

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "The Mystery of Godliness" (Colossians 2:9)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/8/2011

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## **Introduction**

Today we are resuming our study of the important passage that is found in the book of Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. If you are able to do so as you are listening, I trust that you will open your Bible and follow along with me as I read, and also as we look at some other related passages. So we begin in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse four. The Apostle Paul under divine inspiration writes these words:

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.

Now in this series of messages, we have seen that the Apostle Paul is telling us about Satan's ever-present triple threat to the church. Satan always seeks to use three main things, in order to undermine the individual believer's spiritual life and testimony, and to undermine the testimony and the message of the church as a body.

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Those three things, as we find them in Colossian chapter two, are worldly philosophy, legalism, and man-made doctrines. We have seen that the Devil is always trying to infiltrate these three things into our lives and into our thinking, and into the message of the church. And he does it in many different ways, and often in very subtle ways. We've seen that many evils, many errors fall under these three headings.

### **Five Imperatives**

We have seen that in Colossians chapter two, the Apostle Paul is telling us how to deal with these threats. He does this by giving us a series of five imperatives. We have already studied three of them.

First, in verse six, Paul tells us that in order to meet Satan's triple threat we must walk an enlightened walk: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."

Secondly, in verse seven, Paul tells us that in order to meet Satan's triple threat 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."

Thirdly, in verse eight, Paul tells us that 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."

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Now in our last message in this series, we began to take up two final imperatives that Paul places before us. And as I said in our last message, these two things are not stated in the text using imperative verbs, as the first three were. But they *are* stated in the form of the strongest possible declarations. And so from those declarations we can draw these two final imperatives. And once again, as in the other imperatives, the focus is upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me remind you, once again, of verses nine and ten: "For in Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

Here, then are the two final imperatives, two further 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.

Number four, we must trust in a complete Savior – the One in whom "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" the One who "is the head of all principality and power."

Number five, we must rest in a complete salvation, because we as believers are complete in Christ.

### **A Critical Question**

Now in our last message we began to focus our attention on the fourth imperative: We must trust in a complete Savior. Jesus Christ is the complete Savior.

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There is nothing lacking in Him – nothing lacking in who He is, and nothing lacking in what He has done, nothing lacking in what He is doing, and nothing lacking in what He will do for those who call upon His name to be saved.

Satan wants you to think that there is something lacking in Jesus Christ. Satan wants the church to think that it needs to proclaim Christ plus something else, or Christ plus someone else. But Jesus Christ Himself – the complete and perfect Christ, the One in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body – He is the One in whom we stand against Satan's triple threat to the church. He is the only One in whom we can take such a stand. We stand in Him, because ultimately this is His battle, not merely ours.

Now, as I said last time, this fourth imperative raises a critical question. What does the Bible mean when it says that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ? How is this possible? How, specifically, did it come about? We looked at a number of Scriptures that relate to that question.

We saw that the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is critical to this question. Anyone who denies the virgin birth of Jesus Christ denies that He is God.

We also saw that it is because of His virgin birth that Jesus came into this world, and remained in this world throughout His earthly life, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," as the writer to the Hebrews tells us.

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And we also saw that because of this, as Paul tells us in Second Corinthians chapter five, verse twenty-one, Jesus, who knew no sin, was able to be made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus Christ had no personal relationship with sin. But He took our sins upon Himself. And He was able to do this because He was fully God and fully man, two natures, unmingled, manifest in one body. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body.

Now with these things in mind, today we are going to look at two more passages that are critical to our understanding of how it is, that God and man have been joined in one body, in the person of Jesus Christ.

### **The Form of God...The Form of a Bondservant**

The first of those passages is found in Philippians chapter two, verses five through eleven. Philippians chapter two, verses five through eleven. The Apostle Paul says this:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and 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

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under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When the Apostle Paul under divine inspiration speaks of Jesus “being in the *form* of God” and “taking the *form* of a bondservant,” the Greek word that is translated “form” in our English Bibles is a word that has special significance. It is the Greek word *morphe*. It is the word from which we get our English word metamorphosis. In the Greek this word *morphe* signifies the fact that something or someone has an outward appearance that agrees with the inward nature.

Let me repeat that, because it is very, very important. This word that is translated “form” in Philippians chapter two means that something or someone has an outward appearance that agrees with the inward nature. Now, how does this apply to the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, here in Philippians chapter two, Paul is telling us two things about our Lord.

First, Paul speaks of Jesus “being in the *form* of God.” What does he mean by that? Well, Paul’s inspired use of the Greek word *morphe* in this phrase “being in the *form* of God” tells us that Jesus’ *deity* is the outward expression of His inward nature. It is the *morphe*. And notice that Paul speaks of Jesus as “*being* in the form of God.” The verb “being” in this particular case tells us that Jesus’ deity is a continuous state — past, present, and future. Jesus did not become God in any sense. He is God from all eternity. He was God when He was here on earth. He is

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God seated at the right hand of the Father at this moment. And He will be God, forever and ever.

Now, this has a special significance in what Paul is saying here in Philippians chapter two. Paul is speaking of what happened when God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, came into this world to die for sinners. He came "in the *form* of God." Jesus never lost that nature. He never ceased in any sense to be God when He came into this world. Jesus did not empty Himself of, or in any way diminish, His *deity* when He came into this world in a body of flesh.

In taking on the form of a servant, Jesus voluntarily laid aside heavenly privileges and prerogatives in obedience to God the Father. But His deity was not changed or diminished. Jesus was still the God of the universe while He was in this world in a human body. All of this is comprehended in these words that Paul uses to describe our Lord Jesus Christ – "*being* in the *form* of God." Jesus' deity is the outward expression of His inherent nature, and He never ceased to be deity when He came to earth in human form.

But then secondly, Paul uses this word "form" or *morphe* once again in Philippians chapter two, verse seven. Paul says that Jesus "made Himself of no reputation" – notice – "taking the *form* of a bondservant." Remember the meaning of this Greek word that is translated "form". It means that something or someone has an outward appearance that agrees with the inward nature. Jesus came into this world, "taking the *form* of a bondservant." Paul is telling us that servanthood was

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also an outward expression of Jesus' inward nature. Listen to me carefully. This is so very important. Paul is telling us that Jesus' deity remained absolutely intact when He took on the form of a servant. Humanity was the means by which He manifested His servanthood. This passage echoes Jesus' own words in the Gospels.

John chapter six, verse thirty-eight: Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Matthew chapter twenty, verse twenty-eight: Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus is the Suffering Servant spoken of, prophesied, in Isaiah chapter fifty-two, verse thirteen: "Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high" — and onward through chapter fifty-three, culminating in verse eleven: "My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."

So, in Philippians chapter two, verses five through eleven, we have the Holy Spirit's declaration through the Apostle Paul that Jesus' deity and Jesus' servanthood both reflect His true nature as God. His outward appearance changed, but His inner nature did not. Jesus was — and is — both fully God and fully man at

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the same time. This is why Paul says that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body" (Colossians 2:9).

### **Jesus' Metamorphosis**

Now with these things in mind, let me call to your attention a second passage that is critical to our understand of what it means for God and man to be joined in one body, in the person of Jesus Christ – what it means for Jesus to be "all the fullness of the Godhead in a body." That second passage is found in Matthew chapter sixteen, beginning at verse twenty-eight, and it extends into the beginning of the next chapter, chapter seventeen. Matthew chapter sixteen, verse twenty-eight. Jesus said this to His disciples: "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

And then in the very next verse, at the beginning of Matthew chapter seventeen, we read this:

Now after six days [six days after He made that statement] Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one

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for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, ‘Arise, and do not be afraid.’ When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.’ (Matthew 16:28-17:9)

Now, this passage of course speaks of Jesus’ changed appearance before three of His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. The disciples were given a glimpse of Jesus’ coming kingdom, even before His death and resurrection.

Matthew says that Jesus “was transfigured before them.” Now, I want to call your attention in particular to that word “transfigured.” It is a form of the same word that we saw just a few moments ago in Philippians chapter two. It is another use of the Greek word *morphe* – that word which means that something or someone has an outward appearance that agrees with the inward nature.

What Matthew actually, literally says here is that Jesus “was *metamorphosized* before them.” At this moment on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus underwent a metamorphosis. In other words, when Jesus was transfigured, His outward

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appearance was changed. But Jesus' changed outward appearance was still a reflection of His inner nature.

The change on the Mount of Transfiguration is the reverse of the one that we saw in Philippians chapter two. In Philippians two, Paul tells us that when Jesus came to earth He didn't actually lay aside His glory, but rather He took on a different outward appearance so that He could live among men and do the work for which the Father had sent Him. The glory of His deity was cloaked in a body of flesh.

But here in the transfiguration, for a brief time, Jesus permits His glory to shine through the human vessel of clay – and this is a foreshadowing of the glorification that would be His after His death and resurrection, when Jesus ascended to the Father and was seated at His right hand. Here once again is proof, from the Scriptures, that in Jesus "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body."

### **A Declaration in Total Opposition to Satan's Triple Threat**

Dear friend, this is something that is beyond human explanation and human authority. This is a divine declaration that is in total opposition to worldly philosophy concerning Jesus Christ. This is a divine pronouncement that is in total opposition to legalistic teachings about Jesus Christ. This is a doctrine that is in total opposition to man-made doctrines about Jesus Christ.

With the Apostle Paul we must bow the knee, and say with all our hearts as he did in First Timothy 3:16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

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God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.”

Dear friend, you need to put up and keep up a solid battle front against Satan’s triple threats to the church, because those threats almost always involve some denial or diminishment of this great doctrine of who the Lord Jesus Christ actually is – all the fullness of the Godhead in a body. But here is the solid ground upon which you can stand against the enemy – Jesus Christ Himself. Because Jesus is who the Bible says He is, you can defeat Satan when he comes against you, or against your church. In our next message, the Lord willing, we shall continue to explore the depths of this great truth.

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