complex body of regulations called the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah was supposedly a commentary on the Old Testament, and the Gemara was actually a commentary on the Mishnah, in other words, a commentary on the commentary. But both of these sets of writings were filled with man-made doctrines that had no basis in Scripture. And these things had come to carry greater weight with the Jews than Scripture itself.

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This is what Jesus was speaking of at the beginning of Matthew chapter fifteen, when He called the Jewish religious leaders hypocrites. Jesus said, you have put your own man-made doctrines, your own traditions, above the Word of God. You have used your traditions to make the Word of God "of no effect" (verse six).

And later, in Matthew chapter twenty-three, Jesus says: You have used your man-made doctrines to tie burdens on the backs of men that God never intended them to bear. You have no authority to do this, Jesus says. You are blind guides – blind leaders of the blind, and you will both fall into the ditch.

Now, you may also remember that it was these Jewish religious leaders – these men who had invented a mountain of man-made doctrines – it was these very men, the Pharisees and the Sadducees in particular, who had the audacity to deny that Jesus had authority to teach the things that He taught during His earthly ministry.

In the Gospel accounts, we find repeatedly the statement that the Jewish people, who were steeped in these man-made doctrines, and who accepted the authority of the Jewish religious leaders without question, these people were astonished at Jesus' teaching, because He taught things that were contrary to the man-made doctrines of the day, and "He taught as one having authority." We find that phrase repeatedly.

And the Jewish leaders, these inventors of man-made doctrines, repeatedly said to Jesus, "By what authority are You doing these things? By what authority are You teaching these things?" In John chapter eight, Jesus said this to these men. He said,

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My Word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father [in Heaven], and you do what you have seen with your father [that is, the Devil]....You do the deeds of your father...

If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My Word.

You are of your father the Devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources [not by God's authority], for he is a liar and the father of it.

But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God. (John 8:37-47)

And so clearly, for the very same reason, Paul also has the Judaizers in mind when he warns against man-made doctrines here in Colossians chapter two. Don't let the Judaizers take things away from the pure Word of God. Don't let them add things to the pure Word of God. And above all, don't let them judge you by such things. They have no authority to do this.



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## **The Pagan Philosophers**

But there was also a second group of people that Paul has in mind when he warned the Colossian believers against man-made doctrines, and that second group were the pagan Greek philosophers of that time. Colosse was a major center for pagan philosophy and pagan worship, and that was the environment that so many of the Colossian Christians had been saved out of, by God's grace. Paul is warning them not to go back into that realm, the realm of the false authority of the pagan philosophers.

What did the pagan philosophers teach? Well, they taught many things.

First of all, the Colossian believers were in the midst of many followers of what were called mystery religions. These people said that to experience true joy, and to truly know and experience God, you had to have ecstatic, out-of-control religious experiences. You had to have times in your religious experience when you threw aside self-control, when you threw off moral restraint. And they said that this counterfeit kind of "joy" was something to be sought after – much as the Charismatics and the Word-of-Faith imposters say that a person must do today. And they say that if you don't have those things, it means you are not a believer, or at least they will say that you are not truly "spiritual." So the Colossian believers were facing this sort of thing in their time.

The Colossian believers were also being pressured by other pagan philosophers who said you had to punish your physical body in order to achieve spiritual

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superiority. There were those who said you had to avoid certain kinds of oils in your diet. There were those who said you had to be a vegetarian. If you don't do these things, they said, if you don't avoid these things, you are spiritually inferior. Paul speaks against these people in Colossians chapter two, verse twenty-one when he speaks of those who say, "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle." Paul says, these are "the commandments and doctrines of men."

But on the other hand, the Colossian believers were also being pressured by those who said the opposite of this. These people said that it doesn't matter what you do. You can try anything and everything, and it doesn't matter, because the things of the flesh, physical pleasure and prosperity – health and wealth – this is the highest goal. These are the things that cast out fear, they said. And so many of these people lived immoral lives, and they made physical pleasure and prosperity their greatest goals in life. That, too, sounds very familiar as we look at the church scene in our own time.

And then the Colossians were also faced with other false teachers who said that a coming new life would not be imparted through Christ and the resurrection, but it would come by man transforming his own nature through his good works. Here we have the seeds of what would later become Romanism, at this very early stage in the history of the church, coming through paganism.

I could go into much more detail on these things, but this will give you some idea of the kinds of man-made doctrines the Colossian believers were up against.

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## **An Epidemic of Counterfeit Authorities**

They were in the midst of a moral and philosophical disaster. They were surrounded by an epidemic of man-made doctrines based on counterfeit authority. All sorts of confused and even contradictory things. All of the teachers of these things claimed to have some kind of authority, when they had no God-given authority at all. And all of these influences, all of this multitude of man-made doctrines, were pressing in on the Colossian church, seeking to draw them away and even tear them away from the authority of Christ their Redeemer, and the authority of His pure Word.

And so Paul is saying to the Colossian believers, stand firm in the face of all of this. Do not go back to living in the world. Man-made doctrines are of the world. They are of the Devil. They have no authority. They are of no use to you. Colossians chapter two, verse twenty – “You died with Christ from the basic principles of the world.” Why then, Paul says, would you possibly want to go back to these things? You are in Christ. Christ is in you. Therefore remain in the realm of His authority, do not stray outside of His genuine and legitimate authority into man-made, illegitimate authority. And do not permit these counterfeit authorities to gain any foothold in the church.

## **As We Continue**

Well dear friends, I am sure that many of you are already recognizing parallels between the kinds of man-made doctrines the Colossians were up against at the time this letter was written, and the epidemic of man-made doctrines that are afflicting the

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church in our time. But we have much more to see concerning this vital matter of genuine and counterfeit authority.

And so as we continue in our next message we are going to turn our attention to some of the most significant kinds of counterfeit authorities that we find in subsequent church history, and we shall see even more parallels to our situation in the present day. But through it all, we shall continue to constantly come back to the anchor of genuine authority, the authority of Christ, and His written Word, and His indwelling Spirit.

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