

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Christ the Head of the Church" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/10/2012

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On recent broadcasts we have been studying the implications of the Apostle Paul's inspired warning against the evil tyranny of man-made authority in the church, which we find in Colossians chapter two. And today we are coming to the final message in this part of our study. As we begin let me read the passage for you once again – Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Turn with me in your Bible, if you are able, to Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Let us hear the Word of God:

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 our Lord 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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We Have Seen Many Counterfeits...

When we allow sinful man to become the source and standard of authority within the church, instead of Christ and His Word and His Spirit, a multitude of evils can and will take hold of the church. We have seen this in several ways.

We saw this first of all in the church to which Paul wrote these words. The Judaizers tried to establish themselves as the authority within the Colossian church. They said that you needed to continue to practice the Old Testament ceremonies, in addition to believing on Christ, in order to be saved. They tried to sit in judgment over the church, they tried to make people conform to their un-Biblical view.

Likewise the Gnostics, the followers of pagan philosophy, said that you needed to have a higher knowledge, a knowledge of their invention, in order to have a hope of eternal life. They tried to diminish Christ in the Colossian church. They said that Christ was simply one of many, many components of what they called "God". And they tried to establish their authority by way of their false teachings, and lead the Colossian church away from the truth.

In fact, we have seen that these two evils in the Colossian church – the counterfeit authority of Judaism with its legalism, and the counterfeit authority of pagan philosophy with its appeal to the worldly mind – these two are prototypes for every occasion of counterfeit authority that we find in the two thousand years of church history that have elapsed since that time.

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And so we have also seen the evil tyranny of man-made authority in the subsequent history of the visible church – most dramatically in Roman Catholicism, and also quite often in the Protestant church as well.

And then we have also identified and examined the evil tyranny of man-made church authority in our own time – in the Purpose-Driven Church movement, in the Emergent Church movement, in the Charismatic or Word of Faith movement, and in the largest and most influential nominally conservative Presbyterian churches in our time.

Returning Our Focus to the Genuine

We could continue to look at many other such evil tyrannies in the church today. We live in a time when the cases are endless. But when we began this part of our study of Colossians, I promised that we would follow a pattern that would bring us back, finally, to focus once again on the truth of God's Word concerning authority in the church.

Now we have done that at various times all along the way. We have made it our practice to always have God's genuine article before us, because it is only as we have an intimate understanding of that which is genuine that we can recognize and avoid counterfeits. It is only as we have a thorough grasp of the truth that we can recognize and confront error.

And so today I want to bring us back to focus our attention on the truth in a very particular way. I want to call your attention especially to verse nineteen in the

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passage we read a few moments ago. Colossians chapter two, verse nineteen. Paul says that those who seek to establish counterfeit authority in the church 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.”

This is a picture that we find often in Scripture, especially in the New Testament. We find two great doctrines: The doctrine of the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ over the church, and doctrine of the church as the Body of Christ – the true church, composed of regenerated believers only. The doctrine of one body of believers, from our first parents in Eden to the last person who will ever be saved from the wrath of God as this world comes to its final destruction – all of them, from the beginning of time to the end, members of one body in Christ.

We have other pictures of this in Scripture as well. Christ is the vine and we are the branches, John chapter fifteen. Jesus’ prayer for the unity of all believers over all time, in John chapter seventeen. The believers living and praying and witnessing “with one accord” in the early chapters of the book of Acts.

But today I want to focus our attention on the two inseparable doctrines that we find in Colossians chapter two, and in other passages: The doctrine of the Headship of Christ, and the doctrine of the true church as the Body of Christ.

For purposes of our message today, I would like to focus on the positive corollary to Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:19. I would like to focus our attention on that

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which is true of the genuine Christian, which is not true of those who persist in seeking to establish man-made authority within the church.

Now in order to do that, all that we need to do is take our focus away from that which is true of those who seek to establish counterfeit authority. Paul says that they are “*not* holding fast to the Head,” that is, to Jesus Christ. It follows, then, that the one who opposes the efforts to establish man-made authority, the one who is not permitting charlatans to cheat him of his reward – that person *is* “holding fast to the Head,” holding fast to Christ. And so with that in mind, I would like to call your attention today to four things.

The Purpose of Christ’s Headship

First of all, let me call your attention to the *purpose* of Christ’s headship over the church. We see this not only in Colossians, but we also see it in more specific terms in a passage that has been part of the focus of our last two messages, in Ephesians chapter four. Turn there with me if you are able – Ephesians chapter four, beginning at verse eleven.

Here Paul is stating the positive that relates to the negative case that he states in Colossians chapter two. Here in Ephesians Paul is stating that which Christ has set forth as the position and the purpose of the true church that is truly functioning under the Headship of Christ. Ephesians chapter four, beginning at verse eleven:

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And He Himself [He, our Lord Jesus Christ] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, [and now notice verse fifteen] but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

This, then, is the purpose of Christ's headship. So that the true body of believers will be a body that is well-instructed, a body that is grounded in the truth, a body that is growing in the truth, a body that is maturing in the truth, a body that is characterized by love – love for Christ the Head of the church, love for the truth of the Word of God, love for the true people of God wherever they may be.

The Extent of Christ's Headship

Secondly, let me call your attention to the *extent* of Christ's headship. Turn back just a page or two in the book of Colossians to chapter one, beginning at verse

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thirteen. Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse thirteen. I want you to take special notice of the repetition of two words, five times, in this passage:

He [that is, God the Father; Colossians chapter one beginning at verse thirteen] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

[Now notice the five-fold repetition.] For by Him *all things* were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. *All things* were created through Him and for Him. And He is before *all things*, and in Him *all things* consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in *all things* He may have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:13-18)

We find a similar statement in Ephesians chapter one, at verse twenty-two:

And He [God the Father] put *all things* under His feet [the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ], and gave Him to be head over *all things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Notice the repetition of the phrase "all things" in these passages. That is the extent of the headship of Jesus Christ over the church. It is not a limited headship. It is a

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universal headship. Nothing is left out of Christ's headship over the church.

"All things" leaves no room for any authority or headship other than Christ's authority and headship. "All things" leaves no room for any power other than Christ's power. "All things" leaves no room for any spirit other than Christ's Spirit. "All things" leaves nothing that is not in the sovereign control of Christ, everywhere and at all times.

And notice – Christ is "head over all things to the church." Christ as Head of the church is God the Father's great love-gift to the church. Christ is everything. In Him is everything.

His church does not need to go anywhere else for anything. His church does not need to seek any other headship than His headship. His church does not need to seek any authority other than His authority. His church does not need to seek any power other than Christ's power. His church does not need to seek any spirit other than Christ's Spirit. Christ's church does not need to seek to become more like the world, it needs to become more like its Head.

The Functioning of Christ's Headship

And so we have seen the *purpose* of Christ's headship, and the *extent* of Christ's headship. Let me now call your attention to a third point, and that is the *functioning* of Christ's headship over the church.

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Let me call your attention once again to our passage in Colossians chapter two, at verse nineteen. Paul says that under the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ "...all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God."

We find the same thought expressed in different terms in Romans chapter twelve, beginning at verse four. Paul under divine inspiration writes this:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. (Romans 12:4-5)

And so here we have two great statements, as well as the statement in Ephesians chapter four, which describe to us the functioning of Christ's headship over His body, the true church. It is a functioning that is characterized by relationship. Relationship.

It is a relationship that only exists between Christ and Spirit-regenerated believers.

Ephesians 4:4-6 –There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – For by one Spirit we were all baptized [that is, placed] into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

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Jesus [said to Nicodemus, John chapter three], "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water [that is, born physically] and [born of] the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5-6)

John 7:38-39 – " 'He who believes in Me [Jesus said], as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' ... [T]his He spoke concerning the Spirit [the Holy Spirit], whom those believing in Him would receive..."

In Acts chapter nineteen, when Paul encountered men at Ephesus who had learned something of the Gospel, the first thing he wanted to know was this: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit?" (verse two). Are you truly saved?

In First Corinthians chapter two, Paul says that the things of God have been revealed to true believers, those who are members of the true body of Christ, by God the Holy Spirit who lives in them. He says that the natural man – the unsaved man, the man who is outside of the true body of Christ – cannot accept the things of God as true, they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned. They are only understood by those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God.

This is the essential relationship. A relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Connection to the Head, because of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. No one who is not a regenerated child of God is a member of Christ's body, the church. This is the basis of the functioning of Christ's headship. He is Head over those who are His.

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Notice also that it is a relationship of equality, not hierarchy. "All the body knit together by joints and ligaments." But all the body connected to Christ the Head.

It is a relationship of membership in Christ, not mere membership in a visible community. "You [believer] are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:16). God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24).

It is a relationship that is not merely local but universal. It is relationship with all believers now on earth, with all believers now in Heaven, and with all believers yet to come to saving faith in Christ. All, one body in Christ.

It is a relationship of growth in Christ – the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. "All the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God."

It is a relationship that is grounded in truth because Christ is the Truth. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

It is a relationship that is nurtured by the Word of God, applied to each heart by the Spirit of God. Paul told the believers at Thessalonica, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe"(1 Thessalonians 2:13).

It is a relationship that is cultivated through *agape* love – love toward Christ, love toward other members of the body. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that

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you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Confidence Because of Christ's Headship

And so we have seen the *purpose* of Christ's headship – God's ultimate goal of bringing a body of saints to glory who are made not only positionally perfect but actually perfect on the Last Day, in Christ.

We have seen the *extent* of Christ's headship – it is a headship over all things, nothing left out, no room for any other headship or source of authority.

We have also seen the *functioning* of Christ's headship – it functions through a relationship between individuals and their Lord which is brought about by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and it also manifests itself in a body of believers who are to function together in love for Christ and for one another.

And finally, let me draw your attention to the fact of our *confidence* as believers, our confidence as the true Body of Christ, because of His headship.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ – Romans chapter eight. We can count on nourishment and growth in Christ because we are His and He is ours – Colossians two and Ephesians four. We can come boldly before the throne of grace – Hebrews chapter four. We can rest in the perfection of Christ's authority over all things – Hebrews chapter one. We can confidently reject all other authority – Colossians chapter two. We can confidently reject all man-made doctrines –

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Colossians chapter two. We can confidently live and walk in the truth as it is in Christ – Colossians chapters one and two.

And because these things are true, we worship only the Lord Jesus Christ, we worship only the triune God of the Bible. And we must worship God according to the instructions and mandates of His Word. That subject – genuine worship, in distinction from all of the counterfeit worship that we find in the world and even in the church – that subject will be our focus as we move into a new section of our study of Colossians, as we continue, the Lord willing, in our next message.

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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