

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Rome's Counterfeit Worship" (Colossians 2:18-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of July 15, 2012

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The passage of Holy Scripture that I want to call to your attention once again is found in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. Please turn with me to that section of the Word of God if you are able to do so today. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. The Apostle Paul under divine inspiration gives this warning and exhortation:

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)

The central theme of this passage in Paul's letter to the Colossian church is a warning against falling prey to the evil tyranny of man-made doctrines. Man-made

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doctrines are, in fact, always counterfeit doctrines. They have no authority from the Word of God.

And here the Apostle Paul warns us against four specific categories of counterfeits. First, he warns against submission to counterfeit authority. Second, he warns against engaging in counterfeit worship. Thirdly, he warns against the use of counterfeit intercessors. And fourthly, he warns against the deception of counterfeit revelation.

At the present time we are focusing on the second of these four evils, the evil of counterfeit worship. In Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen, Paul speaks of a specific form that this kind of false worship had taken among some people who were trying to influence the Colossian church in an ungodly direction. This specific form of counterfeit worship was the worship of angels, and that worship was rooted not in Biblical Christianity but in pagan philosophy, in pagan religion, in pagan polytheism and pantheism.

At the present time we are seeing how this warning in Colossians chapter two is not only a warning to the Colossian believers in the first century, but also a warning against many of the worship doctrines and practices that we find in the subsequent history of the church.

The people who were trying to bring this false teaching into the church were in fact trying to bring in elements of the pagan culture and pagan religion, and Christianize them. That is a pattern that we find in false teachings about worship

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throughout the subsequent history of the church. People who do not submit to the sole authority of the Word of God are constantly trying to bring the world's ways and the world's thinking into the church, and they think that they can make it all acceptable by putting a so-called Christian label on it.

And so in our last message we asked this question, and we began to answer it: What kinds of counterfeit worship do we find in church history, and how does Colossians chapter two apply to those things?

We saw that during the past two thousand years, the greatest and most long-standing champion of counterfeit worship has been the Roman Catholic church. Roman Catholicism's counterfeit worship is rooted in the same false teaching that plagued the Colossian church in the first century. It is rooted in the false teaching that man can bring the world's philosophies and practices into the church and put a so-called Christian label on them, and doing this will make such things acceptable to God. That is what Roman Catholicism has done.

Let me remind you once again that the Roman Catholic church teaches that people must worship four things that God has never commanded His true church to worship. Rome says that people must worship saints. Rome says that people must worship relics. Rome says that people must worship Mary. And, Rome says that people must worship the Pope.

And as we also saw last time, Rome makes a very strange and unsupportable claim about that which they are promoting. They say that is not worship, but

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“veneration”. Veneration is not the same as worship, they say. But when you give the adoration and devotion to other persons and to other objects that is to be reserved for the one true and living God alone, it is nothing less than counterfeit worship. The Roman Catholic church may call it by whatever name it wishes to call it, but it is, in fact, idolatry.

### **The Counterfeit Worship of Saints**

In our last message we saw that Rome commands the worship of so-called saints. But we saw that Rome's definition of sainthood is an un-Biblical definition. A church hierarchy does not declare a certain few people to be saints after they are dead. God declares every person who receives the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior to be a saint, set apart in Jesus Christ, the moment that person believes. Every member of the true church of Jesus Christ is a saint of God.

But as we look at religious history we find the true source of the Roman Catholic doctrine of sainthood. We find that it was in fact a way of bringing ancient pagan beliefs into the church, and putting a counterfeit Christian label on them. There are many parallels between the Roman Catholic worship of saints, and the ancient pagan Greek and Roman worship of a pantheon of many gods who were said to hold special powers in specific areas of life. Each one of those gods was to be the object of devotion, in order to gain each god's favor as you needed it. The Roman Catholic doctrine of sainthood is one of the many areas in which the Roman church has blended elements of paganism into its false version of Christianity.

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It is, in fact, exactly the sort of thing that Paul warns against here in Colossians chapter two: "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..."

Today I want to call your attention to three other areas in which Rome commands false worship – the worship of relics, the worship of Mary, and the worship of the Pope.

### **A Different "Ten Commandments"**

Most people – even most people who would identify themselves as Evangelicals or Protestants – most people do not know that the Roman Catholic church uses a different set of Ten Commandments from the Ten Commandments that are used by Protestant churches. The difference is this: The Vatican's version of the Ten Commandments eliminates the Second Commandment. It eliminates these words from Exodus chapter twenty, verses four and five:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image — any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

The summary of this commandment is, "you shall not commit idolatry." The Vatican eliminates the second commandment against idolatry, and the Vatican subdivides the tenth commandment against covetousness in order to artificially keep

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the number of commandments at ten. The Biblically accurate version of the Ten Commandments includes the Second Commandment against idolatry

The commandment against idolatry is clear, it is strong, it is specific. It was principally for their flagrant, persistent violations of this commandment that God evicted Israel and Judah from the Promised Land and sent them into captivity. Man has no right to arbitrarily remove the Second Commandment from the Decalogue.

But the Vatican maintains the fiction of its revisionist Ten Commandments in order to perpetuate Roman Catholicism's extensive idolatry. Rome commands its faithful to bow before statues and crucifixes, to light candles, to burn incense, and to pray to the dead. Rome commands veneration of the host, the wafer which it claims a priest turns into the body of Christ by an incantation. (The Latin words the priest uses when he does that are *hoc est corpus*, from which the magician's incantation *hocus pocus* is derived.)

### **The Counterfeit Worship of Relics**

Rome also commands Catholics to venerate so-called "relics". These "relics" are the remains of the bodies and bodily fluids of dead saints. These relics range from entire corpses to body fragments such as a finger, a bone, or hair. A few years ago I was in San Antonio, Texas. I saw what were said to be the remains of a dead saint housed in an ornate, gold-plated chest on poles. This chest was being carried aloft by priests through the streets of the city, and crowds of Catholics on

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the sidewalks were kneeling in worship and making the sign of the cross as the procession went past.

The altar is the focal point of every Roman Catholic church. By Vatican edict, every altar contains a cavity in which some part of the remains of a dead saint's body is placed. According to Rome, the presence of these human remains in the altar cavity is necessary in order for the altar to be consecrated and used. Wherever possible, the remains are from the body of the saint for which the church is named. It is upon this combination altar and sepulchre that the priest, according to the false teaching of Rome, turns bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ in order to offer a fresh sacrifice for sins at every Mass, contrary to Scripture.

Dear friends, such things were and are the practices of the pagans, and Rome has brought them into the visible church. God speaks against such things, such associations with the dead, often in the pages of Scripture. For example, in Psalm 106 we read this:

They [the people of Israel] joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, [notice – ] and ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus they provoked [the Lord] to anger with their deeds....Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance. (Psalm 106:28-29, 40)

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Dear friends, God likewise abhors the idolatrous worship of relics that is commanded by Rome.

### **The Counterfeit Worship of Mary**

Likewise, Rome commands the worship of Mary the mother of Jesus. Rome says that Mary is the Mediatrix of salvation along with Jesus Christ. Let me quote for you an official statement of the Catholic church:

To begin, we can say without doubt that the title 'Mediatrix' [for Mary] is justified, and applies to all graces for certain, by her cooperation in acquiring all graces on Calvary....

...in suffering with Him [with Jesus] as He died on the cross, she [Mary] cooperated in the work of the Savior, in an altogether singular way, by obedience, faith, hope, and burning love, to restore supernatural life to souls. As a result she is our Mother in the order of grace.

... after being assumed into heaven, she has not put aside this saving function, but by her manifold intercession, she continues to win the gifts of eternal salvation for us.<sup>1</sup>

Dear friends, this is a lie. Biblical Christianity recognizes that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man. He alone is the Savior of souls. He

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<sup>1</sup> William G. Most, "Mary, Mediatrix of all Graces" in the "Teachings" section of the website of the EWTN Global Catholic Network, an official website of the Vatican, as viewed on December 10, 2009 at <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/marya4.htm>.

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alone is the Redeemer of sinners. Scripture makes no claim that Mary is a Mediatrix or Co-Redemptrix. In fact Scripture records the fact that Mary herself understood and stated that she was in need of redemption herself, and she herself professed Christ as her Savior. Luke chapter one, beginning at verse forty-six:

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in [notice – ] God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. (Luke 1:46-49)

But Roman Catholicism says that Mary is to be worshipped as the "Queen of Heaven." Dear friends, this also is a throwback to ancient paganism. This also is bringing pagan theology and practices into the visible church.

The pagans of ancient Babylon worshipped a goddess who they addressed as the "Queen of Heaven" and the "Virgin Mother." In ancient Egypt a similar goddess was worshipped by the name Hathor. In China and Tibet this false deity was called the "Virgin God-Bearer." Later in Greece this goddess was called Hestia, and in Rome she was called Juno.

The Roman Catholic church simply incorporated elements of these later forms of pagan worship into Catholic worship, and they called it "the veneration of the Blessed Virgin." Today, New Age religions engage in what is called "Mother Worship." I have heard a New Age practitioner who has a program on the radio

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say that New Age pagans see their worship of "the Mother" or "Mother Earth" as the same thing as the Roman Catholic worship of Mary. At least the New Age pagans recognize paganism in others when they see it.

Dear friends, the Lord long ago condemned such things. Let me give you just one passage of Scripture. In Jeremiah chapter seventeen, beginning at verse seventeen, the Lord says this:

Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, [notice – ] to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me [the Lord] to anger. (Jeremiah 7:17-18)

And we find the same condemnation of the worship of the queen of heaven in Jeremiah chapter forty-four, beginning at verse seventeen. Dear friends, Scripture could not be more clear that the worship practices of Rome are the worship practices of the world under the sway of Satan. These things have no place in the true church of Jesus Christ.

### **The Counterfeit Worship of the Pope**

And finally, we see that through the history of the Roman Catholic church there has been a growing worship of the Popes. This has especially increased since the time of the Protestant Reformation. Dear friends, what I am about to read for you

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are direct quotations from official Roman Catholic statements on the status and position of the Pope. I'm quoting now –

The pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man (...) He is as it were God on earth, sole sovereign of the faithful of Christ, chief of kings, having plenitude of power.<sup>2</sup>

The supreme teacher in the Church is the Roman Pontiff. Union of minds, therefore, requires (...) complete submission and obedience of will to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself.<sup>3</sup>

Hence the Pope is crowned with a triple crown, as king of heaven and of earth and of the lower regions (*inferorum*).<sup>4</sup>

Pope Leo the 13th said this. He said, I, the Pope, "hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty."<sup>5</sup> Utter blasphemy.

On May 1st, 2011 Pope Benedict XVI, along with officials of the Roman Catholic church-state and a crowd of 1.5 million people, worshipped the body, the blood, and images of Pope John Paul II during beatification ceremonies at the Vatican. More than fifty heads of state from nations around the world were present for the ceremony.

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<sup>2</sup> Lucius Ferraris, *Prompta Bibliotheca*, 1763, Volume VI, "Papa II", pages 25 and 29.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Leo VIII, *On the Chief Duties of Christians as Citizens*, Encyclical Letter of January 10, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Lucius Ferraris, *Prompta Bibliotheca*, 1763, Volume VI, "Papa II", page 26.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *The Reunion of Christendom*, Encyclical Letter of June 20, 1894.

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The Vatican teaches that the blood of this dead Pope has special power. They have taken some of his blood, which was collected during medical tests while he was alive and subsequently preserved, and they have housed this blood of the Pope in an ornate container. This container of John Paul's blood was held aloft for the worship of the crowd. The container of blood was kissed and worshipped by Pope Benedict XVI and other worshipping priests.

Dear friends, once again this is nothing but the most vile paganism. There is power only in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. True Christians worship not His blood, but His person, because Jesus Christ alone is our God, our Savior, our Mediator before the Father, and the Head of the Church. The Apostle Peter himself, the one who Rome falsely claims was the first of the line of Popes, Peter denied any other way to God. He said, this – First Peter chapter one, beginning at verse eighteen:

Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:18-21)

There is no power in the blood of the Pope. There is no power in the worship of the Pope. All of this, dear friends, is the worst kind of falsehood and the worst kind

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of spiritual bondage. The worship of saints, the worship of relics, the worship of Mary, the worship of Popes – all of these things are of the Devil and not of Christ.

Dear friend, listen once again to the inspired words of Colossians chapter two: "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" – to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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