

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Ten Contemporary Lies About Worship" (Colossians 2:18-3:11)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 7/29/2012

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At the present time we are studying the very important warning that we find in the Word of God in the book of Colossians, chapter two, beginning at verse eighteen. So I hope that if you are able you will turn with me to that passage, and especially today, since we are going to also see how these verses connect to the opening verses of chapter three. So let us begin at Colossians chapter two, verse eighteen. This is 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 [that is the entire true Church of Christ], 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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The Trap of Syncretism

The great theme of the passage we have just read is that the individual Christian, and the church as a body, are to reject the tyranny of man-made doctrines. Counterfeit doctrines. In particular right now we are focusing on that great warning and exhortation as it relates to the doctrine of worship.

The Apostle Paul under divine inspiration has given us a great principle in these verses. That principle is that you cannot bring the ideas of the unbelieving world, and the things of the unbelieving world, into the church, and call it worship. You cannot bring anything you want to, out of the world and into the church, put a Christian label on it, and turn that worldly thing or that worldly practice into something that is acceptable to God as worship.

We have seen that this is exactly what men attempted to do in Colosse, when they introduced the pagan idea of the worship of angels. We have seen that it is also exactly what men have succeeded in doing over the long and tragic history of the Roman Catholic church in its false worship.

And today, precisely the same thing is happening in the Evangelical church. Men and women are bringing the thinking and the practices and the trappings of the unbelieving world into the church. They are putting a so-called Christian label on these things, and they think that this makes such things acceptable as worship to God.

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But God has not changed. His standards have not changed. His Word has not changed. The nature of true worship, as we find it in Scripture alone, has not changed.

We also saw, in our last message, that the theological term for this tragic development in the Evangelical church is syncretism. Large segments of the Evangelical church today have walked into the trap of syncretism in their worship. Syncretism is religious compromise. Syncretism is the un-critical, un-discerning, un-questioning acceptance of beliefs and practices that are contrary to the Word of God.

Syncretism is the mingling of those counterfeit beliefs and practices with authentic Biblical Christianity within the church. The mixing and mingling and confusing of beliefs and practices which are outside of and contrary to the Word of God, with beliefs and practices that are acceptable according to God's Word.

Syncretism is the mingling of light and darkness, of truth and error, of the genuine and the counterfeit. We also saw that syncretism is one of the methods that Satan most often uses to lead a Biblically sound church into eventual apostasy. What begins as a subtle mingling of truth and error in worship will inevitably lead, if it is not stopped, to the mingling of truth and error in preaching, and teaching, and evangelism. The watering down of the Gospel message, and eventually the abandonment of the Gospel message. The visible church in our time is filled with examples and evidences of this tragic downgrade.

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In our time the problem has reached epidemic proportions. In many places today, what were once sound churches are really nothing more than social clubs, self-help gatherings. The so-called worship services are nothing but entertainment productions. These places may still have the word "church" in their names, but they are no longer churches.

How Bad Is It?

Now dear friends, some of you may be asking the question, "Is it really that bad in our churches today?" Is the problem really that serious and that widespread? Well dear friends, let me tell you just how bad it is.

In our last message I mentioned that there is a very popular magazine called *Church Production*. *Church Production*. The idea behind this magazine, and behind other publications like it, is the idea that the so-called worship service should be a stage production in which people are entertained and emotionally manipulated in the same way they would be if they went to a rock concert, or to a Broadway show, or to a theme park.

Dear friends, that is not worship. It is an abomination to God. But that is what the people behind this magazine and other publications like it are promoting. That is what the Purpose-Driven Church movement is promoting.

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These people are holding conferences and seminars all over the United States and in other parts of the world, to promote these things, and to indoctrinate pastors and church leaders in these things.

Two years ago I went to one of those conferences as an observer, to gather information, to see just what these people are doing and saying. And let me tell you what I observed.

The conference that I attended was held in one of the largest convention centers in the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Several thousand pastors and church leaders from churches all over the United States were gathered for this conference.

Now, given the nature and the purpose of this conference, I expected this to be a young crowd – mainly people in their twenties and thirties, maybe forties. But I was surprised to find that the average age of the several thousand pastors and church leaders present at this conference was between forty-five and fifty-five years old.

Why were they there? Well, there was a recurring theme in conversations during the breaks between sessions. That theme was this: These middle-aged pastors and church leaders were saying, "I am here to learn how to do what it takes to bring the un-churched into my church. Whatever it takes, my church is going to do it, and I'm here at this conference to learn how to do it."

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Ten Lies About Worship

And so what were they learning? What were several thousand pastors and church leaders being told they had to do to bring the un-churched into their churches? Let me sum up for you in just a few statements the philosophy that was being promoted at this conference.

The core of this philosophy can be summed up in ten false statements. I think it is fitting to call these ten statements the ten lies of 21st-century counterfeit worship. They are ten of the most common and most believed false teachings about worship today. And in this three-day conference they were repeated over and over again, in various forms. Here they are:

- Lie number one: The Bible does not give the church specific instruction about how to worship God.
- Therefore, lie number two: God will accept anything we offer if we call it "worship" and it is done with passion and sincerity.
- And that is because, lie number three: God is not the sole audience for worship.
- You see, lie number four: The purpose of worship is to draw the un-churched into your church. They are the audience you must seek to draw and to please.

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- And therefore, lie number five: Worship must make the un-churched feel comfortable, and it must impress them. That is the goal.
 - And so, lie number six: Worship must constantly change with the times and the culture.
 - And therefore, lie number seven: Worship is a matter of style – “contemporary” vs. “traditional” – or as we are hearing it more often now, “new worship” vs. “old worship.” And “old worship” may be what you did in last week’s service. If it didn’t impress people, if it didn’t “work,” discard it. Move on. Invent something new.
 - And so in order to impress the un-churched, lie number eight: The worship service must be a well-staged production.
 - And so, lie number nine: A church must use technology to manipulate people’s emotions, to impress the un-churched, and to create the desired mood for the service.
 - And, lie number ten: If you do not buy into lies number one through nine, your church’s worship will be inferior, and so you will not accomplish the main goal, of bringing the un-churched into your church and impressing and manipulating them.
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Now this particular conference, like just about every one of these conferences today, did not stop with indoctrinating thousands of pastors and church leaders with this kind of un-Biblical thinking in conference sessions and breakout seminars. They took these pastors and church leaders out, by the busloads, to visit so-called churches that have implemented these ten lies of counterfeit worship.

The Idols of the “New Worship”

And not only that, there was a trade show associated with this conference. A huge area of the convention center had been taken over as a show area. Nearly a hundred companies were exhibiting the products and services that they provide, in order to help churches implement this counterfeit doctrine of worship.

Some of the biggest names in technology were there – Sony, Philips, Epson, Panasonic, and Yamaha, just to name a few. These and other large corporations now have dedicated teams of sales people who are focusing on what they call the “worship market.” The “worship market” is now a multi-billion dollar business.

And what are they selling to the “worship market”? What were they selling to thousands of Evangelical pastors and church leaders who attended this conference? They were selling the same kinds of laser light systems that they sell to theme parks and night clubs and theatres. They were selling stage scenery and props. They were selling strobe lighting. They were selling big moving globes – so your church too can have a big moving globe on the platform, just like Joel Osteen. These are the idols of the new so-called “worship.”

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But none of these were the most popular product that was being exhibited. The most popular product in this big exhibit hall was – are you ready for this? – fog machines. Fog machines! Fog machines, so that you can generate fog in your church service. Generate fog, even different colors of fog, on the platform and even throughout the congregation, throughout the building, to create the desired mood in a so-called worship service.

Dear friends, I think those fog machines were a metaphor for this whole so-called worship conference. The thousands of pastors and church leaders who were there, enthusiastically taking all of this in, talking excitedly about what they were going to do with all this technology when they got back to their churches – these people were in a thick fog of absolute and utter confusion about the true nature of Biblical worship.

The Thinking That Must Govern Our Worship

Dear friends, God is specific, in Holy Scripture, in telling us how He is to be worshipped, and by whom. He is to be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. He is to be worshipped by Christians only – by people who have been changed from unbelief to saving faith in Christ by the truth of the Gospel. That truth, the truth of God's Word, is the foundation of true worship.

But there is a tendency among Christians today to talk in terms of what we "should" do, or "should not" do in worship. There is this tendency to talk as though God's commandments and imperatives are matters on which the church

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may make its own judgments, as though the church is free to decide which parts of God's Word to obey, and which may be ignored.

But that is not how God speaks to His people. Our God is a God of imperatives. Colossians chapter two tells us: Do not let anyone cheat you of your reward by introducing man-made doctrines of worship into the church. Do not be driven by the commandments and doctrines of men. Do not let anyone who is vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind drive you to do things that displease your God.

You died with Christ to the basic principles of the world, the world's ways of thinking and doing. Don't go back to that. And don't bring any of it into the church! These things are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh – against the old nature. In fact, today's counterfeit doctrines of worship are one gigantic appeal to the indulgence of the flesh.

And the Apostle Paul under Divine inspiration not only says these things in chapter two. He continues on in the opening verses of Colossians chapter three. Please follow along in your own Bible if you are able.

Colossians chapter three, verse one: "If then you were raised with Christ," – if, then you are indeed a Christian and not an imposter – "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

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Don't seek the things of the world and call it "worship." Paul tells us in Colossians chapter two that true believers have been crucified with Christ, have been buried with Christ, have been raised with Christ. And Ephesians chapter two, verse six tells us that we have been seated in the heavenlies with Christ.

Our earthly worship must reflect those great facts of our salvation. Our old man has been crucified. We have been raised to newness of life. Second Corinthians 5:17 – "If anyone is [truly] in Christ [and not merely a professing Christian] he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Dear friends, the worship of God by true believers on earth must be a reflection of the worship that takes place around the throne of God in Heaven.

That is our goal. Colossians chapter three, verse four: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." "Therefore, [verse five] put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Worldly worship is unclean in the sense that it brings that which is unfit and unholy into the church. Worldly worship cultivates the kind of impurity of which Paul speaks here. When he speaks here of "evil desire" he speaks of a desire for things that God has forbidden. And indeed, that is the nature of counterfeit, worldly worship.

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And furthermore, it is based on and cultivates a covetousness, an idolatry, of the thinking and practices and trappings of the world. Idolatry of these things that are being brought into the church under a false doctrine of worship. I saw that in so many of the pastors and church leaders at this conference – “Oh, we have to have these things that the world has! We have to bring these things into our church. This is the key to transforming our church!”

And so they are making idols of these things that are abominations in the eyes of God. And they are transforming their churches – they are transforming them into synagogues of Satan.

Christian Worship Is Not a Function of the Culture

Dear friends, our time is limited so I cannot say as much about these verses at the beginning of Colossians chapter three as I would like to. But let me draw your attention to verse eleven for one final point. Paul says that in the new man, in the person who is truly in Christ, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

What is Paul saying? He is saying that Christianity and Christian worship are not a function of the culture around us, the culture of this fallen world. Christianity is the culture of the world to come. Christian worship is the worship of the world to come.

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Those who are truly in Christ, those who worship Him in the beauty of holiness, those who worship Him in spirit and in truth, are not of this world. We are aliens here.

The true church – the gathering of the true saints of God for the true worship of God – is the one sanctuary from all that is in this world. We must never, never allow the influences of the world and its false wisdom to gain a foothold in the church. Not in any area of doctrine. Not in any area of our practice. When we come together to worship our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, we must come apart from the world, not bring the world in with us.

The Apostle Paul says this, in Philippians chapter three, beginning at verse seventeen:

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:17-21)

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Dear friend, how is your worship? How is the worship of your church? Is your church following the world's lies, or is it following God's truth? Every believer, every church, must answer that question honestly before God. And we must answer according to the only standard that God has given us for doctrine and for life – His inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word.

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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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