

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Beware of Being Led Away From the Truth" (Colossians 2:8)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/10/2011

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Meeting Satan's Triple Threat

Today we are continuing our study of the greatest challenge that is facing the church of Jesus Christ in our time, and how we as Christians are to meet that challenge. That challenge is what I have termed Satan's triple threat to the church. By what authority, and by what power, are we to meet this challenge? How are we to do it?

Let me read for you once again the passage on which we have been focusing our attention. It is found in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. And if you are able to do so as you are listening, I trust that you will open your Bible and follow along, not only as I read this passage, but also as we focus today on one verse in particular. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four:

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.

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In Colossians chapter two the Word of God tells us that the individual Christian, and the church of Jesus Christ as a body, constantly face a serious threat to the Christian faith, and it comes in three forms or categories. Those three things, as we find them in Colossian chapter two, are worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines.

We have also seen from other related Scriptures that God's Word clearly identifies the ultimate source of these threats. And that source is none other than the enemy of the saints, the enemy of the Church, Satan himself. Satan seeks to undermine and destroy the church by putting forward this triple threat. He seeks to subvert and destroy the individual Christian, and the church as a body, through the infiltration of these three things into our lives and into our thinking, and into the message of the church, in many different forms and in many very subtle ways.

We have seen that the Apostle Paul in this passage not only warns us about these things, he tells us how to deal with them. He tells us how to stand against the enemy. How to keep the enemy from gaining a foothold. He tells us that we need to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against Satan's threats. That is what Paul means when he speaks of "good order and steadfastness" in verse five. He is using military terms. He is speaking of taking up our battle positions – "good order" – and staying in those battle positions – "steadfastness" – rooted and grounded in our faith in Christ.

And so Paul tells us how to do it, by giving us a series of imperatives. He begins with two imperatives that we have already studied in considerable detail.

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First, in verse six, he tells us that we must walk an enlightened walk: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

Second, in verse seven, he tells us that we must grow upon a firm foundation: “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

This brings us now to verse eight, and this focuses our attention on a third great imperative. Here is a third thing that must be true if we are going to put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against Satan’s triple threat to the church: We must beware of the enemy’s forces and the enemy’s tactics. “Beware,” Paul says, “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.”

An Expanded Translation of Verse 8

Now, as I have done many times in the past, I want to give you an expanded translation of this verse in context from the original language. Paul is saying this:

“Be constantly on your guard, with a discerning eye, and with an awareness of imminence, the nearness, of the threat, so that no one will lead you away as a captive into error by means of his human speculations and the deceptions that are associated with them, speculations and deceptions that are empty of truth, speculations and deceptions that have their origins in the words or writings or thinking of fallen men as opposed to the Holy God, speculations and deceptions that have their origins in the

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rudimentary teachings of this fallen world system, and do not have their origin in the person of Jesus Christ.”

To sum it up, Paul is saying, “Beware lest anyone lead you away captive by deceiving you into believing things that are “not according to Christ.” This is the third imperative in putting up, and keeping up, a solid battle front against Satan’s attacks on our faith.

Now, we need to take note of five things in this verse.

Another Military Imperative

First, the language once again carries the same military overtones that we found in verse five. In verse five Paul spoke of “good order” and “steadfastness”. We saw that in the Greek those are both military terms. The words Paul uses speak of soldiers taking up their positions in the battle, and not breaking ranks, remaining in their positions, maintaining a solid and fortified front against the enemy.

Likewise in verse eight Paul uses another military term. He says, “Beware.” Literally, it means “be constantly on your guard, like a soldier.” Always be in a state of readiness, expecting the enemy to come, because he will. Always be prepared to meet the enemy when he comes, because he will.

Second we need to take note of the fact that the language once again is imperative – this is something you must do, or you and your church will face the most serious consequences.

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An Urgent Task Because the Threat is Ever Present

Third, we need to take note of the fact that the language of verse eight carries a sense of urgency. That sense of urgency is rooted in the fact that Satan's threat is always close at hand. If you say, "It can't happen to me," you are in the most dangerous situation imaginable. If your pastor and church leaders say, "It can't happen in our church," then your church has placed itself in the most dangerous position imaginable. You are taking a position that is exactly the opposite of that which Colossians chapter two, verse eight, says must be the position of every believer and every church.

Satan gains his foothold in the life of a Christian the moment you let down your guard. Satan gains his foothold in the church the moment the church lets down its guard. Dear friend, never, ever be deceived into thinking that there is no present danger. As long as you are in this world, and as long as Christ's church is in this world, Satan's triple threat will exist, and he will be actively seeking to undermine you in your walk with Christ, and he will be actively seeking to destroy your church. And so Paul tells us to beware, to be constantly on our guard, so that we will not be led away captive by those who are doing the bidding of the enemy of our souls.

Paul wanted the Colossian believers to understand this, because they were a believing minority situated among an unbelieving and largely pagan majority. These things, these spiritual threats, were as close to the Colossians as the air they breathed. They were surrounded by people who practiced the mystery religions of the Greeks,

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people who engaged in the pagan worship of a pantheon of deities throughout the Roman Empire, people who worshipped the Roman emperor, people who practiced the ascetic religions that were based on Greek philosophy, people who practiced Jewish legalism, and people who had already gone off into captivity to various corruptions of authentic Biblical Christianity. They were surrounded by such things, just as we believers in Christ are surrounded by them today.

Deception in the Church Today

Fourth, we need to understand that Satan's threat involves deception. In our time we face increasing paganism, even in the Western world. The influence of the Eastern mystical religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Confucianism – is growing in the Western world. Along with that, the influence of New Age mystical religions and cults is growing. We also face, more than ever before, the spiritual threat of Islam. And I could name many other false religions that are gaining an ever-greater following, even in the Western world, in our time.

But here is the point: Dear friends, these things are influencing the Evangelical church today. Now, you may think that is an absurd statement. Well, let me prove it, by just two examples. If you look closely at the Word-of-Faith heresy, the name-it-and-claim-it, prosperity gospel heresy that you see on much of so-called Christian television, you will find that it is the product of the influences of the mystical, non-Christian religions, Eastern religions. That is one glaring example today.

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And let me give you another. Islam is having an evil influence on the Evangelical church. Do you think that sounds absurd? Well let me tell you just how real, and how subtle, and how near Satan's threat is. It can be as near as your church tract rack. Recently I was in a fundamental Baptist church, and something in their tract rack caught my attention. It was supposed to be a Gospel tract that was designed to lead Muslims to Jesus Christ. It was published by one of the leading Gospel publishing houses in the United States.

But what was the approach in this so-called "gospel tract"? The writer of this tract tried to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ by giving them passages from the Quran rather than from the Bible. This "gospel tract" – so-called – said that the Quran and the Bible were both Scriptures. This tract said that the Quran was sent to confirm the Bible. It said that the Quran is also God's revelation.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Quran openly and forcefully denies the things that we find in our present passage. The Quran denies that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ. The Quran denies that Jesus is the Son of God. The Quran denies that He is the Savior from sin. But the writer of this tract was trying to gloss over those things to a considerable extent. He was trying to lead people to Jesus through the gateway of the Quran.

What happens, dear friends, when a sincere but undiscerning Christian who wants to lead Muslims to Christ picks up a tract like that? He probably thinks, "Wonderful! I have found something I can use to witness to Muslims." But what is actually

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happening? What is Satan actually doing? That sincere but undiscerning Christian is led into error and confusion. And then that Christian goes out and gives a Muslim this tract that presents not the one true Gospel, but something that is loaded with error, and actually affirms the Muslim in his false religion.

Dear friends, this is how subtle Satan can be. Satan can use what is supposed to be a Gospel tract to accomplish his destructive purposes. You must be on your guard. Your church must be on its guard. Satan will use every trick to drag us away from the truth, every trick to undermine our witness for the truth.

The Threat is Personal

And this brings us to point number five: In verse eight we need to take notice of the fact that the threat is personal. In the original language of verse eight, there is a personal pronoun that is not included in many English translations. Verse eight actually begins like this: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through *his* philosophy and empty deceit..."

The threat is personal. Satan brings ruin upon the church through people, through individuals and groups of individuals. He brings ruin upon the church through the infiltration of false teachers, and through people who buy into the things that false teachers have to say, because the people who follow after them are unstable and confused, they are not rooted and grounded in the truth.

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And so this is the sum of what we find in verse eight: Don't trust your eternal destiny, or your present walk with God, to the speculations and deceptions of sinful man.

Recognize all of these forces for what they are. They are enemies of your souls. They are the enemies of the true faith. The enemies of Christ. And they will come at you in different ways. They will use different tactics. Sometimes they will launch a frontal attack. But far more often they will come in secretly, they will seek to undermine you in subtle ways. Learn to recognize who these people are, and what they stand for.

How do you do that? Compare everything with Scripture. If it is not according to Scripture, reject it. If any teacher refuses to be in subjection to Scripture, reject him. Do not have anything to do with him. Do not have anything to do with what he – or she – is attempting to promote. They are promoting the way of the fallen world, not the way of Christ. They are promoting things that lead to spiritual death, not to eternal life. And so you need to maintain a disciplined, united battle front against these forces. Don't allow these people to influence you. Don't allow these people to undermine the church.

Be on your guard. Don't ever say, "It can't happen to me" or "It can't happen in my church." The threat is real. The threat is imminent. The threat is personal. It comes through the words and actions of men who either have never really possessed the truth as it is found only in Christ and His Word, or, it comes through the words and actions of men who have, in some way or other, been taken captive by some person who is the instrument of Satan, and have been dragged away from the truth. The threat can even

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come from such an unlikely source as what is supposed to be a Gospel tract, supposedly designed to reach the lost, but that actually leads both the witnessing Christian and the unbeliever away from the truth.

Complete Salvation By a Complete Savior

Now this brings us to verses nine and ten. In these verses Paul tells us *why* verse eight is true – why you need to be on your guard against any teaching that is not rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ and in His Word. I want to begin our consideration of these verses once again by giving you an expanded translation of them from the original text in its context. And it will be helpful if you follow along in your own copy of God's Word as I do this:

Verse 9: "The reason you must be on your guard against such things, is because of the fact that the entire fullness of the Godhead permanently and bodily resides in Jesus Christ."

Verse 10: "And you – all of you Colossian believers – are in Him, in Christ, having been filled full with a full salvation, which means that you are at this moment in that state of fullness, and this Christ who is your Savior is the One who is preeminent over every principality and authority, both seen and unseen, in this universe and also in the heavenly realms."

Now once again, as is the case so many times in the book of Colossians, we have hit a vein of pure gold. There are great spiritual riches in these two verses. There is rich truth

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here concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is rich truth here concerning the position of every person who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

Here we find two final imperatives, two other things that we must do, in order to put up and keep up a solid battle front against Satan's triple threat to the Christian and the church. We must trust in a complete Savior, and we must rest in a complete salvation.

And those imperatives, dear friends, will be our focus, the Lord willing, as we continue our study of this very important passage of the Word of God on our next broadcast.

About the Broadcast

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