

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Emergent Blasphemy" (Colossians 2:18-23, 2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/13/2012

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If you are able to do so as you are listening today, I hope that you will turn in your Bible with me to the passage we are studying at the present time, Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. This is God's inspired warning, given to us through the Apostle Paul, concerning the danger of false teachers bringing man-made doctrines into the church. Please follow with me as I read this passage once again, 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)

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Two Evil Movements

In our most recent messages in this series, we have been focusing on the fact that all man-made doctrines are founded on counterfeit authority. Men setting themselves up as the authorities, in the place of Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit, and the written Word of God.

We have seen that counterfeit authority was a problem in the church at Colosse, and that is what prompted the Apostle Paul under divine inspiration to write these words to the Colossian believers. We have also seen that counterfeit authority has been a problem throughout the subsequent history of the church, most notably in Roman Catholicism, but also quite often in the Protestant church as well.

But in our last message we turned our attention away from the history of the evil of counterfeit authority, and we began to focus our attention on the present-day problem of counterfeit authority within the Evangelical church.

The Bible is a very up-to-date book. It is a timeless book. And so Paul's warning to the Colossian church applies just as much to us today.

In our last message, I said that I believe that two movements in particular are the greatest manifestations of the evil of counterfeit authority within what is called the Evangelical church in our time. In our last message we focused on the Purpose-Driven Church movement, and today we shall focus on the Emergent Church movement.

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Many pastor and church leaders, as well as church members, are running after these two movements. They are running after the men and women who are the leading spokesmen for these movements. Buying literally millions of copies of their books, and adopting the un-Biblical thinking and practices that they promote.

The Standard of Evaluation

Now as we focus in particular on the Emergent Church movement today, let me remind you once again of the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ has told us we should evaluate all men and movements within the visible church.

Scripture gives us the principle that evil fruits come from an evil root. Bitter water comes from a bitter source. The Apostle Paul is saying the same thing in a slightly different way here 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.”

And so we must evaluate all men and movements by their roots and 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.”

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And so we must apply the kinds of tests that we find here in Colossians chapter two. Is this teacher or this movement causing believers to cling to that which is theirs in Christ, or cheating believers of their reward in Christ? Is the Emergent Church movement connected to the Head, Jesus Christ, or is it cut off from Christ? Is the Emergent Church movement promoting true wisdom, or only the appearance of wisdom? Is there true humility, or only a false show of humility? Is the Emergent Church movement profitable to the individual believer and to the true Church of Christ, or is it of no value?

Well, as we look at the Emergent Church movement we find that it does fit into all of the categories of counterfeit authority that Paul names in Colossians chapter two. It is a cheat, a spiritual swindle. The spokesmen for the Emergent Movement exhibit a false humility. The movement is disconnected from the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. It draws no life, no nourishment, from Him. The Emergent Church movement does give an appearance of wisdom, but in fact the Emergent Church movement is of absolutely no value. It is of no value to the believer who is trusting in Christ, and it is of no value to the unbeliever who needs to trust in Christ.

The Emergent Church Philosophy

A man named Brian McLaren is considered to be the leading spokesman for the Emergent Church movement. Brian McLaren has written a book called *A Generous*

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Orthodoxy. A Generous Orthodoxy. That's the short name of the book. But let me give you the full title of the book. Listen closely. Here is the full title:

A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional — Evangelical — Post-Protestant — Liberal/Conservative — Mystical/Poetic — Biblical — Charismatic/Contemplative — Fundamentalist/Calvinist — Anabaptist/Anglican — Methodist — Catholic — Green — Incarnational — Depressed-Yet-Hopeful — Emergent — Unfinished Christian

That's the full title of the book. Now, if this sounds to you like the title of a book that was written by someone who is very confused, you are absolutely right. The one thing that is clear is that Brian McLaren and the other spokesmen for the Emergent Church movement really believe nothing. Rather than being ashamed of this confused state of mind, Brian McLaren and the rest of the folks in the Emergent movement wear this complex and contradictory title proudly, like a badge of honor. They really think that it sets them apart as intellectuals.

Here is the essence of the Emergent Church philosophy. Emergent Church leaders believe that the visible church forms what they call a "Universal Community of Interpretation." And they believe that this "Universal Community of Interpretation" redefines "Christianity" to suit the conditions of the times. Truth changes with the times.

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Emergents Reject the Bible

Now, this inevitably leads us to a crucial question: What do Emergent Church leaders think about the Bible? Well, Brian McLaren says that the Bible is "an inspired gift from God – a unique collection of literary artifacts". Another Emergent leader named Doug Pagitt agrees with McLaren, and he indicates to us what they mean when they talk about the Bible being "inspired". It is certainly not the Biblical definition of inspiration.

I'm quoting Mr. Pagitt now – he says that the "history of the Christian faith" is that "the Scriptures come from and inform the church." In other words, Emergents do not believe that Scripture comes from God in the sense of verbal, plenary, authoritative inspiration by the Holy Spirit, as we find in passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. No. They believe that the Bible comes from man.

Now, Brian McLaren goes even further. In his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, he says – and I'm quoting him now – that the words "inerrant, authoritative, literal, revelatory, objective, absolute, [and] propositional" are "foreign to the Bible's vocabulary about itself". McLaren also asserts that "not even one-hundredth of one percent of the Bible" presents "objective information about God."

Now those are some pretty absolute statements from a man who claims that little, if anything, is certain, or permanent. But Brian McLaren is just getting warmed up. He goes on to say that the Christian Church has misrepresented the Bible as something containing "universal laws." He says – and I'm quoting him again – "We

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[falsely] claimed that the Bible was easy to understand" — "We [wrongly] presented the Bible as a repository of sacred propositions."

This is how we must approach the Bible, according to Brian McLaren. I'm quoting him again. He says,

Drop any affair you may have with Certainty, Proof, [or] Argument...The ultimate Bible study or sermon in recent decades yielded clarity. That clarity, unfortunately, was often boring – and probably not that accurate, either, since reality is seldom clear, but usually fuzzy and mysterious...

And then McLaren says this, quoting him again:

Find things to do with the Bible other than read and study it [and McLaren suggests several "things to do with the Bible" that are forms of medieval, mystical meditation commended by the Roman Catholic church].

And then he says this, quoting Brian McLaren once again:

In the recent past we talked a lot about absolute truth, attempting to prove abstract propositions about God (for instance, proving the sovereignty of God).

But Brian McLaren and his fellow Emergents assert that such thinking about the nature and purpose of the Bible is now out of fashion.

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Dear friends, you can see that the Emergent Church movement is not at all subtle in its approach to the authority of the Bible. Emergents take the Bible, they throw it on the ground, and they grind it into the dust with their feet. They scoff at God's authority. They shake their fists at the true and living God. They want nothing to do with the true Christ of the Bible. They openly and proudly assert that they are the authority. They invent doctrine, they make it up, they change it on the fly, all according to their own sinful impulses.

A Pastor's Firsthand Experience

Several months ago I received a very interesting letter from a pastor in the southern United States. With his kind permission, I am going to share some of what he told me with you. This pastor told me about his own face-to-face encounter with the influence of the Emergent Church movement, in a denomination that once stood firm for the Word of God.

He said that he had little idea just how bad things were until he went to a pastors' conference. He was actually laughed at by other pastors, when he stood on the authority of the Bible.

He said that he went to this pastors' gathering for two reasons. There was going to be a retreat for pastors, and he hoped to benefit from it. But while he was there, he was also going to be examined for transfer of his ministerial credentials into this denomination. In his letter to me he said this – I'm quoting him now:

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My experiences in both the examination and the retreat were unsettling, but the final outcome strengthened my resolve to remain loyal to the Bible, and reject what unfolded before my eyes. I saw the influences of the Emergent Church Movement in action.

First let me tell you about the examination session. I began to know there was trouble when my examiners asked my position on two issues. The first was baptism. It became apparent that at least some of my examiners believe that baptism either removes... original sin (which is the Roman Catholic doctrine), or actually regenerates and justifies the one who is baptized. Or perhaps both. As our discussion went on, and I stated my opposition to these views based on Scripture, the atmosphere became increasingly uncomfortable.

The second issue was the question of women as pastors. As soon as I stated that the Bible does not permit it, some of the more "open minded brethren" assumed that I was denying that God allows women to do any kind of ministering in the church. The irony was that they kept proclaiming how diverse they were. They allowed all viewpoints on the issue, they said, and I should as well. But it was clear that there was one viewpoint they would not allow: [which was] mine, or I should say, the Bible's.

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I left this session with a high degree of discomfort, but I think my examiners figured I would eventually come around to their inclusive views. But I knew I would not, and could not.

During the examination, something became clear: The leaders of this denomination say the Bible is their authority, but they have a problem. They believe the Bible should be interpreted through the lens of the culture. Their philosophy is the thinking of the Emergent Church Movement.

Pastors Laugh at God's Messenger

This pastor went on in his letter to talk about what happened in the so-called pastors' retreat. I'm quoting his letter again. He said,

I had hoped for some solid spiritual food during those meetings, but the menu was quite different.

The main speaker kept using the term "The Conversation". This is a favorite term of the Emergent Church. Like most Emergents, this man believes that the "gospel is a conversation". He doesn't mean that we share the true Gospel in conversations with people. Rather, he believes that the "gospel", or any truth for that matter, is arrived at by people getting together to give their input. And when they have come to a consensus of opinion, that is the "gospel" for them. But then that group

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will have a conversation with another group, and they will come to a consensus of opinion, and so on and so on. Thus the "gospel" evolves with the times. It's Emergent. It's not, "Let's see what God said in His Word." It's more like, "Well, right now I feel like God is (fill in the blank)."

This pastor went on in his letter to talk about what happened next. Several of the pastors who were present were called upon to put on a skit. And this pastor was given a part to play in it. I'm quoting his letter again:

At first I thought it might not be too bad. The setting for the drama was going to be a seminary classroom. The teacher would ask the students to explain Bible passages that he would give them. The problem was that as this...unfolded, the man playing the part of the teacher treated the thing as a comedy. His role, it turned out, was to play an out-of-touch "old school" teacher, who doesn't realize that everything has changed – that the young folks are smarter than any generation before them, and we've all been "doing church" the wrong way up till now.

I was to play the part of one of the students in the seminary class. When it came my turn, I was to give the explanation of the opening verses of 2 Timothy chapter four: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and at His kingdom; Preach the Word; Be instant in season and

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out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears," and so on.

And so, this pastor told me in his letter, quoting him again,

I began to give an exposition of [this passage in Second Timothy]. The people in this pastors' retreat thought I was doing a parody of a "fundamentalist", and they were roaring with laughter. The problem was, I wasn't being funny. I was teaching the Bible the way I have for the past thirty years.

Well, dear friends, this dear pastor concluded his letter with this. He said,

Even though I didn't walk out physically right at that point, I did walk out spiritually. I don't want this denomination's credentials.... I'm saying no to a denomination that says I'm totally out of touch with the times because I believe the Bible should be the sole authority in worship and life, not man's latest "emergent" thinking.

Well friends, I praise God to be able to report that the Lord has since moved this pastor into a place of service in a ministry that is faithful to the Word of God, and not part of the Emergent Church blasphemy. This brother resolved to stand for the truth, even if it meant standing alone. He went through some very difficult trials,

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but the Lord blessed his stand. No doubt his exposition of Paul's exhortation to Timothy to faithfully preach the Word serves as the condemnation of those who thought it was all so funny. I pray, and I know he does too, that some of them will be convicted by it in retrospect, and will repent.

Not An Isolated Case

Dear friends, I can tell you, based on similar reports from an ever-growing number of pastors and church leaders, that this man's experience is not an isolated case. The horror of the Emergent Church movement is rapidly infiltrating once-sound churches.

But many Evangelical church members, and even pastors and church leaders, don't know what's going on behind closed doors in their own circles. They do not know what is happening in seminary classrooms, in pastors' retreats and workshops, in presbytery meetings, and other venues all over the United States and on the mission fields of the world.

That is where these seeds are being sown. These things are happening. I believe we need to recognize it for what it is, and we need to call it exactly what it is: It is an active, conscious conspiracy against the Gospel of Christ, and against the sole authority of the Bible in the church.

That is why I wanted to devote one broadcast to this particular movement, the Emergent Church movement, in the light of Colossians chapter two. It is a cheat

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and worse than a cheat. The Emergents are not merely disconnected from the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, they are shaking their fists at Him. The Emergent Church movement is leading souls to Hell. Dear friends, we must be on our guard. We must put up, and keep up, a solid battle front against these things. May the Lord keep you strong and vigilant in the battle, as you stand on the authority of God's Word alone.

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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