

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 1 of 14

Let me call your attention once again to the book of Colossians, chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. As always, I hope that if you are able to do so as you are listening, that you will follow along in your own 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 puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head [that is, to 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 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)

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 2 of 14

A Strong & Serious Warning

This passage is a warning, given by God through the Apostle Paul, against the threat of man-made doctrines. It is a strong and serious warning. Satan is constantly working and scheming to take the Christian and the church away from absolute and complete reliance on the authority of God's written Word alone. An evil deception, and often an evil tyranny, takes hold of the church when we follow the word of man, instead of the Word of God.

If you have been following this series of messages, you will recall that we have been focusing on the fact that all man-made doctrines are founded on counterfeit authority. We have seen that counterfeit authority was a problem even in the newly-founded church at Colosse, which of course is why Paul wrote these words to them. We have also seen that counterfeit authority has been a problem throughout the subsequent history of the church. We see that evil most vividly in Roman Catholicism. But we see it cropping up quite often in the history of the Protestant church as well.

The Threat in Our Time

Those are the things we have considered thus far. But in this message and in the one that will follow, the Lord willing, I want to shift our attention away from the historical problem of counterfeit authority in the church. Today I want to focus our attention on the present-day problem of counterfeit authority within the Evangelical church. How does this warning in Colossians chapter two apply to us today? What

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 3 of 14

things must we be guarding our hearts and minds against? What kinds of counterfeit authority do we see at work within the church today?

At the present time, I believe that two movements in particular are the greatest manifestations of this evil within what is called the Evangelical church. One of those movements is the Purpose-Driven Church movement, and the other is the Emergent Church movement.

There are many other evil movements within the church in our time, but I believe that these two head the list. They are the most serious and the most dangerous at the present time. They represent the greatest threat to the church. They represent the greatest possibility for the deception and subversion of the true believer in Christ in our day. Many pastors, church leaders, and church members are running after these two movements, adopting the thinking and the practices of these movements.

The Lord willing, in this message and the one to follow, I want to briefly address these two movements in the light of Colossians chapter two. Today I want to focus our attention on the Purpose-Driven Church movement, and the Lord willing in our next message we will take up the Emergent Church movement.

The Movement's Evil Fruits

Now as we begin, we must keep something very important in mind. Our Lord Jesus gave us an infallible standard for evaluating men and movements within the

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 4 of 14

church. He said, in Matthew chapter seven, "You shall know them by their fruits...every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."

And immediately after this, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but [only] he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Jesus said that many religious leaders will say to Him on the Day of Judgment, "Did we not speak in Your name? Did we not do great works in Your name?" But Jesus said that He will say to them, "I never knew you."

And so we must evaluate all men and movements by their fruits. It is not wrong for us to make these kinds of judgments, as long as we make them according the Scripture. First John chapter four, verse one tells us, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

"Test the spirits." "You will know them by their fruits." Those are the principles God tells us to employ. And as we look at the Purpose-Driven Church movement, we find that the fruits are evil.

What is evil about this movement? It is, above all, a man-centered movement. The focus is on what pleases men – especially on what pleases the unsaved – rather than what pleases Christ. The Purpose-Driven Church movement brings the influences of the ungodly, unbelieving world into the church like a flood. The Purpose-Driven Church movement substitutes man-made authority for Christ's authority. The Purpose-Driven Church movement is a movement away from

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 5 of 14

Scripture. Expository preaching of Biblical truth is actually discouraged in the Purpose-Driven Church model. Instead, the church is told to follow handbooks that have been written by Rick Warren and other men who lead the movement.

Because of this man-centered focus; because of this disconnection from the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ; because of this disconnection from the authority of Scripture – it should come as no surprise to find that the Purpose-Driven Church movement is also disconnected from the one true Gospel. It presents a false gospel.

The Purpose-Driven Church movement has become more and more ecumenical as time goes on. There is a self-conscious effort on the part of Rick Warren and other leaders of this movement to erase the lines of distinction between those who believe the truth of God's Word and those who believe a lie. They are embracing liberal churches, Roman Catholics, and even Muslims.

They have shifted the focus away from the salvation of souls for eternity. Instead they now focus more and more on social and political improvement. The focus is more and more on making this fallen, perishing world a more comfortable place for sinners, rather than calling sinners to repentance so that they might escape the wrath to come.

The Movement's Evil Root

Scripture gives us the principle that evil fruits come from an evil root. Bitter water comes from a bitter source. The Apostle Paul articulates that same principle

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 6 of 14

in different language in Colossians chapter two. He says that those who establish man-made doctrines based on counterfeit authority are “not holding fast to the Head [that is, to Jesus Christ], from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.”

That is certainly the case with the Purpose-Driven Church movement. They have connected themselves not to Christ but to unsaved men. Rick Warren makes no secret of the fact that his “mentor” is not the Lord Jesus Christ who lives forever. Rick Warren says that his “mentor” is an unsaved management theorist named Peter Drucker, who died in 2005.

Peter Drucker is well known in the business world. He was the man who developed the theory of "management by objectives." This theory says that management and employees need to agree on a set of business objectives. They need to create what he called a "shared vision." He said that they need to focus all of their activities toward achieving that vision.

Drucker did not believe in objective truth. He denied that the Bible is a book of truth. In Drucker's theories, there are no transcendent truths. There are no moral absolutes. There are only pragmatic purposes.

In his later years, Peter Drucker marketed his management philosophy to religious organizations. Pastors involved in what became the Purpose-Driven movement paid Drucker many thousands of dollars to teach them how to operate their churches like business corporations.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 7 of 14

And so Drucker simply changed the labels on his theory. "Management by objectives" for business became "management by purpose" for churches. Drucker's "self-assessment tools" for business became "spiritual health assessment tools" and "skills assessment tools" for churches. Drucker's "market assessment tools" for business became "seeker assessment tools" for churches.

The whole idea of management by objectives is to build an efficient business management structure that constantly responds to the constantly-changing desires of consumers. The whole idea of the Purpose-Driven church model is to build an efficient church management structure that constantly responds to the constantly-changing desires of the unsaved. In business, products and services are constantly redesigned and repackaged to please the consumer. In the Purpose-Driven church, the message and the church service are constantly redesigned and repackaged to please the unsaved, to draw them into the church while keeping them comfortable in their sins.

Rick Warren and other men bought into this ungodly theory, and through their books, videos, magazines, and seminars they have promoted it to thousands of churches. They have trained nearly half a million pastors and church leaders in over 100 countries to implement this un-Biblical model in their churches.

The Pastor – CEO of the Church?

In order to implement the Purpose-Driven church model, the gurus of the movement say that the pastor must be the undisputed "chief executive officer" of

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 8 of 14

the church. He must be a dynamic leader who stimulates the entire church into action for numerical growth.

In the Purpose-Driven Church model, Christ is not the head of the church. The pastor – the chief executive officer – is the head of the church. You see this reflected even in the title that some pastors are adopting today. They are often calling themselves the “executive pastor” of the church.

The literature of the Purpose-Driven Church movement says that the pastor should "not be afraid of [exercising] power." The handbooks of the movement say that the pastor should do whatever is necessary to stimulate the congregation to think of their CEO, their pastor, as the superior force upon whom success depends. Not Christ, not God the Holy Spirit, not Scripture, but the pastor, the church’s CEO.

Now, the gurus of the Purpose-Driven Church movement admit that such a pastor may appear to be a dictator. But, they say – and I’m quoting one of their books now – a mindset must be cultivated in which "to the people of the church [the pastor’s] decisions are their decisions. They should realize that, almost as if he had a sixth sense, the pastor knows how to lead the church where the people want to go." And people who do not agree with his vision and his decisions should simply leave the church. The so-called “executive pastor” is as much of a pope in his own church as the Pope of Rome is at the Vatican.

And where are such “executive pastors” leading their churches today? They are leading them on the path to destruction. Let me give you just one example. Not long

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 9 of 14

ago, I spoke with a man who had left a church because it had adopted the Purpose-Driven model. The pastor actually stopped people from going out and doing door-to-door evangelism in the community. Instead, he sent people out into the community with a one-question survey, one question to ask the unsaved. The question was this: "What do we need to change about our church in order to get you to come?"

That question is the essence of the Purpose-Driven Church philosophy. Man is the authority, not Christ. And it is not even Christian man who is the authority in the Purpose-Driven Church. That would be bad enough. But in the Purpose-Driven Church movement, the ultimate authority is unsaved man – his wishes, his desires, his pleasures. The church is not "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), but a product to be shaped and marketed according to the dictates of people who have no conception of Christ's true purpose for His Church.

Dear friends, as Paul says in Colossians chapter two, these things may have "the appearance of wisdom." But they are of no value for sinful man's true need. God has not changed. He is still the holy creator of the universe. Man has not changed. He is still a sinner in need of salvation by the shed blood of Christ.

And Christ's purpose for His church has not changed. It is the Great Commission – evangelize the world, and edify the saints, and do so on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word alone. This is the sum total of the true purpose of

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 10 of 14

Christ's Church. Whenever sinful man by his own authority adds anything to that simple commission, sinful man diminishes Christ and diminishes the Church.

The Scripture-Driven Church

The true Church of Jesus Christ must be the Scripture-driven church, not the Purpose-Driven church. Let me remind you of the introduction that our announcer gives at the beginning of every one of our broadcasts: "The Church of Jesus Christ must be the Scripture-driven church, relying on God's inspired, inerrant Word as our sole authority, and our infallible critic, in every area of life and ministry." That is what the Word of God teaches. The church's sole authority is the Word of God, not the word of man.

Now, we are often asked, "Is your use of the term, 'the Scripture-driven church' a response to the Purpose-Driven Church movement?" I don't know if our ministry coined the term, "the Scripture-driven church." I am sure someone else thought of it before we did. But we decided to use it because "Equipping the Scripture-driven church" describes what we endeavor to do, by God's grace. We believe that this is a timeless statement of the nature of Christ's Church, and not merely a fad phrase.

We are not at work in this ministry to create a movement. The only movement that there should be within the true Church is the moving of God the Holy Spirit, not movements created by men. Christ's true Church must always be the Scripture-driven church.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 11 of 14

The Purpose-Driven Church movement is the direct opposite of this. It is drawing the Evangelical church away from the authority of Scripture. This movement is doubtless the greatest single influence on the Evangelical church today — and it is, I believe, the most harmful influence in our time.

Dear friends, as I have often said in this series, we need to be aware of Satan's counterfeits. But we must never stop with our focus on Satan's lies. We must always bring our focus back to God's truth. The best way to recognize a counterfeit is to have a deep and intimate and ever-growing understanding of that which is genuine. And so I want to bring our focus back to Scripture.

What does Paul say here in Colossians chapter two? Paul says, Christian, why would you possibly want to go after such things? Why, as though you were still living in the world, do you subject yourselves to the commandments and doctrines of men? When you became a Christian, you died to the things of the world. The things of the world became dead for you. There is no life in them. There is no light in them.

Christ is your life. His Word is your light. Let no one cheat you of your reward in Christ by leading you into error. Let no man substitute his authority for Christ's authority. Hold fast to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who is the Source of all spiritual nourishment and growth – not the men who write the church-growth handbooks.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 12 of 14

“God Has Chosen the Foolish Things”

Listen to the Word of God in First Corinthians chapter one, beginning at verse twenty-six. The Apostle Paul writes this:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Church Leaders Are to Be Servants, Not Lords

The Purpose-Driven Church movement's view of the pastor as chief executive officer of the church is contrary to Scripture. Church leaders are to be servants, not lords. Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter twenty, beginning at verse twenty-five:

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 13 of 14

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-28)

Clearly, the Apostle Peter took Jesus' words to heart. Listen to what Peter says in his first epistle, chapter five:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not... as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Hold Fast to the Head

Clearly, the Purpose-Driven Church is a deadly counterfeit. It is the evil tyranny of man-made doctrines based on counterfeit authority. The word of man in place of the Word of God.

Flee from these things, dear friend. Pastor, elder, deacon – do not fall prey to these deceptions. Keep these influences out of the church. Christian church member

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Purpose-Driven Tyranny" (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/6/2012

Page 14 of 14

– if you find that these influences have taken over in your church, the Word of God tells you it is time to leave. Your church has become disconnected from the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Obey the Lord's command to "come out from among them, and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Hold fast to the Head, dear friend. Hold fast to Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward in Him.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is that of the Great Commission: to preach the Gospel to the world, 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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